



**yourtown**  
POWERING kids helpline

# Queensland Housing Summit

A submission to: the Queensland Government

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**yourtown** is a trusted provider of services for young people, with a focus on mental health and wellbeing, long-term unemployment, prevention of youth suicide, child protection, as well as support for those experiencing domestic and family violence. **yourtown** has evolved to helping hundreds of thousands of young people each year by powering a range of service offerings that support them through difficult challenges.

## Our Queensland services

For over 60 years, **yourtown** has been supporting children, young people, and families in Queensland. Our track record in Queensland includes:

- Kids Helpline, **yourtown**'s national 24/7 helpline providing free professional counselling and support for children and young people aged 5-25, responding to over 1,488,903 counselling sessions from children and young people in Queensland
- Parentline, a telephone and online counselling and support service for parents and carers in Queensland
- Accommodation, post refuge and therapeutic support for women and children seeking refuge from domestic and family violence in southeast Queensland
- Skilling Queenslanders for Work offering training and support for unemployed or underemployed young people in southeast Queensland
- Social Enterprises, which have provided young people aged 15-25 with paid work experience and training as a 'stepping stone' to employment in southeast Queensland
- Free programs to Queensland primary schools to improve student mental health literacy, resilience, and help-seeking skills through our Kids Helpline @ School BUPA-funded initiative
- Free social and emotional programs to high schools in the Northern Queensland Primary Health Network region, facilitated by qualified Kids Helpline counsellors and developed in collaboration with teachers for their students
- My Circle, a confidential, private, online peer support network for 13–25-year-olds to share information and build coping skills
- Expressive therapy programs for infants and young children who have experienced trauma and abuse or who have been exposed to violence in southeast Queensland
- Mental health services for children (0-11 years of age) and their families, including Starfish Family Mental Health Support Service in Deception Bay and Logan and Mind4Kids in Deception Bay
- Facilitating partner of Communities for Children in Deception Bay
- Engagement in Education Program, supporting primary school students at risk, to successfully transition to and complete high school in Ipswich
- Transition to Work supporting young people to develop their social, emotional and communication skills while helping them identify and access opportunities to find work or commence apprenticeships and traineeships, and
- Glugor Young Parents Program providing parenting support to help with child development, life skills and health and wellbeing activities in safe, supportive environments in Deception Bay.

## Kids Helpline

Kids Helpline is Australia's only free and confidential 24/7 phone and online counselling service for young people aged 5 to 25. It offers children and young people a range of care options that are right for their needs and circumstances.

Our commitment to being there anytime, and for any reason, has meant that we have responded to more than 8.6 million contacts from children and young people nationally in the 31 years since our service was first established, whilst also providing tens of millions of self-help interactions via our website and social channels.

**yourtown** welcomes the Housing Summit being hosted by the Queensland Premier on 20 October 2022 and the opportunity to provide suggestions as to what the Summit should consider when seeking to address the critical housing crisis in Queensland.

While we support the Queensland Government's recent and substantial commitment to investing \$2.9 billion in social and affordable housing<sup>1</sup> and \$200 million to unlock housing supply,<sup>2</sup> targeted investment is still needed for the most vulnerable within our communities, particularly women and children escaping domestic and family violence (DFV); and children and young people experiencing housing instability. Only by quarantining resources and infrastructure to meet their needs will the Queensland Government be able to meet their aspiration that every Queenslanders has access to a roof over their head and is supported to thrive.

Australia is a highly developed country with significant vacant land mass, yet we are ranked by the OECD as being in the top four countries in the world on price to income rental affordability and where prices appear to be overvalued but continue to rise<sup>3</sup>. It is imperative that all Australian Governments review the policy settings that have led to this situation.

