NATIONAL SHELTER AT 51

STILL IN OUR PRIME

national shelter





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Introduction

For more than half a century, National Shelter has carried the voices of renters, people without a home and the organisations that stand with them into the heart of national housing policy. Its strength has always come from its network: state and territory Shelters, tenant and homelessness organisations, community housing providers, researchers and thousands of individuals united by the belief that a secure, affordable home is the foundation of a good life. This handout celebrates their shared work and the many people who have made it possible.

1974
A movement forms

1975
First national housing conference

1976
Operating in every state and territory

1997 - 2015
Twice defunded, never silenced

2026
Fifty-one years on, funding restored



Born of a movement

1974 - 1976

National Shelter began as an idea shared by housing activists. In May 1974, Sydney University activist Mark Harris recorded that "we saw the need to coordinate activities and form a national organisation". Concern about the state of Australia's housing among students at the University of NSW, together with housing activist John Wood, helped prompt the Whitlam Government's Department of Housing and Construction to grant $50,000 to the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) to employ a worker to consult on and facilitate a national network of Shelter organisations. ACOSS championed the emerging movement, with Greg Mills chairing the steering group, supported by housing policy officer Kate Holland.

In January 1975 ACOSS seconded Cathi Moore to bring it to life. Working from the ACOSS office in Sydney, she travelled to every state and territory to consult Councils of Social Service and other agencies, which were instrumental in forming Shelter organisations around the country. ACT Shelter first met at the ANU in February 1975, and Shelter WA held its first public meeting in Perth on 22 October 1975. Mark Harris later called her "Shelter's woman in Canberra."

On 9–10 August 1975, National Shelter held its first national conference in Canberra, probably the first recognisable national housing conference in Australia. Delegates worked in groups on housing co-operatives, emergency housing, public housing, special needs, economic factors and tenancy.

The conference's 59 recommendations ranged from medium-density housing and home purchase to women's refuges and Aboriginal housing. Together, they called for a national housing policy encompassing the entire housing system including planning rather than focusing only on the management of social housing.

Cathi Moore told the conference that "it is very important to maintain close liaison with the Councils of Social Service," a partnership that has endured. Adrian Pisarski later continued that tradition as National Shelter Chair from 2005 to 2013 and ACOSS Deputy President from 2008

to 2013, and many state Shelter staff have also worked in the Councils of Social Service.

National Shelter was formally established at a national forum in Canberra on 9 October 1975, attended by representatives from every state and territory, as its first national co-ordinating committee met. Shelter Housing Action (Tas), now Shelter Tasmania, was a founding member alongside the Shelter organisations in NSW, Victoria and South Australia; the formation of National Shelter and the Tasmanian Shelter went hand in hand.

Bernie Coates was involved in establishing Shelter SA and, as National Shelter built its national network, served as the South Australian representative. He took a leading role in drafting National Shelter's early national policy documents and proposals, including the paper making the case for a national housing policy.
Within two years, National Shelter had achieved nationwide reach. By November 1976, organisations and representatives from all eight Australian states and territories were active in the network. They worked through a federated structure supported by a national executive and 17 affiliated entities. Most were regional or specialist working groups. This active national involvement preceded the legal incorporation of some state and territory Shelter bodies, whose formal establishment continued over subsequent years.

The first national executive was chaired by Andy McCutcheon, with Andy Bush as vice-chair, Cathi Moore as treasurer and Tony Dalton as editor of the national newsletter. The state and territory representatives were Julia Hayes **(ACT)**, Mark Harris **(NSW)**, Clara Pilkington **(NT)**, Greg Smith **(SA)**, Ann Hughes **(Tas)** and Jo Kinross **(Vic)**.

> I would like to see the emerging 'Shelter' organisation become an effective voice for those interested in a better housing policy.
>
> **The Hon Joe Riordan MP, Commonwealth Minister for Housing and Construction, opening the first national conference, August 1975**

national shelter

First wins and a national voice

1977 - 1995

National Shelter's first campaign victory came swiftly. It challenged the Fraser Government's Housing Allowance Voucher Experiment and commissioned economic analysis showing that the scheme would mainly benefit landlords. The Government abandoned the experiment in June 1978.

Through the late 1970s and early 1980s National Shelter ran on a shoestring, as a federation of state Shelters with a volunteer executive and a national council of one delegate from each Shelter. Tony Dalton, who helped establish Shelter Victoria, chaired National Shelter from 1981 to 1987. Its journal National Housing Action was, for most advocates, the only way to follow developments in other states and in Canberra and helped "bind the Shelter organisations into a more effective lobbying force."

