



Building the Territory's Housing Future

Safe, Affordable Homes for all Territorians.

Discussion Paper – September 2026





ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the lands on which we live and work, and we pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

We acknowledge the sorrow of the Stolen Generations and the impacts of colonisation on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

We also recognise the resilience, strength and pride of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Message from Selena and Ed

Whether you are renting in Darwin, buying a first home in Palmerston, working as a nurse in Alice Springs, or living on country, every Territorian deserves an appropriate, affordable and safe home.

The Territory Labor Opposition believes it is a fundamental human right and a critical foundation for thriving children, families and communities.

Housing is also a critical economic driver, supporting population growth and workforce participation.

Right now, the Territory's housing system is under enormous strain along every step of the housing continuum, from crisis accommodation through to affordable homes for Territorians to buy and settle down in.

This housing crisis is causing significant social and economic challenges for the Northern Territory (NT). It acts as an anchor on population growth and on realising the full economic benefit of existing, new and emerging industries. It is putting pressure on our already stretched health system and our social services.

At the emergency and transitional end of the housing continuum, there are not enough safe or accessible accommodation options for Territorians escaping domestic violence, experiencing sudden homelessness or facing financial distress.

More than 5,000 Territorians are waiting for social housing for themselves and their families, leaving them in insecure housing or sleeping rough on our streets.

For more and more working Territorians, it is becoming harder to find an affordable rental or house to buy.

There simply are not enough homes for the key workers we need in Darwin and right across our regions to take up jobs now and into the future.

In remote communities, families are living in overcrowded houses that are dangerous and unhealthy.

On homelands, people are trying to live on country with ageing infrastructure that doesn't meet their current or future needs.

It is a significant challenge, but there are solutions. They require strategic, collaborative effort from all levels of government, working with industry, with developers, with community housing providers and the social services sector.

This discussion paper seeks to identify the housing challenges we are facing and the ideas we think are worth exploring to address those challenges.

We want to hear directly from Territorians and those in the housing industry about how we can build a housing system that works for everyone.

Selena Uiibo

Leader of the Territory Labor Opposition

Ed Smelt

Shadow Minister for Housing Construction



Starting position

Territory Labor Opposition believes that appropriate, affordable and safe housing is a fundamental right for every Territorian.

The NT is facing a worsening housing crisis, denying many people that basic right, particularly young people and people living in remote areas. It is impacting our economy and the liveability of our communities.

There are many things government can and should be doing to tackle this pressing issue, working alongside industry, developers and the community housing sector.

This paper sets out a range of options and proposals for alleviating our housing pressures, to support population growth, economic development and better social outcomes for everyone.

We want to hear what you think about the ideas in this paper, as well as what you think will make the biggest difference to addressing our housing issues.

Your views will help shape Territory Labor's housing policy ahead of the 2028 election.

The case for reform

Growing our population is critical to building a stronger economy, attracting private investment and ensuring Territorians have access to the services, infrastructure and amenities they need to thrive.

Housing is one of the most important enablers of that growth. We need a steady supply of homes, and a good mix of housing options, so people can afford to stay, settle and build their lives here.

More housing also means stronger economic development, better health and wellbeing outcomes, greater participation in education and employment, and safer, more connected communities.

The scale of the challenge is clear. According to the NT Government's recently released housing strategy, the Territory will need more than 7,100 new homes by 2029–30.

That can't be left to chance.

Across our urban centres, more and more Territorians are struggling to afford a decent home, whether they are renting or buying. Tight housing supply is putting upward pressure on both prices and rents, making it harder for people to put down roots.

In the June quarter of 2026, the median house price in Darwin reached \$715,000 – an annual increase of more than 16%.

At the same time, median house rents increased by more than 12% to \$799 a week, while unit rents reached \$601 a week¹.

For many households on low and middle incomes, those costs are becoming increasingly untenable. Young Territorians are particularly exposed.

If we want people to stay in the Territory, we need to provide a realistic pathway into home ownership. That means building more affordable homes and building them faster.

Getting more homes on the ground means confronting the barriers that make construction harder and more expensive – including high freight and material costs, workforce shortages and regulatory burden.

Industry and developers are telling us clearly that they also need certainty. They need confidence that land will be available when they are ready to invest and build.

That means establishing a clear pipeline of suitable, well-located, titled land to give industry the certainty it needs to plan, invest and deliver homes ahead of demand, rather than constantly playing catch-up.

We also need to make the most of the economic and social opportunities created by existing, new and emerging industries. That means ensuring there is enough suitable accommodation for key workers, so they can live in our communities, raise their families and contribute locally – rather than being forced into a fly-in, fly-out workforce.

And while increasing supply is essential, we cannot lose sight of why housing matters in the first place. Decent, secure housing gives people the foundation they need to thrive and contribute to their communities.

That means making sure the most vulnerable and disadvantaged Territorians can access crisis and transitional accommodation when they need it.

It also means rethinking how housing is delivered and managed in remote communities. Where communities have the capacity, they should have greater decision-making power and greater control over the housing that they live in.

At the same time, we need to make sure remote communities have housing available for the people delivering important services – teachers, nurses, police, frontline workers and council staff – so they can live in those communities and get on with the important work they are there to do.

There is no single lever that will solve the Territory's housing challenge. Government has a range of tools available, but unlocking them will require urgency, coordination and genuine collaboration across government, industry, communities and the housing sector.

The task is significant, but the stakes are even greater.

If we get housing right, we do more than build houses. We build the foundations for population growth, economic opportunity, stronger communities and a Territory where more people can afford to stay, grow and thrive.

¹ Department of Treasury and Finance, Real Estate Institute of the Northern Territory

Housing Data Snapshot

The following data provides a snapshot of the current housing situation in the NT, highlighting key challenges and trends.

