



PAUL FLETCHER MP
Federal Member for Bradfield
Minister for Families and Social Services

MC18-005887

Mayor David O'Loughlin
President
Australian Local Government Association
8 Geils Court
DEAKIN ACT 2600

Dear Mayor O'^{David}Loughlin

Thank you for your letters of 2 August 2018 to the former Minister for Social Services, the Hon Dan Tehan MP, concerning the resolutions at the National General Assembly of Local Government (NGA) from the 17-20 June 2018. I am responding to you as the matters raised by the NGA now fall within my portfolio responsibilities.

The Australian Government recognises the matters raised by the NGA, and supported by the Australian Local Government Association Board (ALGA Board), affect many Australians. This is why we have put in place a comprehensive plan to address housing affordability.

I am pleased to provide detailed responses addressing each resolution in the enclosed table. I note you have also written to the former Treasurer, the Hon Scott Morrison MP, regarding resolution 42. I understand the Treasurer, the Hon Josh Frydenberg MP, will write to you separately.

Thank you again for taking the time to raise these important matters with me.

Yours sincerely

Paul Fletcher

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21 / 9 /2018

Resolution	Response
<p>Resolution 42</p> <p>The National General Assembly call on the Australian Government to commit to action and resources to address the growing problem of housing affordability in Australia, impacting significantly on infrastructure and essential service provision. Specifically the NGA calls for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An economically sustainable approach under the National Affordable Housing Agreement to deliver significant assistance to states and territories to support people on low to moderate incomes with limited housing options to secure appropriate public/social housing or affordable housing. • Research into new models for facilitating financing and investment of affordable housing development, including developer collaborations with industry and philanthropic organisations and use of government land to build local housing that is affordable, well-located, diverse and well designed • Working collaboratively with the States to develop a comprehensive, long term set of integrated policy measures to address housing affordability to align with migration and population changes. <p>Additional funding or incentives to address severe shortage of affordable and appropriate housing options available to key workers including nurses, teachers and police across the States and Territories.</p>	<p>The Government recognises access to secure and affordable housing has significant economic and social benefits. It can improve education and health outcomes, increase workforce participation and reduce welfare dependency.</p> <p>The delivery of homelessness services however is primarily a state and territory responsibility. Equally, the supply of affordable housing largely rests with state and territory governments. The planning, construction, allocation and rents of public and community housing are the responsibility of state and territory governments and community housing providers.</p> <p>As announced in the 2017-18 Budget, this Government has a comprehensive housing affordability plan (the plan) to improve housing affordability and housing outcomes for all Australians. The Australian Government is unlocking supply, creating the right incentives and improving outcomes for those most in need through its plan.</p> <p>This plan includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing \$1.5 billion annually through the new National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA) to states and territories • A \$1 billion National Housing Infrastructure Facility to help unlock new housing supply including social housing • Increasing the Capital Gains Tax discount to 60 per cent for affordable housing investors (estimated cost of \$15 million for 2017-21) • The First Home Super Saver Scheme to help Australians buy their first home (estimated cost of \$250 million for 2017-21) • A \$6 million investment to support the Homes for Homes initiative, which aims to raise funds for social and affordable housing • Providing \$10 million over ten years to develop social impact investments that help young people at risk of homelessness. <p>The Government is committed to implementing an automatic rent deduction scheme for social housing welfare recipients. The Automatic Rent Deduction Scheme will help tenants remain in their homes, reduce their risk of eviction due to arrears and secure social housing providers' incomes. Together these measures will increase the supply of affordable housing, including affordable rental housing.</p> <p>The Government spends around \$4.5 billion annually in Commonwealth Rent Assistance which assists around 1.3 million individuals and families meet their rental costs.</p> <p>The Government is also providing \$5.5 million over three years from 2018-19 to fund the National Housing Research Program of the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute. The program provides an evidence base to support the development of future housing, urban development and homelessness policies.</p>

