

NT Shelter

Submission to the have your say on
Northern Territory Housing Strategy



April 2026

Contents

About NT Shelter	3
NT Shelter Members	3
Preamble.....	4
Executive Overview	5
NT Shelter Recommendations	7
The Challenge – Sector-Identified System Pressures.....	7
NTG Strategic Pillars.....	8
PILLAR 1: Accelerate land access and approvals.....	8
PILLAR 2: Strengthen the construction and development system	9
PILLAR 3: Deliver housing in regional and remote NT.....	11
PILLAR 4: Improve affordability and access.....	12
PILLAR 5: Strengthen social housing and asset performance.....	14
Enabling Delivery: Accountability and Implementation.....	15
Why Housing Matters in the Northern Territory	16
Methodology	17
REFERENCES	17

About NT Shelter

NT Shelter is the Northern Territory’s peak body for affordable housing and homelessness. We advocate for affordable and appropriate housing for all Territorians, especially those on low incomes who are particularly vulnerable and disadvantaged in the housing market.

NT Shelter’s work involves research and policy development, advocacy and communications, sector consultation and coordination, and capacity building.

NT Shelter is proud to work with and represent a range of organisations that make a significant contribution each day to the lives of people for whom housing is unaffordable and inaccessible. Our member organisations are specialist providers of services relating to housing and homelessness. Their focus is on low to moderate income Territorians who have a wide range of social and affordable accommodation needs, including crisis, transitional, short-term, low-cost, and supported housing.

Many NT Shelter member organisations also provide professional services to support people who are experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness.

NT Shelter Members



Preamble

NT Shelter welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Northern Territory Government's (NTG) development of a new Territory-wide Housing Strategy (the Strategy) and to contribute insights from the housing and homelessness sectors.

As the peak body for social and affordable housing and homelessness in the Northern Territory, NT Shelter brings a system-wide perspective, informed by our work with Community Housing Providers (CHPs), government and sector partners. This includes a focus on the role of housing as both essential social infrastructure and a key enabler of economic participation, workforce stability and regional development.

The development of a new Northern Territory Housing Strategy is a critical opportunity to establish a clear, coordinated and long-term direction for the Northern Territory's housing system. The Northern Territory faces a distinct housing context, with disproportionately high rates of homelessness and overcrowding (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2023). These pressures, combined with supply constraints and cost challenges, have wide-ranging impacts across the economy and community.

A well-defined Strategy can provide the foundation for aligning policy, investment and delivery across government, industry and the community sector. It can support greater certainty for investment, clarify the role of different facets of the housing system, and enable more effective responses to current and emerging demand.

This submission draws on recent engagement with the community housing sector, system mapping work undertaken by NT Shelter, and ongoing dialogue with stakeholders.

Executive Overview

The primary constraint in the Northern Territory housing system is an insufficient supply of social and affordable housing.

The Northern Territory Housing Strategy is an opportunity to strengthen the housing system to support economic growth, workforce participation, and safe, connected communities.

NT Shelter supports the overall direction of the Strategy. However, based on extensive sector engagement and systems mapping, the current approach will not deliver sustained system improvement without a stronger focus on supply, system flow, and delivery settings.

The Strategy will not deliver sustained system improvement without the recognition of the following as priorities:

- i. ***Housing is essential economic and social infrastructure***
Housing underpins workforce participation, economic productivity and community safety. When supply is insufficient, costs are shifted across health, justice, and social systems rather than reduced.
- ii. ***Increasing social and affordable housing supply is non-negotiable***
The housing system is currently constrained by insufficient supply. Without sustained growth in social and affordable housing, pressures across homelessness, workforce and public systems will continue to intensify.
- iii. ***The system requires improved flow, not just crisis response***
Crisis and transitional accommodation are essential, but without pathways into long-term housing, system capacity is reduced. Improving flow across the housing continuum is critical to reducing demand on crisis services.
- iv. ***Financing and delivery settings must be strengthened***
Government investment alone will not meet demand. Increasing supply at scale will require coordinated financing, including institutional investment, partnerships with community housing providers, and alignment with economic development.
- v. ***Clear accountability and implementation mechanisms are required***
The Strategy requires clear supply targets, defined responsibilities, transparent reporting and ongoing system oversight to ensure delivery.

