1 BACKGROUND

This submission is made on behalf of E tū, the largest private sector union in New Zealand, with 55,000 members. Our members work in industries including:

- Aviation
- Communications
- Community Support
- Energy and Mining
- Engineering and Infrastructure
- Food manufacturing
- Manufacturing
- Public & Commercial Services

E tū has many members living in Auckland and other expensive parts of New Zealand, who are finding housing increasingly unaffordable. Many E tū members are paid the minimum wage of $15.25 an hour, or only a little more than that amount. This means that the aspiration of home ownership has become all but unachievable for them.

E tū welcomes the Homelessness Inquiry and believes that urgent action is needed to address homelessness in New Zealand.

This is E tū’s written submission. E tū requests the opportunity to make an oral submission to the inquiry. E tū in that oral submission would like to present evidence from members about their experiences of homelessness and their struggles to house themselves and their families.

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2 INTRODUCTION

The opening of the first state house in New Zealand on 18 September 1937 was a seminal moment in New Zealand history. Most of the Labour Cabinet, including Prime Minister Michael Joseph Savage, helped the first tenants, Mary and David McGregor, move into their new home.\(^1\) Around 300 people attended the opening ceremony and then walked through the home, and many others visited for days afterwards. The photo of the McGregors standing in front of the house is an iconic picture, familiar to generations of New Zealanders.

The Labour Government’s aim was to eliminate sub-standard housing in this country by constructing 5000 new homes a year. The following year, the Social Security Act 1938 was passed, writing into law the philosophy that every New Zealand citizen had the right to a reasonable standard of living and that the community collectively was responsible for supporting those who could not support themselves.

Prime Minister Michael Joseph Savage said that a new principle had been introduced by the Act –

"Citizens of the Dominion are insuring themselves against the economic hardships that would otherwise follow those natural misfortunes from which no-one is immune."\(^2\)

The move away from this philosophy of collective and community responsibility and its replacement during the 1980s with one of individual responsibility, the worship of money and a focus on individual accumulation of wealth, has wrought immense damage to New Zealand and led to a surge in the assets of the wealthiest and increasing poverty for those on low incomes.

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E tū submits that New Zealand needs to return to a principle of collective responsibility for all citizens, incorporating a recognition that it is the state’s duty to support those in need.

This requires an acceptance of the responsibility of central and local government to provide sufficient housing, of a healthy standard, to ensure that all citizens are properly housed. Implementing this will involve cross-party co-operation between all political parties in Parliament, as well as co-operation between central and local government.

It also requires a long-term approach to housing and homelessness. New Zealand’s short, three year election cycle for both central and local government means that short-term approaches are almost always taken to issues. This is immensely damaging and means that serious problems such as homelessness are not properly addressed. However, in the case of superannuation, parties were able to take a long-term approach to an issue, and that is what must be done with housing.

In addition, there needs to be a move away from the concept that houses are investments. Houses are not investments. Houses are for people to live in.
3 HOMELESSNESS AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Article 25(1) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights provides that –

"Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control."

New Zealand ratified the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on 28 December 1978. Article 11 of the covenant provides that –

"1. The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions. The States Parties will take appropriate steps to ensure the realization of this right, recognizing to this effect the essential importance of international co-operation based on free consent."

However, the magnitude of New Zealand’s current housing crisis means that tens of thousands of citizens do not have adequate housing, and the rapid increases in rents and house prices are eroding citizens’ standards of living very quickly. As discussed below in the section of this submission about International initiatives to address homelessness, Australia was in 2007 found by the United Nations to have failed to implement the human right to adequate housing.

The Australian Human Rights Commission in 2008 published a paper titled *Homelessness is a Human Rights Issue*.³ It said that, as a party to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Australian governments at all levels were under an obligation to progressively implement the right to adequate housing.⁴

The commission said that the right to housing was more than simply a right to shelter. It was a right to have somewhere to live that was adequate. Whether housing was adequate depended on a range of factors, including –

⁴ Ibid, p 7.
• Legal security of tenure
• Availability of services, materials, facilities and infrastructure
• Affordability
• Accessibility
• Habitability
• Location, and
• Cultural adequacy.  

The paper went on to say that implementation of the right to adequate housing required concrete, targeted, expeditious and effective steps, including budgetary prioritisation.  

In the case of children protected by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Australian Government had an immediate obligation to take all appropriate measures to implement this right.

It is difficult to see why the above does not equally apply to New Zealand.

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5 Ibid, p 7.  
6 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, General Comment 3: The Nature of State Parties’ Obligations, [2], [9].
4 INTERNATIONAL INITIATIVES TO ADDRESS HOMELESSNESS

1 Australia

In 2007, a report to the United Nations by the Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing, Miloon Kathari, concluded that Australia had failed to implement the human right to adequate housing and was in the midst of a serious national housing crisis. The Special Rapporteur noted Australia’s status as a rich and prosperous country, and said that specific problems relating to its housing included a decline in the availability of low-cost rental housing in both the public and private sector, and the lack of complaints mechanisms for alleging violations of human rights. The Special Rapporteur said that low income households were spending more than 30 per cent of their incomes on rent, and were forced to live in houses which were in poor condition and offered little access to services.

It was estimated that 105,000 Australians were experiencing homelessness.7 25 per cent of homeless people were indigenous Australians. 85 per cent of homeless people had mental illnesses, and the two largest age demographics were under 12 (17 per cent) and 25 - 34 (18 per cent). 24 per cent of people were homeless due to domestic violence.

