

## MEDIA RELEASE

# Shelter NSW welcomes NSW Government planning changes to enable the practical repurposing of vacant buildings for temporary accommodation to prevent homelessness

When principled people and organisations come together to do something practical to alleviate the immediate effects of the housing crisis and find themselves thwarted by the fine print of planning regulation you know something is wrong with our system.

This has been the case for many years, with many organisations, such as some women's shelters and churches, valiantly trying to gain approval for the 'meanwhile use' of vacant buildings.

'Meanwhile use' is the temporary use of a vacant building for short-term emergency accommodation often when developers wait for planning approvals to repurpose a building or land. In some cases, this can be years, providing ample time for charities and other not-for-profit developers to repurpose the site and quickly provide temporary accommodation to those who desperately need it.

After an advocacy campaign that included submissions and appearances before an NSW Parliament Inquiry, Shelter NSW is excited to see that exempt and complying development pathways will now be made available to agencies that manage social and affordable housing to permit the use of certain buildings as temporary accommodation.

In 2021, John Engeler, CEO Shelter NSW appeared before a NSW parliamentary inquiry reiterating how the NSW planning system was preventing meanwhile use, advocating for an easier planning approval pathway such as exempt and complying development for meanwhile use.

Shelter NSW asserts there is no substitute for dramatically increasing the stock of social and affordable rental dwellings across NSW. 'Transitional housing' options should be temporary, as people move into longer-term secure, appropriate and affordable housing. That's why we continue to advocate for the stock of social housing to be returned to its safety net level of 5% of all housing stock in NSW (and 10% by 2040)".

These changes to make it easier for the 'meanwhile use' however, open the way for the quick practical use of otherwise empty buildings to create temporary accommodation that is desperately needed right across NSW



## Quotes attributable to John Engeler, CEO Shelter NSW

*“We welcome these changes to the planning and congratulate the NSW Government on this much-needed reform to the NSW planning system”*

*“We have shared the frustration of the broader sector. To see the essential elements of a co-ordinated practical local response to homelessness come together and then be stalled or blocked by planning red tape has been disappointing. In some cases, jumping through the planning regulation hoops has only served to chew up the ‘meanwhile use’ time when something useful might have been provided”.*

*“This is a great example of the NSW Government and the Department of Planning listening and responding to organisations who are working hard on the ground to respond to the homelessness crisis”.*

*“Shelter NSW has long called for the planning process to bring together the people and the properties. These seemingly small planning reforms are large in terms of the impact they can make on the daily lives of people from tomorrow – and indeed for the people who need it most. The more vulnerable whose needs especially around crisis accommodation will not urgently be met by the private rental market. This is an example of good governance, in fact, good government getting it right. Moreover, this is getting the gears that each of the government departments sometimes operate separately acting as one coordinated government for a greater purpose.”*

### Extra resources:

Shelter NSW Enews stories:

- [NSW has a chronic shortage of social and affordable housing – meanwhile...:](#) (12 August, 2021)
- [Social and affordable housing – and ‘meanwhile use’](#) (10 November 2021)

**Shelter NSW submission to the Legislative Assembly Committee of Community Services:** *Options to improve access to existing and alternate accommodation to address the social housing shortage:* <https://shelternsw.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Shelter-NSW-Submisison-LA-Committee-on-Community-Services-August-2021.pdf>

### Media contact:

- **John Engeler, CEO Shelter NSW**  
Email: [john@shelternsw.org.au](mailto:john@shelternsw.org.au)  
phone: 0410 402 212