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House of Assembly Select Committee on Housing Affordability  
Parliament House, Hobart 7000  
[housing@parliament.tas.gov.au](mailto:housing@parliament.tas.gov.au)

26 July 2019

Dear Committee Members,

The Youth Network of Tasmania (YNOT) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the House of Assembly Select Committee on Housing Affordability in Tasmania. Our response will focus on two Terms of Reference outlined by the Select Committee, specifically a) the experiences of Tasmanians in housing stress or homelessness; and i) the relationship between housing, health and education.

YNOT represents the interests of 85,000 young people aged 12-25 years, 60 member organisations and approximately 300 youth sector workers statewide. YNOT has consulted with our members and stakeholders to identify the issues and challenges faced by young Tasmanians experiencing housing stress and homelessness.

Young people are significantly affected by the complex systemic issues impacting Tasmanian housing affordability and availability, and are currently disproportionately represented in the State's homeless population. There are a myriad of issues that contribute to youth homelessness, including family breakdown and family violence. However, financial hardship and a shortage of affordable and available housing exacerbate the issue.

With an unregulated short-stay tourist accommodation industry, thousands of properties have been removed from the Tasmanian housing market<sup>1</sup>. This has further compounded the effects of Tasmania's low housing supply on the current rental market with high demand and competition in many locations throughout the State. In Hobart, rental prices have increased by 44% since 2009, surpassing the growth of every other capital city in Australia<sup>2</sup>. This change has not been reflected in wages with Tasmania reporting the lowest average ordinary full time earnings in the country<sup>3</sup>.

For young people on minimum and apprenticeship wages and those receiving Newstart or Youth Allowances, the Tasmanian private rental market is almost unobtainable. Young people are spending at or above 50% of their income on rent to secure accommodation in suburbs with accessible public

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<sup>1</sup> Eccleston, R., Verdouw, J., Denny, L., et al. (2018) Tasmanian Housing Update: August 2018 Executive Summary. Institute for the Study of Social Change, University of Tasmania.

<sup>2</sup> CoreLogic (2019). CoreLogic Quarterly Rental Review: June Quarter 2019.

<sup>3</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (2018). 6302.0 – Average Weekly Earnings, Australia, Nov 2018.

transport and to remain in close proximity to their education, employment and support networks<sup>4</sup>. Shared housing is the only option for many young Tasmanians on low incomes within the private rental market. Once a cost saving measure for students, shared housing is becoming increasingly more expensive and can cost up to or above 50% of a young person's Youth Allowance<sup>4</sup>. These high rental costs are having significant flow-on effects to young people including: living in overcrowded accommodation; financial stresses resulting in an inability to pay for essential services such as health care, food or utilities; and poor physical and mental health outcomes. High rental costs also inhibit many young people from saving to purchase their first home.

A reliance on or expectation for parents to continue supporting their child's housing needs throughout early adulthood is not a realistic or sustainable measure. Many young people are unable or unwilling to return to their family homes due to location, physical and/or mental health issues, family breakdown or domestic violence. Without intervention young people will continue to experience disadvantage and rely on government social housing and homelessness services.

The Department of Human Services (DHHS) reported 1003 active social housing applications in March 2019 from persons 25 years and under, comprising 30% of the total housing register at that time<sup>5</sup>. However, March 2019 data suggests that young people are less likely to secure social housing with 2.3% of total applications being successful<sup>6</sup>, but only 1.5% of applications by young people.

Recent feedback from YNOT members identified that young people are being left in cycles of service reliance. Crisis centres Statewide are turning away young people every day as they are operating at capacity. Many young people move between short-term specialist homelessness services while they wait for their application to be successful through the public housing register; reported as 66.7 weeks in March 2019<sup>5</sup>.

Supported accommodation is an excellent model for young people that require services and support to learn to live independently. However, those that decide to leave supported accommodation are unable to find appropriate and affordable housing in the private market. This results in continued reliance on the social housing system. Young people have reported feeling guilty while they wait for alternative accommodation to become available, as they are aware that other young people are waiting for help and would benefit from the stability that their supported accommodation provides them.