## **Need for a cohesive and measurable action plan**

An outcome of the Housing Summit must be the development of a clear plan of action, with measurable outcomes to invest in, build and deliver housing; including commitments as to who will be responsible for delivery of each item, and when it will be delivered. This plan should involve commitments from the Queensland and local governments, and articulate the contributions from the Federal Government, and how the governments, community and industry will support, invest in, and facilitate delivery of the plan. This plan must include targeted strategies to deliver housing for the most vulnerable in the community, particularly women and families escaping domestic and family violence (DFV), and young people experiencing housing instability and homelessness. It is also important that the broader Queensland community be provided with reliable information about the housing stock supply shortfall in Queensland and that the government be able to measure and report on progress in closing the gap on this supply on a regional/place-based basis throughout Queensland.

### **Recommendation 1:**

**Develop a plan for collaborative investment by government, the community and industry to invest in, build and deliver social housing in Queensland, with targeted strategies focused upon vulnerable sectors, such as those escaping domestic and family violence, and young people experiencing housing instability and homelessness.**

**Develop a reliable, evidence-based performance framework to benchmark the current supply gap in affordable and safe housing supply in Queensland broken down to regional levels and cohort groups to enable targeted demand-driven strategies to address the gap.**

<sup>1</sup> Queensland Government. (2022). Palaszczuk Government's housing approach is helping vulnerable Queenslanders. (<https://statements.qld.gov.au/statements/96185>)

<sup>2</sup> Queensland Government. (2022). Queensland Government to hold Housing Summit. (<https://statements.qld.gov.au/statements/96144>)

<sup>33</sup> OECD, [Focus on house prices - OECD](#)

## Varied housing for women and children escaping domestic violence

### Need for investment in purpose-built accommodation

It is well known that the housing crisis is worsening, impacted by the increase in the cost of building homes, lack of existing affordable housing<sup>4</sup> and escalating rents accompanied by an increasing shortage in rental properties.<sup>5</sup>

Not only is there a housing shortage, but there is a lack of accommodation that is fit for purpose for women and families escaping domestic and family violence. On average, one woman a week is murdered in Australia by her current or former partner. 1 in 6 Australian women have experienced physical or sexual violence by a current or former partner. 1 in 4 Australian women have experienced emotional abuse by a current or former partner. Yet, the number of women and children seeking support far outweighs the number of available refuge beds and transitional homes.<sup>6</sup> Approximately one in five women return to violent partners as they have nowhere else to go and no financial support.<sup>7</sup>

Accommodation must be 'fit for purpose' and should: adopt 'safety by design' principles, including secure fencing and access, security systems and CCTV; be like a 'home' and not hotel (for example, enabling family members to carry on their education and schooling needs); and support services should accompany the accommodation, and engage trauma responsive and child aware approaches.

Designing accommodation that is fit for purpose, also means that it is adaptable to the individualised needs and circumstances of the person or family who will be using it. A one-size fits all approach to accommodation for victims/survivors of domestic and family violence is inadequate. A human centred design approach needs to be undertaken in designing 'fit for purpose' DFV accommodation. It needs to be designed with sufficient agility to be adaptable to a range of circumstances. For example, designs should accommodate the ability for all members of the family to be welcome and safe, whether human, furry or feathered. Pets are often abused as part of domestic and family violence, along with family members. Pets can be used by frightening and controlling the victim into staying in the abusive relationship, with threats of violence/harm to the pet if the person does not stay or obey.<sup>8</sup> The challenge for many families with pets is that shelters and refuges often do not allow pets. For many families, this further traumatises the children or adult if pets are left behind and cannot accompany them. It is also known that if accommodation cannot be found for a pet with family or friends, a person experiencing violence or abuse may often choose to stay with their abuser for fear of what will happen to the pet if they leave without it.