In December 2008, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd and Housing Minister Tanya Plibersek released a White Paper titled The Road Home: A National Approach to Reducing Homelessness. The document outlined a national plan for tackling homelessness, to be implemented through three main strategies –

- Turning off the tap – a focus on strategies to prevent those at risk of homelessness from becoming homeless in the first place. Those at increased risk were identified as older people in housing stress, women and children

leaving violence, indigenous Australians, and people exiting state care

- Improving and expanding services – more integration of agencies and better services being provided both by mainstream agencies and by organisations which delivered services specifically for homeless people
- Breaking the cycle – reducing the proportion of people experiencing repeat periods of homelessness by providing wrap-around support addressing all their needs and assisting them to participate in the community.8

The White Paper set goals of halving overall homelessness by 2020 and offering supported accommodation to all rough sleepers by 2020.

The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family, Community, Housing and Youth in 2009 released the report of an inquiry into homelessness legislation. The paper made 15 recommendations regarding proposed homelessness legislation, including that it should specify the right of all Australians to adequate housing. The report directly linked social inclusion, human rights and homelessness.9

The Homelessness Bill 2013 was introduced to the Federal Parliament. It stated that the Commonwealth of Australia’s aspiration was that all persons living in Australia should have access to appropriate, affordable, safe and sustainable housing. The bill defined homelessness, set out factors contributing to homelessness, and stated that the Commonwealth recognised that homeless people should have the same ability to exercise rights as other Australians. The legislation said that the Commonwealth was committed to five service delivery outcomes, and recognised the importance of having strategies to reduce homelessness. It also said that reducing the number of homeless people was part of meeting Australia’s international human rights obligations.10

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end of the parliamentary session without being passed into law.

The Australian Senate’s Economics Committee in 2014 initiated an Affordable Housing Inquiry. Homelessness Australia in January 2015 released a submission to the Department of Treasury titled *Priorities for the Federal Budget 2015-16*. The document advocated renewing funding for innovative homelessness services through the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness for at least two years, and increasing funding for homelessness prevention and early intervention programmes with proven records of success. It said that a long-term Affordable Housing Growth Fund should be created, and the private sector and institutions should be encouraged to invest in affordable housing stock through incentives, subsidies, grants and the reform of housing taxation.

The New South Wales Homelessness Action Plan set the direction for reform of the homelessness service sector between 2009 and 2014. It focused on preventing homelessness; responding effectively; and breaking the cycle. In 2009/10 a report card on the Homelessness Action Plan was published. Subsequently, comprehensive annual reports on the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness were released.

The Homelessness Action Plan Evaluation Strategy was designed to assess the progress made in meeting the aims of the action plan, gather evidence of effective responses and identify lessons that should be considered in future responses to homelessness in New South Wales.\(^\text{11}\) It found that a short-term investment in support and financial assistance for tenants could reduce the risk of eviction. The evaluation said that specific support provided to Aboriginal tenants through culturally-specific services helped sustain tenancies and increase access to housing. Collaborative case planning through local multi-agency co-ordination groups was found to

strengthen service delivery. Longitudinal evaluations for street to home initiatives, Camperdown Common Ground Project and Platform 70, were completed in 2014.

The Victorian Homelessness Action Plan 2011 – 2015\(^\text{12}\) aimed to support innovative approaches to homelessness, investigate models focusing specifically on early intervention and prevention, and better target resources. 20,511 people in Victoria were identified as homeless in the 2006 Census, with the largest group (19 per cent) being aged between 12 and 19.

Minister for Housing, Wendy Lovell, said that the Homelessness Action Plan was a first step in tackling homelessness and would complement the development of a strategic Housing Framework for Victoria that would address current and future housing challenges for low income Victorians and provide a vision for the housing system.\(^\text{13}\)

Ms Lovell said that Innovation Action Projects would harness local knowledge and provide opportunities for the most effective approaches to be tested across different settings. Through the establishment of a Ministerial Advisory Council on Homelessness, the Victorian Government would work with partners from all sectors to prevent and reduce homelessness. An Inter-Departmental Committee would be established across government to provide advice on approaches that linked housing and homelessness services with services such as health, education and employment, in order to respond to individual needs.

2 Canada

The annual cost of homelessness to the Canadian economy was estimated at C$7.05 billion in 2013.\(^\text{14}\) This included the cost of running shelters, as well as providing social services and health care and corrections costs.

\(^\text{13}\) Ibid, page 3.
The Homeless Hub’s report, *Homelessness in Canada 2013*, said that at least 200,000 Canadians experienced homelessness every year. At least 150,000 Canadians annually used a homeless shelter at some point. At least 30,000 Canadians were homeless on any given night, while at least 50,000 were part of the “hidden homeless” each night – staying with friends or relatives on a temporary basis as they had nowhere else to go.

The study said it was time Canada moved from crisis management – including emergency shelter beds and soup kitchens – to more permanent solutions. The authors said there were few signs of a broad national turnaround in homelessness, but despite that there were indications of progress. The Federal Government’s Homelessness Partnering Strategy had been renewed for a further five years, but this investment had not been accompanied by a robust and ongoing investment in affordable housing.

The report advocated better data collection for Canada so that communities could determine the full extent of their homelessness problems and take steps to address them effectively.

The paper said that several initiatives at the provincial and municipal level appeared to be making progress. For instance, Alberta had announced a 10-year plan to end homelessness in 2008 and budgeted C$3.3 billion for the project. Since then, the province had seen a 16 percent reduction in homelessness.

Vancouver, through a series of public and private partnerships, had achieved a 66 per cent reduction in street homelessness. Edmonton had seen a 30 per cent fall in homelessness since 2008. More than 2300 people had found homes through the Housing First programme, and over 80 per cent of them successfully remained in those homes. Homelessness in Calgary also fell, and Toronto achieved a marked decline in street homelessness by means of outreach programmes.

