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Housing, finance, community leaders highlight solutions

Sydney's Everybody's Home Affordable Housing Conference highlighted the unanimous agreement from housing, financial, and community leaders that Australia faces growing homelessness, social inequality and costs to the economy unless urgent action is taken to deliver investment in more social and affordable housing.

The two-day conference attracted speakers and delegates from Europe, New Zealand, the US and around Australia.

Speakers including Saul Eslake, Industry Super Chief Economist Stephen Anthony, Landcom CEO John Brogden, CHIA Australia and leading academics joined local councils, and organisations such as the NSW Nurses and Midwives Association, Domestic Violence NSW, and the NSW Aboriginal Land Council to discuss solutions.

CHIA NSW CEO Wendy Hayhurst said the conference showed there's agreement from across the spectrum that Australia must change tack on the way we are addressing housing affordability now to avoid catastrophic consequences in coming years.

"What is interesting is the diversity of people saying the same thing – we need to do something now, we already have the solutions, we can learn from the rest of the world, we just need the political will to see housing as critical economic infrastructure," Ms Hayhurst said.

"There was furious agreement that we need more social housing on the ground for those who desperately need it, and to start thinking smarter about how we encourage large scale institutional investment in below market affordable rental housing.

"The Senate has just passed legislation to create the National Housing Finance and Investment Corporation (NIFIC).

"The next step is to make it work through mechanisms such as the affordable housing tax credit system proposed by Stephen Anthony to close the financing gap and unlock institutional investment in affordable rental housing projects.

"The US housing credit system has delivered 3 million homes benefitting 7 million households since 1986. It's not the only answer, but it's certainly a very good one."

Homelessness NSW CEO Katherine McKernan said it was encouraging to see the level of commitment to solving housing issues across the board.

"A healthy housing system is vital for a healthy economy and creating an Australia that cares for everybody in its community no matter where they live, or how much they earn," Ms McKernan said.

"People who are homelessness are at the pointy end of a housing system that is broken.

"The solutions are there to fix it, but we need everyone to work together to make that happen so that everybody has a home."

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