Investment in purpose-built accommodation can make a significant difference in the ability of a woman and her family to overcome their trauma and begin the journey towards living independently and thriving in the community. It can also alleviate accommodation pressures that may force a person to re-enter a potentially life-threatening living situation with a perpetrator of abuse.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/australias-red-hot-housing-get-hotter-affordability-worsen-2021-08-19/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://probonoaustralia.com.au/news/2021/08/advocates-call-for-change-as-social-housing-crisis-reaches-new-heights/>

<sup>6</sup> ANROWS. (2019). Domestic and family violence, housing insecurity and homelessness: Research synthesis. (<https://www.anrows.org.au/publication/domestic-and-family-violence-housing-insecurity-and-homelessness-research-synthesis/>)

<sup>7</sup> ANROWS. (2019). Domestic and family violence, housing insecurity and homelessness: Research synthesis. (<https://www.anrows.org.au/publication/domestic-and-family-violence-housing-insecurity-and-homelessness-research-synthesis/>)

<sup>8</sup> [Pets in Crisis cares for pets of families escaping domestic violence \(dvconnect.org\)](https://www.dvconnect.org.au/pets-in-crisis-cares-for-pets-of-families-escaping-domestic-violence)

Police domestic violence data could be used to assess the demand in each region of Queensland and growth corridors to determine areas of focus for affordable housing construction activity.

### Early Intervention accommodation

Consideration should be given for planning for early intervention accommodation options, focused on preventing people from needing crisis and tertiary responses due to their experiences of violence.

Consideration should be given under the plan for investment in accommodation options at the early intervention stage in local communities. The aim of this type of accommodation could be to provide safe and secure, home-like, short term (up to 13 days) family/pet-friendly accommodation to women and children at high risk. During the stay, services would be able to work in a strengths-based way with families to address the emerging domestic violence concerns.

Most early interventions focus on programs, and services that can intervene early, but there is little focus upon providing purpose-built accommodation that enables women and children to 'take a break' at the early signs of domestic violence before matters escalate to a crisis. Investing in family, and pet friendly 'take a break' home style accommodation for women, and children who need early intervention support could help address problematic behaviour when it first emerges and enable services early opportunities to work with women and children in a de-escalated home-style environment. This short-term accommodation option for women and children to get away, 'take a break' and de-escalate, could also provide the opportunity for services to connect with the person demonstrating early signs of abusive behaviour, and work with the family to stop the behaviour before it escalates.

### Crisis care accommodation

More investment is needed in purpose-built crisis care accommodation. This accommodation type includes crisis care/emergency accommodation to provide longer term accommodation for the duration of the crisis, with access to intensive wrap around supports for those directly impacted by violence. Delivery of services within these facilities should consider the individual and cultural needs of the potential residents and be designed in collaboration with those who have experienced or are experiencing disadvantage. They should be designed to support a maximum of five families at a time, to ensure that conflict and violence does not arise, given the already heightened context of residents, and the interpersonal dynamics that this will inevitably involve.

Investment in crisis accommodation should be made in all parts of Queensland (particularly rural, and remote), to ensure that all women and children facing violence have access to purpose built emergency accommodation in communities where they can be both safe and will want to live.

### Affordable long-term housing

The Housing Summit must address the need for secure, stable housing for the safety and wellbeing of people experiencing violence and abuse, particularly for children.<sup>9</sup> It is a well-known and ongoing problem that there is a lack of secure and long-term accommodation

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<sup>9</sup> Breckenridge, J., Hamer, J., Newton, B. and valentine, k. (2013) *NSW Homelessness Action Plan extended evaluation: final evaluation report for long-term accommodation and support for women and children experiencing domestic and family violence*. (4 reports) Report produced for Housing NSW, Centre for Gender Related Violence Studies and the Social Policy Research Centre, University of New South Wales, Sydney

available for people who have escaped a domestic abuse crisis.<sup>10</sup> It is also well-known that the high (and increasing) demand for social housing and competitive rental market places extraordinary strain on existing domestic violence refuges. For women escaping violence, the lack of social housing and long term affordable (low-cost) housing means that many women are faced with the unenviable choice between homelessness or returning to their abuser.<sup>11</sup> This problem is heightened when children are involved. Because of this crisis, more and more families are staying longer in crisis accommodation, and through no fault of their own, are bottlenecking the system.

The evidence regarding these issues is overwhelming. It is well known that the number of people seeking help from homelessness due to domestic and family violence has risen in recent years. In 2019, only 4% of those who approached a homelessness service who had experienced domestic and family violence and needed long-term housing received it.<sup>12</sup> The current bottleneck in the system will only be reduced through the establishment of a stockpile of purpose-built accommodation for disadvantaged families, not just those experiencing domestic violence.