National housing conferences followed in March 1977, organised jointly with the Commonwealth housing department, and in September 1982 in Sydney. At the 1982 conference, 28 workshops helped regional and local groups "broaden their networks with other housing groups working on related issues across Australia". Council meetings were a labour of love: a 1985 report noted that "masochism reached new heights" when delegates met in Canberra for a weekend-long agenda, with "brass being in shorter supply than enthusiasm".



Judy Yates addresses the National Shelter Conference, University of Wollongong (1988)

In 1981 National Shelter ran public meetings across the states on the Commonwealth State Housing Agreement (CSHA), pressing for funding for co-operatives, local government housing, emergency accommodation and tenant participation, and opposing the shift to market rents in public housing. The advocacy bore fruit: the 1984 CSHA created the Local Government and Community Housing Program, which for the first time tied Commonwealth funds to community housing projects, while extra Commonwealth funding doubled the public housing build rate.

Also in 1981, National Shelter convened a national workshop of homelessness organisations that led to the formation of the National Youth Coalition for Housing. Adrian Pisarski took part as the representative of the Tasmania Youth Accommodation Coalition.

In 1983 Dr Alice Clark attended her first National Housing Conference, beginning almost four decades with the movement. Where it could, National Shelter also helped newer Shelters to grow: in 1984 Shelter WA's base funding of $4,000 for the year came from National Shelter.

Until the mid-1980s the Shelters in NSW and Victoria largely sustained the national body, convening national council meetings and producing the newsletter and policy submissions. In 1985 National Shelter received its first ongoing Commonwealth grant funding. In May that year Rae Porter was appointed national co-ordinator, the first person in the role for a decade, and National Housing Action was revived. In 1987, the United Nations International Year of Shelter for the Homeless, National Shelter prepared a national housing publication funded by the Commonwealth Department of Community Services and Health. By 1989 it employed three staff and was helping to build the state Shelters, and in 1993–94 it had three full-time and two part-time staff. Its Strategic Plan 1993–98 described National Shelter as "a federation of State and Territory Shelter organisations", whose "viability is strongly linked to the capacity of these organisations".

In the early 1990s National Shelter worked closely with Brian Howe, Deputy Prime Minister from 1991 to 1995 and Minister for Health, Housing and Community Services, on the National Housing Strategy and the Better Cities Program. Martin Attridge, Philippa Davis of NSW Shelter and Rae Porter engaged with government and community-sector figures including ministerial adviser Tom Brennan, Senator Bob McMullan and Tony Walters. Leanne Barron of Shelter WA served as National Shelter's Secretary until 1993, and Eleri Morgan-Thomas, formerly executive officer of Queensland Shelter, chaired National Shelter from 1992 to 1996, leading its largest national campaign of the decade.

As the Shelter network strengthened in every state and territory through the 1990s, bringing together tenant groups, women's refuges, emergency housing services, local government and charities, National Shelter worked on reform of the CSHA and on research linking housing and the labour market.

> "Networks in NSW and Victoria virtually carried National Shelter for most of the first 10 years of its life."
>
> **Eleri Morgan-Thomas, Chair of National Shelter, 1994**



Defunded, not silenced

1996 - 2009

The Howard Government came to office in 1996 intent on reducing the Commonwealth's role in housing. In June 1996, the Council of Australian Governments agreed that the Commonwealth would provide rent assistance directly to all tenants, while the states would run public and community housing at market rents.

The Government proposed to dismantle the CSHA and ration housing assistance to people receiving social security payments. Shelter NSW called it "the most fundamental change to public, community housing and assistance for private renters for 50 years ... fatally flawed".

A Coalition to Save Public and Community Housing was launched in July 1996, and National Shelter, chaired by Eleri Morgan-Thomas, ran a nationwide campaign against the proposals. On 6 September 1996, its executive members were called into the office of Social Security Minister Senator Jocelyn Newman, where concern about the campaign was coupled with threats to National Shelter's funding.

The campaign worked. The most radical proposals were abandoned, the CSHA continued and social housing did not move to market rents, although Commonwealth housing funding was still cut through an annual "efficiency dividend." Eleri Morgan-Thomas cautioned that the campaign had only "slowed the housing reform process." As Champions of Change puts it, National Shelter had "won the battle but lost the war."

