

JOINT MEDIA RELEASE

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HOUSING FOR THOSE ON LOW-INCOMES MUST BE TOP PRIORITY IN FLOOD RECOVERY

A coalition of peak bodies is urging the NSW Government to invest in an immediate housing recovery package to support communities affected by the NSW flood emergency.

NCOSS, Community Housing Industry Association NSW (CHIA NSW), Aboriginal Community Housing Industry Association NSW (ACHIA NSW) and Homelessness NSW are calling for:

- immediate temporary housing options for people on low incomes,
- the rebuilding of existing social housing affected by the floods,
- a major construction program to build social and affordable housing and address the critical shortage of housing in the flood impacted areas, and
- recovery grants to be made immediately available to local community housing providers, Aboriginal community-controlled organisations and homelessness services to assist people made homeless as a result of the floods.

The peaks have released a joint statement detailing the immediate steps needed to address the housing and homelessness crisis which will be significantly exacerbated by widespread flooding events.

The organisations said the scale of the disaster in northern NSW deserved an urgent and proportionate response.

“We are seeing devastation throughout northern NSW, and we need an immediate response to support those now without a roof over their head,” NCOSS CEO Joanna Quilty said.

“We welcome the Premier’s acknowledgment that housing will be a priority in the recovery effort. We look forward to working with him to urgently support communities in need, including those who were already experiencing disadvantage and who can be hardest hit when disaster strikes.”

The North Coast of NSW was already at the forefront of the housing crisis – with 250 people on the priority housing waiting list at June 2021 and a private rental market vacancy rate of 0.5%.

The 2021 Tweed, Byron Bay and Lismore homelessness street counts identified over 300 people sleeping rough.

“Before the floods of recent days, North Coast families were already being forced to live in tents, cars, and other makeshift arrangements because they couldn’t afford a home,” Homelessness NSW CEO, Katherine McKernan said.

“The devastating floods in regional areas like the NSW North Coast have turned a difficult housing market into an impossible one. A massive and speedy response is required to help these communities,” CHIA NSW CEO, Mark Degotardi said.

“Community housing providers are ready to support the NSW Government and industry partners in getting communities struck by flooding on the road to recovery, starting with making sure people have a safe and secure roof over their head,” Mr. Degotardi said.

NSW had a housing and homelessness crisis before the floods with 50,000 applicants on the social housing waiting list and a private rental market that is unaffordable, particularly in regional NSW.

More than 30% of all clients of homelessness services are Aboriginal. Homelessness services are supporting 25% more clients than funded for and are turning away more clients than they can accommodate due to high demand that has been exacerbated by COVID-19.

“For many Aboriginal communities, the problems of overcrowding in substandard housing and the detrimental impacts of this on health and well-being have been longstanding. The situation will now be so much worse – this catastrophe will widen the gap in life outcomes even further,” ACHIA NSW CEO, Lisa Sampson said.

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