Reliance upon private rental market subsidies to achieve housing outcomes is inadequate. Subsidies are problematic and insufficient, particularly given the increased tightening of rental markets and the reluctance of landlords to take on potentially financially insecure tenants. Rental assistance can only go so far and is insufficient to overcome barriers such as affordable supply and competition from other perspective tenants. Women and their children often find themselves forced into unsafe or sub-standard housing arrangements in risky or dangerous neighbourhoods because there is no alternative.

What is needed is the building of, and access to quality post-crisis housing options within their local communities where families do not have to move frequently. Housing security facilitates not only continuous schooling for children, but also ensures vulnerable women and children can remain close to their support networks and have continuity with after crisis support care such as access to therapeutic, rehabilitation and re-integration support services that can lessen or reduce the long-term impacts and consequences of the experience of violence.

#### Recommendation 2:

Develop targeted strategies for investing in and building purpose-built accommodation for survivor-victims of domestic and family violence for:

- Early intervention support
- Crisis care accommodation, and
- Post crisis affordable long-term housing

#### Children and young people experiencing housing instability and homelessness

While **yourtown** strongly supports the Queensland Government's new framework *Towards ending homelessness for young Queenslanders 2022-2027*<sup>13</sup> to give young Queenslanders

<sup>10</sup> [Housing outcomes after domestic and family violence \(ahuri.edu.au\)](https://www.ahuri.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0026/37619/AHURI-Final-Report-311-Housing-outcomes-after-domestic-and-family-violence.pdf) AHURI Final Report No. 311, November 2019 accessed at [https://www.ahuri.edu.au/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0026/37619/AHURI-Final-Report-311-Housing-outcomes-after-domestic-and-family-violence.pdf](https://www.ahuri.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0026/37619/AHURI-Final-Report-311-Housing-outcomes-after-domestic-and-family-violence.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> Mission Australia (2019), *Out of the shadows – Domestic and Family violence: A leading cause of homelessness in Australia*

<sup>12</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2019), *Special Homelessness Services annual report 2017-18*, Canberra, AIHW

<sup>13</sup> [Young Queenslanders supported to achieve safe, stable housing futures - Ministerial Media Statements](#)

better access to advice and services, this investment needs to be backed up by the provision of physical accommodation sites designed especially for youth.

In **yourtown's** 2021 Your Voice Project, 450 of the young people aged 15-24 surveyed were from Queensland. Young people told us that a lack of affordable housing meant many were couch surfing, rough sleeping, and experiencing unsafe housing situations.

*Housing for young people the pricing of rent isn't fair, a lot of you people don't have that kind of money and end up living on the streets or couch surfing.*

Young people accessing homelessness services and support told us that they found that services did not often have the skills to support their mental health. Housing solutions and integrated support should be designed to meet their preferences and needs to improve help seeking and outcomes.

Investment in new social housing must include investment in new specialist accommodation and housing solutions specifically for children and young people who are homeless.

### **Recommendation 3:**

**Invest in and develop affordable, youth-friendly housing rental and social housing properties, particularly for young people experiencing housing instability and/or homelessness.**

## **Increase investment in, and access to, holistic support services**

In 2021-22, 42% of people accessing specialist homelessness services had experienced DFV.<sup>14</sup> Housing solutions alone will not solve housing instability and homelessness among women and children escaping DFV or children and young people. They require improved access to holistic support that meets their individual preferences and needs.

### **Women and children escaping DFV**

Women and children accessing DFV refuges need culturally safe, trauma informed, and responsive therapeutic support that: creates a sense of safety and stability and allows them to start processing traumatic experiences, while strengthening parent-child attachment; addresses practical concerns; and empowers them to develop the insights, knowledge, skills, and confidence to disrupt the cycle of violence and regain self-determination and control of their lives. They also need coordinated and tailored support planning, counselling support, and practical assistance as they move, settle into, and exit from transitional housing to independent housing.