NT Shelter's recommendations strengthen the Strategy Scaffold's proposed pillars:

- Accelerating land access and approvals must be aligned with social and affordable housing delivery outcomes.
- Strengthening the construction and development system must support workforce capacity, pipeline certainty, and alternative delivery models.
- Delivering housing in regional and remote Northern Territory must be complemented by a stronger response to urban demand and mobility.
- Improving affordability and access must include expanded rental options and pathways across the housing continuum.
- Strengthening social housing and asset performance must include system flow, asset renewal, and a clear role for community housing providers.

NT Shelter Recommendations

To ensure the Strategy delivers sustained outcomes, NT Shelter recommends that it:

- Establish clear, regionally based social and affordable housing supply targets informed by need, backlog, and population growth.
- Commit to no net loss of social housing stock, including replacement prior to demolition.
- Implement a coordinated investment and financing framework to support delivery at scale.
- Strengthen partnerships with community housing providers as key delivery partners.
- Align housing delivery with economic development and workforce needs.
- Establish a transparent implementation and accountability framework, including public reporting.

The Challenge – Sector-Identified System Pressures

NT Shelter member organisations consistently raise the following concerns:

- Persistent shortages of affordable and social housing resulting in prolonged homelessness and overcrowding, particularly for Aboriginal households, who represent around 87% of people experiencing homelessness in the Territory (ABS, 2023).
- Limited pathways into long-term housing causing bottlenecks across crisis, transitional and support services (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare [AIHW], 2025).
- A private rental market that is increasingly unaffordable and inaccessible, including documented discrimination against Aboriginal people, people with disability, young people and key workers (Everybody's Home, 2025).
- Ageing and underperforming social housing stock that increases energy hardship and long-term maintenance costs (Australian Building Codes Board [ABCB], 2022).

NTG Strategic Pillars

These pillars are interdependent, but increasing supply is the primary constraint on system performance. NT Shelter provides the following recommendations to strengthen their effectiveness.

PILLAR 1: Accelerate land access and approvals

Increasing housing supply in the Northern Territory is constrained not only by funding and delivery capacity, but by the availability, sequencing and coordination of land, planning and infrastructure.

While there is capacity to increase housing supply in urban centres, this is often limited by fragmented land release processes, infrastructure constraints, and a lack of alignment between planning decisions and housing outcomes.

At the same time, poorly planned or delivered density can undermine tenant outcomes and community confidence. This has contributed to resistance to increased density of social and affordable housing, particularly in established areas.

However, when done well, increased density can support more efficient use of infrastructure, improve access to employment and services, and enable more diverse and inclusive communities. It is estimated that servicing a dwelling in an established suburb can cost between two and four times less than delivering new housing on the urban fringe (Infrastructure Victoria, 2023).

Accelerating land access and approvals therefore requires a coordinated approach, therefore, the Northern Territory Housing Strategy should include:

Aligning land release with housing outcomes

- Maintain a transparent pipeline of development-ready land across urban centres.
- Prioritise government-owned land for delivery of social and affordable housing.
- Identify and release land in locations that support access to employment, services and transport.

Supporting well planned density

- Apply inclusionary zoning mechanisms to embed affordable and social housing within new developments.

- Support infill and modest densification in established areas with existing or planned infrastructure.
- Avoid large, single-tenure developments that concentrate disadvantage.

Coordinating infrastructure and planning

- Align infrastructure sequencing with identified housing growth areas to ensure communities are liveable from the outset.
- Integrate housing delivery with transport, services, and community infrastructure planning.
- Strengthen coordination between planning, housing, and infrastructure agencies.

Providing certainty and accountability

- Use precinct-based planning approaches to provide clarity to industry and the community.
- Establish clear responsibility within government for aligning land release, infrastructure and housing outcomes.
- Ensure planning and approval processes support timely and predictable delivery.

PILLAR 2: Strengthen the construction and development system

The ability to deliver housing at scale in the Northern Territory is constrained by workforce capacity, construction costs, market conditions, and delivery capability across the system.