\$799

Median Darwin house rent per week
June quarter 2026

Source: Dept Treasury and Finance

\$601

Median Darwin unit rent per week
June quarter 2026

Source: Dept Treasury and Finance

\$715,000

Median Darwin house price
June quarter 2026

Source: Dept Treasury and Finance

\$450,000

Median Darwin unit price
June quarter 2026

Source: Dept Treasury and Finance

0.3%

Darwin rental vacancy rate
Lowest of any capital city

Source: SQM Research

0.3%

Alice Springs rental vacancy rate

Source: HTAG

9%

National Housing Accord progress target achieved

Source: NHSAC

5,550

General and priority social housing applications
as at 30 June 2026

Source: NT Government

6-10 Years

Priority housing wait time

Source: NT Government

~50%

Remote houses experiencing overcrowding

Source: NT Government

12 Times the National Average

Territory homelessness rate

Source: NT Shelter

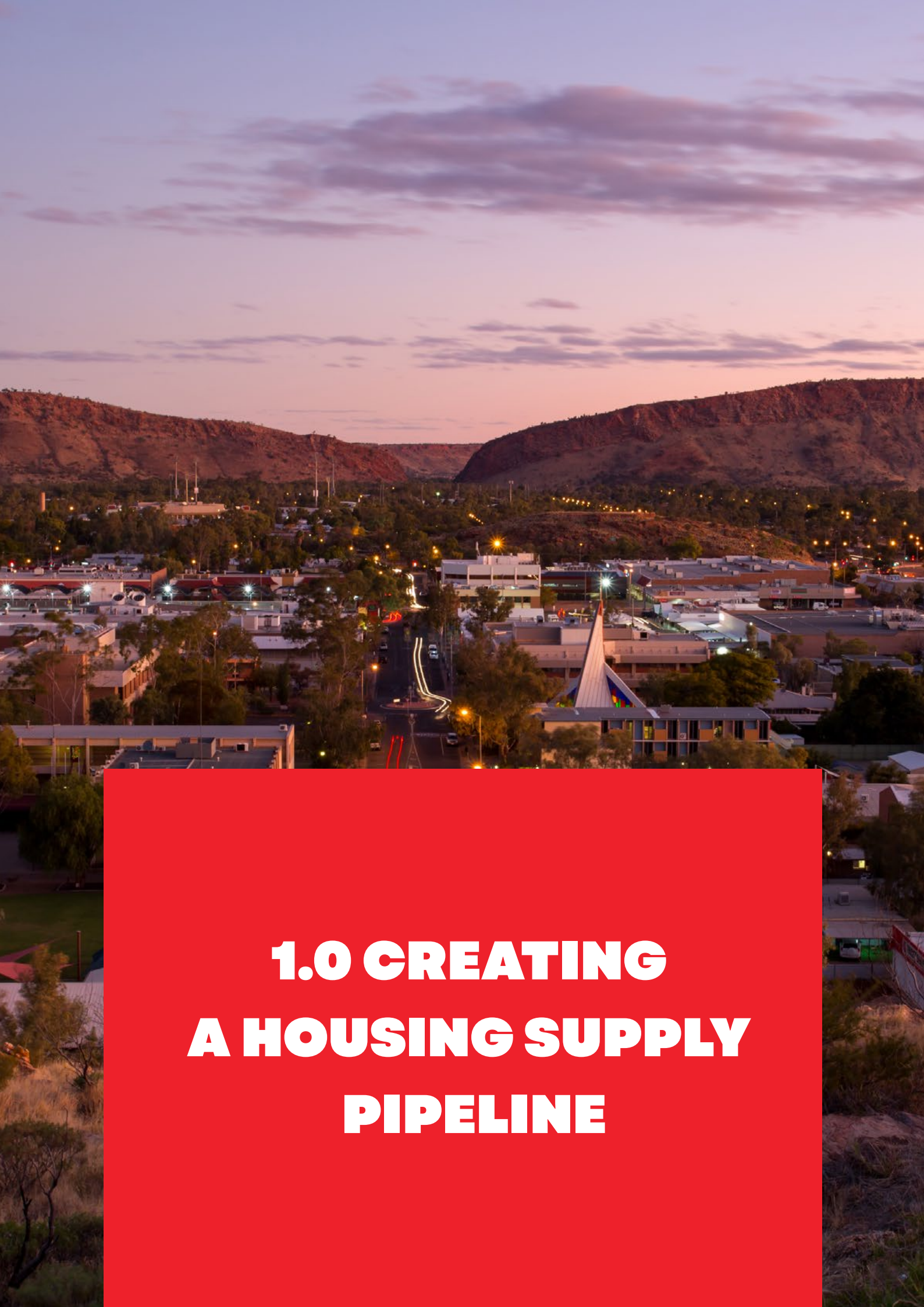
Paper at a glance

Over the past two years, we have had many conversations with industry, developers and community housing representatives about what is needed now and into the future to improve housing supply and affordability.

This paper is informed by the feedback, thoughts and ideas we have heard up and down the track across the Territory. It has been built around a number of key themes and offers options for consideration against each one:

- 1. Creating a Housing Supply Pipeline**
- 2. Tackling Construction Roadblocks**
- 3. Better support along the Housing Continuum**
- 4. Building for our Regions**

While it is not possible to implement all of the options we have put forward at once, we want to hear which ones you think will make the biggest difference in meeting the current and future housing needs of Territorians.

An aerial photograph of a city at dusk. The city is illuminated by streetlights and building lights, with a prominent rainbow flag on a building. The city is surrounded by greenery and hills, with a large mountain range in the background under a cloudy sky.

1.0 CREATING A HOUSING SUPPLY PIPELINE

The Challenge

The NT's economy has been characterised by boom-and-bust cycles – and supply and demand in the housing market has followed a similar trajectory.

Just like the broader economy, we need a more sustained approach to boosting housing supply and ensuring we have a diverse range of housing options that are well-located and contribute to population growth, liveability, workforce participation and community safety.

