

# Safe Places Emergency Accommodation Program (Inclusion Round)

PowerHousing Australia

March 2023



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## Executive Summary

PowerHousing Australia commends the Australian Government on the additional \$100m investment over the next 5 years for the Safe Places Emergency Accommodation Program and welcomes the opportunity to provide our feedback on the Program (Inclusion Round) through this submission. First Nations women and children, women and children from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds, and women and children with disability require further attention to gain a deeper understand and meet their diverse needs under the program. There is a national need to assist women and children who are leaving family and domestic violence situations to:

- create safety of housing,
- allow independence and autonomy,
- provide security of tenure,
- provide access to community amenities and social infrastructure, and
- reduce costs and financial pressures.

The best measure to identify eligibility of those wishing to access services and support under the Inclusion component of the Safe Places Program is to ask them directly whether they or their children identify as a First Nations person, CALD and/or a person with a disability.

PowerHousing Australia is a member network of 38 large scale and Tier 1 registered Community Housing Providers (CHPs) and 50 Affiliate partners who develop and manage social, affordable and disability housing across Australia. As of 30 June 2022, PowerHousing Members collectively represent the largest scale CHPs who own or manage over 85,000 homes for more than 145,000 people on low to moderate incomes, stewarding an estimated \$30bn worth of housing for the benefit of Australian communities. Our feedback is framed by consultations across the year with our Members, corporate Affiliates and community partners, and the PowerHousing Board.

## Recommendations

PowerHousing Australia recommends that the following be considered in the program design of the Safe Places Initiative:

1. That there is a fair and equitable process for assessing proposals for projects to receive funding under the Inclusion Round, with adequate consideration of and weight given to the longstanding housing expertise for vulnerable groups demonstrated by Community Housing Providers.
2. A development period of up to 1 year be provided to ensure that community-based FDV service organisations such as Community Housing Providers can harness the appropriate organisational infrastructure to provide quality support under the Safe Places initiative to victim-survivors with diverse needs.
3. Consider opportunities for funding to encourage and incentivise effective design solutions that maximise security and safety for its residents, while adhering to silver standard of Livable Housing Australia design guidelines, lessening their environmental impact and ensuring a central location that is close to services.
4. Consider opportunities for funding to enhance a vertical integration pipeline which can effectively assist in the creation of more Safe Places, encourage greater stakeholder engagement including all levels of government and private sector support to maximise the success of the initiative.
5. There needs to be pathways for victims out of crisis accommodation into transitional/long-term stable, safe accommodation. Examples of this can be found in the work of CHPs and

these should be considered. Procurements by the DSS should assess submissions on how these pathways can be established and operated.

6. The DSS should examine the requirement regarding a letter of endorsement from a SHS provider to organisation who is not a SHS provider to remove possible conflicts of interest.

## Community Housing Providers – Specialists in Housing and Supporting Vulnerable Cohorts

Housing is more than just shelter. Access to safe housing enhances the social, economic and civic participation of all Australians. Stable housing is a secure base for all, particularly for our most vulnerable. The home is a safeguard for many with physical or mental health issues, and when universally designed can support people with a range of disabilities or challenges. The home is where most family and domestic violence (FDV) is perpetrated and having a safe and secure housing is a vital first step to help tackle FDV.

Provision of safe affordable appropriate housing is a key role for Community Housing Providers (CHPs) and for some PowerHousing Members it is their sole focus. They are striving hard to provide a safe haven for those that most desperately need it. They provide this support for those on a short-term basis if required, potentially preventing persistent and pervasive issues.

Our Members are instrumental in supporting victim-survivors (including children) across the nation, with some of our Members providing specialised Family and Domestic Violence (FDV) services and emergency accommodation. Additionally, our Members hold extensive experience in providing housing support to those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (CALD) and First Nations people.

PowerHousing Member YWCA National Housing is a national women's housing provider who provide over 150,000 nights of affordable accommodation to women every year. They are committed to deliver on access to safe, secure and affordable housing as a fundamental factor in ending inequality for women. Almost 70% of the women housed by YWCA National Housing have experienced family violence.

PowerHousing member Launch Housing has a depth of experience with crisis and FDV housing, providing 1,433 individuals and families support in FY2020. Launch Housing's experience with developing new facilities has revealed a significant opportunity in redeveloping existing state-owned sites, resulting in an achievable uplift in yield. Launch Housing currently operate two such sites in Dandenong and Southbank. This should be taken into consideration for the Safe Places program.

PowerHousing Australia CHPs are closely aware of the need to provide safe adequate housing, particularly through intake and assessment services for homeless women and providing support to women experiencing a housing crisis, such a fleeing a FDV situation.

The ability of CHP tenancy managers to respond to the challenges faced by families, women and children is to be recognised as a core support mechanism in tackling domestic violence. They are experienced in determining the specialist support needs of someone identifying as at risk or experiencing domestic violence and can support in the provision of alternative immediate accommodation options.

CHPs demonstrate the capacity and capability required to effectively deliver safe and adequate housing to support women and children leaving FDV situations under the Safe Places Program.

### Recommendation 1

That there is a fair and equitable process for assessing proposals for projects to receive funding under the Inclusion Round, with adequate consideration of and weight given to the longstanding housing expertise for vulnerable groups demonstrated by Community Housing Providers.

