

Submission in response to the Tasmanian
Housing Strategy Exposure Draft



July 2023

About Us

The Youth Network of Tasmania (YNOT) is the peak body for young people aged 12-25 years and the non-government youth sector in Tasmania. YNOT works to ensure policies affecting young people in Tasmania are relevant, equitable and effective and that young people have a voice on issues that matter to them.

Our Vision

A Tasmania where all young people are valued and can achieve anything.

Our Purpose

To drive positive change with young people and the youth sector in Tasmania.

For further information

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Introduction

“I’ve been homeless all my life. And like, for me it’s gotten to the point I always keep a block mattress in the back of my car” *20 North-West (they/them)*.

The Youth Network of Tasmania (YNOT) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Tasmanian Housing Strategy Exposure Draft.

Our response to the Draft Strategy has been informed by young Tasmanians, YNOT members and contemporary academic research on *Emergent Adulthood*. The views of young people reflected in our response are based on previous YNOT consultations related to the topic.

The issues identified in the Draft Strategy are incredibly complex. YNOT commends the Tasmanian Government for striving to develop a housing system in Tasmania that is responsive to the needs of our communities, to ensure that all Tasmanians have access to safe, secure and affordable housing. However, despite a significant focus in the Draft Strategy at placing people at the centre of every policy objective, it is evident that the challenges, needs and aspirations of young Tasmanians have largely been overlooked and are not adequately addressed in this adult-focused strategy.

The current policy environment has been ineffective in reducing youth homelessness and supporting young people to transition to adulthood and live independently in our communities. It is no longer acceptable to respond to the unique, diverse and often complex housing needs of young Tasmanians through strategic policy directions intended for all Tasmanians, most notably adults. Young people have distinctive pathways into, and experiences of homelessness, compared to other cohorts in the community, which will not be adequately addressed by the Strategy.

We recognise that the Tasmanian Government has invested in a suite of programs and initiatives to respond to youth homelessness in our communities including Youth2Independence facilities, youth at risk centres, responding to the needs of unaccompanied homeless children under 16 years of age and piloting shared tenancy options within social housing. We welcome this investment. However, with a staggering 39% of Tasmania’s homelessness population under the age of 25, it is time for a different approach.¹

YNOT urges the Tasmanian Government to **invest in a standalone Child and Youth Housing and Homelessness Strategy** to effectively support young people experiencing, or at risk of homelessness in Tasmania. A Strategy that specifically reflects the long-term aspiration for Tasmania’s children and young people and aligns with existing strategies aimed at improving health and wellbeing outcomes for young Tasmanians.

In recent years, the Tasmanian Government has recognised the need to respond to the unique challenges faced by young Tasmanians through investing in targeted, developmentally appropriate, whole of government strategic policy responses including *the Tasmanian Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy, A Policy Framework for Children and Young People under 16 who are alone and at risk of or experiencing homelessness in Tasmania* and the recently announced *Tasmanian Youth Jobs Strategy*. A strategic policy response needs to extend to housing solutions for all young people in our State.

Response to the Tasmanian Housing Strategy Exposure Draft

Question 1: 'Our way forward' identifies several levers for achieving a more equitable housing system for all Tasmanians. Are there additional and/or alternative more important levers that you believe should be addressed?

"I was homeless briefly during my honours year, and I do not want to do that again. Couch surfing is extremely stressful, and now it's even greater risk than it was back then. At least back then I was just waiting to find a rental. Now I might not be able to get another rental. So [my partner and I] instead bought a camper. Because at least this way, if we become homeless, we can live on my sister's property. We are very careful with our finances and we're still facing this issue." 24 South (she/they)

Considering housing in policy development

YNOT supports the Government's intention to imbed housing in all government policies. However, strategic alignment with existing whole of government policy relevant to Tasmania's children and young people will be essential in achieving desired outcomes.

Consideration needs to be given to Government focus areas and key actions outlined in the *Tasmanian Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy 'It Takes a Village'*, the *Child and Student Wellbeing Strategy* and the soon to be established *Youth Jobs Strategy* with respect to housing solutions for young people.

We recognise the Draft Strategy acknowledges youth homelessness as a growing concern, yet the priority outcomes do not appear to sufficiently respond the unique drivers and pathways into and out of homelessness for young Tasmanians. Family violence, parental substance misuse, trauma and transitioning to adulthood and independent living are often cited as key drivers of youth homelessness. In recent times, increased cost of living pressures, an impenetrable private rental market and limited social housing allocations to young people has seen an emerging group of young Tasmanians facing housing insecurity and at an increased risk of homelessness.