Government has a very important role to play through strategic investment, sound policy settings, a pipeline of well-located titled land and removing barriers to development.

There is also a need for a more collaborative approach when it comes to financing and delivering large-scale housing developments between government, industry, financial backers and community housing providers.

Strategic planning, appropriate zoning and investment in enabling infrastructure will help to open up well-located land for residential, commercial and industrial use in a purposeful way, with an eye to future economic development, population growth and addressing the current housing shortfall.

We want to hear from stakeholders and the community about which of the below ideas are likely to support a steady land release pipeline and streamlined development.

1.1 – Establish a dedicated Housing Construction Authority within government

Currently, responsibility for housing sits across multiple ministers and government agencies – the approach is fragmented and inefficient.

A dedicated **Housing Construction Authority** within Government could forecast, fast-track, facilitate and build housing developments, as well as help keep construction costs down, by:

- Identifying and preparing a pipeline of land for residential development, including delivering enabling infrastructure;
- Acting as one-stop-shop for developers, community housing providers, private investors and the construction industry, supporting streamlined approval pathways and long-term pipeline stability;
- Supporting access to existing subsidies and government funding, such as the Housing Australia Future Fund and helping to facilitate joint venture partnerships or finance models;
- Initiating publicly funded housing development to support a pipeline of affordable housing for sale and rent.

1.2 – Recommit to National Housing Accord Target of 11,000-plus new homes by 2029

According to the National Housing Supply and Affordability Council, the NT is forecast to deliver around 4,000 homes across the five years of the National Housing Accord – well below the target of 11,427 new homes.

Meanwhile, the NT Government's own Housing Strategy says we will need an extra 7,143 new homes by 2029-30 to meet forecast population growth.

We know the scale of demand; we need clear targets and plans to address it.

As a starting point, recommitting to the **National Housing Accord** target and reporting against the target every six months would bring greater accountability and transparency into housing construction progress.

Published data could include the status of identified land releases and every housing project across the Territory with detail on the quantum of houses, enabling infrastructure required, procurement, workforce needs and timeframes.

Regularly publishing data on housing delivery targets and pipelines provides more certainty to industry on the status and timing of projects and supports accountability around delivery.

1.3 – Consider whether Area Plans need to be re-enlivened

Area Plans are a mechanism to support good land use planning and development policies, articulating principles for future growth in an identified area and supporting essential service agencies to plan for future needs.

While our urban Area Plans are less than ten years old, they could be used more actively to guide development in a strategic way, in line with agreed principles and community expectation.

Area Plans could be re-enlivened to support good planning and provide an opportunity to quickly identify housing growth areas.

1.4 – Implement and publish a five yearly Housing Construction Plan

Achieving housing targets requires a coordinated, long-term approach to identifying and addressing supply gaps across all housing types, including affordable and key worker housing, crisis accommodation, government employee and student housing, and retirement living.

A **Housing Construction Plan** could forecast housing demand and supply requirements over the next 5–10 years across each region. This would identify the type, quantity and location of housing needed, informed by demographic trends, economic projections and changing household needs.

The plan would provide governments, planners and industry with greater certainty to anticipate and coordinate the requirements for land release, planning approvals, workforce and supply chains, financing and enabling infrastructure. It would also support the strategic and sustained release of crown and private land for short-, medium- and long-term development, including clear information on the servicing status, development readiness and constraints associated with individual sites.

Developed collaboratively across government and with major project proponents and industry, the plan could provide a shared basis for investment and planning decisions, improve certainty for the construction sector, and ensure housing supply is aligned with regional needs.

Coordination could be undertaken by a dedicated Housing Construction Authority, with responsibility for maintaining the plan, coordinating delivery across government and industry, and monitoring progress against identified housing needs (see 1.1).

1.5 – Incentivising partnerships between property developers, financial institutions and community housing providers

Over the coming decade, the NT will need thousands of additional workers to fill jobs in the mining, energy, construction and health industries. Meeting this demand will require new, affordable housing at scale in Darwin, Nhulunbuy, Katherine, Tennant Creek and Alice Springs.

Securing finance for new affordable housing developments is a significant barrier to progress. Innovative funding structures and strategic partnerships could help strengthen the housing sector and unlock new development.

Government could help coordinate and incentivise these partnerships through measures such as public-private partnerships, low-cost loans for joint ventures, funding to bridge gaps between construction costs and project returns, fee waivers, long-term low-cost land leases, and better leveraging of National Housing Accord funding.

A strong framework for innovative finance arrangements could support and streamline new developments, while partnerships between government and industry could help reduce housing costs.

1.6 – Establish a Government-Major Project housing construction partnership

With a number of major projects coming online over the next decade, the NT has an opportunity to attract more workers to put down roots in the Territory, rather than relying on fly-in, fly-out arrangements.

Western Australia has a public-private partnership model under which major resource companies co-fund regional residential construction alongside the State Government, helping to address critical local housing shortages.

The NT could consider a similar model or establish a dedicated major project proponent fund to support key worker housing developments and land servicing in areas experiencing housing pressure.

1.7 – Unlock government-owned land and public assets for housing

Underutilised government land should be opened up for development as soon as possible, starting with sites already in the pipeline for fast-tracked development.

Land could be developed by government, or gifted, provided at low-cost, or on a long-term lease arrangement to developer/community housing provider consortiums with a mandatory minimum of social and affordable housing, so that public assets create lasting public benefit.

Consideration could also be given to fast-tracking analysis of infill and adaptive re-use opportunities, giving consideration to infrastructure and essential services capacity, amenity, environmental and climate impacts, and good design principles.

Any analysis should be done transparently and in consultation with industry and community and made publicly available, so Territorians have clear information about the benefits and risks of each identified infill proposal and can have their say.

