

Queensland Youth Housing Coalition Inc.

Submission to the
Community Services and Support Committee
on the **Housing Legislation Amendment Bill 2021**



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The Queensland Youth Housing Coalition Inc. (QYHC) was established in 1984. We have evolved since that time to become a significant voice for the issues impacting marginalised young people with a focus on addressing the underlying causes of youth homelessness including poverty and social disadvantage.

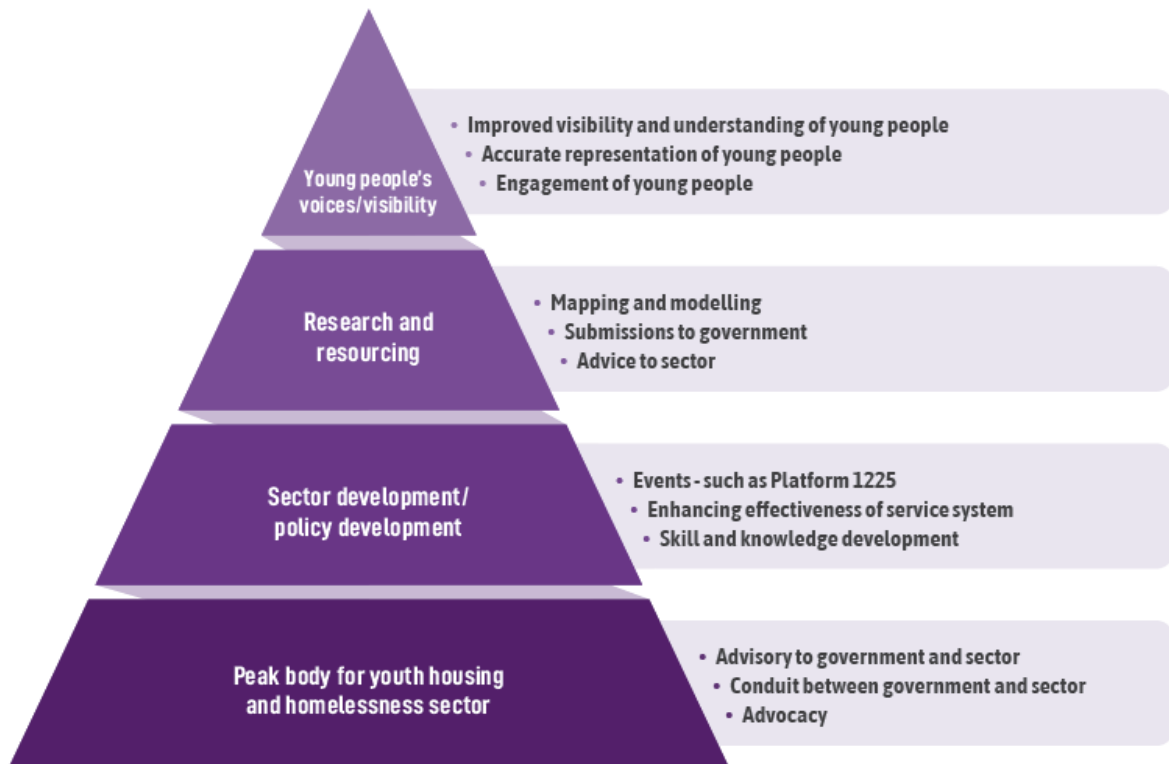
QYHC is a not-for-profit state-wide coalition of organisations and individuals engaged across projects and campaigns. QYHC is intent on conducting research projects, informing policy, and enhancing community education as well as working on workforce development activities to ensure a robust sector and community able to address homelessness and the associated issues that impact young people.

The vision of the Queensland Youth Housing Coalition is: **All young people safely housed.**

Queensland's young people need a safe and secure home to be included in our society and experience holistic wellbeing. Support programs are as important as safe structures for young people in terms of ensuring their specific developmental needs are met. Whilst a bold undertaking, we note the various options for intervention when young people experience homelessness. Further opportunities are yet to be explored. Such interventions need to occur at the earliest possible point in time to minimise the impacts of homelessness on young people. We accept the plethora of life issues that lead young people to homelessness but reject any notion that such issues need negatively impact their life trajectory. The experience of homelessness for young people can be short lived and rapidly resolved. There is no reason for young people to experience chronic homelessness and the associated myriad of problematic life outcomes.