On 27 June 1997, the last sitting day before the winter break, the Howard Government ended National Shelter's funding with two weeks' notice, after 23 years. Shelter NSW chair David Ramsey said the Minister had "gagged the national housing voice of low-income people" in every state and territory. The stated reason was that National Shelter duplicated the role of ACOSS; Shelter NSW's annual report called it "a blatant attempt to silence a dissenting voice to the Commonwealth reform proposals," and Shelter NSW executive officer Rod Plant criticised the Government's "shoot the messenger" approach.

National Shelter did not close. Shelter NSW convened the network, while the state Shelters sustained the national work. Erin Gauntlett of Shelter WA was National Treasurer in 1999; Shelter WA's Karel Eringa held the national presidency in 2002–03; and Paul Pendergast chaired National Shelter in 2003–04, followed by Adrian Pisarski from 2005. Dr Alice Clark joined National Shelter's leadership in 2004–05. Philanthropy helped bridge the gap: grants from the Cavill and Scully Foundation in 1997–98 and 1998–99, and $50,000 in 1999–2000, allowed National Shelter to employ a project officer for part of the year. From 2004 to 2011, National Shelter was sustained in large part through Q Shelter's financial and in-kind support.

As housing affordability worsened, National Shelter became a founding partner of the National Housing

> I think without the support of Q Shelter and the Queensland Government at the time, National Shelter would have struggled to survive.
>
> **Adrian Pisarski, 2026**



Alliance, which brought together property, union, community housing and welfare organisations. Its members included the Community Housing Federation of Australia (CHFA), UDIA, ACOSS, the ACTU and HIA. Mike Myers of CHFA helped align social equity with housing supply, while Adrian Pisarski became a leading spokesperson.

The Summit led to the National Affordable Housing Summit Group, chaired by Professor Julian Disney and comprising National Shelter, HIA, CHFA, ACOSS and the ACTU. Adrian Pisarski at times also represented ACOSS as its Deputy President, and Sharan Burrow and Grant Belchamber represented the ACTU. Together, the group advanced three goals:

- A Commonwealth Minister for Housing
- A National Affordable Housing Agreement
- An incentive to attract institutional investment into low-rent housing



Adrian Pisarski and Tanya Plibersek at Q Shelter Conference (2009)

By 2009 all three goals had been realised: a dedicated Housing Minister in December 2007, the National Rental Affordability Scheme (NRAS) in 2008 and the National Affordable Housing Agreement in 2009, alongside The Road Home homelessness white paper (2008). These were shared victories to which National Shelter contributed, and Champions of Change credits its mid-2000s work with the National Community Housing Forum with helping to shape the Rudd Government's housing policy.

The Rudd Government's Nation Building Economic Stimulus Plan, announced in February 2009, delivered the largest investment in social housing in a generation. Its Social Housing Initiative committed around $5.2 billion to more than 19,500 new social homes, completed by 2012, and a further $400 million to repair around 80,000 existing homes. The Commonwealth encouraged states and territories to transfer ownership of many of the new homes to not-for-profit community housing providers and combined with NRAS incentives the program produced the first mixed-tenure developments in most states.



For community housing this was a turning point. Owning homes at scale, providers could use those assets to borrow, leverage private finance and build again, beginning a step change from small tenancy managers to growth-oriented housing developers. That foundation of ownership, scale and financial sustainability has underpinned the sector's growth ever since, and later reforms, from the National Regulatory System for Community Housing to the Housing Australia Future Fund, have continued to build on it. It realised a long-standing National Shelter goal: a larger, stronger not-for-profit housing sector.

Through these years National Shelter also set out its agenda in national policy platforms in 2003, 2004, 2007, 2009 and 2011. As a key community peak during the Henry Review of Australia's Future Tax System (2008–10), it represented low- to moderate-income households and advocated reform of housing tax concessions, state stamp duties and Commonwealth Rent Assistance. The Review recommended major structural reform in each of these areas, helping to elevate housing affordability within national economic policy.



Tanya Plibersek at the 2009 NSW Shelter Conference

On 3 July 2009, opening the NSW Shelter Conference, Housing Minister Tanya Plibersek announced $200,000 over two years for National Shelter, its first Commonwealth funding since 1997. Earlier that year she had told the Queensland Shelter Conference that "National Shelter, QLD Shelter and the other state Shelters have been of great assistance to me and our Government."