Industry and community buy-in would be essential in ensuring infill development can progress with certainty.



1.8 – Consider a workable policy for affordable housing targets in all new developments

Jurisdictions around the world have successfully introduced a range of policies that support the inclusion of social and affordable housing as part of new developments.

Supporting the delivery of more social and affordable housing through a mandatory inclusion policy could be considered for the Territory, while ensuring the viability of any new developments.

We acknowledge industry's concerns about the potential impact of such a policy, particularly given the higher costs associated with building in the Territory. Getting the balance right will be essential to supporting continued housing supply and ensuring new homes remain accessible to a broad range of Territorians.

There are a number of successful examples internationally that demonstrate the potential for mandatory inclusion policies to deliver meaningful increases in social and affordable housing.

The key will be getting the settings right for the Territory, including working closely with industry and the community housing sector to develop a practical approach that increases social and affordable housing stock while supporting ongoing development and housing supply.

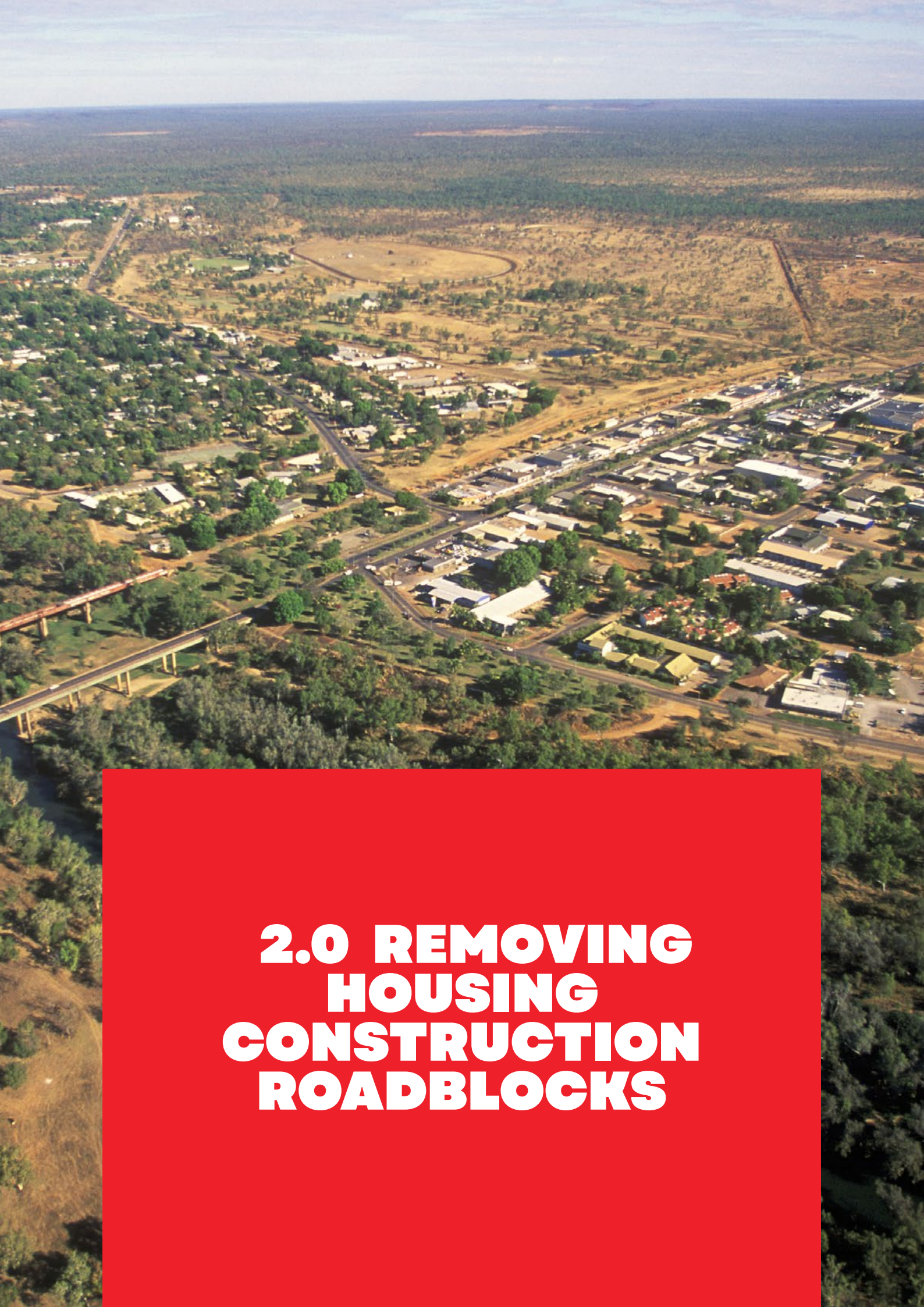
This helps –

First Home Buyers; Territorians experiencing rental or housing stress; Territorians looking to buy an affordable home; People on social housing waitlists; Planners; Private investors; Financial institutions/Financers; Property developers; Community housing providers; Construction sector; Private industry and developers; Major project proponents; Essential workers – both local and those looking to settle here from interstate or overseas; All levels of government; Community services sector; Territory communities



Guiding Questions:

1. What are the most effective things Government can do to activate more housing developments?
2. Do targets assist with progress on housing construction?
3. What type of housing is most urgently needed in each of the regions?
4. Is mandatory inclusion zoning the right approach (if developed in collaboration with industry), or are there better ways to increase affordable housing without discouraging private development?
5. Would a dedicated body, if implemented correctly, assist with streamlining planning, construction and delivery of new housing?
6. What else do developers and industry need that would assist them to have greater confidence in future development opportunities and can plan accordingly?
7. What is the best way to inform and consult with the community on future land use or land release?
8. Are there other measures that would support land release, or the land release to delivery pipeline?
9. What are some of the biggest barriers to activating infill development?

