

Regional NSW locked out of housing debate – 4,600 new social and affordable homes needed in Riverina 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 442 properties listed in the Riverina region were appropriate for households earning minimum wage, and only 192 for households on income support.

The Riverina region will need 4,600 new social and affordable homes by 2036 to stop increasing homelessness and provide relief for local communities struggling with chronic rental stress.

In less than two decades Riverina will need 3,600 new social housing homes for people in the local community on very low incomes and government support such the aged pension or Newstart.

The region will need another 900 below market rentals properties to provide relief for local families surviving on minimum wages or low incomes.

CEO of Argyle Housing Wendy Middleton said the local community is already experiencing a shortage of 2,800 social housing properties and 800 affordable homes.

Ms Middleton said one of the most important issues facing low to moderate-income earners is the standard of private rental properties and the security of tenure in the private rental market.

“There are instances of people on low incomes who are paying up to 60% of their wage on private rentals within the Riverina. This is clearly unsustainable, and the disruption of moving properties every six to twelve months takes its toll on families’ connections to schools and local communities.

“In Leeton and Griffith, as the economy improves with local industry, people on low incomes are forced out of the private rental market. So housing supply remains low, but rents increase by 30 or 40%.

“Many social housing dwellings in Wagga and Leeton is very poor quality, and single parent families feel so unsafe living in housing estates that many would

rather sleep in their cars. High levels of crime and lack of reliable transport makes it difficult to maintain housing in outer rural areas.

“It's imperative that our government addresses tenancy regulations. Strengthening the rights of renters would not only help relieve mounting rental stress, but also make a world of difference to families suffering from the instability it causes.”

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.

“A combination of lower wages and increasing rents and house price mean that people in regional NSW are doing it tougher than almost anywhere else in Australia, going without many essentials including food just to pay the rent.

“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.

“Not only haven't wages kept up with the private rental market and there's a chronic shortage of both social and affordable housing close for people who need a home they can afford.

“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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