The introduction of Education First Youth Foyer Models in Tasmania provides viable long term supported accommodation options for some young people. YNOT acknowledges that this model can be highly effective in achieving positive education and employment outcomes for young people who are willing to make a commitment to engage and remain in education and/or training. However, this model is not suitable for all young people, particularly those experiencing complex issues who are unable or unwilling to engage in education and/or training. These cohorts of highly vulnerable young people experiencing homelessness are likely to be ineligible for Education First Youth Foyers, and have no other long term supported accommodation options available to them. Given the high demand for long term supported accommodation in Tasmania, there is also the potential for

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<sup>4</sup> SARC (2019). Rental Affordability Snapshot: Tasmania 2019. *Anglicare Tasmania*.

<sup>5</sup> Department of Human Services (2019, April). Human Services Dashboard Information Request. Unpublished.

<sup>6</sup> Department of Human Services (2019, June). Human Services Dashboard. Retrieved from [https://www.dhhs.tas.gov.au/humanservicesstats/human\\_services\\_dashboard](https://www.dhhs.tas.gov.au/humanservicesstats/human_services_dashboard)

preferential consideration to be given to Education First Youth Foyer applicants with the highest outcome potential.

Young people who have experienced trauma often have complex needs and related health conditions including physical and mental health issues, which are exacerbated by housing instability and homelessness<sup>7</sup>. This also reinforces the existing barriers to education and employment. Further impacting this is their potential exposure to, or reinforcement of, antisocial and at-risk behaviour including substance use when experiencing homelessness.

Young people must have access to a range of housing options that are affordable and appropriate for their needs. Young people experiencing complex issues would benefit from long-term supported accommodation that provides wrap around support services and therapeutic care. This includes trauma informed care, physical and mental health support, counselling, as well as supporting the development of life skills to engage with education and employment opportunities in the future.

YNOT acknowledges that a significant investment is required from the Tasmanian Government to respond to the needs of this cohort. However, without additional investment in alternative long term supported accommodation options highly vulnerable young people experiencing homelessness will struggle to break the cycle of homelessness and experience ongoing disadvantage and social exclusion. The individual, social and economic costs of youth homelessness to our communities far outweighs the expense of early intervention and prevention initiatives designed to combat youth homelessness.

YNOT recognises that the Tasmanian Affordable Housing Action Plan 2 2019-2025 contains a range of measures to improve outcomes for young people experiencing, or at risk, of homelessness. YNOT welcomes initiatives including two new purpose built youth foyers in Burnie and Hobart, a new Youth at Risk Centre in Launceston and the establishment of a new under 16 youth homelessness Taskforce. However, the demand for housing and homelessness services continues to outstrip supply, despite recent commitments from the State Government to invest in additional youth accommodation services.

Many young people are reliant on social housing and specialist homelessness services; a trend that will only increase pressure on public housing systems into the future without appropriate intervention and greater investment.

#### Key Recommendations

1. Engage with young Tasmanians experiencing housing stress and homelessness to identify solutions and inform future public policy.
2. Regulate the short-stay tourism accommodation industry to encourage investment in the private rental market.
3. Greater investment in social housing and prioritisation for young people in areas with reliable public transport and access to services including education, employment and health care.
4. Explore and invest in alternative long-term supported accommodation models for young people experiencing homelessness with complex needs.

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<sup>7</sup> O'Donnell, M., Varker, T., Cash, R., et al. (2014). The Trauma and Homelessness Initiative. Australian Centre for Posttraumatic Mental Health.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment on an incredibly important matter impacting on the lives of young Tasmanians. YNOT welcomes the opportunity to participate in further discussions with the Select Committee on Housing Affordability in the future.

Yours sincerely,



**Tania Hunt**  
Chief Executive Officer