An aerial photograph showing a town with various buildings, roads, and green spaces. A large red rectangular box is overlaid on the bottom half of the image, containing white text. The background shows a mix of urban development and natural landscape, including a river or waterway on the left and a large open field in the upper center.

2.0 REMOVING HOUSING CONSTRUCTION ROADBLOCKS

The Challenge

Housing development is about more than new homes – it provides employment and business opportunities for Territorians and is a major contributor to our economy.

Global conflicts, supply chain challenges and fuel spikes continue to have a significant impact on material and transport costs; those pressures are felt more acutely in the Territory.

Other cost pressures come from our smaller market, site preparation costs, cyclone coding, as well as other regulatory requirements that have a significant impact on the viability of projects.

Meanwhile, trade shortages remain one of the biggest barriers to boosting housing construction, with the sector struggling to attract enough workers across a range of in-demand jobs including carpenters, electricians, metal fabricators, plumbers and project builders.

A clearer, more reliable pipeline of work would support industry to undertake workforce planning with certainty, however there are other ways government – both Territory and Commonwealth – could assist industry to build the workforce they need.

2.1 – Independent review of barriers to housing construction, co-designed with industry

Good regulation provides essential safeguards for housing construction, including safety, certainty, consumer protection, structural integrity, accessibility and environmental performance. However, regulatory requirements have grown increasingly complex across all levels of government, creating barriers to housing delivery.

The National Construction Code is around 2,000 pages and references more than 100 standards, with Territory-specific requirements adding further compliance costs and complexity.

While the Productivity Commission is progressing national housing supply reforms, the NT can also improve its own regulatory environment. A six-month, industry-led review could identify duplicative requirements, unclear standards and procurement, contractual and approval bottlenecks, with reforms implemented within 12 months.

Another option for fast-tracking construction could include developing a **Housing Pattern Book** with pre-endorsed designs eligible for fast-tracked planning approval, helping developers deliver high-quality, affordable and sustainable housing more quickly.

2.2 – Introduce a Territory Construction Workforce Strategy and Investment Fund

A dedicated strategy, backed up by focused investment to address construction workforce shortages could support businesses to take on additional apprentices, fund gap training for overseas-qualified tradespeople, see investment into industry-led training infrastructure across the Territory and support more Territorians, including Aboriginal Territorians, into the construction industry.

The strategy could include a set target of, for example, 500 additional construction workers entering the Territory workforce over four years, with annual reporting on completions and retention.

Key focus areas for a Construction Workforce Strategy could include:

- Reforming trade licensing pathways for internationally trained workers, including funding local gap training courses and expanding Territory-specific Designated Area Migration Agreement (DAMA) arrangements that are more responsive to the needs of the construction sector;
- Reviewing apprentice supervision ratios, where the ratio is a barrier to workforce growth rather than a genuine safety measure;
- Introducing targets and incentives for women and girls to enter the construction sector; currently women make up only around 15% of the construction workforce;
- Investing in more trade training hubs in regional centres and remote communities, so more Aboriginal Territorians can take up work in the construction sector, building and maintaining homes in their own communities; and
- Low home loan deposits or other incentives for apprentices and early career workers to help them buy a home.



2.3 – Government support to re-start stalled housing developments and get new ones started

High construction costs and market uncertainty are often critical factors in housing developments not getting off the ground.

Consideration could be given to government taking an equity stake in stalled housing developments to remove some of the financial risk for developers and get projects moving, in return for a portion of the houses being priced affordably and designated for key workers.

Alternatively, government could take a stake in proposed housing ventures which may fast-track bank approvals and delivery more affordable housing opportunities.

2.4 – Scaling up modular and prefabricated housing

This could be explored as a way to streamline construction and reduce costs, particularly for regional and remote housing development.

Government could look to provide funding support for research and development, pilot programs, updated specifications and regulations to support more scalable use of these contemporary construction models.



Guiding Questions:

1. What are the biggest planning and permitting bottlenecks, and how can they be unblocked?
2. Which regulatory requirements are most costly to meet, and are there opportunities to reduce these costs while maintaining necessary safety, quality and environmental safeguards?
3. Where are there regulatory or administrative duplications that could be eliminated or streamlined?
4. Would a dedicated Housing Construction Authority help streamline planning, permitting and project delivery processes? If so, what functions should it perform?
5. What measures could the Territory Government take now to attract, retain and expand the construction workforce, including skilled trades and apprentices?
6. Is there an opportunity to scale up modular, prefabricated and other innovative forms of construction to accelerate delivery and reduce costs? What role could Government play in enabling this?
7. How are supply chain constraints affecting the cost and availability of building materials, and are local building requirements or standards limiting the use of lower-cost or innovative alternative materials?
8. What other opportunities exist to reduce housing construction costs without compromising safety, quality or long-term housing outcomes?
9. What financing, taxation or project-viability barriers are preventing otherwise viable housing projects from proceeding, and what could Government do to unlock greater private and community-sector investment?

A nighttime photograph of a city street. On the left, a large, curved, light-colored building is visible. In the foreground on the left, there are trees and a building with a sign that says "DIAMOND". On the right, a tall building with a red facade and a "cole" sign is prominent. The street is lit by streetlights, and there are cars and traffic lights visible. A large red rectangular overlay covers the bottom half of the image, containing white text.

3.0 BETTER SUPPORT ALONG THE HOUSING CONTINUUM

The Challenge

Housing needs vary significantly for different cohorts of Territorians; those needs can change over time, with people moving back and forth along the continuum depending on their circumstances.

At one end are Territorians needing crisis and emergency accommodation and at the other end there are those Territorians living in their own home or looking to buy their first home.

Viewing housing as a continuum helps identify the investment, policy and service responses needed at each stage to ensure every Territorian has access to an appropriate housing option, regardless of their circumstances.

