



Homelessness NSW



The NSW government introduction of legislation to introduce public housing bonds today lets down this week's 'budget with a strong heart'.

People who need public housing are among the poorest in NSW, and asking them to pay thousands of dollars in bonds will be a massive barrier to accessing essential housing. This surprise change from the NSW Government is a blow to people in desperate need of a home.

This is also a baffling beginning to the Homelessness Strategy outlined in the Budget – introducing measures that will make getting a roof over your head more difficult.

Key community groups call for the plan to be dropped amid concerns it will make life harder for people living in public housing, increase administrative costs of the Family and Community Services department, and be unlikely to have any benefits for the department in costs or tenant behaviour.

The additional administration costs on the Family and Community Services department have not been disclosed and were not budgeted for in a state budget delivered only two days ago. The groups say the policy has not been subject to proper scrutiny, is complicated, unclear and will attract an increased level of appeals and Tribunal activity.

“The time and money the department will spend on administering the system would be better spent on providing new housing, completing the maintenance backlog or providing more assistance to homeless people,” said Leo Patterson Ross, Senior Policy Officer at the Tenants’ Union of NSW.

Tenants living in public housing are already responsible for damage and cleaning costs. The vast majority of tenants take care of their premises, and pay for any damage that does happen. This policy will apply to people even if they have taken full responsibility and paid for all damage.

“People with disability already face huge barriers in finding an affordable and accessible place to live in. Public housing is one place where many people with disability find a home, and introducing bonds will make this much more difficult to access,” said Dean Price, Senior Policy Officer at People with Disability Australia.

“The policy will have a serious impact on those people already doing it tough. There is not adequate protection for people with dementia and other mental health issues, the behaviour of people from outside the household, or decades old damage caused by former occupants which is only recently discovered,” said Karen Walsh, Chief Executive Officer of Shelter NSW.

The community groups are also concerned an imposition of additional costs at the beginning of a tenancy will only set already vulnerable households on the path to further hardship.

“This is not only creating further barriers for people in accessing housing but it will also mean that homelessness services will potentially have to use brokerage funding to cover it. The government may end up paying for these costs itself” said Katherine McKernan, CEO of Homelessness NSW.

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