Whilst the Draft Strategy mentions youth homelessness, it is not attuned to the specific needs of young people experiencing or at risk of homelessness. The only effective way to combat youth homelessness is to ensure a pathway for all young Tasmanians to be securely housed. This requires a strategic policy framework that:

- Explicitly recognises the drivers of youth homelessness.
- Acknowledges the distinct pathways into and out of homelessness for young people.
- Seeks to understand and reflect the lived experience of young people.
- Recognises *Emergent Adulthood* as a distinct life phase for young people 18-25 years.
- Is developmentally appropriate.
- Explores innovative housing solutions to accommodate the needs of all young people.
- Recognises the intricacies and demands placed on the youth homelessness service system and the interplay between the youth and adult homelessness service systems.
- Integrates best practice approaches and trauma informed principals.
- Is underpinned by genuine, meaningful youth participation principles.
- Builds on and strengthens existing government initiatives.

Reducing rental vulnerability

This priority outcomes needs to be strengthened to explicitly address rental affordability and security challenges experienced by young Tasmanians under 25 years of age.

Young people are particularly disadvantaged in Tasmania’s competitive and expensive private rental market. Low incomes, reliance on economic support from parents, insecure and casual employment, lack of rental/work history, transport disadvantage and age-discrimination means that the private rental market is impenetrable for many young Tasmanians.

“It is so hard to find stable housing without a rental history or work. There is just too much competition. I know a lot of people going through private rentals which are super risky – dodgy arrangements, overcrowded houses and they aren’t required by law to fix anything like heaters or hot water because in the end you are paying cash in hand and made a verbal deal.” 24 South (he/him)

The inability for young people to get a foothold into the private rental market, and the distinct lack of social housing allocated to them, means that young people are at an increased risk of homelessness. Anglicare’s 2023 Rental Affordability snapshot showed that there was not one rental property available in Tasmania for a young person receiving income support.² A recent Australian Council of Social Services (ACOSS) and University of NSW (UNSW) report showed that among people in households below the poverty line, who relied mainly on income support, poverty was deepest for those relying on Youth Allowance.³

It must be recognised that young people attempting to live independently in our communities have the same cost of living expenses as other community members; and that many young Tasmanians do not have familial support or resources to help them. Housing insecurity and homelessness has a significant impact on health and wellbeing outcomes, and can have lasting impacts on the trajectory of a young person’s life.⁴

“The only thing for me is the difficulty in finding a place to live. When I came, I had 16 applications rejected. I was a student, no credit history, living in student accommodation – no one would bother with my application...” 24 South (he/him)

YNOT welcomes a commitment to reviewing the Residential Tenancy Act 1997. We implore the Government to seek the views and lived experience of young people, particularly with respect to age-based discrimination, when attempting to secure a rental property. The rights of young renters need to be strengthened in the Act.

Young Tasmanians continue to tell us that they experience age-based discrimination when applying for, and living in, rental properties. For many, this experience has been exacerbated by historically low vacancy rates in the private rental market and increased demand for properties.

Discrimination during the rental application process, reluctance of landlords to enter into shared housing arrangements, widespread variation in rental application forms and leases, power imbalances

and requests for personal and excessive information from landlords and real estate agents continue to be cited as barriers to securing residential tenancies by young Tasmanians.

“We arrived at this house viewing and we parked and we got out. It was me and two of my friends, we were around early to mid-20s. And the real estate agent was standing there and she said: “Oh, there's no point in doing this. They [the landlord] won't rent it to young people. He doesn't want any share houses...” 25 South (he/they).

Childhood and youth development

YNOT welcomes the focus on safety in the home for children, and ensuring sufficient housing and accommodation options are available. However, this priority objective must be strengthened to explicitly recognise *Emergent Adulthood* as a distinct life phase for young people 18-25 years.

YNOT's recently released research report *Emergent Adulthood: A Review of Literature* produced by the Tasmanian School of Business and Economics at UTAS, found that young people aged 18-25 years are experiencing prolonged transition to adulthood compared with previous generations.⁵ The research calls for recognition of *Emergent Adulthood* as a distinct life phase and highlights the benefits of structured and targeted approaches to transitional policy and systems development.

The absence of structured pathways and transitional points into the housing system for young Tasmanians, including the youth homelessness service system, social and community housing or the private rental market, has the potential to profoundly impact the growth and development of Tasmania's young people, and subsequently prolong their transition to adulthood.

Emergent Adults are experiencing a time of profound development, including physiologically, behaviourally, socially and morally. Situational and structural factors also play a significant role in influencing decision making for *Emergent Adults*.

Contemporary, age-appropriate and real-world responses to housing solutions for young people has never been more important.

“As a result of my decision to study at university, I remained living at home with my parents until I was 23. While my relationship with my parents had developed from one of childhood dependence to a more adult relationship, I nevertheless remained dependent on them. On numerous occasions, I considered moving into a share house or living with a partner, however, when I crunched the numbers, once I had paid for my living expenses, I was ostensibly left with nothing.”
24 South (she/her).