This section considers options to support a stronger focus across the continuum and better respond to existing and future housing needs including:

- Crisis and emergency accommodation
- Transitional and assisted living accommodation
- Social Housing
- Affordable Rentals
- Private Market Rentals
- Shared Equity and Home ownership



3.1 – Improving crisis and emergency accommodation

Options for consideration include:

Developing a strategic plan for boosting the supply of crisis and emergency accommodation

Around 1 in 3 requests for emergency housing in Darwin go unmet, because of severe shortages in crisis and short-term accommodation; this leaves many Territorians with neither housing or a referral to a service.

The recent announcement about the closure of YiSSA in Darwin highlighted the realities of crisis and short-term accommodation in the Territory and just how dire the situation is.

Developing a long-term plan for boosting crisis and short-term housing supply will help to meet this need over time. This work should be done in conjunction with the Federal Government and the community housing sector, with funding opportunities identified through the National Housing Accord.

Establishing Youth Foyers in Alice Springs and Darwin

Youth foyers provide at-risk and vulnerable young people with supported accommodation for up to two years, combined with education and training support.

It gives these young people a clear pathway to more permanent, stable housing, setting them up for success.

This is a well-established model that has delivered positive outcomes in other jurisdictions. The NT Government could work with the community services and housing sector to advocate for Federal Government funding for the establishment of youth foyers in Alice Springs and Darwin initially and explore the possibility of expanding the foyer model into other regional centres.



3.2 – Building more and safer social housing

Options could include:

Establishing a Social Housing Advisory body

At June 2026, there were less than 200 vacant social housing homes across the Territory with around 5550 applicants – that is nearly 28 applicants for every home.

This supply shortfall drives the longest social housing wait times in the country (around 10 years) and a homelessness rate that is 12 times the national average.

An independent advisory body could help advise the government on strategies to boost social housing supply, including accessible housing supply, publish regular evaluations, and bring together experts across economics, urban planning, homelessness and other social services, Aboriginal housing and developers to work proactively on strategies that address need at this stage of the housing continuum.

Setting annual targets for social housing builds

With more than 5000 Territorians on the social housing wait list, there is an urgent need to build more social housing that is well-located and well-designed, promoting community safety and cohesion and better health and workforce participation outcomes.

Currently, we are seeing a reduction in social housing stock, putting more Territorians in unstable living conditions.

Round Three of the Housing Australia Future Fund is currently open to State and Territory governments, offering significant funding for social housing builds.

The Territory has an opportunity to access this funding to provide a much-needed boost to our social housing stock, either through infill opportunities or releasing suitable parcels of land.

A specific target – for example, 250 new social homes a year over four years – would send a clear signal to the construction sector, enable workforce and supply planning and hold government accountable on delivery.

Establishing a government and community housing partnership to fast-track social housing construction

The NT Government could partner with community housing providers to rapidly increase the supply of social housing, including accessible social housing.

Government could provide land, funding and development support, while community housing providers bring their experience in delivering and managing housing for people who need to access social housing support.

Modern modular construction could help turn this partnership into homes more quickly. Standardised, high-quality designs could be built faster and at greater scale, while still being adapted to the Territory's climate and the needs of local communities.

This approach would bring together government resources and community sector expertise to get more homes built, sooner.

3.3 – Rental Reform

More than half of all Territorians are renters – the highest proportion in the country.

The NT has recently become the least affordable place to rent in the country, with rent now taking up 29% of a median family income.

For pensioners in inner Darwin, median rent for a one-bedroom unit is around 76% of their income, leaving them with around \$160 a week for living costs.²

Without urgently relieving rental pressure and getting more Territorians into their own home, the NT is in danger of losing key workers and their families interstate, while Territorians on low incomes or pensions are priced out of the market.

Options for consideration include:

Finalising implementation of National Cabinet's 'A better deal for renters'

This suite of rental reforms is aimed at strengthening renters' rights. The former Labor Government implemented a number of these measures, but progress has since stalled.

These final reforms should be implemented to provide some relief to Territorians who are struggling with rental stress including:

- Caps on rent increases and fewer rent increases
- Banning no-grounds evictions
- Establishing an independent bond board that securely holds tenant bonds rather than landlords or real estate agents. The Territory is the only jurisdiction that does not have this in place.
- Requiring a minimum habitability standard for rentals
- Establishing a Territory Rental Commissioner with powers to investigate serious rental complaints, publish regular rental market data and advocate for renters in policy development, giving the half of Territorians who rent a dedicated, independent voice in government

While the rights of renters should be balanced with those of landlords, we need to ensure renters in the Territory are getting a fair go.

Setting parameters around short-stay accommodation

Tourism plays a significant role in the Territory economy and there will always be a place for short-stay accommodation for visitors and tourists.

However, in lieu of appropriate controls or oversight, short-stay accommodation is having an impact on the availability and cost of long-term rentals in places like Darwin and Alice Springs.

There is a need to step back and consider what can be done to ensure the influx of short-stay platforms is balanced with the affordable rental needs of Territorians.

Some options for consideration include:

- Introducing a Territory register for short-term rentals to increase transparency around the extent and location of short-stay accommodation across the Territory
- In high-demand rental areas, limiting the number of days unhosted short-term accommodation can be rented out
- Offering incentive payments to homeowners to encourage them to move to the long-term rental market
- Establishing a levy on short-term accommodation, with all proceeds going to a Territory Social Housing Fund
- Putting a pause on new planning permits for converting homes into short-stay accommodation in high rental stress areas



3.4 – Supporting more Territorians into their own home

Every Territorian deserves the opportunity to own their own home, but as house prices continue to rise, home ownership has become increasingly out of reach for many people, particularly young Territorians.

Home ownership also supports population growth and economic development.

Alongside sustained efforts to increase the supply of affordable housing, there are a range of measures government could implement to help more Territorians purchase their first home.

