Housing Services

Budget Initiatives and Priorities 2015-16

I. Investing in affordable, safe and sustainable housing for Tasmanians

The State Government has committed a total of $22.96 million for the Housing Tasmania Capital Program in 2015-16. The following major projects are planned:

- $3.3 million is allocated to complete construction of the Trinity Hill Youth Accommodation and Training facility in the South. This follows from the $7.2 million spent in 2014-15.
- $1.5 million will be spent in 2015-16 on developing a new youth accommodation facility in the North West. A total of more than $7.5 million is committed to this project, including the allocation from the 2014-15 Budget.
- $1.3 million will be spent on the upgrade of 13 neighbourhood houses across the State.
- $1.8 million will support capital projects under the Affordable Housing Strategy.
- $3.4 million will be spent on increasing the supply of new homes.
- $7.5 million will be paid to the Australian Government for the repayment of principal on outstanding Commonwealth State Housing Agreement loans.
- $0.9 million will provide ongoing funding for the National Rental Affordability Scheme.

This program translates to 630 new affordable homes across Tasmania. In 2015-16:
- 550 new, affordable homes are expected to be built in Tasmania under the National Rental Affordability Scheme.
- Trinity Hill Youth Accommodation will open providing 46 units for young people.
- Housing Tasmania will build six new adaptable homes for people living with disability.
- Housing Tasmania will deliver 15 residential lots on the old Somerset Primary School site.
- 16 dwellings will be built by Community Housing Organisations under the Better Housing Futures initiative.
The Government is working to further increase supply through land transfers. Three land parcels are expected to be developed in the coming year, including the site of the old Brent Street Primary School and Huntingfield in the South, and the former Somerset Primary School in the North West.

2. **The Tasmanian Affordable Housing Strategy**

The Tasmanian Affordable Housing Strategy is on track for delivery by 30 June 2015. The Strategy was a commitment in the 2014 State election.

The Strategy will provide direction for the next 10 years about how Tasmania can improve housing affordability and help those most vulnerable to housing stress and homelessness.

Community engagement has been a key part of the strategy. It will demonstrate a shared vision amongst Government, the community and private sector. It will identify outcome-based solutions for Tasmania.

The Strategy will:
- build on the current successes in housing and homelessness;
- be a guiding framework for future action;
- identify the roles and accountability of all stakeholders; and
- position Tasmania to respond to change over the next decade.

The Strategy is being developed with research and analysis input from the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) and the University of Tasmania’s Housing and Community Research Unit (HACRU).

Funding of $1.8 million has been allocated to support capital initiatives under the Affordable Housing Strategy in 2015-16.

The Strategy will address the entire housing spectrum. It will include recommendations to reduce rental stress, reduce mortgage stress, deliver more appropriate homes and prevent homelessness and increase exit points from crisis and transitional accommodation to sustainable homes. It aims to give all Tasmanians access to affordable, safe and sustainable housing.

3. **Addressing Homelessness**

The State Government is committed to reducing homelessness and increasing affordable housing options. At the last census Tasmania had the lowest homelessness rate in Australia. But the number of people experiencing homelessness has increased Australia-wide over the last decade.

Homelessness is caused by different reasons, and affects people regardless of age or gender. There are 16 homeless shelters across the State. These shelters help a range of people who are in crisis, including women (and potentially their children) who are escaping from family violence, single men, children, youth and adults.
There are currently nine supported accommodation complexes located across the State. These complexes offer housing and support for people who choose to live in a communal setting. They are run by Anglicare, Community Housing Limited and Common Ground Tasmania.

In all the Government provides funding of $24.3 million per year to Specialist Homelessness Services.

Over half of Tasmanians who seek help because they are homeless cite the main causal factor as financial difficulties, unaffordable housing costs and/or the lack of appropriate dwellings. Therefore, while emergency responses are important for people while they are in crisis, increasing the availability of affordable housing will reduce homelessness.

The Affordable Housing Strategy, the Better Housing Futures initiative and services available through Housing Connect will all help to increase the availability of affordable housing and reduce homelessness.

**4. Housing Options for Young People**

It is important to provide appropriate, affordable housing options for children and young people. Some young people have limited family support. These young people often have difficulty finding affordable, secure rental in the private market because of their low incomes and limited rental history. Some may not have the living skills to successfully manage a tenancy without support and advice.

The Tasmanian Government provides various responses for young people in Tasmania. Housing Tasmania provides 32 properties for Children and Youth Services clients, which are used for foster care, therapeutic residential care and family group homes. Six shelters provide crisis accommodation to young people aged 13 to 20 years. Two more facilities provide longer-term transitional support for young people aged 13 to 18 years.

Some young people who prefer to live independently are housed in Direct Tenancies, where they receive support to maintain a public housing tenancy.

Other young people benefit from living in a complex near people their own age. There is currently one supported accommodation complex specifically for youth: Thyne House in Launceston. Thyne House provides medium to long-term accommodation for up to 30 young people aged 16 to 25 years. Following the success of Thyne House, a second complex is being built in the South and a third will be built in the North West.

Construction of Trinity Hill in Hobart is anticipated to provide 46 units of housing, including 16 units suitable for young people living with disability. Work on this site began in 2014-15 and will be completed in the 2015-16 financial year.