A second winter, & remarkable resilience

2010 - 2021

Renewed funding allowed National Shelter to run national roundtables on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing and on the National Affordable Housing Agreement, to join the Ministerial Council on Social Housing and Housing Assistance, and to help steer Australians for Affordable Housing.

National Shelter also took seats on the Ministerial Advisory Committee on Social Housing and Housing Assistance, the Urban Policy Forum and the reference group for the new National Regulatory System for Community Housing and spoke for renters and people on low incomes at AHURI, ACOSS and national homelessness conferences.

Its 2011 Policy Platform called for 200,000 new social homes by 2021, Rent Assistance indexed to rents, limits on no-grounds evictions and a single Minister for Housing, Homelessness and Urban Development. In 2012 a Commonwealth grant allowed National Shelter to appoint its first ongoing employee since the 1997 defunding, rather than relying on consultants and short-term project officers: Emma Greenhalgh, a project manager based at Q Shelter. That year Chair Adrian Pisarski pledged to "continue to support moves for a growth fund and to increase NRAS," an idea realised eleven years later in the Housing Australia Future Fund.

In July 2013, the Commonwealth funded National Shelter for three years at $150,000 a year. Adrian Pisarski, who had chaired National Shelter for eight years, stepped down as Chair and became Executive Officer in January 2014, the first full-time person in the role for 18 years.

Then, on 22 December 2014, the Abbott Government announced



Adrian Pisarski, Karen Walsh, and Arthur Sinodinos meeting to discuss housing and homelessness (2019)

it would defund National Shelter, Homelessness Australia and the Community Housing Federation of Australia from June 2015. Executive Officer Adrian Pisarski called it "a really callous act to cut the voice of the homeless a couple of days before Christmas."

Once again, the network held. The state and territory Shelters voted to raise their membership fees, Shelter SA took over the books, and sponsors including Brisbane Housing Company, Compass, CHL and SGCH stepped in. Chair Mary Perkins reflected that "the loss of funding has in some ways liberated us to focus on our priorities."

National Shelter rebuilt on its own terms. In 2015–16 it created an associate membership category, joined the National Reform Summit, held a Day of Action at Parliament House that met 25 MPs and Senators, and, with funding from the South Australian and Western Australian governments, reported on Commonwealth policy and house price inflation.

Building evidence and influence

In 2015 National Shelter launched the Rental Affordability Index. SGS Economics and Planning and Community Sector Banking were key founding partners; the Brotherhood of St Laurence and Beyond Bank later joined as partners, with support from Housing All Australians in 2025. More than a decade on, the Index remains Australia's standard measure of rental stress.

In the years that followed, National Shelter led the Vote Home campaign in 2016 with a coalition of peak organisations, worked with Griffith University and Queenslanders with Disability Network on disability housing, and helped re-establish the Parliamentary Friends of Affordable Housing and Reducing Homelessness, with John Alexander MP as a co-chair.

Housing advocacy through the pandemic

When COVID-19 struck in 2020, National Shelter met weekly with the offices of Ministers Sukkar and Ruston and Assistant Minister Howarth, alongside CHIA, Homelessness Australia and PowerHousing. Together, they developed the call for a national moratorium on evictions, which National Cabinet adopted.

It raised funds from its members to pay for SGS modelling of the Social Housing Acceleration and Renovation Program (SHARP), developed with CHIA, Homelessness Australia and Everybody's Home, and Adrian Pisarski chaired the founding of the National Affordable Housing Alliance,



David Pocock supporting the Rental Affordability Index (SGS Economics and National Shelter partnership) (2023).

which brought community, industry and union voices together, from ACOSS and the ACTU to the Property Council, HIA, Master Builders and Industry Super.

National Shelter also worked with partners to strengthen the evidence for reform. With CHIA, Professor Duncan Maclennan of UNSW City Futures and the University of Glasgow, it joined the Housing Productivity Research Consortium, which framed social and affordable housing as productive infrastructure rather than welfare. It collaborated with CHOICE and the National Association of Tenant Organisations on rental quality, and with a national consortium on the Constellation Project on mandatory inclusionary zoning and an affordable housing finance aggregator. In 2021, it partnered with Rights and Inclusion Australia and Enliven Communities to launch Opening the Door, a federally funded project on housing rights for people with disability.

By 2021 the Rental Affordability Index was drawing more than 900 media stories a release, and Treasurer Peter McMillan reported that National Shelter's balance sheet was "in the best shape that it's been since the association was defunded in 2015".



Anthony Albanese and Adrian Pisarski (2019).