Resolution	Response
	<p>The Government has published the Australian Government Property Register where all Australians are able to propose alternative uses for Commonwealth land and has updated the Commonwealth Property Disposal Policy to now require affordable housing initiatives to be considered in the disposal of all Commonwealth land that is suitable for housing. In particular, it suggests working with state, territory and local governments to encourage planning measures that will promote an appropriate proportion of affordable housing at sites where residential development is feasible.</p> <p>The Government is also actively contributing to the supply of housing by disposing of land that is suitable for residential housing and no longer required. For example, in Melbourne, the Government will divest 127 hectares of surplus Defence land in Maribyrnong that is located 10 kilometres from the Central Business District.</p> <p>For further information about the measures under the Government's comprehensive housing affordability plan refer to the Budget 2017-18 at https://www.budget.gov.au/2017-18/content/glossies/factsheets/download/FS_Combined_Housing_Affordability.pdf.</p>
<p>Resolution 42.5</p> <p>That this National General Assembly calls on the Federal Government to make provision for housing for councils in remote areas that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are performing services such as aged care, childcare, Centrelink, night patrol and sport and recreation which are funded by the Federal Government; and • Do not have access to social or private housing; • Are having to find funds to construct new housing and as well as pay for essential services infrastructure to connect to it to accommodate employees. 	<p>The response noted for Resolution 42 applies to this resolution.</p>
<p>Resolution 48</p> <p>That the National General Assembly call on the Federal Government to undertake extensive consultation with local governments, the community sector, medical experts and other relevant stakeholders prior to proposing further income management measures, such as drug testing and trials for cashless debit cards for welfare recipients.</p>	<p><i>Cashless Debit Card</i></p> <p>The Government undertook extensive consultations before introducing the Cashless Debit Card (CDC) program into trial sites. Consultations were held with community leaders, affected welfare recipients, state and local governments, industry, merchants and welfare groups. The Government recognises that consultation is critical.</p> <p>An evaluation of the CDC will also be undertaken to collect further evidence of the ongoing and longer term impacts of the CDC in current trial sites. This will inform any future extension or design changes to the program.</p>

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	<p><i>Drug testing trial</i></p> <p>The Government is committed to working with stakeholders to get the best outcomes from the drug testing trial. Since it was announced in the 2017-18 Budget, the Government has engaged 170 stakeholders at more than 60 forums and meetings around Australia including trial sites.</p> <p>Feedback from stakeholders and industry experts has been taken into consideration when refining the policy and implementation arrangements for the trial. For example, evidence and submissions provided to the Senate Committee Inquiries, informed the design of the \$10 million dedicated Treatment Fund for the trial.</p> <p>The Government will continue to engage with stakeholders and industry experts, including from the drug and alcohol treatment sector and the local communities, to finalise arrangements for the trial. Local reference groups in each trial site will be formed prior to the trial's commencement to ensure local input and expertise is incorporated into the trial as it is rolled out.</p> <p>A comprehensive evaluation will run in parallel with the trial. Each step of the evaluation will be informed by local stakeholder engagement, starting with the design of the evaluation strategy before the trial commences.</p>
<p>Resolution 64</p> <p>In light of the burden placed on local governments across Australia to respond to the needs and challenges of people living in poverty and homeless, that the National General Assembly calls on the Federal Government to raise the Newstart Allowance to the level of the Henderson Poverty Line to increase the wellbeing and life chances of many in our community.</p>	<p>The Australian social security system aims to support the basic living standards of all Australians and increase their social and economic participation.</p> <p>Working age allowance payments such as Newstart Allowance are designed to provide a safety net for people who require financial assistance, while maintaining incentives for people to join or return to the workforce where they are able. A higher rate is payable to single recipients with dependent children and to single recipients aged 60 years and over after nine continuous months on payment. Newstart Allowance is indexed twice a year in March and September, in line with movements in the cost of living as measured by the Consumer Price Index.</p> <p>Supplementary payments such as Family Tax Benefit and Commonwealth Rent Assistance are available where recipients have additional costs, such as those associated with raising children or renting in the private market. Other supplementary benefits that may be payable depending on the recipient's circumstances include Pharmaceutical Allowance, Carer Allowance, Remote Area Allowance, Telephone Allowance, Mobility Allowance as well as a concession card.</p> <p>Income support recipients can receive a range of additional benefits and concessions that increase their economic security, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • subsidised prescription medicines under the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme • subsidised health care and related products

