



PARLIAMENT OF NEW SOUTH WALES
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-SEVENTH PARLIAMENT

Private Members' Statements

11 May 2021

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Ms SONIA HORNERY (Wallsend) (18:07):

We associate scenes of rows and rows of tents crammed full of desperate people with a natural disaster or a humanitarian crisis like the shantytowns that we had in Wallsend during the Great Depression—we had lots of those at Jesmond, where the town was called "Hollywood"—or refugee camps that pop up in warzones around the world. They are scenes we could soon see in our suburbs as the housing crisis gripping our State and our suburbs worsens.

Every day my office receives messages from people struggling to find housing. Since 2007 it is the most common phone call that my office receives.

Housing stress, defined as being experienced by households that spend more than 30 per cent of gross income on housing costs, was bad before COVID. The pandemic and the recession were both hammer blows, one after the other, to people already doing it tough.

People saw their jobs disappear or lost hours as businesses were forced to close. Some who had developed careful routines to avoid abusive situations at home were trapped with their abusers. Relationships broke down.

It has contributed to a sharp increase in housing stress and a soaring housing demand that both public and private sectors are struggling to meet, and it has got worse in recent weeks.

With JobKeeper ending on 1 April, there are so many families that cannot afford to pay the rent. The economy is stagnating. What will they do? Where will those desperate people go?

Women, young people and men are living in cars and tents, couch surfing, rough sleeping or staying in unsafe domestic and family violence situations because they have no other options.

There are over 1,200 applications on the Newcastle social housing waitlist and in the private rental market the most recent data shows a vacancy rate of just 0.3 per cent.

Add to that the increasing number of no-grounds evictions of tenants by landlords and New South Wales is facing a housing crisis.

It is no surprise that the demand for homelessness services is soaring. Services in and around the Wallsend electorate have many more new clients and their budgets have been exhausted. They no longer have the capacity to supply temporary accommodation.

I share the story of Hilda and her partner, who contacted me on social media:

My partner and I have been told we have to vacate the premises by 7 April. In all honesty, we have applied for hundreds of houses. I have a full time job with a government agency and my partner a casual security guard. We've heard nothing.

I have called real estates and asked what's wrong with my applications and they said nothing but there's hundreds of people applying and they have more money and a better rental history ... It has gotten my partner and I extremely depressed and we are at a loss with what to do.

There are so many people in this boat, it's wrong. I don't know what the solution is but it's affecting people's mental health and physical health severely.

This is a public servant working a stable full-time job but she is still unable to find accommodation.

Recently the Deputy Premier was asked about the housing crisis gripping regional areas. His response was, "I call this a champagne problem—these are the problems you want." I ask the Deputy Premier what he means.

We must have significant investment in social and affordable housing in the very near future to avoid tent cities popping up all over the State.