### Recommendation 2

A development period of up to 1 year be provided to ensure that community-based FDV service organisations such as Community Housing Providers can harness the appropriate organisational infrastructure to provide quality support under the Safe Places initiative to victim-survivors with diverse needs.

### Recommendation 3

Participants should be encouraged to redevelop existing gov-owned crisis accommodation sites where an uplift in yield is achievable. Learnings should be undertaken from existing projects operated by CHPs.

## Safety Enhanced Through Design

There are several design considerations that are needed to ensure that dwellings built under the Safe Places initiative enhance a sense of safety and security for its occupants. Clear benefits of new developments to be delivered under the Safe Places program could look to minimise the environmental impact, while enhancing dwelling condition, universal design and accessibility of homes to promote greater tenant wellbeing of victim-survivors with diverse needs. Australia needs to look to replace ageing social housing stock to help create more efficient social and affordable homes, including emergency accommodation under the Safe Places initiative.

To efficiently and effectively roll out new emergency accommodation dwellings, a vertical integration model could be employed which would help streamline the entire process from planning and development approval stage, through to financing, tendering, supply and labour, to build completion. The Gardenhouse, as an example, is a collaboration with YWCA, Salvation Army, Housing All Australians and others is one of the first of its kind facilities in Australia. It provides emergency accommodation to women experiencing homelessness in Melbourne and has been fitted out by a group of more than 40 private companies.

Design of Safe Places accommodation needs to keep in mind who the end user is, with the dwelling appropriately meeting the needs of the different client cohorts and vulnerable groups.

### Recommendation 3

Consider opportunities for funding to encourage and incentivise effective design solutions that maximise security and safety for its residents, while adhering to silver standard of Livable Housing Australia design guidelines, lessening their environmental impact and ensuring a central location is that is close to services.

### Recommendation 4

Consider opportunities for funding to enhance a vertical integration pipeline which can effectively assist in the creation of more Safe Places, encourage greater stakeholder engagement including all levels of government and private sector support to maximise the success of the initiative.

## Pathways to Long-term Housing

The [‘Nowhere To Go’ Equity Economics](#) report analysed the benefits of providing long term social housing to victims of family violence, finding it is the leading reason women and children seek specialist homelessness services.

Outlined in the report, family and domestic violence is the primary reason women and children seek specialist homelessness services, however only 3.2% are currently receiving the long-term housing they need. It estimates that the lack of long-term social housing is leading to 7,690 women a year returning to violent partners and 9,120 women a year becoming homeless.

The report states that if the Commonwealth Government invested in 16,800 additional social housing units the \$7.6 billion cost of developing the housing would be miniscule by immediate economic benefits of \$15.3 billion and the creation of 47,000 new jobs.

The report also found the additional social housing would generate savings of \$122.5 million in a year due to women not returning to a violent partner and a further \$257 million in a year in savings due to women not experiencing homelessness after leaving their homes due to family and domestic violence.

With these findings in mind, there is a need to look at how the Safe Places program can maximise pathways to long-term housing solutions through social and affordable housing options delivered and managed by CHPs. Many CHPs provide wrap around social and community services and supports, which can assist with the transition to long-term accommodation while supporting clients holistically and through a client-centred approach. This approach is particularly needed when ensuring adequate support of those who identify as a First Nations person, CALD or those with disabilities.

PowerHousing CHP’s have unique experience in providing these long-term pathways. Launch Housing operates Viv’s Place, Dandenong ([see video](#)), which provides long-term and transition accommodation for women and children escaping family violence. This includes the provision of support services including counselling, education and employment assistance. Launch Housing have would like to offer a tour Viv’s Place as part of the Safe Places consultation.

### Recommendation 5

There needs to be pathways for victims out of crisis accommodation into transitional/long-term stable, safe accommodation. Examples of this can be found in the work of CHPs and these should be considered. Procurements by the DSS should assess submissions on how these pathways can be established and operated.

### Eligibility Criteria

The previous round of the Safe Places program required that if an applicant was not a specialist homelessness service provider (SHS), that they provide evidence of a formal partnership with a SHS provider. Our CHP Members have noted a conflict in this as SHS providers who would be sought to provide evidence of partnership with a tender may also be considering tendering for the Safe Places program.

### Recommendation 6

The DSS should examine the requirement regarding a letter of endorsement from a SHS provider to organisation who is not a SHS provider to remove possible conflicts of interest.

## Conclusion

PowerHousing Australia is encouraged by the investment in Safe Places program and the consideration given those with diverse needs in the design and implementation of the program. Community Housing Providers (CHPs) possess significant knowledge and expertise in support vulnerable groups, including women and children with diverse needs who are leaving FDV situations. Consideration around a fair and equitable assessment process is required, in addition to an adequate development period to allow for grant recipients to ensure ample supports and organisational infrastructure is in place for quality accommodation services under the Safe Place program.

Designs should seek to maximise the security and safety of residents, while also meeting Livable Standards and factoring in opportunities for environmentally sustainable builds that are close proximity to services. Adoption of a vertical integration pipeline can encourage greater engagement of all levels of government and the private sector, while enhancing efficiencies and timeliness of program delivery.

Funding of the Safe Places program should not be in isolation; consideration of how the initiative can provide a pathway to long-term social and affordable housing options delivered by CHPs is needed.