



Submission to the National Housing and Homelessness Plan Bill 2024 (No. 2)

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Foreword

Sydney University Postgraduate Representative Association (SUPRA) is the representative organisation for postgraduate students at the University of Sydney. Established in 1970, SUPRA's constituency has grown to include 28,431 enrolled postgraduate students in 2023, of which 56% were international students. SUPRA has for over 50 years represented postgraduate student interests, and has provided professional casework and legal services to postgraduate students, gaining valuable experience and insight into the aspirations and issues postgraduate students face. An increasingly significant part of our work has been supporting domestic and international postgraduate students facing unaffordable, insecure and unsafe housing, in a complex and oftentimes owner-centric legislative landscape.

Background

Secure, affordable and accessible housing is not only a fundamental human right – for many students, their experiences of housing are central to their University experience. University students, like many renters in NSW, are facing significant barriers to accessing affordable housing. This crisis is exacerbated by a progressive reduction in University provided accommodation in Sydney (City of Sydney, 2023). International students in particular are at significant risk of homelessness, as well as associated vulnerabilities including overcrowding, hot-bedding, excessive rents, high bonds, and unauthorised additional charges, evictions, and contract conditions (Gurran et al., 2021; Hastings et al., 2023; Wilson et al., 2023). People with disability and First Nations People are also at higher risk of homelessness (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2024).

The lack of affordable housing was repeatedly noted in the final report of the Australian Universities Accord which linked secure and affordable housing to student safety, and emphasized the provision of safe and affordable student housing as the responsibility of universities and Government. The final report stated in recommendation 23 (p. 188) that “The review is recommending that providers have appropriate risk management strategies for international education that include consideration of access to and availability of affordable student housing”. Clearly this is a national and state priority that needs attention, planning and action.

Discussion and recommendations

SUPRA strongly supports the development implementation and maintenance of a National Housing and Homelessness Plan. We agree that a 10 year Plan, with 3 year reports on the effectiveness of the Plan, is vital to nationwide improvement to the availability and affordability of safe and secure housing, especially for vulnerable groups.

To ensure that student housing needs are met we recommend that:

- The Consumer Council include a higher education student representative who can speak to higher education student housing issues.
- That the Plan be created through genuine consultation with a diverse range of student representative organisations and lived experience experts on the housing needs of students in higher education.
- Due to their particular needs, this consultation should ensure that with students with disability, students from low SES groups, international students, LGBTQIA+ and First Nations students are represented in the planning and implementation of the Plan.
- That the Plan should, at minimum, include planning and consideration of domestic and international higher education student housing needs.
- That the Plan should work towards improving the affordability of housing in both the private rental market and in Purpose Built Student Accommodation (PBSA).
- The plan should consider supporting alternatives to PBSA for student accommodation including not profit driven student housing with high levels of university oversight, student social housing partnerships with state Governments, and more student cooperative housing groups.
- In collaboration with the states, that the Plan should work towards the protection and extension of state-based renting rights for higher education students in both the private rental market and in PBSAs.
- That the Plan should, in collaboration with student representative organisations that focus on issues such as sexual assault and harassment and racism on campus, work to address student safety issues across student housing.

References

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