



Supporting Mental Health & Wellbeing

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Mr Peter Boxall AO
Chairman
Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal of NSW
PO Box K35
Haymarket Post Shop NSW 1240

Dear Mr Boxall and Tribunal Members

Re: Review of Social and Affordable Housing Rent Models

Flourish Australia is one of Australia's largest community managed organisations delivering community based mental health supports to people with a lived experience of a mental health issue. We support people to find a home, get a job and meet people and learn new things, often in partnership with other organisations, including public and community housing providers. We support close to 5000 people annually across NSW and South East Queensland.

Having a place to live that is safe, secure and stable is important to the health and wellbeing of every citizen. It is essential for people with a lived experience of a mental health issue. The affordability of housing on limited income and accessibility of supports to maintain that housing are important factors for consideration in helping people stay well, connected and to encourage their economic participation, where that is possible.

We will leave detailed analysis of the proposals set out in the Other - Issues Paper dated November 2016. However, we acknowledge the pressures on the social and affordable housing system and the growing gap between income and costs.

We support the consideration of a "safety net group" in the tribunal's deliberations that seek to define cohorts that might attract different approaches to tenancy



management and rental decisions. The inclusion of people with “severe or chronic mental illness” in this category is important. (We prefer the term lived experience of a mental health issue, as a less stigmatising term to “severe or chronic mental illness”).

People’s experience of mental illness is varying. For some, with access to early intervention and intensive supports the experience and its impact on day to day functioning and economic participation can be manageable. However, for others the experience can have major impacts on lives, including significant psychosocial disabilities which impact on a person’s life opportunities and, importantly, economic participation. Sometimes the barriers to social inclusion and economic participation are not the person’s but arise due to the stigma and discrimination people experience from others that is associated with mental illness.

In our experience people with a lived experience of a mental health issue want to work, and with the right supports and flexibility many are able to do so, if given the chance by employers. But their ability to work maybe restricted or limited including by experience, disability or interrupted educational opportunities. Taking this into account caution should be exercised in considering issues such as motivation to work and incentives to workforce participation for people with lived experience of a mental health issue.

We have reviewed the proposed assessment criteria set out in Chapter 4 and agree they provide a reasonable balance of issues, for tenants and the social housing system and Government, for consideration. In considering these criteria, and mindful of the ‘safety net group’ noted above, we wonder whether there should also be consideration of accessibility of appropriate supports, e.g. local community health and social infrastructure.

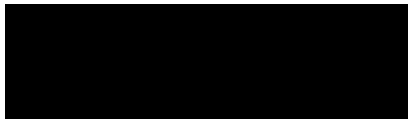
We welcome the identification of health and social supports for tenants with high or complex support needs within the paper. Any consideration of the sustainability of the social housing system must take this into consideration. The social housing system should be seen as part of a broader social support system for vulnerable people that includes housing, health and social supports that facilitate wellness, social inclusion and citizenship.

In considering rent setting models or contributions that can be made by tenants we highlight the non-cash contributions that are made by people to their local communities and building social capital. Whilst the review seeks to address the growing gap between income received and the cost of operations, we wonder whether there is scope in this review to also consider such time investments by tenants as a contribution to the system and for these to be somehow recognised.

There is logic in the argument that a one size fits all approach to rent setting, whilst administratively reasonably simple, is inequitable. Increased flexibility in the rent setting framework would provide for more tailored or individualised approaches that meet specific circumstances to be developed.

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this review.

Yours sincerely

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Pamela Rutledge
Chief Executive Officer