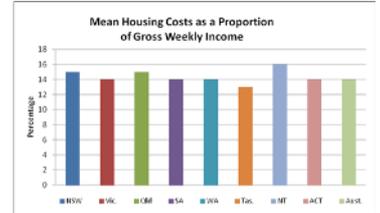




MEDIA RELEASE 17 December 2013

All we want for Christmas is affordable rent STRICTLY EMBARGOED until 1am 17 December 2013

The second NT *Cost of Living Report*, released today by the Northern Territory Council of Social Service with support from NT Shelter, reveals that Territory households pay a greater proportion of their incomes on housing costs than households elsewhere in the country. These high housing costs are being driven by rises in the cost of buying a home as well as rental costs.



The report shows that the Northern Territory is the only place where renters pay a significantly greater proportion of their income on housing costs than do home owners. “Given the reliance on rental housing for many low income households this is an alarming finding,” stated Ms Wendy Morton, Executive Director, NTCOSS.

In the past year alone, the Consumer Price Index (CPI) for rental housing in Darwin has risen by 7.9%, compared with the national rise of 3.2%. In the last 15 years, rent prices in the NT have risen by 87%, while the general CPI has risen by 53%.

“These trends are of great concern to NTCOSS, as the cost of living in the NT is already high, and we know that households in the lowest income quintiles spend more on housing costs than those in the highest quintiles. Any increases in housing costs hit those with the least ability to pay, hardest”, stated Ms Toni Vine Bromley, Executive Officer, NT Shelter.

“On average, NT households spend \$82 more per week on housing costs than the average Australian household, and this should be cause for alarm for all Territorians”, said Ms Vine Bromley.

“The NT faces the staggering situation where the median weekly rental price for a 3 bedroom house in Darwin, in the suburb with the lowest rental prices, is more than the total weekly income for a sole parent, with two children, on Newstart and receiving maximum Family Tax Benefit payments”, said Ms Morton.

Added to the alarming findings on rising costs are the facts that the homelessness rate in the NT is almost 15 times the national rate, and urban public housing stocks are dwindling while demand rises. “Given all this, it is hard to conclude anything other than the Northern Territory is in a state of continual housing crisis. We have been living with low housing stock availability, appalling standards of housing, and high homelessness rates for so long, that such figures can lose their sting. This has to be unacceptable in 2013”.

In the lead up to Christmas, we owe it to Territorians to take decisive action to provide affordable housing to ease the burden many households are facing.

For media comment, contact: Wendy Morton – Executive Director, NTCOSS 0418 482 660

Toni Vine Bromley– Executive Officer, NT Shelter or 8981 5003 or 0428 802 240



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NT Council of Social Service



‘Growing the NT fairly’



MEDIA RELEASE

17 December 2013

Report Recommendations:

NTCOSS recommends urgent action on the following recommendations from the NT Shelter Pre-Budget Submission to the NT Gov: Key Messages from NT Shelter 2014/15 'Opening doors in the housing system'. R

- **The redevelopment of public housing estates without any loss of social housing stock numbers.**
- **That the NT Government ensures that the 'Real Housing for Growth' target of 2000 affordable rental dwellings for the NT is met by 2016**
- **That support be provided for a small number of Not for Profit (NFP) organisations to develop their capacity as viable community housing providers through the transfer and management of a Homelessness funding agreement**
- **That the NT Government reintroduce home loan schemes which support home ownership opportunities for lower income households; and the Stamp Duty Concession for First home Buyers**
- **That the NT Government takes a 'Housing Plus' approach to chronic homelessness, which is premised on the provision of housing and then the range of wrap around services needed to assist people to overcome long term conditions that develop when they cycle through insecure tenure and states of homelessness**
- **The establishment of Regional Indigenous Community Housing Organisations that are well resourced and supported to have a significant and ongoing role in NT Aboriginal Housing services**
- **Incentivise levers which generate affordable housing through the planning system**
- **Extend opportunities for mixed use building development to include commercial and affordable residential opportunities**
- **Promote high density, mixed tenure development in town centres and medium density, mixed tenure, well designed development in residential areas**

In addition to the above, NTCOSS recommends the following (from its Framing the Future Submission):

- **A strategy to identify support needs and establish strategies to move people from 'homelessness' into permanent, secure accommodation**
- **The development of NT specific targets aimed at ending 'homelessness'**

NTCOSS also recommends the following::

- **That Commonwealth Rent Assistance needs to be increased and indexed to match rental prices – taking into account regional differences.**
- **That Newstart and other base level Centrelink allowances (e.g. Youth Allowance, Widow's Pension) be increased by \$50 per week**

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