

Friday 12th May 2017

Attention Tribunal members,

Review of rent models for social and affordable housing

I am writing to provide input into IPART's review of rental models for social and affordable housing.

Background and general comments

It is essential that the NSW Government should ensure that any changes to the social housing system are done in collaboration with tenants. As part of this, prior to implementing any changes IPART and the NSW Government should have a process to make sure social housing tenants are consulted.

In terms of focusing on employment, whether people can work this needs to be done in consultation with their medical professionals. Some may appear to be able to work but forcing them to do so will cause great distress and detrimentally impact the health of the tenant. The other factor is the fact that it is very difficult to get jobs and will again compound the distress and problems for the tenants. IPART needs to examine not just incentives but support that people need to get into employment.

The discussion paper also focuses a lot on pushing people towards private rental. But it is not just an issue of providing financial assistance as many tenants face discrimination from landlords.

Positive recommendations

I believe the following recommendations from IPART can be positive changes to the social housing system:

Keeping current tenant's contributions at 25 per cent of their income (Draft finding One);

A right of return if someone leaves social housing after finding employment (Recommendation 18);

While I support this, I believe the right of return of 2 years is too limited. Often people with disabilities or health issues may have laps or episodes outside the two-year time frame

Expanding the availability of the Private Rental Assistance Program (Recommendation 20).

Negative recommendations

I believe the following recommendations are concerning and will not address the current housing crisis:

Including the FTB and other general in assessable income (Recommendation 2)

Increasing the family tax benefit contribution will detrimentally affects struggling families and payments have been granted to assist with the cost of living and should not be considered as 'income'. It is also not fair to charge an increase for 'security' of tenure when one of the other recommendations of the report is to move to a system where tenants could be moved every 3 years.

Attempting to better match the housing stock with tenants' needs and characteristics (Recommendation 7).

It is important to remember that moving causes great distress and is the highest form of psychological stress and distress so any moves have to be very carefully considered and consultative rather than dictated. On this point, of matching people to properties is not simple. If FACS or another provider attempts to offer people properties that aren't suitable then they will end up with more complexities of problems. Many social housing tenants currently experience bullying from FACS in the process of attempting to move people into new locations and I am concerned that this would continue or get worse under the new approach.

Moving so frequently will also have a greater impact on groups such as those who have had experiences of domestic violence or childhood abuse as well as people who suffer from disabilities and mental health issues.

The recommendation regarding prioritising those with transfers needs to be done on a case by case basis especially ascertaining whether there are safety issues and/or homelessness issue in determining those who had priority, as in the case of Domestic and Family Violence as well as Homelessness.

Affordable housing (Recommendation 26)

It is disappointing that IPART is not considering affordable housing. You cannot divorce Social Housing from the affordable Housing as the lack of affordable Housing issue is pushing more people to seek Social Housing.

Conclusion

Thank you for considering my submission. I would be happy to speak to how the NSW Government can involve social housing tenants or any other issue that I have raised in this submission.

Warm regards,

Talie Star