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15 See section on Utah later in this submission for an explanation of this initiative.
However, in 2015 Toronto’s mayor announced plans to rent 90 motel rooms in winter after four homeless people died on the streets in one month. The deaths came amidst chronic overcrowding at homeless shelters and a shortage of affordable housing.

The 2011 *Pathways out of Homelessness – Regional Study* recommended that consideration be given to how best to support homelessness outreach work; continued provision of rent subsidies; support for efforts to gain adequate income; and consideration of establishing minimum housing standards. The study’s main aim was to understand the factors that contributed to people being housed and able to stay housed for six months or longer.

### 3 United Kingdom and Ireland

In the United Kingdom, a Green Paper on Housing, titled *Quality and Choice: A Decent Home for All*, was published in 2000 by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions. The document was the first comprehensive review of housing in 23 years, and noted that years of underinvestment in social housing had left a £19 billion repair backlog.

It set out a vision for housing in the 21st century, noting that housing was failing when people were homeless or trapped in bad housing. The report included recommendations from Policy Action Teams set up in 1999 by the Social Exclusion Unit to develop a new national neighbourhood renewal strategy.

The paper stated that a sizable minority of people faced severe problems with housing, including:

- Too many people living in poor-quality housing or finding that their landlords in both the public and the private sector did not provide a proper service

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Many people living on estates which had been left to deteriorate for too long and contributed to ill health and poverty

Many families and individuals, including elderly and vulnerable people, living in housing that was not energy efficient, and in which it was difficult to keep warm

Most public-sector tenants were offered housing on a take-it-or-leave-it basis and charged rents that were not comparable for comparable homes. The most disadvantaged were often concentrated in the poorest housing

Some homeowners, including many retired people, could not afford to maintain their own homes

Others who had bought homes could not afford mortgage payments, for example, after losing jobs

Some people were homeless or sleeping rough.

The paper said that, in some parts of the country – both in cities and in rural areas – rising house prices meant that people on modest incomes found it more and more difficult to find houses to buy, or even to rent. However, in other areas, good housing stood empty because there was no demand for it. The cost of building and renovating was often higher than it needed to be, and many people were put off undertaking essential repairs because they were worried about falling into the hands of “cowboy” builders. The report said that the Housing Benefit, which assisted people with housing costs, was complex and administered inconsistently.

The document outlined three key challenges –

- Improving the conditions and opportunities of the minority who faced severe problems, such as poor conditions in both public and private housing
- Tackling the more general problems faced by most people at some points in their lives, such as difficulties that could be encountered in buying and selling homes
- Doing this without undermining the successful features of the current system, which delivered decent housing to a majority of people.
The paper invited submissions from the public on a number of proposals, including –

- Promoting a stronger role for local authorities in housing to reflect variations in circumstances around the country and to enable solutions to be tailored to local conditions; including encouraging all local authorities to take a strategic view of needs across all housing, both public and private sector; and ensuring local authorities linked housing policies with planning policies and those for the wider social, economic and environmental well-being of the community.

- Supporting sustainable home ownership by helping key workers and others on modest incomes to buy their own homes, perhaps on a shared equity basis, under a new Starter Home initiative in areas in which housing costs and demand were high; assisting unemployed homeowners to move into work through improvements to benefit help, including payment of mortgage interest and paying extra support for a limited period after a person obtained a job; enabling local authorities to support the renovation and improvement of private sector housing in a better targeted, more strategic way, through grants and greater use of loans and low-cost maintenance services.

- A step change in the quality of the stock and the performance of social housing landlords to ensure all social housing was of a decent standard within 10 years.

- Tackling specific problems relating to poor standards and exploitation by bad private sector landlords; while helping well-intentioned landlords to improve their expertise and standards through voluntary accreditation and letting schemes and best practice guidance.

- Changes to the allocation of Housing Corporation funding for new social housing so that greater account was taken of local demand and likely future changes in demand; applying new construction techniques to Housing Corporation-funded developments to improve the quality of social housing construction and reduce costs.

- Strengthening the protection available to homeless families by extending the statutory safety net to a wider group of vulnerable homeless people, including care leavers, domestic violence victims and 16 and 17-year-olds.
olds; and extending local authorities’ duties to provide advice and support by requiring them to take a multi-agency strategic approach to preventing and responding to homelessness

- Restructuring rents in the social housing sector over a 10 year period to put them on a fairer, affordable basis, including limiting rent changes to no more than £2 per week in any year.


In 2002, the Homelessness Act was passed\(^\text{17}\). It required local authorities to adopt a strategic approach to tackling homelessness. It also improved protections available to homeless people by strengthening the duties owed to them, removing limits on how local authorities can assist homeless people, and conferring additional powers on local authorities to assist homeless people who did not have priority need. The provisions recognised the need for local authorities to have integrated policies on tackling homelessness and allocating housing.

Part 7 of the legislation defines when a person is homeless and imposes duties on housing authorities relating to homeless people. Section 193, described as “the main homeless duty,” places local housing authorities under a duty to ensure that suitable accommodation is available for applicants who are eligible, homeless through no fault of their own, and have a priority need.

Part 6 provides the statutory framework for the allocation by local housing authorities of long-term social housing. Authorities are required to have a scheme that determines priorities and sets out the procedure to be followed in allocating accommodation. Preference must be given to specified classes of applicants, and all applications must be considered by authorities. The legislation provides that authorities may decide

that individual applicants are ineligible for allocations as a result of unacceptable behaviour serious enough to make them unsuitable to be tenants of the authority.

