Refugee Council of Australia

24 April 2026

The Hon. Rose Jackson, MLC
Minister for Housing and Homelessness
52 Martin Place
SYDNEY NSW 2000

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

Dear Minister Jackson,

Thank you for your response to the sector's joint letter to Minister Burke. We are writing to follow up on the NSW Government's response and the NSW Homelessness Strategy Action Plan 2025 - 2027, particularly following distressing reports of the death of Bikram Lama, a young rough sleeper in Sydney, who was on a temporary visa.

As reported in The Guardian, we note you acknowledged the gaps in services for people without residency status in NSW, and your commitment to work with local advocacy groups and the Commonwealth Government to explore solutions.

At present, we are deeply concerned about the state of homelessness among non-residents and people seeking asylum. As highlighted in our previous briefs to you, daily casework reports from frontline asylum agencies in NSW indicate a growing number of asylum seekers experiencing deep poverty and deteriorating mental health and destitution. They are without access to mainstream housing and social services.

Recent data underscores the scale and urgency of this issue. In 2024–25, NSW frontline asylum support agencies referred 820 clients for complex casework, with 53% experiencing or at risk of homelessness. Of those, 136 women (31%) had fled domestic and family violence. These crisis situations are driven by intersecting factors including lack of income, insecure visa status, housing stress, unsafe or overcrowded living conditions and exposure to violence.

Meanwhile, Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) remain overstretched. Although people seeking asylum may be technically eligible, many cannot afford subsidised costs, and limited availability of beds further restricts access. This leaves many without viable pathways to emergency or short-term housing.

We continue to advocate for greater inclusion and access to housing support through our engagement with Homes NSW. The Refugee Council, along with frontline asylum agencies, health and SHS providers have met with Homes NSW on several occasions, providing policy and practical recommendations. We are happy to note that Homes NSW have offered to engage with us on a quarterly basis to explore solutions. We are committed to working closely and collaboratively with Homes NSW as the Action Plan progresses.

There is a clear need to strengthen the Action Plan by including specific actions and commitments to support people seeking asylum in NSW. Dedicated support for asylum seekers

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

and frontline agencies will be critical to ensuring meaningful access to housing services and products, meeting growing demand and enabling sustainable pathways out of homelessness.

In this context, we urge the NSW Government and Homes NSW to commit to improving access and strengthening support systems for people seeking asylum. In particular, we recommend:

- Expanding access to Homes NSW products and housing pathways for people seeking asylum
- Enhancing eligibility and criteria for asylum-based organisations to access initiatives such as the Homelessness Innovation Fund (HIF)
- Providing targeted funding for frontline asylum support agencies delivering homelessness responses
- Strengthening coordination between housing, homelessness and frontline asylum agencies to improve system responsiveness

We acknowledge your previous response highlighting that visa-related exclusions from income support and housing assistance are shaped by Commonwealth policy settings. We also recognise that the NSW Government has demonstrated leadership in this space by providing access to essential services for people seeking asylum, including fee waivers for public schooling, hospital cost waivers for Medicare-ineligible asylum seekers and free training programs through TAFE providers.

We would welcome the opportunity to further discuss eligibility criteria for potential Homes NSW programs and appropriate triage processes, particularly for those in acute crisis regardless of their visa status. This would help ensure that responses are targeted, effective and avoid placing undue pressure on existing systems through reliance on a single pathway.

We believe the NSW Government has an opportunity to lead in delivering inclusive, forward-thinking housing policy—reducing long-term costs while ensuring fair and equitable access to stability and support for all members of the community, regardless of visa status.

We would welcome the opportunity to continue working collaboratively to support the implementation of these solutions.

Yours faithfully,



Adama Kamara
Co-Chief Executive Officer
Refugee Council of Australia

Cc:
The Hon. Jodie Harrison, MP Minister for Women, Minister for Seniors and Minister for the Prevention of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault
Mr Stephen Bali, MP Member for Blacktown
Ms Donna Davis, MP, Member for Parramatta
Ms Julia Finn, MP Member for Granville
Mr David Saliba, MP Member for Fairfield
Ms Linda Voltz, MP, Member for Auburn
The Rt Hon the Lord Mayor of Sydney, Councillor Clover Moore AO, City of Sydney