Options for consideration include:

Stamp duty concessions for first home buyers

The current HomeGrown grants provide valuable support to Territorians looking to build or purchase a new home. However, take-up has been limited outside Darwin and Palmerston, in part due to the structure and eligibility requirements of the grants.

Stamp duty concessions are another potential tool to support first home buyers.

While concessions are currently available to Territorians purchasing new homes and land packages, this approach limits the number of people who can benefit. In particular, it can exclude lower-income workers and other Territorians who may be looking to purchase an established home.

Expanding stamp duty exemptions or concessions to all eligible first home buyers—not just those purchasing a new home—would provide support across the Territory and benefit first home buyers across a wider range of price points.

Options for reform could include:

- Providing a stamp duty exemption for first home buyers purchasing a property below a set price threshold, with a partial concession above that threshold.
- Targeting stamp duty concessions towards regional and remote areas where there has been limited take-up of the existing HomeGrown grants.
- Extending concessions to the purchase of established homes, ensuring first home buyers have greater choice in the type of property they purchase.

A broader approach to stamp duty concessions would provide another practical incentive for Territorians to enter the housing market and could help ensure Government support reaches those who are currently missing out under existing schemes.

Guiding Questions:

1. How well does our current housing stock meet the demographic, household and income needs of the Territory population now and into the future?
2. Do we have accurate and timely data that allows us to measure transitions between different stages of the housing continuum, so we can dynamically track need?
3. Where are the most significant gaps in housing supply and support across the continuum, and which groups of Territorians are most affected?
4. What are the key barriers that prevent people from moving successfully between different stages of the housing continuum – for example, from homelessness into stable housing, social housing into private rental, or renting into home ownership?
5. What role should community housing providers and community land trusts play in scaling up social and affordable housing assets and how can they best be supported by government to do that?
6. What are the most effective ways for government to increase the supply of long-term social and affordable housing, including through direct investment, land contributions, partnerships and leveraging private or institutional capital?
7. How should housing provision be integrated with homelessness, health, disability, family and domestic violence, mental health, employment and other support services to help people sustain their housing?
8. Are there financial, planning and regulatory incentives that would encourage private developers to include a meaningful proportion of below-market rental housing in new developments, while ensuring the incentives represent good value for government?
9. What incentives, such as stamp duty concessions or waivers, deposit assistance or other targeted support, are most likely to get more Territorians into their own home without unduly inflating house prices?
10. Could models such as shared equity, community land trusts, limited-equity housing, rent-to-buy or cooperative ownership provide viable alternatives to conventional home ownership in the Territory?
11. What would need to change for the Territory to have a genuinely functioning housing continuum, where people can access the right type of housing at the right time and move between housing options as their circumstances change?
12. What outcomes and indicators should government use to measure whether the housing continuum is improving – including housing affordability, availability, quality, security, homelessness, housing transitions and rates of home ownership?

An aerial photograph of a small town in a vast, arid, red landscape. The town is clustered in the lower-left quadrant, featuring numerous small buildings with blue and white roofs, interspersed with green trees. The surrounding terrain is flat and red, with sparse vegetation. In the distance, there are low hills and a clear horizon under a bright blue sky with a few wispy clouds. A large red rectangular overlay covers the bottom third of the image, containing white text.

4.0 BUILDING FOR OUR REGIONS

The Challenge

Chronic overcrowding in our remote communities has significant and immediate health, wellbeing, safety and economic impacts on Territorians living in these conditions, with flow-on impacts for the broader community.

The former Labor Government struck a 10-year, \$4 billion Remote Housing Program with the Commonwealth Government to build 2,700 new homes over ten years, supported by a comprehensive repairs and maintenance program.

It is critical that work under this program progresses as a matter of urgency.

There is also a need to review the way remote housing is delivered, maintained and managed across the NT to address ongoing issues, from slow repairs and maintenance to long-term planning at a community level.

Ongoing investment in homelands housing is critical to support families to remain on country.

Government employee housing remains a significant barrier to getting enough teachers, police, health and council staff into remote communities. Ensuring adequate employee housing is critical to supporting safer communities and better education, health and employment outcomes.

4.1 – Urgently review arrangements under the Remote Housing Program

This should include greater transparency around progress reporting and data sharing in relation to this program and the status of remote housing generally.

The Joint Steering Committee on remote housing could then use this data to review arrangements and determine the most efficient and cost-effective way to get this program moving again.

Consideration should be given to expanding the program to support families, clans and communities who opt to build new houses on homelands rather than in communities.

4.2 – Transition to a community-controlled housing model

Remote communities have experienced ongoing problems with repairs and maintenance, overcrowding, slow response times and housing systems that are often managed a long way from the communities they are meant to serve.

A community-controlled housing model would give Aboriginal Territorians greater ownership over the construction, management, maintenance and long-term planning of housing in their own communities.

This should not be a one-size-fits-all approach. Different communities have different circumstances, governance structures, workforce capacity and aspirations.

Consideration could be given to a series of **Remote Housing Pilot Programs** in partnership with interested communities to test:

- Community control of repairs and maintenance;
- Local housing management and tenancy services;
- Aboriginal-owned construction and maintenance enterprises;
- Employment and apprenticeships for local Aboriginal Territorians;
- Greater involvement of communities in housing design and allocation;
- Local procurement and supply chains; and
- Models that allow communities to progressively assume greater responsibility for their housing systems.

The approach should ensure long-term sustainability through investment, training, workforce development and governance support.

Remote housing should create more than houses. It should create jobs, skills, apprenticeships, stronger local organisations and economic opportunities that remain in communities.

Aboriginal Territorians should not simply be tenants or recipients of a housing system designed elsewhere. They should increasingly be the builders, managers, decision-makers and owners of the organisations delivering housing in their communities.