The act ensures that everyone accepted by housing authorities as eligible, unintentionally homeless and in priority need must be provided with suitable accommodation until they obtain a settled housing solution. Housing authorities are given greater flexibility to assist non-priority homeless households, primarily through a new power for authorities to obtain accommodation for such households when they have scope to do so. The legislation also aims to assist in creating sustainable communities, tackling social exclusion and making better use of the national housing stock.

Local housing authorities, with the assistance of social services authorities, are required to carry out reviews of homelessness in their areas. The reviews are conducted in consultation with other bodies, including registered social landlords and voluntary organisations, and aim to formulate and publish strategies for tackling and preventing homelessness. New strategies are to be published every five years.

One of the factors to which the housing crisis was attributed was developers sitting on large tracts of empty land, rather than building on them.

As far back as 2003, the Chancellor and Deputy Prime Minister commissioned the Barker Report, which produced final recommendations in 2004. The study was initiated after the construction of new homes in the United Kingdom in 2001 fell to its lowest post-World War 11 level. In the decade to 2002, output of new homes was 12 ½ per cent lower than in the previous ten years, despite rising demand for housing.

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The Barker Report proposed building 245,000 private sector homes each year to rein in house price inflation. However, between 2004 and 2012 there was a cumulative shortfall in England of 1,154,750 homes.\textsuperscript{20}

The House of Commons’ ODPM: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions Committee in 2005 published the paper \textit{Homelessness – Third Report of Session 2004 - 05}\textsuperscript{21} in 2005. It said that every person had the right to a secure home, and there was no place for homelessness in today’s society. The paper stated that the Government should not aim to reduce homelessness, but rather to eradicate it. Clear and ambitious targets were required to achieve that aim.

The report observed that it was important to recognise that homelessness was more than rooflessness. The number of people in temporary accommodation had risen to intolerable levels and the Government need to address both that issue and the rough sleeper problem. The paper expressed concern about the shortage of social housing and the low level of investment in additional provision, and said that increasing the stock of social housing should be a priority in the next decade. New housing should be built in areas where it was needed and updated guidance should be issued to local authorities.

The document said that, despite the Homelessness Act 2002, it appeared that many local authorities still displayed a lack of strategic thinking when dealing with homeless people.

Prime Minister Gordon Brown in 2007 promised to build three million new homes by 2020. He placed tackling the housing shortage at the top of his agenda when he unveiled the Government’s legislative programme for the next parliamentary session.\textsuperscript{22} Mr Brown said he would make new house building a “national priority,” as it had been in the inter-war years and

\textsuperscript{20} “Solutions for the housing shortage – How to build the 250,000 homes we need each year, Matt Griffith and Peter Jeffreys, Shelter, July 2013.


the 1950s. During that time, Housing Minister Harold Macmillan had set an apparently unattainable target of 300,000 homes a year and achieved it.\textsuperscript{23}

Mr Brown said that the annual target for new homes would be raised from 200,000 to 240,000 by 2020, and three bills would be passed to speed up planning processes and permit surplus public land to be used for housing. Suggestions of a windfall tax on profits from selling land for development were mooted but not implemented. The Prime Minister also said he wanted to facilitate the development of new “eco towns,” with zero or low carbon housing.

In 2007, the Department for Communities and Local Government presented to Parliament a paper titled \textit{Homes for the future: more affordable, more sustainable}. The report noted that, for a generation, the supply of new homes had not kept up with rising demand. The 10 years to 2007 had seen house prices double in real terms and, unless action was taken, widening wealth inequality and damage to the economy would result. The document also said that failure to act would deny too many children a good start in life. The report called for a new national drive to support more affordable housing.

Housing advocacy group, Shelter, in its response to the paper, warmly welcomed the Government’s target of delivering three million new homes by 2020.\textsuperscript{24} It said it supported the Government’s desire to ensure that new homes were the right ones in the right places. This must involve consideration of the design of homes and neighbourhoods; environmental sustainability; achieving mixed communities; increasing levels of family-size homes; and providing adequate infrastructure.

However, Shelter said that tackling the affordability crisis meant that the Government’s vision for housing must go further than increasing the supply of homes. In particular, it must include –

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{24} “Shelter’s response to the CLG Green Paper – Homes for the future: more affordable, more sustainable, \url{www.shelter.org.uk}, October 2007.
• Reforms to the Housing Benefit to tackle shortfalls and poverty trap effects
• Measures to create a more stable and equitable housing market and to contain house price inflation
• Consideration of the role of the private rental sector and key related issues such as security of tenure, accessibility and housing conditions
• Reducing mortgage risks through reform of safety nets and an urgent review of the sub prime sector.\textsuperscript{25}

The National Housing Federation calculated that 974,000 new homes were needed between 2011 and 2014. However, figures from 326 councils showed that only 457,490 were built during that period. The federation said 245,000 new homes were required annually in England alone. Capital Economics property economist, Matthew Pointon, said that keeping low numbers of new homes available meant that prices could be kept high. Building slowly enabled developers to maximise the value of their assets.\textsuperscript{26}

Dr Philip Oldfield and the Sustainable Tall Buildings Design Lab at the University of Nottingham sought to predict what new houses would look like in 2025, developing the ideas of vertical villages, flat pack housing and eco homes.\textsuperscript{27}

In 2012, the Government introduced changes to the National Planning Policy Framework, aimed at speeding up planning processes.

