

**Submission  
No 93**

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

**Organisation:** United Services Union

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Submission to the  
Legislative Select  
Committee on Essential  
Worker Housing

Prepared by the  
**United Services Union**

By your side

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# Who We Are?

The United Services Union represents workers performing essential work for the community in local councils, NSW Ambulance, and for the states major energy distributors.

Our members collect rubbish bins, run childcare centres, answer 000 calls and ensure people have power all across New South Wales.



30,000 members

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131 essential community employers

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120 years old

# The importance of housing for essential workers

The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the critical role of essential workers in maintaining the functioning of our communities. Among these essential workers, local council workers, NSW Ambulance call-takers and people working for energy distributors, play a pivotal role in ensuring the delivery of vital services such as waste management, public health, infrastructure maintenance, early childhood education and care. However, the affordability and availability of housing for these workers remain significant challenges.

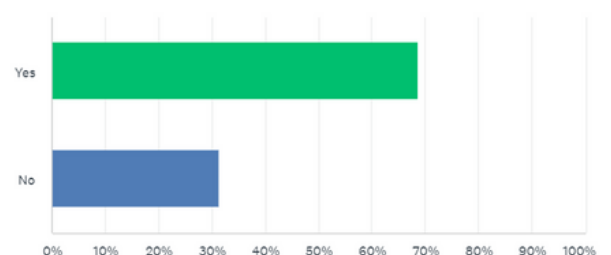


## Ensuring Workforce Stability

Local council workers, call-takers for NSW Ambulance and those working for energy distributors are integral to the smooth operation of community services. Stable housing is crucial for retaining these workers, as it reduces turnover and ensures that experienced personnel remain in their roles. High turnover rates can disrupt service delivery and increase training costs for new employees.

In data gleaned from a unique survey of 30,000 USU members across New South Wales nearly 70% of respondents identified a clear link between where they choose to work and where they are able to live.

Does where you can afford to live impact on where you work?



While on one view this is un-surprising, it does call into question both service decentralisation and expanding the footprints of housing on outer-fringes of communities as opposed to building centrally-located and convenient density for workers. Should these trends continue communities will be stratified with relatively more costly communities (from a housing perspective) unable to attract essential community workers without paying a wage-premium. This creates an unenviable wage-price spiral as the higher costs of services in these communities due to higher labour costs, will drive increases in cost of living, therefore exacerbating the housing affordability issue and driving further cost of living increases. This cycle, if unbroken, will compound onto itself and leave both workers and members of the public worse off.

### **Enhancing Community Resilience**

Housing stability for essential workers contributes to the overall resilience of communities. When local council workers, call-takers for NSW Ambulance and those working for energy distributors live within the communities they serve, they can respond more quickly to emergencies and are more invested in the well-being of their neighborhoods. This proximity fosters stronger community ties and enhances the effectiveness of local services.

### **Reducing Community Stress**

Affordable housing close to workplaces reduces the commuting burden on essential workers. Long commutes can lead to increased stress, reduced productivity, and higher absenteeism. By providing housing near their places of work, local councils, the state public service and community infrastructure (i.e energy distributors) can improve the quality of life for their employees and ensure more reliable service delivery.



## Promoting Economic Stability

Stable housing allows essential workers to focus on their jobs without the constant worry of housing insecurity. This stability can lead to better job performance and economic stability for the workers and their families. Additionally, when essential workers live in the communities they serve, they contribute to the local economy through their spending. This is the inverse of the wage-price spiral referred to above, as the downstream economic benefits of local community employment lifts up communities. In private research conducted for the Union by the Australia Institute, we see a clear link between employment in in-sourced essential services and community growth and prosperity:



<b>Table 1</b>				
<b>Gains from In-House Provision of Local Services</b>				
	<b>NSW</b>		<b>Australia</b>	
	<i>Lower Bound Estimate</i>	<i>Higher Bound Estimate</i>	<i>Lower Bound Estimate</i>	<i>Higher Bound Estimate</i>
<b>Employment Impacts (new jobs)</b>				
Early child educ. & care	4,234	6,818	13,534	21,794
Local waste collection	530	776	2,546	3,726
Road construction	365	658	1,258	2,268
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>5,129</b>	<b>8,252</b>	<b>17,338</b>	<b>27,789</b>
<b>GDP/GSP Gains (\$million)</b>				
Early child educ. & care	\$0	\$423	\$0	\$1,352
Local waste collection	\$43	\$81	\$206	\$391
Road construction	-\$6	\$41	-\$20	\$141
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>545</b>	<b>186</b>	<b>1,885</b>



# Government Support Options

## **Affordable Housing Initiatives**

Governments can implement affordable housing initiatives specifically targeted at essential workers. These initiatives can include subsidies, tax incentives for developers, and the allocation of public land for affordable housing projects.

## **Inclusionary Planning**

Inclusionary planning policies require developers to include a certain percentage of affordable units in new housing projects. This approach can help ensure that affordable housing is integrated into all communities, providing essential workers with more housing options.

## **Rent Control and Stabilisation**

Rent control and stabilisation policies can help keep housing affordable for essential workers. These policies limit the rate at which rents can increase, providing tenants with greater stability and predictability in their housing costs.

## **Employer Assisted Housing Programs**

Local councils and other employers can offer housing assistance programs to their employees. These programs can include down payment assistance, rental subsidies, and low-interest loans for home purchases.

## **Conclusion**

Providing adequate housing for essential workers is key to maintaining the stability and resilience of our communities. By addressing the challenges of high housing costs, insufficient supply, and regulatory barriers, governments can ensure that essential workers have access to affordable and stable housing. Implementing a combination of affordable housing initiatives, inclusionary planning, rent control, and employer-assisted housing programs can significantly improve housing availability for essential workers. These efforts will not only benefit the workers themselves but also enhance the overall well-being and functionality of the communities they serve.