

Regional NSW locked out of housing debate - 22,700 new social and affordable homes needed in Newcastle Hunter region

Regional housing providers have called on the NSW government to address chronic housing stress in local communities experiencing among the highest levels of housing stress and homelessness in Australia.

The rental market is facing renewed scrutiny after the Anglicare Rental Affordability Snapshot revealed yesterday that just 856 properties listed in the Newcastle Hunter region were appropriate for families earning minimum wage, and only 83 for households on income support.

Newcastle and Lake Macquarie will need 12,700 new social and affordable homes by 2036 to stop increasing homelessness and provide relief for local communities struggling with chronic rental stress, while the Hunter will need 10,000.

In less than two decades Newcastle and the Hunter will need 8,500 and 7,400 new social housing homes respectively for people in the local community on very low incomes and government support such the aged pension or Newstart.

The region will need another 6,800 below market rentals properties to provide relief for local families surviving on minimum wages or low incomes, 4,100 in Newcastle and 2,700 in the Hunter.

Compass Housing spokesperson Martin Kennedy said approximately 40% of renters in the Newcastle Hunter region are in housing stress.

“Since 2000, median rents in the Newcastle area have increased by around 150%, which is roughly twice as fast as wages,” he said.

‘This sort of discrepancy between rents and incomes can have a serious impact on living standards because people in housing stress are less able to pay for other essentials like food, utilities, insurance, healthcare, childcare, and debt repayments.

“Even in more regional towns, where prices are nominally cheaper, the comparatively lower household incomes mean plenty of renters still struggle.

“There are a number of things governments could do to address the issue, but the first priority should be a substantial increase in the supply of social and affordable housing.”

There are currently around 2,200 households on the social housing register in Newcastle and Lake Macquarie and an additional 1,100 across the rest of the Hunter.

CHIA NSW Chair, John McKenna said regional towns and country areas are being ignored in debates around housing and housing affordability – when 1 in 3 new social and affordable homes needed in NSW by 2036 are outside of Sydney.

“It’s clear when you compare population sizes that communities in regional NSW are in just as desperate need – if not more than – for social and affordable housing than they are in Sydney,” Mr McKenna said.

“The flow on effect to local economies is huge. Too many politicians are still saying move to country areas because it’s cheaper – but the reality is very different for many people already living in these areas.

“The government has said regional infrastructure is a priority – housing is absolutely critical infrastructure that must be funded in all areas of NSW, not just in the city.”

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