Housing charity, Shelter, in July 2013 published a blueprint titled \textit{Solutions for the housing shortage – How to build the 250,000 homes we need each year}.\textsuperscript{28} The paper said that, almost 10 years after the Barker Report, England’s house building performance remained “dire.” It noted that England was now delivering fewer homes than in any year since the First World War, even before accounting for a much larger

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{26} “‘Million’ new homes aim declared by minister Brandon Lewis”, BBC, 21 September 2015.
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{28} “Solutions for the housing shortage – How to build the 250,000 homes we need each year, Matt Griffith and Peter Jeffreys, Shelter, July 2013.
population and smaller households. The result was that the country faced a large and accumulating shortfall of approximately 100,000 to 159,000 homes a year. If England continued to build at current levels, it would build a million fewer homes than required every seven years.

The document warned that failure on that scale needed a radical response. It said that all the feasible options involved “hard choices, significant changes and real costs.”29 The paper called for short and long-term responses, including –

- Spending more on house building, by increasing the investment either from central or from local government. The Secretary of State for Business had proposed £12 billion of new spending, which would deliver 204,000 new homes and lead to substantial long-term government savings from reduced housing benefit costs. Local authority spending could be increased by borrowing based on existing housing assets. Raising the current local authority borrowing caps so that investment could increase along prudential lines would release an extra £7 billion of investment over five years and create 60,000 new homes.
- Expanding green belt swaps
- Supporting rural affordable housing
- Commercial property conversions
- Widening and diversifying who delivered housing, including by the Government encouraging the emergence of small or medium-sized building firms
- Land market reforms
- The creation of new development vehicles to help plan, finance and deliver new housing development. One option was new town or garden city corporations with substantial powers to acquire land at close to use value, long-term financing via government loans or private market bonds, and the ability to create successful, green and desirable places to live. The other option was local authorities
- Longer-term financial reforms, including guaranteeing investment and borrowing from new private sector

29 Ibid.
actors; and restructuring the borrowing capacity of local authorities.

Secretary to the Treasury, Danny Alexander, in December 2014 announced a pilot plan for the Government to directly commission, build and even sell homes at a former RAF base in Cambridgeshire.\(^{30}\)

The number of new homes being built in the United Kingdom fell in the last three months of 2014, the first decline in almost three years. However, the Government said that 137,000 homes were started in 2014, a rise of 10 per cent on the previous year and up 36 per cent on 2012.\(^{31}\)

The national charity for single homeless people, Crisis, in 2015 released a report titled *At what cost? An estimation of the financial costs of single homelessness in the UK*. The following year, Crisis published *The homelessness monitor: England 2016*, an annual state-of-the-nation report examining the impact of economic and policy developments on homelessness. The 2016 report showed that 275,000 cases of homelessness were recorded in England in 2015. The paper said that councils attributed the problem at least partly to welfare changes, which had fuelled homelessness.

In 2015, Housing Minister Brandon Lewis said the Government wanted to see a million homes built during the term of the current Parliament.\(^{32}\) The comments followed a BBC *Inside Out* investigation, which revealed the scale of the housing crisis.

In the run-up to the 2015 election, the Conservatives promised that 200,000 homes would be made available to first-time buyers in England by 2020 if they won the election.\(^{33}\) The Government had previously announced plans for 100,000 low-price homes for people under 40. The Conservatives also said

\(^{30}\) “David Cameron: We’ll directly commission 13,000 new homes,” BBC, 4 January 2016


\(^{32}\) “‘Million’ new homes aim declared by minister Brandon Lewis”, BBC, 21 September 2015.

they would extend the Help to Buy scheme in England to 2020 and make it easier for council tenants to buy their own homes.

First-time buyers under 40 were invited to register to buy new homes at a discount of up to 20 per cent, with the discount being funded by waiving fees normally paid by builders to local authorities.

Labour’s policy was for 200,000 new homes to be built annually by 2020, with local authorities being given new borrowing powers to fund projects as well as consideration being accorded to penalising firms for land banking. The Liberal Democrats called for 300,000 new homes to be built annually by 2020, including ten new garden cities. The Green Party advocated building 500,000 social homes for rent.

Prime Minister David Cameron in January 2016 said the Government would directly commission the building of up to 13,000 homes on public land. Smaller developers would be able to buy sites in England with planning permission already granted. 40 per cent of the new builds would be required to be “starter homes” aimed at first-time buyers. Direct commissioning would enable the Government to assume responsibility for developing land, rather than it being done by construction firms. This was a marked ideological shift from the view that the market should be left to provide. However, critics warned that the starter homes would be too expensive for many people to buy.

Parliament’s Communities and Local Government Committee in December 2015 announced that it would conduct an inquiry into the causes of homelessness and the approaches taken by national and local government to prevent and address homelessness. The committee invited written submissions and then heard oral evidence. The Ministers for Local Government, Health and Work and Pensions were questioned about their policies for reducing homelessness.

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34 “David Cameron: We’ll directly commission 13,000 new homes,” BBC, 4 January 2016.
The committee is also examining the effectiveness of the current legislative framework in England, including reviewing the different approaches taken in Scotland and Wales. Oral evidence has been concluded and the committee is now preparing its report.

Scotland in 2013 introduced a housing support duty, aimed at preventing further homelessness among people local authorities believed might have difficulties in sustaining their tenancies. The duty provides that all those assessed as being unintentionally homeless by local authorities have a right to settled accommodation.

Five Housing Options Hubs were created to look broadly at homeless people’s options and to intervene early. The Homelessness Prevention and Strategy Group was established in 2013, with its members including the Minister for Housing and Welfare and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities.

Scotland publishes regular reports on homelessness. The paper *Homelessness in Scotland: 2015-16* provided an overview of key trends and features of homelessness in Scotland.

In Ireland, a homeless action plan for Dublin was developed in 2013 by the Dublin Joint Homeless Initiative Consultative Forum and Statutory Management Group. It published the paper *Sustaining Dublin’s Pathway to Home – The Homeless Action Plan Framework for Dublin, 2014 to 2016*.

