




Speech By
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MATTER OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Homelessness

 **Ms SCANLON** (Gaven—ALP) (2.38 pm): Last week I spoke at and attended the 14th Gold Coast Homelessness Symposium with a range of stakeholders in our community who are doing some incredible work for families who are doing it tough. The focus of this year's symposium was support for our ageing population, with the latest stats showing that more than 27 per cent of Gold Coasters are aged over 55 and, like everyone, they are facing high housing costs, an increase in cost of living and a tight rental market.

One of the Palaszczuk government's key mantras is that every Queenslanders deserves the right to a safe, secure and sustainable place to live. Our Queensland Housing Strategy is a \$1.8 billion plan to deliver more social and affordable housing. Through our Housing Construction Jobs Program, we are investing \$110 million over five years to build 392 new social homes on the Gold Coast. In doing so, we are partnering with industry and the community housing sector to ensure that we get the right places built in the right spots. Usually this means building smaller, more accessible properties— one- and two-bedroom apartments, close to critical infrastructure, transport and shops. This is important because we know that on the Gold Coast 62 per cent of demand for social housing is for one-bedroom apartments.

We are also transforming the way that housing services are delivered to better support people in need, with a focus on early intervention and prevention. For example, one of the key legacy outcomes from the Commonwealth Games which continues to this day is the Advance to Zero program. It is a collaboration between Gold Coast support services and the Palaszczuk government which has so far found homes for 66 people experiencing homelessness—19 of those since the games finished. Our homeless protocol for the Commonwealth Games set the benchmark for major global events. Its message was very clear: all people have a right to the enjoyment of public places and to participate in public activities and events. Extra services, free bus travel, expanded hubs and more beds were put in place to cope with any potential rise in homelessness. We learnt a lot from the games about how we can work together and respond quickly to help people in need.

In 2018-19, the Palaszczuk government allocated almost \$8 million in homelessness program funding to support seven services on the Gold Coast—organisations like the Salvation Army, UnitingCare Community and Surfers Paradise Anglican Crisis Care. They deliver beds, temporary supported accommodation and support to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. We are in our third year of running the Dignity First Fund—another \$2.5 million to make innovative community projects come to life which help people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness to live with dignity. This includes projects like food vans, mobile barber shops and mobile laundries and vending machines that provide free women's sanitary products.

Our Open Doors to Renting Reform consultation is also seeking answers from everyone—tenants, property owners and managers—about how we can improve the renting experience. We want to know why people are unable to find an affordable rental, what we can do about it and what we can

do to help people sustain longer tenancies. The private rental market is tight on the Gold Coast and it is expensive. We are doing something to address that: expanding our package of private rental assistance over the next three years. The aim is to help people access or sustain their current private market tenancy or to help public housing tenants move into the private market, thus freeing up more government homes.

The list of initiatives provided by the Palaszczuk government goes on. Unfortunately, despite all the good work we are doing, the federal LNP Morrison government has decided to end 50 years of critical support to Queensland's remote Indigenous communities by ending its \$112 million per annum funding commitment. Because of this cut, Queensland has had to step in with a \$40 million remote housing construction program to protect local jobs. We know that all evidence points towards housing as being a critical building block in terms of long-term social and economic outcomes, and yet we continue to see funds slashed from this sector. This cut means that, without the federal government's contribution, Queensland will have to consider other options, including redirecting funding from essential social housing, affordable housing and homelessness services to cover this funding shortfall. We need national leadership on this issue, not funding cuts.

Today's *Gold Coast Bulletin* has also highlighted the devastating impact that the undersupply of affordable housing will have on victims fleeing from domestic violence. Vulnerable Gold Coasters deserve a lot better. All levels of government should be bringing about change to find more people a bed and a roof over their heads and to give dignity to those still searching for a place to live.