Question 3: Theme two centres on 'affordability in the private market'. Are there additional or alternative objectives you recommend for consideration?"

Young people need to be identified as a priority population group under this objective to increase access to safe, affordable, and appropriate private rental tenancies as outlined above in reducing rental vulnerability.

“I've been on the housing list for the whole time that I've been here in Tasmania and I'm still waiting. I'd move into a motel, but I can't afford to pay \$500 a fortnight for the motel.” 21 North (he/him).

Question 4: Theme three places ‘people at the centre’ of the draft Strategy. Are there additional or alternative objectives you recommend for consideration?

We welcome the Tasmanian Governments’ commitment to placing people at the centre of policy objectives in the Draft Strategy. It is well recognised by governments at all levels and the community services industry that systems work best when they are built both with, and for the people we want to use them.

We are particularly pleased to see lived experience overtly identified in the Draft Strategy. However, it is unclear how the views of those with lived experience of homelessness or housing insecurity will be imbedded in the development, implementation and ongoing evaluation of the Strategy.

Of particular interest to YNOT, is the type of youth participatory frameworks and mechanisms used to seek the views of young Tasmanians. Meaningful youth participation involves creating conditions for young people to contribute to and influence decision making and action, that address identified issues.

We understand that consultation has occurred with a small number of young Tasmanians who have experienced housing insecurity or homelessness to inform the development of the Draft Strategy. We welcome this initiative. However, it is unclear how many young people had an opportunity to share their views. Feedback obtained from young people on housing matters during our consultations does not appear to be reflected in this Draft Strategy.

Young people have told us that governments need to establish better mechanisms to communicate youth participation opportunities and outcomes to young people, and to reduce barriers to their participation. Young people we have spoken with firmly believe participation extends beyond just sharing an opinion or experience, it also means being actively involved in the planning, implementation and evaluation of initiatives.

Young Tasmanians continue to feel marginalised in public policy making and are becoming increasingly frustrated at being shut out. Young people consistently tell us that they want direct involvement in public policy decision making on issues important to them to meet their needs, which are often distinctively different to other age groups in the community. Young people want to be welcomed into decision making processes and meaningfully supported to participate in shaping their future, not just simply sharing an opinion that they feel is often ignored.

“Young people – as much as we'd like to say we have an impact on what goes on. We don't at the moment. Middle aged people are in politics and making decisions that are right for them but not for the next generation.” 24 years South (unknown).

Young people are experts in their own lives and have unique insights and experiences of the world around them. Involving young people in decision-making on matters important to them leads to better outcomes for themselves, their peers and our communities.

“I think older people just need to listen to us. They had different experiences growing up, so they need to try and understand what it’s like for us”. 19 North (she/they).

Question 6: Are there other ways the government could make its actions and progress to meet the proposed objectives more transparent and accessible?

The Draft Tasmanian Housing Strategy is ambitious. YNOT acknowledges that this Strategy is intended to be a high-level strategic policy framework however, there is a distinct lack of detail with regard to the priority outcomes, policy objectives and actions.

Development of Implementation and Action Plans need to articulate which policy outcomes and focus areas will be prioritised, including clear roles and responsibilities of stakeholders. This needs to include the identification of short, medium and long-term activity to achieve the Strategies objectives. Youth participatory frameworks and mechanics for seeking the views of young people need to be considered and included.

This Strategy needs to commit to a program of measurement, evaluation and learning. Further information is required in relation to accountability and measurement frameworks, and potential indicators used to measure success. The views of young people should also be included in measuring success.

This Strategy recognised that a diverse range of stakeholders play a role in the delivery of housing actions. The Governance structure needs to be clearly articulated and reflected in the Strategy.

The Reporting structure also needs to be clearly articulated in the Strategy to ensure transparency and accountability in communicating progress with implementation. This should occur yearly, with a commitment to evaluating progress of actions in the Action Plan(s).

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2023) Estimating Homelessness: Census 2021. Australian Government.

² Anglicare Tasmania (2023). Rental Affordability Snapshot: Tasmania 2023.

³ Australian Council of Social Service and UNSW Sydney (2023). Poverty in Australia 2023: Who is affected. A poverty & inequality partnership report.

⁴ Department of Premier and Cabinet (2021). Tasmanian Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy *‘It Takes a Tasmanian Village’*. Tasmanian Government.

⁵ Youth Network of Tasmania and University of Tasmania (2023). Emergent Adulthood: A Review of Literature. UTAS Tasmanian School of Business and Economics, Tasmanian Behavioural Research Lab and Peter Underwood Centre for Educational Attainment.