Refugee Council of Australia

24 April 2026

The Hon Clare O'Neil MP
Minister for Housing, Minister for Homelessness, Minister for Cities
PO Box 6022
Canberra ACT 2600

Alarming concerns over death of young homeless man and lack of supports for non-residents

Dear Minister O'Neil,

Thank you for your previous response to our letter urging for federal action on housing and homelessness for people seeking asylum in Australia. We appreciate your ongoing work with state, territories and service providers to ensure supports for people from humanitarian and asylum-seeking backgrounds.

We are writing to express our deep concern about the state of homelessness among non-residents and people seeking asylum, particularly following the tragic death of Bikram Lama, a young rough sleeper in Sydney, who was on a temporary visa. We note your spokesperson's comments in The Guardian about the importance of working closely with state government counterparts and community service providers to ensure people don't fall through the cracks.

As highlighted in our previous brief to you, thousands of individuals and families seeking asylum are denied access to a basic safety net. Daily casework reports from frontline asylum agencies indicate a growing number of asylum seekers experiencing deep poverty, deteriorating mental health and homelessness.

Non-residents, including people seeking asylum, are a growing cohort who are trapped in homelessness because they cannot access Centrelink or social housing. Restrictive federal policies prevent them from supporting themselves. For example, many are denied work rights, Medicare and income support. The Status Resolution Support Services (SRSS) program is also largely inaccessible due to the strict eligibility criteria. Despite its original intent to provide short-term support for basic needs, the limited access and payments are hardly enough to survive on, seeing more people forced into destitution.

We have actively engaged with key government departments and ministers to elevate these issues. We have provided briefings to advisors of Rose Jackson, NSW Minister for Housing and Homelessness, as well as to Homes NSW and Multicultural NSW. Last year, we collaborated with St Vincent's Health Australia and St Vincent de Paul Society in preparing a joint sector letter to Tony Burke, Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs requesting urgent reforms around Fast Track, expanding the SRSS program and issuing work rights to people seeking refugee protection.

Under the National Agreement on Social Housing and Homelessness (NASHH), "immigration and settlement policy and programs" are Commonwealth responsibilities, alongside a commitment to support groups experiencing disproportionate disadvantage. People seeking asylum fall within this category. We ask that, in line with NASHH, people seeking asylum who are at risk of or experiencing homelessness be prioritised for access to homelessness prevention and housing programs, to ensure stability while their claims are processed.

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for refugees, people seeking asylum
and the organisations and individuals
who support them • Founded 1981

Within the Commonwealth's remit, we recommend the following actions for people seeking asylum:

1. Expand Targeted Federal Funding Access
   - Following the Victorian model, enable all states and territories, including NSW, to access dedicated federal housing and homelessness funding for asylum seeker support, under the National Agreement on Social Housing and Homelessness (NASHH) .

2. Remove Visa-Based Barriers to Housing Support
   - Extend eligibility for Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA) to include people seeking asylum holding bridging visas.
   - Expand access for people seeking asylum to state-based supports such as bond loans, rent relief and emergency housing grants.

3. Invest in Service Capacity and Community-Led Housing
   - Work with states and territories to ensure SHS providers are specifically funded and enabled to respond to the needs of people seeking asylum.
   - Support community-led initiatives and frontline asylum agencies through capital grants and operational funding to expand transitional housing options.

4. Strengthen Access to Housing Assistance Programs
   - Facilitate access to rental assistance schemes and affordable housing products through strengthened federal–state collaboration.
   - Remove visa-related exclusions from access to federally funded Housing Assistance programs and products.

We note positive precedents already exist: Victoria's Housing Establishment Fund (HEF), delivered as brokerage and housing assistance under the Support for Asylum Seekers program, is an example of collaborative state and federal efforts to meet urgent housing needs. A nationally consistent approach would ensure that people are not disadvantaged based on their location or visa status.

We urge your leadership in implementing practical, targeted measures to ensure people seeking asylum are not excluded from housing support. Coordinated action across both levels of government is essential to reduce homelessness through long-term, equitable and preventative solutions.

We would welcome the opportunity to engage on needs-based eligibility settings and triage approaches for housing and homelessness responses, particularly for people in acute crisis regardless of visa status. This would support more targeted and effective interventions, while reducing pressure on existing systems.

Thank you for your time and consideration on this critical issue.

Yours sincerely,



Adama Kamara
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