

## Media Statement

### ACT Housing evictions

The North Canberra Community Council requests the ACT Government reconsider the decision to notify 300 plus ACT Housing tenants that they will be relocated whether or not they agree.

These ACT Housing tenants have been issued with an eviction notice. The letters sent do not offer a choice. The letters outline steps in the process of forced relocation (aka eviction) and offer the support of a tenancy officer and community groups to ease the pain of dislocation.

This is a new policy for the ACT Government. There was no community engagement that this significant change to social policy was to be implemented. Up to recently, ACT Housing tenants were advised that their homes could be their homes for life – leaving out extraordinary circumstances.

Given the demographics of these inner city blocks, it is most likely that the majority of these letters have been received by older women. There was a time when the plight of older women was a priority for the ACT Government.

Whole social support networks that are so important to these disadvantaged people will be pulled apart. The cost of rebuilding this social capital is hard to estimate and will most likely be lost.

The NCCC requests that a new letter be issued requesting these same tenants identify if they agree or not to be moved. If agreeing, this would be finalised once they accept the new accommodation.

**The NCCC requests that for those tenants who wish to stay where they are for the time being, and that this may mean for the rest of their lives, that these tenants be removed from the current relocation list.**

It is suggested that those who chose to stay could be approached to ascertain what longer term plans the tenants may have - such as plans to move into a retirement home later in life.

If there are any further engagements with these tenants, this should be done in a transparent and non-threatening manner with the tenants' wishes respected. A duty of care exists in relation to social housing tenants. For many this extra stress is totally unacceptable and unnecessary and is most likely to lead to increases in anxiety and associated health issues.

The NCCC requests that these matters be treated as urgent and that a transparent more humane process be adopted to identify those willing to move – and those who wish to age in place.



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## **Background to the NCCC comments on ACT Housing tenant evictions**

The Government should build additional social housing that is not contingent on removing the existing social housing and disrupting the lives of 300 families.

The threat of relocation increases the security and anxiety of the already disadvantaged tenants. The previous redevelopment process had tenants in this situation for several years.

For those tenants who do wish to move, the NCCC would encourage ACT Housing to engage with these tenants in a more open and friendly manner than has been used to date.

The NCCC objects to the talking points being used in the media that are an attempt to shame these tenants into accepting their fate – being evicted against their will.

The official line is that these houses have reached the end of their usefulness, that these tenants should move out to allow for others to be offered a home from the long waiting list, and that this is normal practice for a landlord to move out tenants.

The NCCC rejects these disingenuous statements and the shifting of the blame of the long waiting lists on to those who had been living in their homes under the clear impression that these could be their homes for the rest of their lives.

The NCCC is aware that while there may be houses in need of upgrading and repair, from the information gathered many of the tenants live in houses equivalent to the neighbours who have ownership of their homes; they have been maintaining their properties and gardens and have no wish to be evicted.

The NCCC is aware that ACT Housing is having to use sales of properties to assist with funds for new social housing programs because of budget restrictions placed upon it by the Chief Minister / Treasurer.

However, the solution is a new financial allocation and a larger commitment to achieving a higher level of social housing than is possible under the present budgetary allocations – not this sale of people's homes.

The Government has a commitment that 15% of new suburbs is affordable and social housing. This needs to be implemented.

With some foresight the major new developments on Northbourne Ave could have been required to have a percentage of social housing and this would have gone a significant way to reducing the current housing crisis.

The comparison of the actions of ACT Housing as landlord with the actions of private landlords is ridiculous and indicates that whoever wrote those talking points has no appreciation of the role of government in social housing.

To hear both Labor and ACT Greens politicians using these talking points is reducing the trust that residents have in their elected representatives.

The NCCC agrees with ACTOSS when they expressed their dismay that these unsigned letters were both callous and cruel. These actions should never be acceptable to a government that has been entrusted to care for those in the community that require this extra care.

There was a time when government was big on building community and building community facilities which supported social cohesion. Building social capital. There were grants and all sorts of awards.

Public Housing has an annual award for the tenant who best looks after their property. But this certainly rings hollow when your home gets targeted for the redevelopment program. Pack your bags you're out! Rip another hole in the social fabric. Break communities that have taken a lifetime to develop.

The targeting of 300 inner city blocks is the latest sell off of public housing and the largest housing disruption program since the previous renewal program that saw public housing removed from Northbourne Avenue and other prime city locations. These sites were privatised with no allowance for public housing.

There was no gain in stock numbers but roof for roof replacement mainly to the outer suburbs.

The cost of the increased densification along Northbourne Ave and the impacts flowing into the surrounding suburbs is causing significant planning issues in the Inner North. A lot of green space has been lost with these redevelopments.

As the development on Northbourne Avenue and the other prime sites has shown they don't come with plans of how to make more sustainable and liveable suburbs for the residents in the area. The result is apartments for the well off.

The same clichés for the last redevelopment are being rolled out again. More sustainable housing replacing houses that have come to the end of their useful lives, lower maintenance, properties that are underutilised, properties for people with greater need.

None of this addresses the impact on the tenants. Having to move home is always a shock and the longer you've been in a home and the older you are the more painful it is. The communities were broken up and removed to different parts of Canberra.