



Press Club speech – Kate Colvin, Everybody's Home Launch

I want to acknowledge the Ngunnawal people as the traditional custodians of this land—and pay my respect to their Elders, both past and present.

We are in the midst of a homelessness and housing calamity.

- Homelessness is increasing
- Home ownership rates are in decline; and
- More than 1.5 million Australian households spend more than 30% of their income on housing

This calamity has its genesis in decades of failed policies, misdirected government investment, and inaction.

This does not have to be the way of the future. We can and we must tackle homelessness and housing stress.

It is time we stop waiting for change. We are launching the Everybody's Home campaign.

Here with us today, we have representatives from the community housing, homelessness, welfare and tenancy sectors.

We have banks and super funds, and unions.

This campaign has its strength in unity.

What unites us is that we have a vision for a fair Australia.

An Australia in which every one, every night has a place to call home. A place that is safe.

A place to cook and eat; to rest; to welcome our friends. A place where children have room to play.

These are the basic fundamentals of life that only a home can provide.

We also believe that paying for the roof over our heads should be affordable. It must not leave our pockets so bare, that we cannot put food in the fridge.

We need our homes, but we also need to eat decent food, to fill a prescription, to pay for transport, clothes and the costs of education.

Australia is a great and wealthy country, and we can surely achieve affordable housing for all.



**Housing solutions
for all Australians**

The reality is that our housing system is broken. And it's government policy that's broken it.

Speculators are driving prices out of reach.

One in every 5 Australian households – 1.5 million households - pay more than 30 per cent of their income on housing.

And 3 in 4 of those households are renters.

I want to reiterate that point because the focus is most usually on home ownership, but housing stress is deepest in the rental market.

Everybody's Home, is our National Plan for Affordable Housing to fix these problems. The Plan has five key elements:

- Rebalancing the tax system
- Increasing the supply of social and affordable housing
- Strengthening the rights of renters
- Increasing support for those in rental stress; and
- A national plan to end homelessness.

Most of these ideas have been aired before – they are based on models that work elsewhere.

What makes OUR plan unique is that it is connected – and supported across the sector.

I'll take you through each of these elements in more detail. And I welcome your questions at the end if you would like more information:

Firstly tax.

Australia currently forgoes more than \$11 billion annually in negative gearing and capital gains tax concessions. It is now well recognised that these concessions tilt the property market in favour of investors.

Labor has made welcome commitments to reform these taxes.

These tax reform proposals are on the right path, but they don't go far enough.

We are calling on Government to not only reduce the costs of housing tax concessions, but to also directly reinvest these savings into delivering the second part of our plan – increasing the supply of affordable rental housing.

So part 2; If there's a magic bullet to transforming housing affordability, it is to address the market failure in the low cost end of the rental market by investing in low cost rental housing.

I want to say a bit more about this market failure because it is important.



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While the number of homes overall in Australia has grown – largely in line with population growth - these homes are not matched to households' ability to pay. In many markets, there are too many high cost properties; and too few low cost properties – and they don't trickle down.

As an example of that, on Census night more than one in ten properties across Australia was unoccupied. Many of those are brand new properties that are deliberately left vacant because of our tax settings – that is how speculators get the best return.

We need to address this mismatch – between supply and housing being available to those who need it – by creating a body of low cost rental housing targeted to those on low and moderate incomes and in housing need.

They could be key workers like teachers or nurses who can't afford to live near their workplace – forcing them to spend hours each day commuting.

This could be accommodation for casual workers at risk of slipping into homelessness – or for young people who want to move out of home.

Recent analysis indicates a shortfall of 500,000 low cost rental homes; and we are calling on Government to deliver on this shortfall.

This number is big – but this scale of housing is necessary because it would release the current intense level of pressure in the rental market – creating more choice for all buyers and renters.

This is not a quick fix solution. This requires a long-term commitment from the government – and critically a coherent national housing plan.

It's simply not possible to achieve this scale of new housing without mobilising federal, state and local government to use the many policy tools at their disposal – across planning, cities and infrastructure policy, taxation, investment, and others.

The national housing plan would have to include elements that are missing from housing policy now.

A subsidy to drive growth in 300,000 social housing opportunities and meet the gap between the cost of delivering housing; and the limited rental income that people on low incomes can afford to pay, and

new incentives for super fund and other private sector investors to create 200,000 affordable rental opportunities.

Recent research on the costs of financing social and affordable housing indicates this would need Government to invest between 4 and 4.8 billion annually over 20 years.

This is a substantial sum, but it is far less than our Government currently forgoes each year – the \$11 billion - in negative gearing and capital tax concessions.



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Concessions that simply make the problem worse.

Our plan would create thousands of new jobs and drive economic growth across Australia.

And unlike other proposals on the table, like \$50 billion for company tax cuts, this plan would reduce inequality and make our community stronger.

Number 3: Government needs to immediately increase Rent Assistance payments, which have been losing value as rents rise faster than CPI.

Number 4: We're calling on the States and Territories to strengthen tenant protections by reforming their Residential Tenancies legislation.

Finally, we need a plan in Australia to make homelessness history.

The plan needs to include concrete action to prevent and better respond to domestic and family violence – the number one cause of homelessness for women and children.

Government needs to make social security more secure, instead of making endless rounds of cuts to Centrelink payments, another of which – the Welfare Reform Bill – is currently before the Senate.

Instead of axing the Remote Indigenous Housing Agreement, which is currently on the chopping block; we need Government to house Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, who are ten times more likely to be homeless than other Australians.

And, homeless services must have the capacity to support vulnerable people who need help, to gain and maintain housing. Currently because of a lack of resources homeless service turn away over 250 people who need help every day.

These are the five parts of our plan.

If you have been around Canberra for a while, I'm sure this is not the first housing policy paper that you have seen.

Today, the key difference is, that we are going to take our vision out to the community and give people the tools to demand our leaders take the housing crisis and homelessness seriously.

The hundreds of organisations supporting the Everybody's Home campaign represent people from every walk of life.

We will work through these partners to reach their clients, their tenants and their communities, to give everyone the tools to demand real action from our elected representatives.



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And as the election nears, we will be calling on candidates to let us know where they stand on housing and homelessness. We will ask them: will you fight for a fair Australia?

Here's what we know already: We know housing costs are a top tier political issue. We know people are looking for leadership.

We know we can make a difference.

I ask everyone, pick up your phone – log into everybodyshome.com.au, and sign up to our campaign - now.

We must not miss this opportunity to fight for a more connected, more equal, more fair Australia.

An Australia where Everybody has a place to call Home. Thank you.