

Public housing shortage a 'much bigger problem than people imagine' but Brisbane Housing Company has big plans

By [Emilie Gramenz](#)

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Tony and Frankie Mitchell are new tenants in an affordable housing complex at Woolloongabba. (ABC News: Emilie Gramenz)

Frankie Mitchell and her husband Tony found themselves with few options when the property they had lived in for five years was sold.

Ms Mitchell is a pensioner and knew finding something suitable they could afford could prove almost impossible.

"The difficulty on the Gold Coast is it's virtually impossible to get anything at all, certainly for affordable rent," Ms Mitchell said.

"Some of the things that are affordable rent, you really wouldn't commit to — the streets would be a better option.

"The need for affordable housing, it just cannot be overstated — it's a much bigger problem than people imagine."

Ms Mitchell recalled the first time they tried to put their names down on the wait list for public housing.

"There were people in there — women who'd been sleeping in cars with their children," she said.

"On the Gold Coast, it's impossible to get anything — they said 'look, you're better off going to Brisbane'.

"I thought this is ridiculous — I can't possibly expect to have somewhere to stay if these people are sleeping in cars."



Ms Mitchell is now in her new home, with the walls lined with her husband's artwork. (ABC News: Emilie Gramenz)

The couple is among the new tenants at a recently constructed affordable housing complex at Woolloongabba in Brisbane.

There are 32 new units allocated for people on low incomes, workers in essential industries, and five young people supported through the Brisbane Youth Service.

The project was jointly funded by the Queensland government and community housing provider, Brisbane Housing Company (BHC).

Key points:

- The Woolloongabba project was jointly funded by the Queensland government and the Brisbane Housing Company
- The state government plans to spend \$136 million on 1,121 new social and affordable dwellings
- Ahead of next week's Federal Budget, the Queensland government says national leadership on public housing is vital



The new building at Woolloongabba has 32 units for public housing tenants. (ABC News: *Emilie Gramenz*)

'We could do so much more'

BHC chief executive Rebecca Oelkers said securing a spot in the new building had been like "hitting the lottery" for people on the public housing wait list.

"Which it shouldn't be, because there should be more of this kind of accommodation around as far as we're concerned," she said.

BHC has three more projects about to begin — in Yeronga, Mount Gravatt and South Brisbane.

Ms Oelkers said the enterprise had a [good relationship with the Queensland government](#) but that BHC could "[do so much more](#)" to whittle down the public housing wait list.

"The message that I have is there is so much more that is needed," Ms Oelkers said.

"The Department of Housing, the Queensland government, have a vehicle like Brisbane Housing Company to be able to provide this accommodation — we're ready, willing and able to do it and we just want the opportunity to do more.

"What sort of Australia do we want? There's a lot of different priorities for government, but to my mind, housing has to be a fundamental."



Rebecca Oelkers says the BHC has three more projects about to begin — in Yeronga, Mount Gravatt and South Brisbane. (ABC News: *Emilie Gramenz*)

'Allows them to feel safe and secure'

Housing and Communities Minister Leeanne Enoch said the Woolloongabba complex was one of the first completed projects under a strategy called Partnering for Growth, for which the government had committed \$136 million to build 1,121 new social and affordable dwellings — part of a wider \$1.6 billion housing strategy.

"As a lot of people understand, there are usually very complex needs when people are coming for social housing," Ms Enoch said.

"Those people who end up coming to live in some of these beautiful properties quite often have other needs — being able to wrap those services around people allows them to feel safe and secure.

"The Partnering for Growth program is a relatively new one ... we remain committed to that idea and certainly through our relationship with Brisbane Housing Company — we expect more of this to come."

Days out from the next federal Budget, Ms Enoch said [national leadership was vital](#).

"They need to come back with something with regard to the Rental Affordability Scheme ... they can't keep walking away from the table on these fundamental issues," Ms Enoch said.



Ahead of next week's Federal Budget, Ms Enoch said national leadership on public housing was vital. (ABC News: Stephen Cavanagh)

But the Queensland government is also about to hand down its budget, and social services providers have told the ABC [current funding for housing and homelessness was inadequate](#).

"Our budget processes are underway and certainly conversations about housing is absolutely at the forefront," Ms Enoch said.

Ms Mitchell is now in her new home, the walls lined with her husband's artwork, but she remains emphatic more government money is needed for public housing.

"We want to be shown — don't talk about, 'Oh, it'd be lovely if we could do this' — no, show me," Ms Mitchell said.

"Show me how it's done, and by their actions, we shall know them."

Federal Assistant Treasurer and Minister for Housing Michael Sukkar did not foreshadow new funding commitments when asked about the upcoming budget by the ABC.

However, he expected the Commonwealth to make more land available for housing.

"Due to the unique nature of our Federation, the direct role for the Commonwealth in addressing the predominant issues with housing affordability — land supply, planning and rezoning, is limited," he said.

"While the states have far greater land holdings which can be opened up for development, we are releasing suitable Commonwealth land, including defence land, for private housing development.

"The National Housing Finance and Investment Corporation also makes available \$1 billion finance for infrastructure projects that will unlock and accelerate new housing supply, particularly affordable housing."