

Dear Mr Barr,

MyHome in Canberra – Housing for People with Enduring Mental Illness

I am writing on behalf of the Board of *MyHome in Canberra Inc* (MyHome) in response to your invitation to suggest initiatives, services or programs which the Government should prioritise through the 2019-20 Budget. Our suggested priority, and one which we have nominated in several previous rounds of budget consultation, is for increased provision of supported accommodation for people with enduring and serious mental illness.

We acknowledge that the Government shares our concern for increased investment in this area of housing as underscored in the 2016 Parliamentary Agreement where as part of a commitment to improve social housing and housing affordability ACT Labor and ACT Greens agreed to [item 4.7]

Work with community and business partners to construct purpose-built accommodation for people experiencing mental health concerns and housing difficulties, utilising the 'MyHome for Canberra' project plan.

Following on from this commitment, the 2017-18 Budget contained \$350,000 for the funding of research on long-term accommodation and support requirements for clients with high and complex needs. An additional \$200,000 was provided in the 2018-19 Budget for development and feasibility studies to establish a purpose-built supportive housing facility for people experiencing long-term mental health issues and housing difficulties, informed by the research undertaken in 2017-18.

Notwithstanding these encouraging steps in the past two budgets, we are still some way off implementation of the commitment made in 2016. This submission reaffirms that increased investment in housing for people with an enduring mental illness should remain a priority for the Canberra community; presents the advantages of MyHome being part of a larger housing development on Uniting Church land in Curtin; explains how we envisage MyHome's day-to-day operations will be funded; and makes some suggestions about a way forward.

Background

MyHome is a not-for-profit organisation registered with the Australian Charities and not-for-profits Commission (ACNC). Our board meets regularly and we have developed our own corporate planning documents. We have had prepared professionally, preliminary concept sketch plans and costings (overall cost in current prices around \$7million) for a 20 unit residential complex. MyHome has strong connections with the ACT community mental health and carer sector and has been active in fund-raising. We have developed our own detailed Model of Care, based on HOME in Queanbeyan but adapted to suit the needs of people in Canberra and ACT Mental Health legislative requirements.

In 2013 the Uniting Church agreed, subject to certain conditions, that MyHome could use church land opposite the Curtin shops for its project. The land in question (cnr Theodore and Carruthers) is a large block of land ideally located, in terms of proximity to local shops and services and public transport, for a housing project like MyHome. In 2016 the church proposed to the Government that MyHome should be one element in a mixed housing development, and that the whole block should be developed in an integrated way so that the community can take full advantage of the land's potential.

The need for more investment in housing for people with mental illness

MyHome had its origins around the time of the 2012 Carers ACT Summit held in the ACT Legislative Assembly. That summit reported that supported accommodation for people with mental health needs in the ACT was in a state of crisis.¹ By some measures the situation has improved somewhat since that time. The 2016 Census indicated a small decline in homelessness from the 2011 Census. There has also been a more significant decline over several years in the number of people who present to specialist homelessness services in the ACT and people with a mental illness make up a large proportion (41% of 4,585 in 2016-17) of these clients.² But these numbers are still unacceptably high and they cover only part of the population with whom we are concerned. Many people with mental illness live with (often elderly) parents while others live in public housing or in basic privately rented accommodation such as a small flat or in a group house. These people may have no contact with specialist homelessness services even though their living arrangements can be unsuitable because elderly parents are over-burdened, safety cannot be assured, there is no support for day to day needs and/or there is no regular access to services such as health, training and counselling.

We remain in no doubt that more supported housing is urgently required in the ACT for people with mental illness. It is important however to learn more about the housing needs of these people so as to optimise the type of new housing built and support provided. We expect to get a better understanding on these and related issues from the results of a survey on housing for people with an enduring mental illness which Carers ACT is about to conduct on our behalf. We would also hope to be guided by the outcomes of the ACT Government's inquiry into the long-term accommodation and support requirements for clients with high and complex needs.