A pilot approach provides an opportunity to demonstrate what works, learn from communities and progressively build a remote housing system that is locally controlled, accountable and responsive to the people it serves.

4.3 – Establish a Cyclical Maintenance Program and community-controlled maintenance teams

A program of planned and cyclical maintenance can significantly reduce the life-cycle costs of housing assets, provide a consistent pipeline of work for contractors, including local tradespeople, reduce the need for emergency and urgent maintenance, and support healthy homes for remote tenants.

Funding could be set aside to locally train teams of tradespeople to undertake routine maintenance and urgent repairs.

Local people maintaining local homes creates local jobs, reduces response times and fosters a sense of community ownership over housing infrastructure.

4.4 – Trial of climate-adapted and culturally appropriate housing in remote communities

Consideration should be given to making remote homes more climate resilient and culturally appropriate.

This could be supported by community-specific design guidelines developed in conjunction with Aboriginal Housing NT, Aboriginal communities and community housing providers.

Wilya Janta is an example of community-led housing design that brings together local knowledge and technical expertise to design homes that better reflect local cultural and environmental needs, as well as liveability.

Communities are at the centre of design decisions so houses are built to meet their needs and contribute to better health and social outcomes.



Wilya Janta (Standing Strong) Housing Collaboration

4.5 – Establish a Remote Community Disaster Resilience Fund

As the impacts of climate change cause more extreme temperatures and weather events across the Territory, disproportionately impacting remote communities, there is an urgent need to make community housing more resilient.

While this will require initial investment, prevention and resilience measures are ultimately more cost-effective than repairs following a disaster, as demonstrated by recent flooding in the Daly region.

A dedicated Remote Community Disaster Resilience Fund, established in conjunction with the Commonwealth Government, could support housing upgrades in the most flood- and cyclone-vulnerable communities across the Territory.

The fund could also support appropriate upgrades to houses in Central Australia to combat the growing number of extreme temperature days.

4.6 – Capital Works and Repairs and Maintenance Program for Homelands housing

Consideration should be given to partnering with the Commonwealth Government on a multi-year program for repairs and capital upgrades to existing homelands housing. This would improve housing quality and accountability through clear performance measures.

The target could be approximately 120 dwelling upgrades, 20 replacements and 20 new builds each year.



4.7 – Boosting Government Employee and Service Provider Housing Stock

Adequate and appropriate housing is critical to attracting and retaining teachers, nurses, police and council staff in remote communities.

As well as supporting better health, education and community safety outcomes and ensuring essential services operate effectively, government employee housing also supports local jobs and local businesses.

In the interests of equity, housing could also be available for government employees who are local to the community they serve.

Previous Government Employee Housing Reform work commenced in 2021 should be re-enlivened, supporting a centralised GEH model and identifying opportunities to streamline housing allocation across the GEH portfolio. This should include a clear pipeline for asset construction and renewal, integrated property and tenancy management, and reporting against program objectives.

4.8 – Reforming Town Camp housing management

Across the NT, there are 43 town camps with a total of 700 houses.

Town camps provide cultural security and strong connections to family, kinship groups and traditional land within urban areas.

However, infrastructure, including housing within town camps, is often poorly maintained and below the standard of housing in most urban settings.

The former Labor Government initiated a report into town camps and implemented a five-year plan, backed by investment in housing and infrastructure projects.

However, there is much more to be done to improve the quality of town camp housing and reduce overcrowding, which is currently driving many town camp residents into urban centres.

Ongoing investment in town camp infrastructure and continued reform to streamline essential housing repairs and maintenance are critical to ensuring town camps can be safer, healthier and thriving environments for residents.

This helps –

Remote Territorians; Aboriginal community-controlled organisations; Government and Service Provider employees; Construction industry; Aboriginal-owned construction and maintenance enterprises.

Guiding Questions:

1. How can remote housing design better accommodate local family structures, climate conditions, cultural needs and functional living requirements without driving up construction costs?
2. What strategies could be employed to reduce the construction, transport and logistical costs of housing delivery in remote communities so more houses can be built for the same outlay?
3. How can maintenance programs be structured effectively to ensure local community members are trained and employed to undertake housing repairs and maintenance?
4. What models of community control, local employment and Aboriginal ownership could best support a sustainable remote housing system?
5. How can government, communities, Aboriginal organisations and housing providers work together to improve housing design, construction, maintenance and long-term asset management?
6. How can remote housing investment be better leveraged to create local employment, training, apprenticeships, procurement and broader economic opportunities?
7. What changes are needed to improve the availability, quality and management of government employee housing in remote communities?
8. How should remote housing programs respond to the increasing risks posed by extreme heat, flooding, cyclones and other climate-related events?
9. What measures should be used to assess whether remote housing programs are delivering better outcomes for residents, communities and government?

Conclusion

Our housing system needs urgent intervention and stronger partnerships to address the current housing crisis.

Without the right policy settings, investment, collaboration and strategic partnerships, the situation will only get worse.

More people will choose to live and work elsewhere. More Territorians will be sleeping rough or living in unstable and unsafe accommodation.

And the housing crisis will continue to act as a major handbrake on economic development and job creation. That's why we want to have a conversation with the community about:

- **Boosting housing supply** and ensuring a mix of housing options with a strong forward pipeline, so all Territorians have somewhere suitable, affordable and safe to live.
- **Supporting the construction industry** by removing barriers to development and building a strong, skilled local workforce.
- **Building a strong housing continuum**, so every Territorian has a safe and secure roof over their head, regardless of their circumstances.
- **Investing in regional and remote housing**, so Territorians living in remote communities have access to decent, safe and appropriate homes.

The Territory Labor Opposition welcomes your views and input on this discussion paper. Your feedback will help inform our policy development and our goal of building a housing system that works for all Territorians.

You can provide your feedback by emailing your submission to Opposition.Leader@nt.gov.au, or visiting www.selenauibo.com

