

# SHELTER NSW UPDATE

## NSW signs on to the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement

---

Adam Farrar

6 September 2018

On the 22 August the (then) Commonwealth Treasurer signed off on the bilateral agreement between the Commonwealth and NSW under the new National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA) that replaced the previous National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA). This allows funding for social housing and homelessness to flow for the 5 year life of the agreement to 2023.

Of course, despite some angst about getting the agreement signed, continued funding was never really in doubt. But at least the signing is out of the way.

The bilateral is the second part of the NHHA – the first is the overarching multi-lateral agreement between all the states and the Commonwealth.

This NSW agreement sets out the main elements of NSW's housing and homelessness strategies that contribute to the priority policy areas identified in the multilateral agreement and the objectives of that agreement. However, one of the big wins by the states has been to specify that the Commonwealth financial contribution won't be affected if the outcomes aren't achieved or if the strategies don't achieve their aims.

About all that is required is a statement of assurance that identifies what has been spent on housing and homelessness (and in the case of homelessness, what has been spent on particular cohorts). This includes reporting of state expenditure. That, at least, is something we don't have now. The states will also work to improve data collection and provide transparent reporting against national performance indicators. Again, funding is not affected by these performance indicators.

So, what of these strategies? Sadly, there is nothing new. The housing strategy is the existing *Future Directions* policy. Some further work on details is still to be done and consulted on, although no details are yet public. The homelessness strategy was announced in June. Of course, if we already have effective strategies, that's what should be recognised under the agreement. But do we?

The answer is clearly, no. And that's because they make no mention of what the need for housing that low-income people can afford is and how it will be met. The supply targets in *Future Directions* (9-10,000 over 10 years) will see social and affordable housing fall further and further behind need. The state's own IPART called for a strategy based on identifying local need and setting local targets to meet it. As Homelessness NSW has pointed out, whatever important improvements the new five year homelessness strategy can bring, homelessness can only continue to get worse unless we meet housing need.

Perhaps all this simply recognises that since the new NHHA doesn't provide any more housing money (and only new certainty and indexation for homelessness funding), then the best that can be expected are that activities under the agreement might "contribute to" the aspirational objectives and outcomes. The Commonwealth's refusal to increase funding for a system that still can't pay its way – let alone respond to growing need – is the real story of this agreement.

Improved transparency about how funding is used will be helpful. The national performance indicators will make it clear how badly we are failing, which might at least help advocacy. And in the bilateral agreement, there are a list of 'joint reform commitments', such as employment participation incentives for social housing tenants or improving outcomes for Aboriginal social housing tenants, that could benefit from such co-operation.

Beyond, that, it's business as usual.

---