4 United States

**New York**
In New York City, 60,042 homeless people slept in shelters each night in June 2016.

The Coalition for the Homeless in April 2016 published a report titled *State of the Homeless 201 – Beyond the Rhetoric: What Will Turn the Tide?* The paper noted that homelessness in New York City had risen at an “astonishing” rate between 2011 and
The paper said that the unprecedented increase was a direct result of previous policies that had eliminated all housing resources for homeless families and single adults. The shelter census was at near-record levels and, while a series of new rental assistance and eviction prevention subsidies had shown promise in reducing increasing homelessness among families with vulnerable children, efforts to address the growing crisis for single adults and those living on the streets had been less successful.

The document said that the mayoral administration must commit to helping 5000 families moves out of shelters using federal housing resources. New York City must assist an additional 2500 families with city subsidies. The Coalition for the Homeless said that a commitment to hundreds of new units of supportive housing was essential. New York Governor Andrew Cuomo and the State Legislature must execute an agreement to free up US$2 billion in funding for supportive and affordable housing.

The report also called for resources to enable the city to open more small, low-threshold shelters to provide protection for the most vulnerable. It said that New York City should establish a “right to counsel” in Housing Court to help protect low-income tenants from eviction and homelessness.

A campaign called 4 NY/NY Housing has called on Governor Cuomo to launch a new state-wide supportive programme consisting of 35,000 units to be created in partnership with New York City and localities across the state. The campaign is asking that the units be targeted at vulnerable families, youth, domestic violence survivors and people leaving institutions. At present, there are six eligible people for every supportive housing unit in the city.

Governor Cuomo in January 2016 promised to build 20,000 new supportive housing units over 15 years, but by August

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2016 the plans were stalled by a failure to reach agreement on releasing US$1.9 billion in funding.  

Utah

Utah in 2003 held a summit about homelessness. Social entrepreneur Sam Tsemberis, who began Housing First in New York City in the 1990s, suggested at the summit that the homeless should be given homes, as this would save costs in the long run. It was estimated that Utah at the time was spending US$20,000 a year on each chronically-homeless person.

The state set itself the goal of ending chronic homelessness. By 2015, the population of chronically homeless people had fallen by 91 per cent, from 1932 to fewer than 200.  

Utah identified homeless people that experts would consider chronically homeless. That designation meant that they had a disabling condition and had been homeless for at least a year, or for four different periods in the past three years. Utah as a trial housed 17 chronically homeless people throughout Salt Lake City. A year later, 14 were still in their homes. The other three were dead.

The scheme, called Housing First, was expanded and Utah now calculates that it saves US$8000 per homeless person per annum. The philosophy of Housing First is that housing comes first, and services follow.  

However, Utah still has a substantial homeless problem, with approximately 14,000 people homeless in the state. It has a Ten Year Plan to End Chronic Homelessness and holds annual summits on homelessness. The State of Utah Housing and Community Development Division and State Community Services Office in 2012 published a paper titled *Utah – Comprehensive Report on Homelessness*. It provided details

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39 “Utah reduced chronic homelessness by 90 per cent: here’s how,” NPR 24 Hour Program Stream, 10 December 2015.
about homelessness in Utah and highlighted successful initiatives in reducing homelessness.
5 INTERNATIONAL INDIGENOUS EXPERIENCES OF HOMELESSNESS

Indigenous peoples experience homelessness at rates far higher than their percentages of the overall populations. Effective solutions to homelessness accordingly need to be culturally appropriate and to draw on the work and experiences of indigenous peoples.

1 Australia

Indigenous Australians have four times the rate of homelessness of the general Australian population – 191 people per 10,000, compared with 49 per 10,000 in the 2006 Census. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people make up nine per cent of Australia’s total homeless population, despite comprising only 2.5 per cent of the total Australian population.

Homeless Indigenous Australians are also more likely to sleep rough or in improvised dwellings or shelters, than non-Indigenous Australians (27 per cent compared with 15 per cent). Indigenous homelessness increased between 2001 and 2006, while non-Indigenous homelessness remained relatively unchanged. Approximately 17 per cent of people assisted by specialist homelessness services in 2008-09 were Indigenous.

2 Canada

In Canada, Aboriginal Homelessness in Canada – A Literature Review presented a comprehensive review of scholarly literature about Aboriginal Homelessness in Canada. It examined four key issues –

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40 “Homelessness – A profile of homelessness for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Indigenous observatory.

41 Ibid.

How are the concepts of “homelessness” and “home” defined, particularly for the Aboriginal population? Is there a unique meaning of homelessness for Aboriginal Peoples?

Why are Aboriginal populations (particularly youth, gender minorities, and urban groups) at disproportionate risk of becoming homeless or over-represented in the Canadian homeless population?

How do Aboriginal Peoples experience homelessness? What is the range of diversity of their experiences?

What has been proposed in the areas of homelessness prevention and solutions for Aboriginal Peoples? What is working? What are some new ways authors are conceptualising these issues?

The paper said that the First Nations population represented over 50 distinct nations and language groups and was made up of 634 First Nations communities. Evidence indicated that, as a population, Aboriginal Peoples were the most materially, socially and spatially deprived ethno-cultural group in Canada and were disproportionately homeless and inadequately housed. This was true to such an extreme degree that many had argued for the recognition of Aboriginal-specific homelessness and housing crises.

The paper described Aboriginal homelessness as an “epidemic,” noting that in some cities 90 per cent of those living on the street were Aboriginal. In Thunder Bay, Ontario, Aboriginal Peoples made up more than half the homeless population. In Halifax, First Nations people made up ten per cent of the homeless population, while in Yellowknife they accounted for 95 per cent.

