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## Submission to the State Government Budget Consultation

### Who we are

The Tasmanian Women's Council (TWC) is established by the Minister for Women and the Prevention of Family Violence. Its role is to provide advice to the Minister to assist in the development of effective and evidence-based policy, programs and projects for women.

The Council has 13 members who are selected for their experience and skills, and their ability to represent different communities of Tasmanian women and girls. The members therefore have both a high level of professional expertise and represent a diverse cross-section of the lived experience of Tasmanian women.

### The problem

Tasmania is dealing with a housing crisis and women and children are bearing the brunt of the crisis.

The TWC has identified the shortage of affordable and appropriate housing as a particular problem for women. We are particularly concerned about women and children escaping family violence and women over the age of 55.

We have reviewed the current research on the housing needs of women and children in Tasmania and consulted with representatives of Housing Tasmania, Shelter Tasmania and the crisis housing system about the needs of these women and the policies and initiatives that are in place to assist them. We also investigated the gaps in the current system that place these women at risk. We have requested, and received information about current Tasmanian Government investment, the shelter system, the housing system, options to remove perpetrators of family violence from family homes and the situation of older women.

The TWC would like to congratulate the Government on the initiatives underway to assist women and girls, including the Rapid Rehousing Program (designed for victim/survivors of family violence) and the 150 additional transitional accommodation units to be built over the next two years by Homes Tasmania (although we note that these are not specifically for women). We also note the investment to build new social housing.

However, significant additional investment is required.

## **The situation of women and children escaping family violence**

The rate of homelessness amongst Tasmanian women increased by 50% between 2016 and 2021.<sup>i</sup> Tasmania had over six times the national rate of women being turned away from crisis accommodation in 2021-2022.<sup>ii</sup>

Women seeking assistance from crisis services around their housing needs are more likely to be accompanied by children.

The Council is particularly concerned about women and children escaping family violence given the risks associated with leaving a violent partner, and with returning if they have nowhere else to go. Yet we learned that only one in 20 women experiencing family violence and identified as needing long term housing actually receives that housing<sup>iii</sup>, women are exiting shelters to homelessness<sup>iv</sup> and an estimated 933 Tasmanian women are returning to a violent partner or entering homelessness after experiencing family violence each year due to a lack of housing.<sup>v</sup>

## **The situation of older women**

Many women have too many assets to qualify for social housing, but not enough to purchase a home of their own. This leaves them in a very vulnerable position in the private rental market.

Women aged over 55 are particularly at risk and are the fastest growing group of people vulnerable to homelessness in Australia. Research by the Australian Human Rights Commission into this phenomenon found that older women are experiencing, and are at risk of, homelessness at an increasing rate due to a range of factors including relationship breakdown, death of a partner, loss of income, ill health, rent increases, trauma, abuse, reluctance to seek formal support, and/or providing housing for their family. Further, it found that these risk factors are exacerbated by financial disadvantage flowing from inequality in superannuation, job security, wages, and caregiving expectations.<sup>vi</sup>

## **Budget request**

Significant new investment is required meet the specific needs of victim/survivors and older women with housing needs. In November 2023 Impact Economics published a report on the housing needs of women and children in Tasmania, commissioned by the Tasmanian Government in partnership with Shelter Tasmania and the Hobart Women's Shelter. The following recommendations are drawn from this work. We acknowledge the situation has worsened since the report was published.

**Recommendation 1** That the Tasmanian Government adopt the 2023 Impact Economics recommendation of an additional 1700 crisis beds across the state to meet unmet demand.<sup>vii</sup> These beds need to come with additional staff support to ensure the safety of staff and women and their families.

The number of women eligible for, yet being turned away from, emergency accommodation exceeds the national average six-fold. There is a critical need for more funding for crisis services to include extra beds and qualified staff.

**Recommendation 2** That the Tasmanian Government adopt the 2023 Impact Economics recommendation of significant investment in building a minimum of 4239 additional social housing properties to meet the needs of women and children.

The Council notes the reports of women unable to leave violent partners because they cannot find housing, women separated from adolescent sons by the requirements of the shelter system, and women stuck in shelters unable to be reunited with children. We also note the reports of families uprooted and moved, including multiple changes of school, while they are seeking safe, affordable and appropriate housing.

The Council therefore supports the finding of the report that while the number of properties is important, the size and location of the houses is also critical.

The following table is drawn from this report.<sup>viii</sup>

**TABLE 4 ESTIMATED MINIMUM NUMBER OF AFFORDABLE PROPERTIES NEEDED TO HOME ALL TASMANIAN WOMEN BY REGION, 2022**

Region	Number of properties	1 Bedroom	2 Bedroom	3 Bedroom	4+ Bedrooms
<b>North</b>	<b>1,073</b>	<b>34%</b>	<b>39%</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>9%</b>
Launceston	739				
Meander Valley - West Tamar	108				
North-East	226				
<b>North-West</b>	<b>967</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>36%</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>7%</b>
Burnie - Ulverstone	470				
Devonport	392				
West Coast	105				
<b>South</b>	<b>2,199</b>	<b>37%</b>	<b>35%</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>8%</b>
Brighton	292				
Hobart – North-East	410				
Hobart – North-West	613				
Hobart - South and West	146				
Hobart Inner	434				
Sorell - Dodges Ferry	87				
Central Highlands (Tas.)	62				
Huon - Bruny Island	109				
South-East Coast	45				
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,239</b>	<b>37%</b>	<b>36%</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>8%</b>

Source: Estimated by Impact Economics and Policy

**Recommendation 3:** That the Tasmanian Government address failures in the long term private rental market in Tasmania, including limiting the extent to which properties can be used for short stay accommodation.

We note that Tasmania has the highest rate of properties sitting vacant of any Australian jurisdiction. 4300 properties additional properties would become available if the occupancy rate was increased to match the national average.<sup>ix</sup>

**Recommendation 4:** The Tasmanian Government trial a housing cooperative (non-profit, member-governed) for older women.

The housing cooperative model (non-profit, member-governed) has benefited older women in other jurisdiction (for example, The Women’s Property Initiatives Older Women’s Housing Project).<sup>x</sup> Housing cooperatives are underdeveloped in Tasmania but could benefit older women here.

**Recommendation 5:** That the viability of a specialist social housing provider exclusively for victim/survivors of family violence be explored.

Women leaving family violence situations are highly vulnerable and require specialist support. Generalist housing providers do not have the capacity to provide this.

Please direct any enquiries about this submission to the Tasmanian Women’s Council Chair, Jo Flanagan, at [women@dpac.tas.gov.au](mailto:women@dpac.tas.gov.au).

<sup>i</sup> Impact Economics *Somewhere to go: Meeting the housing needs of women & children in Tasmania, 2023*, Shelter Tasmania and Hobart Women’s Shelter, Hobart. p6

<sup>ii</sup> Ibid, p6

<sup>iii</sup> Ibid, p27

<sup>iv</sup> Ibid, p27

<sup>v</sup> Ibid, p6

<sup>vi</sup> Patterson K, Proft K, & Maxwell J. 2019, Older women’s risk of homelessness: Background Paper: Exploring a growing problem, Australian Human Rights Commission, Sydney,

<sup>vii</sup> Impact Economics, Op cit, p45

<sup>viii</sup> Impact Economics Op cit, p41

<sup>ix</sup> Impact Economics Ibid, p45

<sup>x</sup> [Older Women's Housing Project | Women's Property Initiatives](#)