

## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

# The National Housing and Homelessness Crisis

SHANE WARREN

### **An urgent call to action on the national housing and homelessness crisis**

Australian society continues to be characterised by increasing social and economic inequality post the COVID-19 pandemic. The great hopes of many arose at the onset of the pandemic. A national Australian approach saw the country work cooperatively with an approach of improving social welfare and income supports, housing and accommodation for marginalised people but this quickly eroded as the imminent threat of the COVID-19 diminished. Access to safe and affordable housing for all people across Australia became a major social and political issue after the pandemic receded (Yang and Zhou 2022). Our television and news media has been dominated by reports of a 'Housing Crisis', particularly concentrating on major increases in weekly rental cost for people in private rental housing. Moreover, the demand for social and affordable housing across Australia's cities and regions continues to increase and outstrip supply at an alarming rate. The States and Territory Governments partner with the Commonwealth Government to deliver housing assistance, and their housing registers, often referred to as 'Housing Wait Lists' have applications in the tens of thousands. On Census night 2021 more than 120,000 people experienced homelessness in Australia (ABS 2023). Given the increasing pressures on the housing systems throughout Australia, this figure is in 2023 now likely to be much higher. The provision of housing as a fundamental human right is finally in clear focus, as more and more people experience housing insecurity and homelessness, many for the first time in their lives. It is in this context that this edition of *Social Alternatives* focusing on housing and homelessness is especially important.

In 2023, Australia is at a housing and homelessness policy crossroads. The new Albanese Labor Government has introduced some important housing reforms and policy innovations within their first year in office. These have included:

- A National Housing Accord that brings together all three levels of government and investors and organisations to unlock affordable housing supply.
- An increase in the Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA) payment of up to 15%, the first such increase in over 30 years that will assist people on low incomes.

- A \$2.5 Billion dollar Social Housing Accelerator program that will help increase the immediate supply of social housing.

There is also the hotly contested \$10 Billion Housing Australia Future Funds that has not yet received support from the senate, with the Greens arguing for more immediate action for people in private rental housing who have experienced considerable weekly rent increases. Although these measures are critically important, so much more needs to be done. The Commonwealth Government has announced a public consultation for the National Housing and Homelessness Plan that will be a ten-year strategy, setting out short-, medium- and long-term goals. It is vital that as many advocates and activists as possible engage with this consultation process to ensure a robust housing and homelessness policy framework is developed.

This edition of *Social Alternatives* brings an important focus to the area of contemporary housing and homelessness research, policy and practice. The articles are firmly grounded in critical theory and analysis of the failure of neoliberal housing and homelessness policies. Australia's housing policy settings have been firmly grounded in private home ownership, and this 'all eggs in one basket' approach has delivered immeasurable increases in housing and wealth inequality. Industry and academic partnerships are crucial to achieving innovative approaches to end and prevent housing insecurity and homelessness. The articles in this edition explore the housing and homelessness research through critical approaches to theory, practice and education.

Warren and Barnes' article examines community sector homelessness research and highlights the often-overlooked area of family homelessness. The current housing and homelessness crisis is seeing increasing numbers of families experiencing homelessness, yet the service system is so under-resourced and ill-equipped to support families. This is despite the overwhelming evidence about the impact of domestic and family violence being one of the most common reasons for women and families experiencing homelessness in Australia. The causes of family homelessness are complex and systemic and they require multi-agency policy responses across housing, homelessness, specialist domestic violence, education and child protection agencies. The authors recommend a stronger research agenda focusing

on families experiencing, or at risk of homelessness so that more robust policy and program design is possible. This is in line with critical social work goals and objectives; all social research needs to contribute to social change and social justice agendas.

Purcell and Davidson's paper examines young people's risk of homelessness and housing instability whilst engaged in tertiary education in Australia: 'An urgent call for research', profiles the specific challenges facing young people who are also university students. The impact of cost-of-living pressures on this group of young people, like other groups of marginalised people, has been severe and both policy and service delivery responses have been inadequate. Purcell and Davidson call for urgent research and policy reform and innovation for better program design of services that respond to young people experiencing housing instability or homelessness.

Social Work Academics and Activists Dr Jean Carruthers and Ms Hayley Thirkettle's paper 'Using podcasting to advance activist practice and critical reflection in response to the housing crisis' focuses on the use of podcast technology as a form of resistance, activism and critical pedagogy within social work education. Housing and Homelessness Advocates have long argued that housing and homelessness is not well addressed in social work curriculums. Dr Carruthers and Ms Thirkettle's article brings together a contemporary and cutting-edge pedagogical approach to ensuring housing and homelessness are addressed within social work curriculums. Their article also highlights the value of using technology as a critical and educative tool for contemporary social work education and practice.

### References

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### Author

Dr Shane Warren is a Lecturer in social work at the School of Public Health and Social Work, Queensland University of Technology. He spent a considerable number of years working in the field with the former Department of Families, Youth and Care in Rockhampton, Central Queensland. He then worked in child protection in the UK before taking managerial positions in Queensland concluding in the Homelessness Program. His publications have focussed on youth and family homelessness and COVID and domestic violence.

## POETRY AUTHORS

**Dennis Haskell** is the author of nine collections of poetry, the most recent *And Yet...* (WA Poets Publishing, 2020).

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**Mitchell Welch** is a writer, editor and freelance communications consultant with an interest in music and visual/photographic art. His work has appeared in a range of journals and anthologies including *Antipodes*, *Arena Magazine*, *Arena Quarterly*, *The Australian Poetry Journal*, *The Best of Australian Poems 2022*, *Cordite*, *Meanjin*, *The Medical Journal of Australia*, *Overland*, *Rabbit*, *Southerly* and *TEXT*.

**Deanna Grant-Smith** researches exploitation and employment with a focus on unpaid work and education-to-employment transitions. She is the Deputy Director of the QUT Centre for Decent Work and Industry and Technologies of Justice program co-lead in the QUT Centre for Justice.

## Untitled entry

We run.  
Through the heat and through the cold.

We run.  
As the sounds of violence echoes in the distance.

We run.  
With no destination in mind.

I hold her close.  
As we hide from searching eyes.

I hold her close.  
As we answer endless questions.

I hold her close.  
As we wait for news.

She laughs.  
With her new friends on the playground.

She smiles.  
When she tells me about her day.

She sleeps.  
Peacefully, without a care in the world.

GRACE ANDERSON

*\*Commended entry from the 2022 Seeking Asylum Poetry prize*