Passing the baton

2022 - 2026

A new generation of leadership

In March 2022 two pillars of National Shelter retired together. Dr Alice Clark had served National Shelter for nearly two decades, latterly as Chair, and Adrian Pisarski had led it as President, then for many years as Executive Officer, often as its only employee. Emma Greenhalgh, the project manager of a decade earlier, became CEO.

Within months, housing and homelessness were back in Cabinet with a dedicated Minister, Julie Collins, and the new Government committed to a Housing Australia Future Fund, a National Housing Supply and Affordability Council and a National Housing and Homelessness Plan, all long-standing National Shelter asks.

The next two years brought a run of shared wins that National Shelter and its partners had argued for: the National Housing Accord (2022), a 15 per cent increase in maximum Commonwealth Rent Assistance and the $2 billion Social Housing Accelerator (2023), and National Cabinet's August 2023 agreement on a Better Deal for Renters to strengthen renters' rights across the country.



National Shelter meets with the SA Government (2026).

The Housing Australia Future Fund passed Parliament on 14 September 2023. Together with the establishment of Housing Australia and the National Housing Supply and Affordability Council, it advanced the growth-fund model National Shelter had called for in 2012.

Stronger evidence, rights & public reach

National Shelter's place in the national evidence system also grew. It joined the ABS Homelessness Statistics Reference Group and the expert panel for the Australian Homelessness Monitor 2022, while AHURI and NATSIHA became National Members. National Shelter gave evidence to the parliamentary inquiry into housing affordability and supply, the Productivity Commission's review of the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement, and the Senate inquiry into the Housing Australia Future Fund bills. With Better Renting and the Healthy Homes for Renters campaign, it also backed minimum energy-efficiency standards for rental homes.

In 2023 the Rental Affordability Index was launched at Parliament House with Senator David Pocock. National Shelter also led a joint submission with the National Association of Renters' Organisations (NARO) to the Senate inquiry into the rental crisis, endorsed by 80 organisations, and its photo-essay series The Great Crumbling Australian Dream, created with the Oculi photography collective and published by the ABC, reached more than 1.6 million readers.

National Shelter also supported older women from the Housing for the Aged Action Group to bring their case to Canberra. In 2024 the network mourned Steve Bevington, founder of Community Housing Ltd and a National Council member.



Rental Affordability Index (SGS Economics and National Shelter partnership) launch (2022).

National Shelter kept renters' rights in the spotlight. In August 2024, with NARO, it published the first national report card on the Better Deal for Renters.

In November 2024, after joint advocacy with the Property Council and the Community Housing Industry Association, Parliament passed Build to Rent tax reforms projected to unlock up to 80,000 homes, more than 8,000 of them affordable, with longer leases and limits on no-cause evictions.

In 2025 the 11th Rental Affordability Index launched at Parliament House and drew 2,331 media mentions in six days, and Rights at Risk, a survey of more than 1,000 renters with NARO and the ACOSS–UNSW Poverty and Inequality Partnership, found that only half of renters felt secure in their homes.

National Shelter became a founding consortium partner of the UNSW Housing Analytics Lab, worked with the NSW Chief Scientist's Housing Insights Lab, contributed evidence to the National Housing Supply and Affordability Council's 2025 State of the Housing System report and made submissions to the 2025 Economic Reform Roundtable.



Jackson Hills, John Engeler and Annie Taylor representing National Shelter in Parliament House (2026).



Jackson Hills speaking at the Joint Parliamentary Friends Event during Urban Week (2026).

The campaign to restore national funding

Without core funding, National Shelter's reserves came under increasing pressure. Over several years, successive leaders and Executive Committees engaged with both the former Coalition Government and the subsequent Labor Government to make the case for renewed Commonwealth support and a strong, independent national housing voice. Former CEO Emma Greenhalgh and the Executive of the time were central to this sustained advocacy, keeping National Shelter's funding needs and national role before government.

Under interim CEO Karen Walsh in 2024–25, the advocacy continued through engagement with Ministers, MPs and partner peaks. She led the development of a new policy platform built around five asks: a legislated National Housing and Homelessness Plan, a long-term supply pipeline, national minimum standards for renters, tax reform and a national inclusionary zoning framework. Guided by the principle that "any day that gives people more housing security is a good day," she also led the proposal to the Commonwealth to reinstate National Shelter's funding.