The document said that this situation stemmed from a variety of reasons, including “the historical dispossession of Aboriginal lands, colonial and neo-colonial practices of cultural oppression and erosion, intergenerational traumas, systemic racism,

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43 Ibid, p 2.
governmental policies, the current economy and housing markets.\textsuperscript{45}

The author observed that the review steered its course in the direction of the maxim that “Aboriginal quality of life can be improved only on Aboriginal peoples’ own terms and not prepackaged Eurocentric terms.”\textsuperscript{46}

The paper said that the Aboriginal population often had connections, resources, temporary stability or roots in more than one place. Aboriginal Peoples were frequently mobile between spaces and might travel to and from reserves on a regular basis. Canadian Aboriginal groups had endured the loss of what they traditionally thought of as “home,” since involuntary uprooting and displacement from homes or communities continued to be a reality for many. As a consequence, the report said, many Aboriginal families and communities had become fragmented, culturally disconnected, and frequently experienced the absence of a place to consider “home.” It was accordingly productive to expand the definition of “homelessness” to one that took account both of physical space and amenities, and of emotional/cultural connections.\textsuperscript{47}

The paper noted that Aboriginal youth were overrepresented in the Canadian homeless population and ran the risk of falling through the cracks as they had outgrown services intended for children, but might not be old enough to utilise adult services. The report said that the literature was clear in its support for more community-based and community-driven housing. Youth-specific considerations should be included in official policies and budgets.

The author noted that Aboriginal females of all ages experienced a disproportionate burden of housing problems. Research indicated that Aboriginal girls and young women were over-represented in the homeless populations of Canada’s cities and Aboriginal women were more likely to be sleeping rough in the centres of big cities than women of other ethnic backgrounds.

\hspace{1cm}\textsuperscript{45} Ibid, p 10.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid, p 10.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid, p 13.
groups. Homelessness was a significant risk factor in the sexual exploitation of Aboriginal females in Canada.

The report also said that the devastation to Aboriginal cultures during colonial conquests and European settlement in Canada beginning in the 17th century had had long-term impacts on Aboriginal individuals, families and communities. Aboriginal therapist and scholar, Peter Menzies, had made the link between intergenerational trauma and homelessness among Canadian Aboriginal Peoples. 48

Conclusion relating to international developments

The above brief survey of some international experiences and initiatives relating to homelessness underlines how slow New Zealand has been to grasp the magnitude and seriousness of its homelessness problem. This country has been even slower to begin taking effective action to address homelessness.

The Government does not yet accept that there is a homelessness crisis in this country, and it has no long-term, comprehensive and coherent approach to address it.

This lack of action can be compared with efforts in other jurisdictions, which have now been going on for many years. They include legislation, large amounts of funding, research, plans, and action both by local and central government to address homelessness.

E tū sets out below its specific recommendations for addressing homelessness in New Zealand.

48 Ibid, p 61.
6 RECOMMENDATIONS TO ADDRESS HOMELESSNESS IN NEW ZEALAND

1. New Zealand should enact a Homes for All Act. Other jurisdictions have debated or passed into law Homelessness Acts. E tū submits that calling the legislation the “Homes for All Act” would be a more positive statement of the desired outcome of the law. The legislation should enshrine in law a requirement to end homelessness in New Zealand by a specified date. Specific duties should be placed on both central and local government to address homelessness.

2. The Government, with cross-party support from all political parties in Parliament, should embark on a long-term programme of building hundreds of thousands of new homes. The Government should take advantage of economies of scale to keep prices low. Choosing, for example, five different designs and building tens of thousands of homes to exactly the same plan would significantly reduce costs.

3. The Government should make available billions of dollars in funding to address homelessness. New Zealand can well afford to do this. Tax evasion costs the country between $1 and 6 billion every year. $2.6 billion was in 2013 owing in child support, yet the Government announced in the 2015 Budget that it would write off up to $1.7 billion owing in child support penalties. Over the three years to 2013, $591 million in unpaid fines and reparation was clocked up. When the Inland Revenue Department took proper enforcement action against property speculators, it speedily recouped $68 million. Homelessness is extremely expensive to the economy and taking steps to eliminate it would result in long-term savings in health, justice, and other sectors. In Canada, it is calculated that homelessness costs the economy C$7.05 billion every year. Action to eliminate homelessness should
accordingly be regarded as an investment not only in people, but also in the economy.

4. A national plan should be drawn up to eliminate homelessness in New Zealand by the date specified in the Homes for All Act. This would provide the detail to accompany the Homes for All Act, and set out how the legislation’s goals would be achieved. The plan should set out detailed actions to be taken by central and local government. Implementation of the plan should be evaluated at regular intervals. Auckland Council had an Auckland Council Homelessness Action Plan 2012 – 2015.\(^49\) The plan listed four strands of activities to be undertaken by the council: leadership and public awareness; interagency responses for the future direction of services to end rough sleeping by 2022; a co-ordinated approach to ensure vulnerable tenants living in temporary accommodation have access to appropriate services; and empowering vulnerable groups to move out of homelessness into secure, sustainable and culturally-appropriate accommodation. The dire current state of homelessness in Auckland demonstrates that the plan was ineffective. A detailed, national blueprint is required.

5. Tax deductions on rental properties should be abolished.

6. Capital gains on property apart from the family home should be taxable.

7. Land held by land bankers should be compulsorily acquired for building housing, in the same way that land required for infrastructure and other purposes is acquired under the Public Works Act.

