

People's Commission into the Housing Crisis (Organisational Submission)

By providing this information, you are assisting the Commission develop a fuller picture of the depth and scale of Australia's housing crisis and agreeing to share this information publicly. Thank you for contributing.

<https://everybodyshome.com.au/peoples-commission/submission/>

Submissions close on Sunday 21 April 2024. **Now due by Friday 26th.**

Question Title

1. Name of organisation: Lucy's Project
2. Your name: Alison Waters
3. Position: Policy, Advocacy and Research Lead
4. Email: alison@lucysproject.com
5. What sector/s does your organisation operate in?

Advocacy & legal services

Aged care

Alcohol and other drugs

Disability

Domestic & family violence

Education

Employment & welfare

Government

Health

Homelessness

Housing

Mental Health

Migrant, refugee & settlement services

Policy & research

Social & community services

Youth

Other (please specify)

6. What state/s does your organisation operate in?

National

ACT

NSW

NT

QLD

SA

TAS

VIC

WA

7. Does your organisation work in service delivery? No

The following questions correspond with the Terms of Reference and allow you to provide feedback directly to the Commission.

8. Describe the experiences of people struggling to access affordable and suitable housing in the context of your organisation's work.

Lucy's Project is a national charity that aims to increase the safety and wellbeing of animals and people subjected to DFV. We do not provide animal safekeeping services. Despite this, we receive requests for assistance from women (and practitioners supporting women) who have

recently left violent partners and now require safekeeping for their animal companions as they have been unable to secure a rental property that permits animals.

In states, such as New South Wales and Tasmania, where the default position is a prohibition on companion animals in rental accommodation, women, LGBTQ+ people, children, and animals who are subjected to domestic, family and sexual violence (DFSV) may face barriers and delays to accessing rental accommodation. Research demonstrates that an inability to access animal-inclusive rental accommodation may compel victim-survivors of DFSV to delay leaving, or refrain from leaving, a violent partner.

9. Describe the flow-on impacts of the housing crisis in the context of your organisation's work.

Low rental vacancy rates, particularly in regional areas, create further barriers for victim-survivors who are seeking to rent with animals. As there is high demand for a small pool of rental properties, landlords and real estate agents may demonstrate a preference for renting to tenants who do not have animals in their care. In situations where victim-survivors are unable to secure a rental property that permits animals they may be compelled to rehome a companion animal, or leave them behind with a violent person, in order to secure a rental property and safe home for themselves and their children. This has detrimental impacts on animals and people. For example, research suggests that the human-animal bond improves the physical and mental health of victim-survivors and assists them to recover from the trauma of DFSV. Further, it is recognised that separation from animals may cause children who are victim-survivors of DFSV to experience socio-emotional distress, including grief, fear, and anxiety.

10. Describe how current policy settings impact housing affordability and access to housing from your organisation's perspective.

- A 'default' prohibition on animals in rental properties creates a barrier for victim-survivors who are seeking safety and wellbeing for themselves, their children, and their animals.
- The advertising of 'no pets' tenancies reduces the availability of affordable tenancies for victim-survivors who have animals in their care.
- The advertising of 'pets negotiable' tenancies can cause delays for victim-survivors with animals in their care who are seeking a safe home for themselves, their children, and their animals.

- The existence of ‘no grounds’ evictions in tenancy legislation (in NSW, for example) undermines all other existing legislated rights that renters have. A fear of being evicted for no reason may influence a tenant’s willingness to assert their tenancy rights.

11. Describe what actions your organisation believes should be taken by governments to most improve affordability and access to housing.

- ‘Reasonable grounds’ for eviction should be introduced to replace ‘no grounds’ evictions provisions for renters on fixed term and periodic agreements.
- Animal-inclusive rental housing should be the default. Where a landlord wants to prohibit animals from residing at the property, the landlord should be required to obtain an order to do so (for example, in NSW, a landlord would be required to obtain an order from the Civil and Administrative Tribunal). An animal-inclusive rental housing system supports women and children to maintain the bond with their companion animals and contributes to keeping animals and people safe from violence.
- Landlords and real estate agents should be prohibited from asking about animals when people are applying for rental housing. This would benefit victim-survivors with companion animals who are urgently seeking safe housing.
- Landlords and real estate agents should be prohibited from making blanket ‘no pets’ terms and advertising ‘no pets’ tenancies and should be prohibited from asking for ‘pet bonds’ in addition to the standard bonds.

12. Is there anything else your organisation would like to share with the Commission?

Australia has one of the highest rates of companion animal ownership in the world, with 69% of households sharing their lives with an animal. Further, many people regard animals as members of their family. People and animals have the right to be safe from violence and they deserve the opportunity to recover and heal together. Research indicates that the human-animal bond improves the physical and mental health of people and assists them to recover from a crisis, including the trauma of DFSV. Further, it is recognised that separation from animals may cause children who are victim-survivors of DFSV to experience socio-emotional distress, including grief and anxiety. An animal-inclusive rental housing system will enhance the safety of people and animals subjected to DFV.