Individuals and organisations join the coalition due to their collective belief that all young people need a safe and secure home to be included in our society and experience holistic wellbeing. In doing so, they agree to participate in QYHC's policy and practice activities as well as its campaigns. QYHC is a peak advocacy organisation and coalition of like-minded individuals and organisations who share social justice values, are intent on inclusion and use an evidence base to focus on strategies that ensure all young people have access to a safe and secure home. For more information go to: <https://www.qyhc.org.au/>

Figure 1: Key areas of focus – QYHC



Housing Legislation Amendment Bill 2021

The Queensland Youth Housing Coalition recognises that there are several important amendments in this legislation that will improve the experience of renting.

- Changes which allow a Repair order to attach to the property, not just the tenancy.
- Extension of time for renters to return the Entry Condition Report from three days to seven.
- Extending the amount a tenant can spend on emergency repairs, in specific circumstances, from the equivalent of two weeks rent to four weeks.
- Requiring a current contact for a nominated repair for emergency repairs.
- Allowing agents to carry out emergency repairs to the equivalent of four weeks' rent, then deduct the amount from rent paid, and inform the lessor as soon as possible.
- Allowing tenants and residents to end an agreement within seven days if it is not fit to live in or it does not comply with minimum standards.
- Allowing tenants and residents to end an agreement if a Repair order is not complied with.
- Allowing tenants and residents to end an agreement within three months of occupying if they were given misleading information which impacts or affects them significantly.

Access to the rental market is especially difficult for young people, particularly those who are marginalised, homeless or at risk of homelessness. Once they enter, protecting their capacity to remain tenants is important. Young people pay a considerable portion of their income on renting and are also likely to be long term renters. Protecting their right to call a house a home is essential. Young people are building their futures, sometimes with their own young children, and their right to stable housing is paramount to their holistic wellbeing. So too is their need to personalise their homes and make them their own. Young people are also less likely to advocate for themselves and often deal with impositions or unfair conditions imposed upon them because they are concerned about eviction and difficulty accessing other properties without a positive rental reference. They are particularly vulnerable in this market. Therefore, the more solid the legislation in protecting their housing the better the outcomes both for the young people renting and associated systems.

As such QYHC concurs with the Make Renting Fair Queensland Alliance that the 4 key changes required to the proposed Bill are as follows:

Remove 'end of fixed term'

Stability and security of housing is key. Improving our tenancy law so that renters can't be pushed out of their homes without a good reason will support young people and young families to build a stable life. Given the current proposals allow tenants to be evicted because of the 'end of a fixed term' tenants can still be subjected to evictions for *no* good reason.

Including 'end of a fixed term' as a ground to end a tenancy was not previously recommended by government. Its inclusion now significantly waters down their proposed protections, almost rendering them pointless by providing more reasons for real estate agents to evict renters at no fault.

We support good reasons for the ending of tenancies being included in new legislation but the government must remove the grounds for 'end of a fixed term' as a matter of priority.

Allow Minor Modifications

Being able to personalise and make safe our physical space contributes significantly to our psychological wellbeing.

QYHC is concerned that the original recommendation to allow tenants to undertake minor health, safety, accessibility and security modifications without prior approval, has been removed from the proposed legislation, along with the minor modifications for amenity and personalisation. Making a house a home is such an important factor in a sense of belonging and wellbeing.

We urge the government to reinstate proposals which allow renters to make minor modifications to their home.

Improve Safety for those impacted by Domestic and Family Violence

Everyone has the right to feel safe and live their life free from violence, abuse or intimidation. We support the government's proposals around domestic and family violence. However **the ability to install security measures without prior agreement from the lessor is a vital safety protection which should be included.** This was in the original recommendations and we request that it be reinstated.

Pets to stay with their Families/Children/Young People

Studies show that having pets increases people's health, happiness and resilience. Whilst we recognise steps to make it easier for renters to keep pets have been made in the legislation, more needs to be done. The proposed legislation means that renters with pets may be vetted out at application time.

The changes to tenancy laws must start with an assumption that renters can keep pets if they choose; require the landlord to seek orders to restrict pets if there is a dispute, and declare any previous pet conditions for the property upfront.

QYHC recognises the expertise of Tenant's Queensland and endorses their submission on the Housing Legislation Amendment Bill 2021 as well as their leadership on the Make Renting Fair in Queensland Alliance of which we are a member.