

6 August 2022

Senate Standing Committees on Economics
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

To the Senate Standing Committees on Economics,

RE: Inquiry into the National Housing and Homelessness Plan Bill 2024 (No. 2)

Suicide Prevention Australia welcomes the opportunity to provide input to this inquiry. We are the national peak body for the suicide prevention sector. With over 300 members representing more than 140,000 workers, staff, and volunteers across Australia, we provide a collective voice for service providers, practitioners, researchers, local collaboratives, and people with lived experience.

There is a large body of international and Australian research demonstrating the links between suicide, housing insecurity and homelessness. In addition, many of our members working with those at risk of suicide frequently see housing insecurity and homelessness as significant drivers of suicidal distress. Examples of the research and experiences of our members are given below.

Suicide Prevention Australia strongly supports all components of this Bill.

A National Housing and Homelessness Plan can drive a coordinated nation-wide approach to reducing homelessness and housing insecurity, which in turn reduces suicide risk. In addition, it could address the risk of suicide amongst vulnerable populations such as tenants in social housing and those being supported by homelessness services.

The role of lived experience is critical in providing advice to government and so we support the creation of a National Housing Consumer Council. We would urge that the council should include the perspective of those with lived experience of suicide due to housing issues.

Suicide Prevention Australia also supports the establishment of a National Housing and Homelessness Advocate to monitor the national plan and conduct reviews of systemic housing issues.

These three components of the Bill all help to reduce housing insecurity and homelessness, which the evidence shows is linked to the risk of suicide.





A report commissioned by the National Suicide Prevention Research Fund reviewed the literature and found evidence that housing affects suicide through three channels.ⁱ Firstly, protracted financial stress due to the cost of housing; secondly loss of security due to eviction, insecure housing, and homelessness; and thirdly through the impact of adverse life events on children and young people on their present and future mental health.

In addition, data from the Australian Institute for Health and Welfare shows that problems related to housing and economic circumstance is one of the most frequently occurring psychosocial risk factors in coroner certified suicide deaths.ⁱⁱ

And importantly, the experience of services assisting those facing distress is that housing is often a significant concern. For example, SANE Australia collects data on the different psychosocial concerns expressed by people referring into the SANE Guided Recovery service. Of the over 10,000 people who have referred into the service since June 2022, 12% have indicated they're either homeless or at risk of homelessness.

Due to the strong links between homelessness, housing insecurity and suicide we would urge that this Bill be enacted to drive a nation-wide approach to this critical issue.

If you require any further information please contact Chris Stone, Director of Policy and Government Relations, chriss@suicidepreventionaust.org.

Yours sincerely,

Nieves Murray
CEO, Suicide Prevention Australia

ⁱ Brackertz Nicola (2022) *The role of housing insecurity and homelessness in suicidal behaviour and effective interventions to reduce suicidal thoughts and behaviours: a review of the evidence*, AHURI, <https://www.suicidepreventionaust.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/AHURI-Professional-Services-The-role-of-housing-insecurity-and-homelessness-in-suicidal-behaviour-FINAL-2.pdf>.

ⁱⁱ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2023) Suicide & self-harm monitoring. Psychosocial risk factors and deaths by suicide, <https://www.aihw.gov.au/suicide-self-harm-monitoring/data/behaviours-risk-factors/psychosocial-risk-factors-suicide>.