

**Submission  
No 12**

## **OPTIONS FOR ESSENTIAL WORKER HOUSING IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

**Organisation:** Uniting NSW.ACT

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Alex Greenwich MP  
Member for Sydney  
Chair, Legislative Assembly Select Committee on Essential Worker Housing  
Parliament House  
6 Macquarie Street  
Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Mr. Greenwich,

### Submission to the Select Committee

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission to the Committee.

Uniting NSW.ACT contributes to the work of the Uniting Church in NSW and the ACT, through social justice advocacy, community services and spiritual care. Uniting provides services for all people through all ages and stages of life, and drives solutions to systemic issues so people experiencing disadvantage can live their best lives. Our purpose is to inspire people, enliven communities and confront injustice. We value diversity and always welcome everyone exactly as they are.

In making this submission, we are drawing on our experience as a large provider of aged care, disability, and early learning services across New South Wales. We are acutely aware of the role that our workforce plays in the fabric of the communities they live in and we serve. In 2023, we employed over 11,000 staff across NSW, and supported more than 135,000 people in the services we provide.

Our ability to deliver these critical services is increasingly constrained by the difficulties our workforce faces in accessing affordable housing.

Aged care, disability support, and early childhood education are important services in any community, and the individuals who work in these sectors should be recognised as essential to the state's social infrastructure. Yet, the reality is that many of these workers face severe housing challenges. With wages often below the median income level and the cost-of-living escalating, these professionals struggle to find housing near their workplaces in the communities we serve. This issue is compounded in regional and rural areas across NSW, where the shortage of affordable housing options limits our ability to attract and retain skilled workers, resulting in workforce shortages and, ultimately, a diminished capacity to deliver high-quality care and education.

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Uniting supports the inclusion of aged care workers, disability workers, and early learning educators in the NSW Government's definition of essential workers. Recognising these sectors within the broader framework of essential worker housing is not only a matter of fairness but is also crucial to sustaining the critical services that underpin our communities.

## Essential Contributions to Society

Aged care workers, disability workers, and early learning educators are fundamental pillars of our society, providing services that are crucial to the health, development, and social cohesion of our communities.

- **Aged Care Workers:** As Australia's population ages, the demand for compassionate and skilled aged care services continues to rise. Aged care workers offer indispensable support to older Australians, assisting with daily living activities, healthcare needs, and social engagement. Their work ensures that seniors can live with dignity, respect, and a sense of community, alleviating pressures on hospitals and other healthcare services.
- **Disability Workers:** Disability support professionals empower individuals with disabilities to lead independent and fulfilling lives. They provide personalised care, facilitate access to education and employment opportunities, and promote social inclusion. Their role is critical in upholding the rights and wellbeing of people with disabilities, contributing to a more equitable and inclusive society.
- **Early Learning Educators:** Early childhood education lays the foundation for lifelong learning and development. Early learning educators nurture young minds during their most formative years, fostering cognitive, social, and emotional growth. Their work not only benefits individual children and families but also has long-term positive impacts on educational outcomes, workforce readiness, and societal prosperity.

## Challenges in Housing Affordability

Despite their essential contributions, these workers often face significant financial challenges that impede their ability to access affordable and suitable housing:

- **Low to Moderate Incomes:** The remuneration for aged care, disability support, and early learning roles typically falls within low to moderate income brackets. This financial constraint limits housing options, especially in proximity to their workplaces, which are often located in areas with high living costs.
- **Rising Housing Costs:** The persistent increase in housing prices and rental rates across NSW has outpaced wage growth in these sectors. This disparity forces many essential workers to reside in distant or less accessible areas, leading to longer commute times, increased transportation costs, and reduced work-life balance. This factor impacts our ability to ensure the services we run have access to staff during crises and emergency situations where replacement or additional staff are required to meet the needs of service users.
- **Impact on Workforce Stability:** The struggle to secure affordable housing contributes to workforce instability, marked by high turnover rates and recruitment

challenges. This instability adversely affects service continuity and quality, leading to gaps in care and support for vulnerable populations.

### The Experience in Regional and Rural Areas

The housing affordability crisis is particularly acute in regional and rural communities:

- **Limited Housing Supply:** Many regional and rural areas suffer from a shortage of quality and affordable housing options, exacerbating the difficulties faced by essential workers in these locations.
- **Service Delivery Challenges:** The inability to attract and retain qualified staff due to housing constraints leads to significant service delivery challenges. Communities in these areas may experience reduced access to critical services, impacting health outcomes, educational attainment, and overall community well-being.
- **Economic and Social Implications:** The lack of essential services hampers the economic development and social cohesion of regional and rural areas, contributing to disparities between urban and non-urban communities.

### Necessity for Inclusive Policy Frameworks

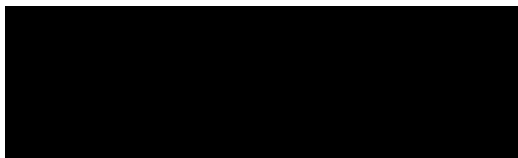
An inclusive definition of essential workers within housing policies is paramount to addressing these challenges:

- **Equity and Recognition:** Recognising aged care workers, disability workers, and early learning educators as essential workers affirms the critical value of their contributions and promotes equity in access to support services.
- **Targeted Support Mechanisms:** Inclusion in essential worker definitions enables the development and implementation of targeted housing support mechanisms, such as subsidised housing schemes, rental assistance programs, and prioritised access to affordable housing developments.
  - This includes the ability for these staff to access programs such as the NSW Government's recently announced \$450 million for Key Worker Build-To-Rent Program to be delivered by Landcom across Sydney, and \$200 million for key health worker accommodation across rural and regional areas.
- **Enhanced Service Quality:** By improving housing affordability and accessibility for these workers, we can enhance workforce stability, leading to improved service quality and better outcomes for the populations we serve.

The inclusion of aged care workers, disability workers, and early learning educators in the NSW Government's definition of essential workers for housing initiatives is crucial to ensuring the sustainability and effectiveness of these vital sectors. Addressing their housing needs will not only improve their quality of life but also strengthen the services they provide to the community. We strongly recommend that the Committee consider these professionals in their deliberations and adopt policies that will increase housing supply and affordability for essential workers across NSW.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this important inquiry. If Uniting can assist the Committee in any further way, please contact Clark Cooley, Government Relations Manager, at [REDACTED].

Kind Regards,



Tom McClean  
Head of Research and Social Policy