**NSW Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing**

**Submission to the NSW Government on Diverse and well-located homes**

We appreciate the opportunity to respond to the NSW Government’s Diverse and Well-located homes policy.

The Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing (MACA) advises the Minister for Seniors on matters affecting the needs, interests and wellbeing of older people in NSW and the impact of population ageing and recommends to Government changes to benefit older people in NSW, their families and community. There are 1.9 million of older people in NSW. Housing is an essential social determinant of health and wellbeing for older people and their families.

The MACA has an obligation to influence policies and programs on behalf of the interests and needs of older people in NSW. We see housing choice, which includes houses designed to accommodate accessibility and mobility needs, as crucial to enabling people to live at home in their community. If a person cannot leave their house, nor receive visitors, because of physical barriers such as steps at the front door, then loneliness and social isolation are exacerbated. In order for older people to have some independence especially if they are providing care or needing care themselves, they must be able to move around their homes easily and safely.

The NSW Ageing Strategy – ***Ageing Well in NSW 2021-2031*** has as one of its aims to “work towards increased housing options for older people that are age appropriate, affordable, accessible and close to transport, recreation and community services.”

We acknowledge that the NSW Government must address housing stress in Sydney and regional cities in NSW. The shortage of housing options, social housing and affordable homes is well documented. Our feedback on the Diverse and Well-located Homes policy relates to specifics about the design standards for new housing, impacting older people. They are as follows:

1. The MACA is concerned that the policy makes no reference to ensuring that the design of new low and mid-rise housing will incorporate the key elements of accessibility and adaptability, which enable people to age in place. Over the next forty years, the demand for accessible housing will increase, as the population ages and is impacted by disability. Even today, over 70% of people with a mobility impairment were found to be living in housing that does not meet their needs (Australian Network on Universal Housing Design).
2. Given the increasing levels of homelessness and housing stress, particularly in the cohort of older women, the new policy neglects provision of social and affordable housing units in the mix of housing density.
3. We found no evidence that new housing will be climate resilient and sustainable with a rating of 9-10 stars, in accordance with the National Energy Rating Scheme. Older people need to have housing options which have low energy usage, given the high cost of energy utilities.
4. Additionally, the loss of tree canopy that will occur through the implementation of the proposed reforms is particularly concerning. Tree canopy is essential for the quality of life, health and survival of both ourselves and natural ecosystems. The increase in temperature that will result will put older people’s wellbeing at risk.

The MACA sees any proposed NSW Housing Reforms as an opportunity to make NSW a leader in an inclusive approach to housing its residents. We should embrace the opportunity to make a life-lasting positive change to build inclusive, liveable, affordable and environmentally healthy and sustainable dwellings for people to live longer and age well in their community.

The MACA makes the following suggestions to achieve housing choice in well-located areas:

1. Engage with older people to understand their housing needs and to facilitate downsizing, while staying within their community.
2. Ensure that all new housing is built to the Liveable Housing Sliver Standard included in the National Construction Code.
3. Specify that a proportion of new housing be allocated for social and affordable housing, in perpetuity.
4. Specify that new housing meet sustainability and energy efficiency targets.
5. Specify a limit to loss of tree canopy.

Thank you for accepting and considering our Submission. We look forward to your response.

**Members of MACA**

Date: 23 February 2024