Jackson Hills (National Shelter CEO), Kate Colvin (Homelessness Australia CEO), Clare O'Neil (Minister for Housing), and John Engeler (National Shelter Chair) after receiving renewed Commonwealth funding (2026).

On 10 February 2026, Minister Clare O'Neil announced Homelessness Sector Development Grants for National Shelter and Homelessness Australia, restoring national housing and homelessness leadership funding dismantled in 2014. Chair John Engeler said, "This investment couldn't have come at a more critical time."

In March 2026 Jackson Hills, formerly of Q Shelter, became CEO as National Shelter entered a new chapter. Australia's future housing model remains unsettled, with significant questions about the scale, mix and delivery of social, affordable and market housing. With its funding restored, National Shelter remains at the table, drawing on the Shelter network's experience and bringing an independent national voice to the decisions ahead. Building on more than fifty years of advocacy, partnership and independent leadership, National Shelter will continue to use its place at the table to help create a fair and equitable housing system that delivers affordability, access and housing security, and is sustainable for the future.



Housing at the Edge Event, discussing barriers for retirees who privately rent (2026).

The next fifty years

As it moves beyond its first half-century and embarks on its partnership with Shelter in the United Kingdom as that organisation turns 60, National Shelter's purpose remains unchanged: to transform the experience and expertise of people across the Shelter network into sustained national action for greater housing security.

> Greater housing security for people on low and very-low incomes remains the gold standard.
>
> **John Engeler, Chair, National Shelter, February 2026**





National Council Meeting held in Brisbane (2024).



Dr Michael Fotheringham, Emma Greenhalgh and Max Chandler-Mather at a Parliamentary Friends of Housing Roundtable (2022).

Fifty-one years of policy wins

National Shelter's influence has always come from working with others. This table includes some of the significant policy and systemic wins it has led and achieved with partners.

Year	Outcome	National Shelter's role
1975	The first national housing conference called for a national housing policy covering the whole housing system, including planning.	National Shelter led the conference and the call for a comprehensive national housing policy.
1978	The Fraser Government abandoned its housing voucher experiment.	We led a campaign against the proposal, securing its first campaign victory.
1981	The National Youth Coalition for Housing was established following National Shelter's national workshop.	National Shelter convened the pivotal national workshop.
1984	The Local Government and Community Housing Program was established under the CSHA, creating the first dedicated Commonwealth funding stream for community housing.	We partnered with other housing organisations called for dedicated community housing funding through 1981 CSHA campaign.
1985	National Shelter received its first ongoing Commonwealth grant funding and appointed a national coordinator.	This funding enabled us to have greater operational capacity as a independent national housing voice.
1987	A Commonwealth-funded national housing publication was produced for the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless.	National Shelter led the development of the publication.
1996	The Howard Government abandoned its proposal to dismantle the CSHA and move social housing to market rents. The CSHA continued.	With State and Territory Shelters, alongside the Coalition to Save Public and Community Housing, we led a nationwide campaign to oppose the proposed changes.
2004	The National Housing Alliance and the National Affordable Housing Summit at Parliament House led to the formation of the National Affordable Housing Summit Group, chaired by Professor Julian Disney.	National Shelter was a founding partner of the National Housing Alliance and a member of the National Affordable Housing Summit Group.
2007 - 09	Key developments included a dedicated Housing Minister, the National Rental Affordability Scheme, The Road Home and the National Affordable Housing Agreement.	We advocated for these reforms alongside its Summit Group partners: HIA, CHFA, ACOSS and the ACTU.
2009	Commonwealth funding for National Shelter was restored.	Restored Commonwealth funding enabled us to continue to comprehensively advocate for fair housing in Australia.