Even where land and funding are available, housing delivery is limited by the availability of skilled labour, particularly in regional areas, and by the cost and complexity of construction in the Northern Territory. These constraints affect both the private market and the delivery of social and affordable housing.

In addition, inconsistent pipelines of work and a lack of long-term certainty reduce industry confidence and limit the ability of the construction sector to invest in workforce development, innovation and expansion.

Community housing providers also play a critical role within the development system. Where settings are clear and consistent, CHPs can contribute to delivery, leverage finance and partner with government and industry to deliver mixed-tenure

developments. However, this role is currently constrained by limited pipeline visibility and inconsistent enabling settings.

Strengthening the construction and development system will require a coordinated approach that builds workforce capacity, provides pipeline certainty, and enables a broader range of delivery partners.

The Northern Territory Housing Strategy should include:

Building workforce capacity

- Develop and implement a housing construction workforce strategy, with a focus on regional delivery and pathways for local and Aboriginal employment.
- Support training, apprenticeships and targeted workforce initiatives aligned to projected housing demand.
- Address workforce attraction and retention challenges linked to housing availability and cost.

Providing pipeline certainty

- Establish and communicate a forward pipeline of housing projects across government, community housing and private sector delivery.
- Align pipeline planning with workforce development to support industry capacity growth.
- Provide longer-term certainty to enable industry investment in workforce, systems and supply chains.

Enabling a broader delivery system

- Strengthen partnerships with Community Housing Providers as delivery partners across social and affordable housing.
- Support mixed-tenure developments that combine public, community and private housing outcomes.
- Encourage collaboration between government, CHPs and the private sector to improve delivery efficiency and outcomes.

Reducing delivery constraints

- Identify and address regulatory, procurement and contractual barriers that delay or limit housing delivery
- Support innovation in construction methods and materials appropriate to the Northern Territory context
- Streamline approval and delivery processes where appropriate to improve efficiency.

PILLAR 3: Deliver housing in regional and remote NT

The Northern Territory has a distinct housing profile, with significantly higher rates of homelessness and overcrowding than other jurisdictions, particularly in regional and remote communities. These conditions are closely linked to poorer outcomes across health, education, employment and justice, and are central to progress against Closing the Gap targets.

Significant investment has been directed toward remote housing. This investment remains essential and must continue to address overcrowding, housing conditions, and population growth in remote communities.

However, the Northern Territory housing system is highly interconnected. Mobility between remote, regional and urban areas is a defining feature, with many Aboriginal households moving to access services, education, employment and family networks.

As a result, demand for appropriate housing in urban and regional centres is significant. Without a coordinated approach that addresses both remote and urban housing need, there is a risk that gains made through remote investment are undermined by unmet demand elsewhere in the system.

The Northern Territory Housing Strategy should include:

Sustained investment in remote housing

- Maintain long-term investment to address overcrowding, population growth and housing conditions.
- Support culturally appropriate housing design that reflects community needs and local conditions.

- Strengthen local delivery capability, including Aboriginal workforce development and community-led housing models.

A coordinated urban and regional response

- Recognise and plan for mobility between remote, regional, and urban areas.
- Increase supply of social and affordable housing in urban and regional centres to meet demand.
- Ensure urban housing delivery supports Closing the Gap outcomes.

Climate responsive housing

- Commit to adoption of the NCC 2022 seven-star energy efficiency standard for new housing stock (ABCB, 2022).
- Deliver thermal performance upgrades to existing social housing aligned with the Social Housing Energy Performance Initiative (DCCEEW, 2026).

Place-based and culturally appropriate approaches

- Embed place-based planning that reflects the needs of different communities across the Territory
- Support Aboriginal leadership and participation in housing design, delivery and governance
- Align housing responses with broader service systems, including health, education, and community services.

PILLAR 4: Improve affordability and access

The Northern Territory has one of the least affordable rental markets in Australia, despite having one of the highest proportions of renters (ABS, 2023).

For low- to moderate-income households, including key workers, access to stable and affordable housing is increasingly constrained. These conditions contribute to housing stress, instability, and homelessness, and undermine workforce participation and retention.