### **Children and young people experiencing housing instability and homelessness**

Children and young people experiencing housing instability and homelessness need youth-friendly, age and developmentally appropriate support to develop independent living skills, address mental health concerns, engage with education and training, participate in work experience, and transition to employment.

### **Recommendation 4:**

**Invest in more DFV and specialist homelessness service providers, so that services are available to meet the needs of women and children escaping DFV and children and young people experiencing housing instability and homelessness.**

<sup>14</sup> AIHW. (2022). Specialist homelessness services annual report 2020–21. (<https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/homelessness-services/specialist-homelessness-services-annual-report/contents/clients-who-have-experienced-family-and-domestic-violence>)



## Develop innovative financial solutions to empower independence

The Housing Summit should also consider greater collaboration with the financial sector with respect to developing and backing innovative financial solutions to help more people fund and own their own homes, particularly women who have experienced domestic violence.

Providing options to obtain financial independence can help empower women who have experienced housing insecurity and inequity due to domestic and family violence.

The Summit should foster investment in and development of innovative and collaborative co-investment financial solutions to enable disadvantaged families and women to get onto their feet and buy their own homes. For example, 'HomeFundIt' in Baltimore, USA is an online crowdfunding platform that allows home buyers to use gifts from family and friends for the down payment on a home.<sup>15</sup> Community businesses also participate in the project and extra pledges can be received when the participant or their donors shop at participating retailers who pledge anywhere between 1% and 50% back on the person's purchase. Another innovative program that could be explored is the real estate project such as 'Small Change' in Pittsburgh, USA that pro-actively connects investors with developers to build better cities. On the Small Change crowdfunding platform, anyone over the age of 18 can invest in affordable housing projects, or community-centric projects.<sup>16</sup>

### Recommendation 5:

**The Housing Summit should consider how governments, businesses, banks and financial services can develop collaborative and innovative solutions to address financial barriers to owning their own property, particularly for people leaving domestic violence situations.**

## Remove red-tape barriers to accessing accommodation and support

In Queensland, access to Queensland's Homelessness Information Portal (QHIP) – the homelessness assessment and vacancy management system for homelessness and domestic family violence - is only accessible by publicly funded organisations delivering domestic and family violence services. Despite **yourtown** supporting women and children experiencing domestic and family violence, **yourtown's** status as a privately funded service prevents it from using QHIP to access client information and manage referrals for their clients experiencing domestic and family violence. The inability for organisations, such as **yourtown**, to access this Queensland specific service hinders the ability of those escaping domestic and family violence to receive or be referred to appropriate accommodation and support from other frontline services when they need them.

QHIP should also incorporate learnings from Western Australia's new homeless services portal to:<sup>17</sup>

- Allow agencies and providers to check, in real time, which service, such as beds is available
- Open-up referral pathways to meet a person's specific needs at any time, and
- Incorporate a no-wrong door system to ensure that, regardless of which service or agency individuals initially connect with, they can access appropriate accommodation and support from other services when needed.

<sup>15</sup> [Down Payment Gifting - Raise Funds With Crowdfunding | HomeFundIt](https://www.homefundit.com/en) at <https://www.homefundit.com/en>

<sup>16</sup> Abby Ivory and Kent Colton 'Innovative Solutions for the Housing Crisis' *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, Dec. 1, 2020 available at <https://protect-au.mimecast.com/s/0KD8CMwGLkHxxOLhwGop7?domain=ssir.org>

<sup>17</sup> Government of Western Australia, [New homeless services portal to remove barriers to getting help](https://www.wa.gov.au/government/media-statements/new-homeless-services-portal-to-remove-barriers-to-getting-help) (August 2020), [Media statement - New homeless services portal to remove barriers to getting help](https://www.wa.gov.au/government/media-statements/new-homeless-services-portal-to-remove-barriers-to-getting-help) ([mediastatements.wa.gov.au](https://www.wa.gov.au/government/media-statements/new-homeless-services-portal-to-remove-barriers-to-getting-help)).