8. A register of unoccupied houses should be established, and the Government should have power to acquire houses which remain unoccupied for lengthy periods.

The phenomenon of “ghost houses” has emerged in Auckland only in recent times. These are homes which are left unoccupied for considerable periods as the owners are making so much money from the increase in capital value of the home, that they do not consider they need to rent the houses out to earn income. More than 33,000 Auckland dwellings are officially classified as empty. Auckland’s 6.6 per cent vacancy rate is higher than that of either Sydney or Melbourne. There has been a public outcry in those two Australian cities about ghost houses. The number of empty houses roughly equates with the number of people in Auckland in pressing need of homes. Houses are not investments. Houses are to live in. Both central and local government need to be empowered to move needy families into unoccupied homes. It is intolerable that families are living in cars in the middle of winter at the same time as thousands of houses are unoccupied. The phenomenon of ghost houses illustrates that New Zealand’s homelessness crisis is not only an issue of supply. It is partly caused by the fact that houses are now considered to be investments and it is regarded as acceptable and financially prudent for people to buy multiple houses which they have no intention of living in, while other citizens are unable to afford to rent or buy one house. New Zealand needs to return to the basic notion that the purpose of houses is to provide shelter.

9. Auckland’s Unitary Plan aims to provide housing for a million more people by 2041. However, even if houses can be built far more quickly than at present, it is plain that the overwhelming majority will be too expensive for most people to buy. Specific measures need to be implemented to build tens of thousands of truly affordable homes. It is difficult to envisage how this can occur when the population of Auckland continues to expand at such a rapid rate.

10. A Housing First pilot programme modelled on those in New York, Utah and other parts of the United States should be conducted.

11. More funding should be provided to address mental health and alcohol and drug addiction. These are three extremely common causes of homelessness. Homelessness will not be cured until its underlying causes are dealt with.

12. Communities should be supported in their work to end homelessness. For example, Rotorua in February 2016 launched the *Rotorua Homeless Action Plan 2015-2016*. Other communities also have knowledge about the problems and best solutions in their areas, and it is important that their expertise is heeded.

13. The housing needs of Māori need to be specifically considered, and culturally-appropriate solutions must be provided. Māori are disproportionately affected by homelessness. For example, the Auckland City Mission’s 2016 census of homelessness revealed that more than half of the rough sleepers in the city were Māori. Some of the causes of Māori homelessness differ from the causes of homelessness in other sectors of the population. Understanding these causes and seeking appropriate solutions are pre-requisites to eliminating homelessness among Māori. Barriers to lending for building whanau homes on multiple-owned Māori land should be removed.

14. The housing needs of Pasifika populations also need to be studied, to ensure that solutions are culturally-appropriate to those groups.

15. The housing requirements of other specific sectors of the community should be examined, and policies should be implemented to provide solutions that are appropriate to them. One size does not fit all. For example, New Zealand has the highest rate of reported
intimate partner violence in the developed world, and fleeing from domestic violence is a common cause of homelessness both in New Zealand and in other countries. However, there is a lack of attention to developing policies and providing funding to address this issue. Similarly, young people are over-represented in homelessness statistics and require specialised assistance. A 2015 Salvation Army report revealed that tens of thousands of baby boomers risked becoming homeless in retirement unless urgent action was taken. The research estimated that a third of people retiring by 2025 would not own their own homes and, given current superannuation rates, would require state rental assistance. People released from prison also experience severe difficulty in obtaining housing.

16. The provisions of Green Party Co-Leader Metiria Turei and Labour Party Leader Andrew Little’s Healthy Homes Guarantee Bills should be passed into law. All homes should be healthy, insulated, warm and safe. Ensuring that homes are healthy will save New Zealand hundreds of millions of dollars in the long term. Our unhealthy homes have resulted in the re-emergence of diseases normally no longer seen in countries such as New Zealand. This is having a disastrous impact on our children’s health, as well as placing massive costs on the health system for the treatment of skin infections, rheumatic fever and other preventable conditions. All rental homes should have Housing Warrants of Fitness.

17. Long-term security of tenure should be provided for renters. Although it is desirable that action is taken to ensure that New Zealanders can purchase their own homes rather than being life-long tenants, in countries such as Switzerland life-long tenancy is the norm. However, this is only feasible if long-term tenancy is accepted and renters are protected from very short notice periods, such as one month.

18. Sales of state houses should be halted immediately.
19. Auckland has as its goal to become the world’s most liveable city. However, low wages and high housing costs are making the city increasingly unaffordable for tens of thousands of people. Similar problems are now emerging in Queenstown, Hamilton, Tauranga, Nelson, Christchurch and other places. E tū has many members who are paid the minimum wage of $15.25 an hour. This is not enough for families to live on. The Living Wage for 2016 is $19.80 an hour. E tū submits that the Government should legislate to abolish the minimum wage and replace it with the Living Wage, which would mean families would find housing more affordable and could begin once more to aspire to buy their own homes.

20. The benefit cuts of 1991 should be reversed and benefits should be set at liveable levels so that people on benefits can house themselves and their families properly. It is notable in the current public debate that widespread concern about homelessness only developed when it became known that significant numbers of working people were unable to afford housing. Housing is essential for all New Zealanders, both those in work and those on benefits.

21. Research needs to be undertaken into the extent of the homelessness problem in New Zealand, and evaluations of initiatives to address homelessness must be carried out on a regular basis to ensure that the most effective policies are being implemented.

22. The recommended programme to build hundreds of thousands of new homes in New Zealand should take advantage of innovative developments in housing from overseas, such as vertical villages, flat pack housing and eco homes. Environmental sustainability should be an essential part both of homes and of new communities. Green spaces need to be provided for children to play in.