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Economic strength an opportunity for more investment in social and affordable housing

Queensland's peak and industry bodies for community housing have welcomed the \$322.2 million handed down in the budget to expand Queensland's social housing construction program.

"Funding for an additional 500 new social housing dwellings fast-tracked for delivery by 2025 is welcome," said Fiona Caniglia, Q Shelter's Executive Director.

"We are pleased to see the allocation of an additional \$452 million to assist with the rising costs of housing projects already in the pipeline," said Annemaree Callander, Executive Officer of the Community Housing Industry Association Queensland (CHIA Qld).

However, industry experts are also highlighting the strength of the Queensland economy and relatively low levels of debt compared to other states providing an important opportunity to increase the Housing Investment Fund (HIF).

"While the additional investment in social housing is welcome, we all know this is not enough to address the unmet needs of thousands of Queenslanders. We were surprised to see no increase in the Housing Investment Fund," said Q Shelter Executive Director Fiona Caniglia.

"Further investment into the Housing Investment Fund or directly to community housing providers would boost the supply of desperately needed social and affordable housing now and into the future," said CHIA Qld Executive Officer, Annemaree Callander.

Experts are calling on Government to provide a mix of social and affordable homes and ensure that the capital funding increase is maximised through the delivery of homes by community housing providers.

"The State Government must ensure a central role for community housing providers in the delivery of new social and affordable homes. This would guarantee the homes are available at affordable rents in perpetuity and importantly enable community housing providers to attract additional investment and deliver even more housing," said Annemaree Callander, CHIA Qld Executive Officer.

"It is a sign of the times that \$64.3 million to acquire and operate supported accommodation for people in crisis is a centrepiece of the budget. This reflects the current circumstances many people are in, however a continued focus on crisis management overlooks opportunities to embed a longer-term plan and capacity for permanent homes," said Q Shelter's Fiona Caniglia.

"With the current construction environment, purchasing or leasing existing properties that can be repurposed for emergency housing is definitely important," Ms Caniglia continued.

"We are not going to grow the supply of social housing overnight, and in the interim, we understand the need for additional emergency accommodation."

“We are calling for an expert team across the regions to fast-track the assessment of buildings and sites. The Government’s land audit is an excellent first step, and now we need a criteria-based assessment team that looks at the suitability of the site, location, cost of modifications and best operating model.”

“We are also calling for rapid scaling up of construction of modular homes to alleviate the current crisis in supply.”

“We know that vulnerable households need support and Q Shelter believes more needs to be done to support vulnerable people to sustain their tenancies. It is good to see some support measures, however we don’t believe this goes far enough. Intensive support reduces costs in the medium-to-long term because people can sustain their tenancies. They are not rebounding in the system needing more crisis assistance,” said Ms Caniglia.

“We need a policy and investment framework with that focuses on prevention. This will enable us to move beyond expensive crisis responses to ensure every dollar of investment achieves long-term housing with adequate support for vulnerable people to stay in their homes,” said Ms Callander.

In addition to supporting the budget initiatives announced today, Q Shelter is calling on the government to advance preventative measures that are systemic.

“Funds that respond to crisis solutions are important, however, we also want to ensure that there is more investment in prevention from childhood, to ensure that people don’t emerge into complex homelessness when they become adults.”

“Given the strength of the Queensland economy, an increased investment in housing supply combined with preventative support programs at scale would have shifted the dial more than a budget with so much focus on crisis,” said Ms Caniglia.

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Media comment

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