Improving affordability and access requires both reducing barriers for households and enabling increased supply through diversified delivery and financing models.

NT Housing Strategy Submission April 2026

The Strategy should include:

Improving access to housing

- Expand financial assistance products, including rental subsidies and bond assistance, for low- and moderate-income households and key workers.
- Provide targeted supports to enable households to sustain private rental tenancies.
- Support pathways into home ownership and market housing, including shared equity and rent-to-buy options where affordability is the primary barrier.

Expanding affordable rental supply

- Support delivery of affordable rental products within private and community housing.
- Enable build-to-rent and other long-term rental models where appropriate.
- Align planning, land and infrastructure settings to support affordable rental supply in well-located areas.

Enabling investment and financing

- Establish a coordinated investment framework that combines government funding, private capital and community housing delivery
- Provide policy certainty and a visible pipeline of projects to attract institutional investment, including superannuation funds
- Enable Community Housing Providers to leverage assets and access finance to deliver mixed-tenure developments
- Explore aggregation mechanisms to bundle projects and achieve the scale required to attract investment in a small market.

Aligning housing with economic development

- Embed housing requirements within major project and infrastructure planning
- Leverage opportunities for “license to operate” contributions from major developments
- Support delivery of workforce and legacy housing linked to industry growth.

PILLAR 5: Strengthen social housing and asset performance

The Northern Territory housing system is constrained by insufficient supply of social and affordable housing, limiting the system's ability to respond to demand and increasing pressure on homelessness services.

At the same time, system performance is affected by limited flow through the housing continuum. Crisis and transitional accommodation are essential, but without pathways into stable, long-term housing capacity becomes constrained.

Community housing providers play a critical role in strengthening system performance and delivery. Where policy and partnership settings are clear and consistent, CHPs contribute to supply, innovation, asset management and tenant outcomes. A stable and capable community housing sector is therefore essential to improving system performance and enabling delivery at scale.

To deliver improved outcomes, the Strategy must move beyond asset management alone and focus on system performance, including supply, flow, partnerships and accountability.

The Strategy should include:

Clear supply targets and accountability

- Establish regionally-based social and affordable housing supply targets informed by backlog and projected need.
- Commit to no net loss of social housing stock.
- Publish a transparent implementation dashboard to track delivery.

Strengthening system flow

- Improve pathways from crisis and transitional accommodation into long-term housing.
- Reduce bottlenecks by aligning housing supply with demand across the continuum.
- Embed early intervention approaches to support tenancy sustainment.

Strengthening the role of Community Housing Providers

- Set clear targets for community housing growth.
- Provide a transparent pipeline of projects suitable for CHP delivery.

- Ensure consistent regulatory and financial settings to support sustainability.

Workforce and sector capability

- Invest in workforce development across housing, support and construction
- Strengthen organisational capability, governance and leadership within the community housing sector.

Data, transparency and system stewardship

- Establish a clear performance and data framework with agreed system indicators
- Improve data sharing and public reporting to support accountability and confidence
- Commit to regular review and refinement of system settings based on evidence.

Clear roles, responsibilities and oversight

- Define responsibilities across government agencies to support coordinated delivery
- Establish a formal advisory mechanism, such as a Social and Affordable Housing Advisory Council
- Embed ongoing system stewardship and cross-portfolio coordination.

Enabling Delivery: Accountability and Implementation

Delivering the Strategy will require clear accountability, coordination, and implementation mechanisms across all pillars.

NT Shelter recommends:

- Publicly reported housing supply targets by region.
- Defined roles and responsibilities across government agencies.
- A transparent implementation and monitoring framework.
- Establishment of a Social and Affordable Housing Advisory Council to support coordination and continuous improvement.
- Commitment to regular review and refinement of settings, informed by data, evidence and sector feedback.

Why Housing Matters in the Northern Territory

Housing in the Northern Territory must be understood as both essential social infrastructure and enabling economic infrastructure.

Secure, appropriate housing underpins workforce participation, economic productivity, and community safety. When housing supply is insufficient, costs are not avoided but shifted across health, justice, child protection and crisis service systems, often at significantly higher cost (Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute [AHURI], 2022).