MyHome as Part of a Mixed Housing Development

Our original vision for MyHome was as a separate housing project, like HOME in Queanbeyan. We now see that there would be great advantage for both MyHome and for the community more generally if MyHome could be incorporated into a larger housing development, also comprising affordable and market-based housing, as the Uniting Church now envisages for its land in Curtin. Uniting, the social services arm of the Uniting Church, is currently investigating the financial, planning and design aspects of a mixed housing development on the site.

For MyHome the advantages of being part of a mixed housing development include economies of scale in design and construction; to the extent that some of the housing can be leased at market related prices there may be scope for cross subsidy within the project, to the benefit of MyHome; and once completed and operational, all housing on the site, including MyHome, could come under single (more efficient) management. Being part of a larger complex would also offer the potential for MyHome and its residents to become part of a larger and diverse community.

For the broader community, a mixed housing development as proposed would take better advantage of the considerable potential of the block. In recognition of the block's location near to the shopping centre and public transport links, it is identified in the Curtin Group Centre draft

¹ Carers ACT 2012, *Carers Summit: Supported Living Options: Final Report*, p6, Canberra.

² AIHW, *Specialist homelessness services 2016-17: Australian Capital Territory*, AIHW, Canberra, 2018.

Master Plan as suitable for housing, including supported accommodation, with a height limit of 6 storeys. The proposed development would also have the advantage of bringing to Curtin a diversity of housing types – supported, affordable and market. Once a feature of Canberra’s older suburbs this diversity has diminished as property prices in these suburbs have risen.

Funding MyHome’s day-to-day operating costs

While our most pressing immediate concern is to secure adequate housing stock, we are very mindful that a major challenge facing organisations like MyHome, once housing is available, is to find, year in and year out, sufficient revenue to meet operating costs. Inevitably staffing costs will be significant due to the commitment to support residents, especially where there is a commitment to have a 24/7 staffing presence. Many residents will have a limited capacity to pay rent. Some organisations like HOME in Queanbeyan depend heavily on fundraising, financial contributions from donors and contributions in kind from volunteers. MyHome is confident that we too will be able to get support from these sources but we believe it is essential that we have several stable sources of revenue in addition to rents from residents.

In the above-mentioned survey which Carers ACT is conducting on our behalf, one group of questions concerns the capacity and willingness of families to support a family member living at MyHome including by way of financial contributions in addition to the person’s rent. Because many families contribute now to private accommodation costs of a family member with mental illness, we expect families of some MyHome residents will be able to contribute in this way.

We expect most MyHome residents will have an NDIS package. Where a resident’s package incorporates Supported Independent Living assistance this could be drawn on to pay for elements of individual support provided by MyHome. We note that arrangements of this kind are expected to operate in two new housing complexes for people with a mental illness being developed by the Haven Foundation and funded by the Victorian Government. Each complex (one in Frankston the other in Geelong) has 20 units with common facilities. It is expected that all residents will have NDIS packages and that residents will draw on these to help meet Individual support costs .

Once operational we believe MyHome will have the capacity to be self-funding.

Suggested way forward

The Uniting Church’s proposal for a mixed housing development located on church land in Curtin and which would incorporate MyHome, fits exceptionally well with the objectives of the Government’s recently released *ACT Housing Strategy*. Notably, the proposal directly addresses homelessness; boosts the supply of social and affordable housing; involves the innovative use of underutilised community facility land for public benefit; confers housing diversity and hence supports social sustainability in an established suburb; incorporates shared equity opportunities for residents; and supports planning objectives for the development of medium density housing around the Curtin group centre. We make the following suggestions to help bring this potentially outstanding project to fruition.

The proposed development offers much in terms of public benefit. We also believe that development on this site could be an exemplar for an alternative and better use of other, currently underutilised, community facility land in the ACT. These potential benefits including the wider benefits of the project should we believe be factored into the planning authorities' assessment of the proposal.

While the Uniting mixed housing model offers the potential for internal funding of the MyHome element, it is likely that additional support will be required for the project to be viable. We urge the Government to be open to contributing to capital costs.

MyHome is keen to tailor its model of care to best meet the housing and support needs of people in the ACT with enduring mental illness. To that end we look forward to learning from the results of the Government's inquiry into the long-term accommodation and support requirements for people with high and complex needs.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input to the ACT Government Budget Development Process for 2019-20.

Yours sincerely,

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