Funding has been committed to develop a third youth facility, to be located in the North West. $1.5 million will be spent in 2015-16 to acquire land in Devonport and design the complex. Construction is expected to begin in 2016.
5. **Better Housing Futures**

The Tasmanian Government is committed to increasing social housing options. The Better Housing Futures portfolio now numbers 3,911 properties. The program has been fully implemented with four new Community Housing Organisations delivering property and tenancy management at properties owned by the Director of Housing.

Tenants in Better Housing Futures locations can choose to keep their tenancy agreement with Housing Tasmania, or transfer their agreement to the Community Housing Organisation.

Tenants are embracing the change, with all four organisations exceeding their target for tenancy agreement sign-ups. Organisations have offered a range of incentives for tenants to sign an agreement with them, including prioritised maintenance, heating upgrades, supermarket vouchers, iPads and free bonds that will be paid to tenants if they transfer to a community housing organisation.

The program aims to improve community capacity in areas with a high concentration of State-owned housing. The Community Housing Organisations have each established offices in the communities in which they operate. Over the next financial year they will continue to engage with their tenants to build strong local communities.

6. **Housing Connect**

Housing Connect is continuing to deliver support and advice to thousands of Tasmanians. Housing Connect offers a full range of housing solutions including access to public housing, community housing and the private rental market.

Housing Connect provides a tailored response to all people seeking housing assistance, from a light touch to more intensive support. The suite of accommodation solutions available includes social housing (both public and community housing), Private Rental Assistance, the new Tenancy Guarantee Program and emergency brokerage into private accommodation.

A new Housing Connect Information System is being developed. It will enable better information sharing between housing and support organisations, and deliver integrated services to clients. By July 2016 the system will be able to process assessments and applications, oversee Private Rental Assistance, prioritise support needs, administer brokerage, manage referrals and record progress.
7. Tenancy Guarantee Program

The Tasmanian Government is committed to giving Tasmanians a hand up into private rental.

Housing Tasmania has implemented a new Tenancy Guarantee Program, which is delivered through Housing Connect. The Tenancy Guarantee is being piloted to improve access to the private rental market for those at risk of homelessness, particularly families.

The Guarantee is designed to help households that are having trouble securing private rental accommodation even though they can afford the rent.

The Guarantee gives owners and real estate agents confidence to rent housing to tenants with no previous rental history, no references or who may have had tenancy problems in the past which have now been overcome. If the cost of rental arrears or damage to the property exceeds the value of the security deposit (bond), the Guarantee provides up to $1,500 per tenancy to help cover costs.

Vulnerable Tasmanian households are expected to be assisted through the Guarantee. Priority will be given to families who are homeless. The Guarantee can be used to establish new tenancies, or save existing ones.

The Guarantee began in April 2015, with funding of $300,000 per year, to help vulnerable Tasmanians find and sustain safe and affordable homes.

8. HomeShare Relaunch

The Tasmanian Government has delivered on its election commitment to overhaul HomeShare. Changes to the HomeShare initiative are making it easier for more low and middle income Tasmanians to purchase their own home.

HomeShare is the Government’s statewide shared equity mortgage scheme. It makes it more affordable for eligible people to enter and remain in home ownership by reducing the up-front costs and delivering lower loan repayments.

The Tasmanian Government relaunched HomeShare in May 2014 with increased asset, income and assistance levels. The scheme is now available to more public housing tenants than ever before.

The relaunch has proven successful. For the financial year to March 2015, 106 Tasmanian households have been assisted into home ownership. This compares with a total of 77 over the previous financial year. This shows that HomeShare is now better targeted to provide assistance to those who need it.

HomeShare contributes to new affordable housing supply. Eight out of 10 HomeShare arrangements have financed house and land packages. This supports jobs in the residential construction industry.

Ten Tasmanian households have also received assistance through Housing Tasmania’s Streets Ahead Incentive Program. Streets Ahead provides financial and non-financial assistance to help people on low to moderate incomes to purchase a home owned by the Director of Housing.

Together, HomeShare and Streets Ahead provide a hand-up to support eligible Tasmanians into home ownership.
9. A Focus on Client Outcomes

Affordable housing and appropriate support can change people’s lives for the better. In the past, Housing Tasmania has funded community housing and support organisations according to the number of people assisted, or outputs. But the number of clients served does not show whether funding is making a difference. Focussing on outputs does not encourage the best outcomes for clients.

The Department of Health and Human Services has introduced an Outcomes Framework to measure how well our purchased services are achieving real change for our clients and the community. Outcomes take time to define and are harder to measure than outputs, but once in place they deliver better services for clients.

Housing Tasmania is implementing the Outcomes Framework for housing and homelessness. The new model will better target the people who are in greatest need of assistance, and help Tasmanians move to safe, sustainable tenancies.

10. A New Housing Management System

The Tasmanian Government is committed to putting clients at the centre of the human services system; improving the client experience; and reducing duplication across the service structure.

Housing Tasmania is developing a new Housing Management System to replace its numerous outdated and disparate information systems. The new system is planned to be implemented in 2015-16.

Tasmanian company Geometry Pty Ltd has been contracted to develop the new information system. The contract was executed in August 2014 at the value of $1.2 million. This includes the development of the new information management system and a five-year support agreement.

Geometry is a locally owned and managed software development company. The contract has contributed to Geometry being able to recruit two recent graduates from the University of Tasmania as software developers.

For clients, the new system will deliver a more responsive service, prevent them from repeating the same information and introduce more options to access and provide information. It will also reduce the costs associated with providing housing services and help deliver the housing reform agenda.