In the Northern Territory, these impacts are amplified by geography, service delivery complexity, and higher baseline levels of disadvantage. Housing pressures are closely associated with poorer health outcomes, disrupted education pathways and reduced workforce participation, while increasing demand across multiple government systems (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare [AIHW], 2025).

The Territory experiences disproportionately high rates of homelessness and overcrowding, particularly for Aboriginal Territorians. These conditions have direct implications for Closing the Gap outcomes across health, education, employment and justice (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2023).

While significant investment has been directed toward remote housing, the Northern Territory housing system is highly interconnected. Mobility between remote, regional, and urban areas is a defining feature, driving sustained demand for appropriate housing in urban and regional centres. In these locations, where a substantial proportion of social housing tenants are Aboriginal, housing availability is critical to ensuring that gains made through remote investment are not undermined by unmet demand elsewhere in the system.

Crisis and transitional accommodation remain essential components of the housing system. However, without sufficient pathways into stable, long-term housing, system capacity becomes constrained, limiting the ability to respond to new demand.

A Territory-wide Housing Strategy must therefore recognise housing as core enabling infrastructure and respond to both remote and urban housing need in a coordinated way. This includes aligning policy, funding, and delivery across portfolios to support improved social and economic outcomes.

Methodology

NT Shelter's submission is informed by ongoing, structured engagement with community housing providers, specialist homelessness services, support organisations, Aboriginal organisations and other housing system stakeholders across the Northern Territory.

As the Northern Territory's peak body for social and affordable housing and homelessness, NT Shelter maintains a regular schedule of sector meetings, working groups and forums that provide consistent, practice-based feedback on system performance, service pressures and emerging risks.

These engagements include, but are not limited to:

- **Accommodation Action Groups** convened in urban centres, bringing together housing, homelessness and support services, NT and local government to discuss system gaps and priorities.
- **Collaborative allocations and system flow groups** focusing on social housing access, tenancy outcomes and movement across the housing continuum.
- **Communities of practice** supporting shared learning on tenancy sustainment, early intervention and prevention.
- **Homelessness response coordination groups** involving service providers and government agencies to identify emerging pressures and systemic barriers.
- **Regular community housing sector forums** addressing regulatory settings, growth opportunities and delivery challenges.

The issues identified in this submission do not arise from a single consultation process. Rather, they reflect the most consistent themes raised across multiple forums over an extended period of time, across different organisations, locations and service types.

Systems Mapping

In late 2025, NT Shelter undertook a systems mapping process with government, community housing providers, local government and sector stakeholders to better understand the dynamics of the Northern Territory's housing system.

This process identified the interdependencies between housing supply, workforce capacity, policy settings and tenant outcomes, and how constraints in one part of the system reinforce pressures elsewhere.

The work confirmed that the current trajectory is unsustainable. The system is increasingly constrained by housing shortages, rising service demand and growing cross-system costs, with limited capacity to respond within existing settings.

Key insights from the process include:

NT Housing Strategy Submission April 2026

- **Housing supply is the primary constraint on system performance**, with shortages driving pressure across homelessness, health, justice and community safety
- **The system is becoming more reactive and more costly over time**, with limited ability to shift toward prevention under current settings
- **Improved coordination and partnership across government, community housing and industry are required** to enable a more effective and sustainable housing system

These insights directly inform the recommendations outlined in this submission and reinforce the need for a coordinated, system-wide Housing Strategy.

REFERENCES

Australian Building Codes Board (ABCB) (2022). *National Construction Code 2022*.

Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) (2023). *Estimating Homelessness: Census 2021*.

Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) (2022). *Why does Australia have a rental crisis, and what can be done about it?*

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) (2025). *Specialist Homelessness Services Annual Report 2024–25*.

Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW) (2026). *Social Housing Energy Performance Initiative*.

Everybody's Home (2025). *Priced Out: An Index of Affordable Rentals for Australian Voters*.

Infrastructure Victoria (2023). *Our Home Choices*.

UNSW City Futures Research Centre (2021). *Housing Need Dashboard*.