Resolution	Response
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • concessions provided by state and territory governments, which could include subsidies for rates for home owners, utilities such as electricity, gas and water, and public transport and vehicle registration fees. <p>For those having a difficult time financially, Centrelink has social workers who can assist in a number of ways. They can provide information or referral to free financial counselling services to people experiencing financial difficulty, such as having large outstanding bills and generally having trouble making ends meet.</p> <p>Social security payments operate in conjunction with taxation concessions, productivity initiatives, employment services and labour market strategies, as part of an integrated package to support workforce participation objectives. The Government provides a range of employment programs and incentives to help people find employment, including through the Government's employment services called jobactive and Disability Employment Services. Assistance includes help with looking for work, writing résumés, preparing for interviews, referrals to jobs and targeted training that is suited to the needs of local employers. In the 2017-18 Budget, the Government announced measures to support some of the most vulnerable people in our society. These measures will focus on helping more Indigenous Australians, disadvantaged parents of young children, and older Australians into jobs.</p>
<p>Resolution 91</p> <p>That the National General Assembly request that NGA write to the Prime Minister, the Hon. Malcolm Turnbull, the Leader of the Opposition, the Hon. Bill Shorten, the Leader of The Australian Greens, Senator Richard Di Natale, the Minister for Women, the Hon. Kelly O'Dwyer, and the Minister for Social Services, the Hon. Dan Tehan, calling for the following measures to be taken to support women and children affected by domestic violence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A substantial increase in direct funding for specialist services and crisis accommodation providers; • Funding for affordable long-term accommodation; • A substantial increase in direct funding of legal services; and • Transparent reporting of all spending on domestic and family violence programs. 	<p>The Government is committed to keeping women and their children safe from violence. The Government is currently implementing the Third Action Plan (2016-2019) of the <i>National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022</i> (the National Plan) in partnership with state and territory governments. Since the release of the National Plan, the Government has invested over \$700 million to reduce domestic, family and sexual violence.</p> <p>Under the Third Action Plan, the Government is investing: \$20 million in primary prevention and early intervention initiatives; \$15 million in frontline services to respond to violence experienced by women and their children; \$30 million in frontline legal assistance and family law services; \$25 million in Indigenous family violence; and \$10 million in responding to sexual violence and research.</p> <p><i>A substantial increase in direct funding for specialist services and crisis accommodation providers and; funding for affordable long-term accommodation</i></p> <p>Under the National Plan, the Government has responsibility for delivering some support and services through family law, including legal assistance, and the social security system. Primary responsibility for delivering services for women who have experienced violence lies with state and territory governments. To support the existing service system, the Government funds complementary national support services such as 1800RESPECT and DV-Alert.</p> <p>Under the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA), states and territories are required to publish housing and homelessness strategies addressing the housing priority policy areas, priority homelessness cohorts, and commitment to improved data collection and reporting.</p>

Resolution	Response
	<p>Women and children affected by family and domestic violence are a priority homelessness cohort under the NHHHA. States and territories decide where services are located, which service providers are contracted, and the amount of funding for each service. The response noted for Resolution 42 also applies to this resolution.</p> <p><i>A substantial increase in direct funding of legal services</i></p> <p>Providing assistance to victims of domestic violence is a priority for the Australian Government and for the legal assistance sector. More information on the status of legal assistance funding can be found at www.ag.gov.au.</p> <p>On 9 May 2017, the Government announced the first comprehensive review into the family law system since its commencement in 1976. This work is being led by the Attorney-General's Department.</p> <p><i>Transparent reporting of all spending on domestic and family violence programs</i></p> <p>The Department of Social Services (the Department) Corporate Plan is the principal planning document. It is an important tool in ensuring that the Department is open and transparent in managing its responsibilities. This includes the proper use and management of public resources, consistent with the requirements of the <i>Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013</i>. Each year, results from both the Department's Corporate Plan and Portfolio Budget Statements are reported in the Department's Annual Report, under Part 2-Annual Performance Statement. These publications are available on the Department's website at www.dss.gov.au.</p>