



CHIA Response - Regional Strengths and Infrastructure Gaps

Introduction

CHIA is the peak body representing not -for-profit community housing organisations (CHOs) across Australia. Our 150+ members manage a \$40 billion-plus portfolio of more than 118,000 homes, housing people on low incomes, disadvantaged in accessing suitable accommodation in the private market.

The Community Housing Industry Association (CHIA) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Regional Strengths and Infrastructure Gaps report. Rather than comment on the specific findings for each region, our response raises questions and makes comments and suggestions about how the report might be used going forward. It also touches on the role of Infrastructure Australia and how it interconnects with other government agencies and departments.

As a national organisation our focus is on the Federal government and naturally as one representing not for profit housing organisations, housing issues.

The response is informed by members who attended a briefing on the report provided by Infrastructure Australia.

CHIA is a small organisation and in order to use its limited resources effectively the report utilises a bullet point format to convey our points.

Infrastructure Australia Remit

- The prominence of both housing and access to further education as infrastructure gaps in the report demonstrate the importance of social infrastructure. It is disappointing that at the same time this report was published, Infrastructure Australia's statement of expectations was revised and social infrastructure removed. It is unclear why this occurred. In the absence of a cogent explanation Infrastructure Australia's statement of expectations should be revised and social infrastructure reinstated.
- The incoming government intends to expand the National Housing Finance and Investment Corporation (NHFIC) into a national housing agency, Housing Australia. The agency will support a [National Housing Supply and Affordability Council](#). The Council's remit includes advising on supply targets, assessing affordability and reporting on outcomes. Will Infrastructure Australia play a role in the Council?

The Report

- The report's findings on the prominence of housing diversity and affordability in the list of infrastructure gaps is consistent with the (limited) housing needs analysis conducted in Australia. This
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[research](#) demonstrated that every SA4 census area in Australia had a shortfall of social and affordable rental housing in 2016. This research will be updated following the release of the 2021 Census data. We anticipate it will, despite a lower than forecast migration rate show no reduction in need.

- We can understand the interest in identifying the top three infrastructure gaps in each region, and appreciate that in an appendix, other gaps are also listed. However, the risk is that these additional gaps may also be critically important to address but overlooked. Should each regional summary also identify other significant infrastructure gaps even if the detail provided is limited.
- The report was produced before the recent East Coast floods. Our members in the Northern Rivers area have for some time battled with the demand for social and affordable rental housing. This has been much exacerbated by the flooding. The updated report should reflect the current circumstances. The recently established Northern Rivers Reconstruction Authority may find the findings of this report useful.
- The report does not consider the resilience of housing - its location, construction and performance. We appreciate this probably outside its remit, but ranks along with availability, diversity and affordability as an issue to address in future.
- Is there scope to identify where infrastructure gaps have already attracted a priority project submission / or a project is listed if as yet unfunded.
- While the report is not comparing the regions' needs, did the exercise reveal where there are particular acute problems or opportunities being lost? Should these be highlighted?

Use of the Report

- The report makes clear that it is not proposing solutions. However, there should be more clarity about how the findings of this report (and indeed other Infrastructure Australia publications) influence other planning processes and funding programs. Apart from the obvious example of regional plans, in our own housing field the findings could inform:
 - State housing strategies and the forthcoming National Housing and Homeless Plan
 - The allocation of funding / the prioritisation of bids for housing programs including the forthcoming Housing Australia Future Fund
 - Objectives / outcomes from the 2023 National Housing and Homelessness Agreement.
- Will the report be used during the assessment of future infrastructure priority projects? If a proposal is made, that impacts on housing demand in an area already identified as having a housing gap, will this need to be recorded and the need for solutions acknowledged.
- If an infrastructure project will increase surrounding land values, and the location is one identified in the report with poor housing diversity and affordability, could this be used as evidence for the introduction of value capture mechanisms to (part) fund affordable housing. Our members note that currently the impact of major infrastructure projects on the low income housing households - existing or future - is generally overlooked. For example, in consultations over the Inland Rail line, its impact on rents and house prices, has frequently been raised as an issue but not addressed.

- Could the report be used to inform the selection of future regional deals?
- Is the intention to review and evaluate how the report is used. Will it be updated?