**Recommendation 6:**

**Access to the Queensland's Homelessness Information Portal should be changed to enable any service provider irrespective of funding status to use the portal to access accommodation and support for vulnerable persons when needed.**

## Addressing housing affordability and cost of living pressures

Building more social housing is only one piece of the puzzle in addressing housing instability and homelessness among children and young people. Of the 450 young Queenslanders who were surveyed in **yourtown**'s 2021 Your Voice Project, 68% identified cost of living as an issue, 45% identified income support as an issue, and 44% identified housing as an issue.<sup>18</sup>

Young people told us that their ability to afford rent and other essentials such as food, clothing, and transport was impacting their mental health and wellbeing.

*...it's been a constant struggle to afford rent, bills, money for public transportation, food, medications and appointments that I have to pay out right for...After everything, I'm usually left with \$50 a fortnight.*

Young people also told us the rate of income support limits their access to affordable health care, including mental health support.

*...the standard rate of job seeker income is a really tight fit and doesn't allow for any excess to be put towards private health services (psychologists, psychiatrists, medications not covered by Medicare, gym memberships etc.).*

**Recommendation 7:**

**That the Queensland Government work with National Cabinet to:**

- **increase and regularly review the rate of income support and supplementary allowances so that young people can afford rent and other essential needs, and**
- **consider measures that address cost of living pressures for young people.**

## Addressing the housing crisis and creating opportunities for those struggling to obtain employment

Fostering greater investment in building social housing is also another means of fostering employment. Employment is a known pathway to social and economic participation and health and wellbeing outcomes. The need to build more social housing represents a unique opportunity to deliver outcomes for young people experiencing unemployment.

One such means can be through the engagement of social enterprises. Social Enterprises can deliver positive outcomes for the Queensland Government and community – increasing Queensland's social housing stock and creating jobs and apprenticeship opportunities for young people experiencing unemployment. This aligns with the Queensland Government Procurement Strategy – to reduce long-term and youth unemployment and deliver a more

<sup>18</sup> yourtown. (2021). Your Voice – Queensland snapshot 2022.  
(<https://www.yourtown.com.au/sites/default/files/document/Your%20Voice%20-%20National%20and%20State%20Summaries%20-%20March%202022.pdf>)

visible pipeline of opportunities for social enterprises<sup>19</sup>, and the Queensland Social Enterprise Strategy – to improve market access and support the growth of the sector.<sup>20</sup>

**yourtown**'s Social Enterprises are specifically designed to break the cycle of youth unemployment by providing long-term unemployed young people with paid work experience and training as a 'stepping stone' to sustainable employment. **yourtown** has worked in partnership with the Queensland Government for 22 years to provide paid employment and training to over 1,500 young people across southeast Queensland in our Social Enterprises through construction, landscaping, asset and grounds maintenance, mowing, and a range of other services.

Procuring Social Enterprises to support the construction of social housing will deliver a wide range of social and economic benefits for young people, communities, and the Queensland Government.

#### Recommendation 8:

**That the Queensland Government leverage the procurement of new social housing to deliver a visible pipeline of opportunities for local Social Enterprises that provide jobs and apprenticeships for young people experiencing unemployment.**

We would welcome the opportunity to explore these ideas with you in further detail. Should you require further information about any issues raised in **yourtown**'s submission, please do not hesitate to contact Kathryn Mandla, Head of Advocacy and Research at **yourtown** via email at [kmandla@yourtown.com.au](mailto:kmandla@yourtown.com.au).

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<sup>19</sup> Queensland Government. (2017). Queensland Government Procurement Strategy. ([https://www.forgov.qld.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0037/187948/qldgovernmentprocurementsstrategy\\_0.pdf](https://www.forgov.qld.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0037/187948/qldgovernmentprocurementsstrategy_0.pdf))

<sup>20</sup> Queensland Government. (2019). Queensland Social Enterprise Strategy. (<https://www.publications.qld.gov.au/dataset/queensland-social-enterprise-strategy/resource/62749c6d-2acc-4324-b91b-74073583354a>)