



Joint statement

Monday, 7 March 2022

Housing for people on low incomes must be a priority of NSW flood disaster recovery

The NSW Council of Social Service (NCOSS), the Community Housing Industry Association NSW (CHIA NSW), NSW Aboriginal Community Housing Industry Association (ACHIA NSW) and Homelessness NSW call on the NSW Government to fund a significant and immediate housing recovery package to address both the short and long-term impact of floods across NSW.

NCOSS, CHIA NSW, Homelessness NSW and ACHIA NSW acknowledge the NSW Premier's statement that this will be priority and call on the NSW Government to provide funding and coordination across NSW to:

- Establish immediate temporary housing options for people on low incomes,
- Prioritise the rebuilding of existing social housing affected by the floods,
- Invest in additional social and affordable housing to address the critical shortage of housing in the flood impacted areas, and
- Make recovery grants immediately available to local community housing, Aboriginal and homelessness services to assist people made homeless as a result of the floods.

Given the high number of Aboriginal families affected by the floods, housing for Aboriginal communities needs to be a priority.

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.

North Coast NSW was already at the forefront of this 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 devastating floods of recent days, North Coast families were already being forced to live in tents, cars and other makeshift arrangements because there was simply nowhere affordable or available for them to live.

Many households are still affected by previous floods and bushfires in the region, living in overcrowded or substandard conditions with significant health, safety and well-being impacts. This includes Aboriginal families and communities who were already disproportionately impacted by disadvantage.

As NSW recovers from these latest catastrophic floods, the provision of housing for all, but particularly for people on low incomes must be a priority. Community housing and homelessness services in the North Coast area are already very concerned about the future for their tenants and clients, and their ability to provide adequate shelter and support, as the water recedes and the extent of the devastation is apparent. Action now can help avert the longer-term trauma of the floods.

The scale of the floods and their disproportionate impact on low-income people mean NSW is in danger of seeing a new generation of people forced into homelessness, living rough or in overcrowded and unfit dwellings.

The Government's response must be significant and immediate. The families of the North Coast cannot wait.

We must not allow a repeat of the increased and extended homelessness that was created on the South Coast in the aftermath of the bushfires. We need a swift, coordinated and resourced housing response that supports the flood affected communities to recover and allow them to get on with their lives.