Year	Outcome	National Shelter's role
2009	The Henry Tax Review formally recommended major reforms to housing tax concessions, state stamp duties and Commonwealth Rent Assistance.	We advocated for systemic tax reform to improve housing affordability and give housing greater prominence in national economic policy.
2009 - 2012	Social Housing Initiative: around $5.2 billion for 19,500+ new social homes; ownership transferred to community housing providers; first mixed-tenure developments with NRAS.	With partners: long-standing call for a larger not-for-profit housing sector.
2013	National Shelter received three years of Commonwealth funding, enabling it to employ a full-time Executive Officer.	Appointed a full-time Executive Officer for three years.
2015-present	The Rental Affordability Index was established, with 11 editions published to date.	In collaboration with SGS Economics and Planning, we provide an annual, detailed snapshot of rental affordability across the country.
2020	Key developments included a national moratorium on evictions during COVID-19, the SHARP proposal and the National Affordable Housing Alliance.	Alongside our partners, we supported these initiatives and co-founded the National Affordable Housing Alliance, serving as its first chair.
2021	*Opening the Door*, a federally funded project focused on housing rights for people with disability, was established.	National Shelter led the project with Rights and Inclusion Australia and Enliven Communities.
2022	Housing and homelessness returned to Cabinet with a dedicated Minister.	National Shelter worked with partners to advocate for a dedicated Cabinet-level ministerial role for housing and homelessness.
2022-23	Key developments included the National Housing Accord, a 15% increase in Commonwealth Rent Assistance, the $2 billion Social Housing Accelerator and A Better Deal for Renters.	Collaborating with partner organisations to advocate for increased housing investment, improved rental assistance and stronger protections for renters.
2023	The Housing Australia Future Fund, Housing Australia and the National Housing Supply and Affordability Council were established.	We advocated for these reforms with partners, having called for a housing growth fund since 2012.
2024	Build-to-rent reforms included longer leases and limits on no-cause evictions. The first renters' report card was also released.	National Shelter worked with the Property Council and CHIA (now Australian Community Housing) on build-to-rent reforms, and with NARO on the renters' report card.
2026	Commonwealth funding restored for National Shelter and Homelessness Australia.	We continue National Shelter's 51 years of housing policy and advocacy and continue the legacy of those who were behind housing reform in Australia.

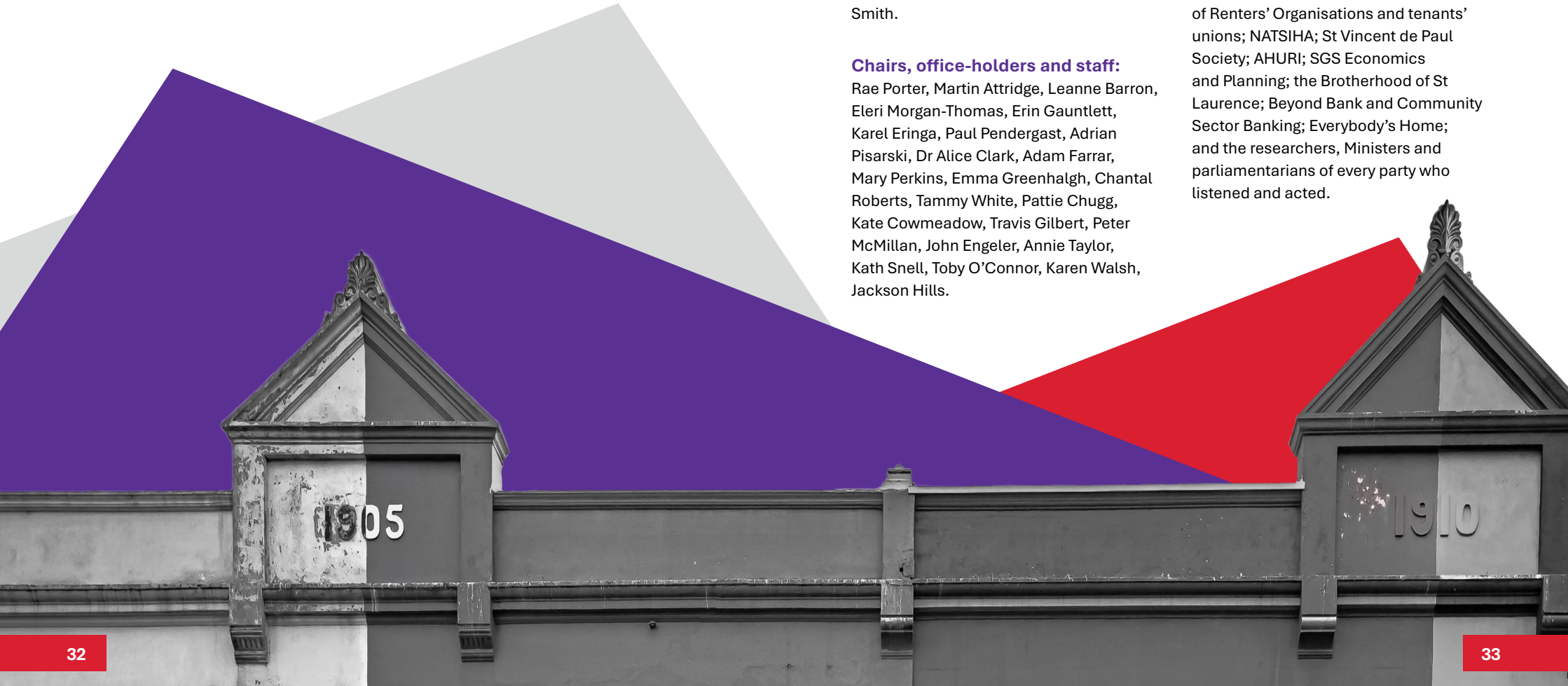
A seat at the table

Much of National Shelter's influence has come from building and joining the structures where housing policy is shaped. These are some of the councils, committees and alliances it has founded, led or served on.

Year	Outcome	National Shelter's role
1975-76	National co-ordinating committee of two representatives from each state and territory, with ACOSS	Founded
1990s–present	National Council of state an territory Shelters, now joined by NARO, NATSHIA, St Vincent de Paul Society, CHL and AHURI.	Convenor
2004–09	National Housing Alliance, then the National Affordable Housing Summit Group chaired by Professor Julian Disney, with HIA, CHFA, ACOSS and the ACTU	Founding partner; member
2009–12	Ministerial Council on Social Housing and Housing Assistance; Ministerial Advisory Committee; Urban Policy Forum; National Regulatory System reference group; Australians for Affordable Housing	Member; steering committee
2018–present	Everybody's Home campaign	Campaign partner
2019–present	Parliamentary Friends of Housing and Reducing Homelessness, now Parliamentary Friends of Housing.	Re-established
2019–21	Housing Productivity Research Consortium; Constellation Project; WA housing strategy advisory committee	Member and contributor
2020–present	National Affordable Housing Alliance (NAHA) of community, industry, property, and construction peak bodies.	Founding member, first chair, and current chair
2022–present	ABS Homelessness Statistics Reference Group; Australian Homelessness Monitor expert panel; Mandatory Inclusionary Zoning steering committee	Member
2024–present	Housing Analytics Lab	Founding member

Reflections

National Shelter's history is one of persistence through changing governments, funding cycles and housing pressures. Its influence has come not from acting alone, but from convening the Shelter network, building durable partnerships and carrying the experience of renters and people facing housing insecurity into national policy debates.



Acknowledgements

Thousands of people have sustained National Shelter over more than fifty years. The names below represent only part of that history, but they reflect the breadth of leadership, advocacy, partnership and practical support that has kept the national housing voice alive.

Founders and early leaders:
Cathi Moore AM, Mark Harris, Anne Rein, Greg Mills, Kate Holland, Bernie Coates, Andy McCutcheon, Andy Bush, Tony Dalton, Julia Hayes, Clara Pilkington, Greg Smith, Ann Hughes, Jo Kinross, Craig Smith.

Chairs, office-holders and staff:
Rae Porter, Martin Attridge, Leanne Barron, Eleri Morgan-Thomas, Erin Gauntlett, Karel Eringa, Paul Pendergast, Adrian Pisarski, Dr Alice Clark, Adam Farrar, Mary Perkins, Emma Greenhalgh, Chantal Roberts, Tammy White, Pattie Chugg, Kate Cowmeadow, Travis Gilbert, Peter McMillan, John Engeler, Annie Taylor, Kath Snell, Toby O'Connor, Karen Walsh, Jackson Hills.

Partners and friends:
the state and territory Shelters; ACOSS and the Councils of Social Service; Homelessness Australia; Australian Community Housing and its predecessors CHFA and CHIA; the National Association of Renters' Organisations and tenants' unions; NATSIHA; St Vincent de Paul Society; AHURI; SGS Economics and Planning; the Brotherhood of St Laurence; Beyond Bank and Community Sector Banking; Everybody's Home; and the researchers, Ministers and parliamentarians of every party who listened and acted.



Sources and acknowledgements

This history draws on National Shelter's annual reports and archives, media releases, Hansard and ministerial statements, the Noel Butlin Archives Centre at the Australian National University, and the histories of the state and territory Shelters. Its core source is Champions of Change: Shelter NSW, Community Activism and Transforming NSW's Housing System by Dr Tony Gilmour (Shelter NSW, 2018), with Shelter at 50 (Shelter NSW, 2024). Some facts have been confirmed through conversations with former leaders, staff and members of the Shelter network.

Compiled by Karen Walsh.

A full list of source documents and references will be available on the National Shelter website



national shelter

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