Refugee Council of Australia

10 November 2026

Re: Support for 2026 LGNSW Motion to improve access to homelessness support for temporary visa holders and people seeking asylum in NSW

Dear Councillors

I am seeking your support for the City of Sydney's Motion (p. 212-213) to improve access to homelessness support for people seeking asylum and temporary visa holders at the Local Government NSW Annual Conference on 22-24 November 2026. As a Refugee Welcome Zone council, you have demonstrated a commitment to creating welcoming, inclusive communities for refugees, people seeking asylum and their families. We believe this motion aligns closely with those values and provides an opportunity for councils to advocate for practical solutions to homelessness affecting some of the most vulnerable members of our communities.

While immigration is a federal responsibility and housing is primarily a federal and state responsibility, councils are increasingly on the frontline responding to homelessness in their communities. People experiencing homelessness do not present to councils according to visa category. They present because they need assistance, support and safe places to go. Many councils are being asked to respond to visible and growing homelessness with limited resources and support from other levels of government.

Temporary visa holders, international students, people seeking asylum and certain New Zealand citizens are among those falling through significant gaps in the service system. As Refugee Welcome Zone councils will know, many people seeking asylum face particular barriers because they are excluded from key supports that most Australians rely on during periods of crisis. These groups are not eligible for Centrelink, public housing or the National Disability Insurance scheme. Many are also denied work rights and Medicare due to restrictive visa conditions.

The NSW Homelessness Strategy (2025-2035) identifies asylum seekers, temporary visa holders, and undocumented people as a distinct group facing unique risks of homelessness and barriers to assistance. However, these groups are denied access to Homes NSW products, such as Rent Choice Start Safely (rental subsidy for women escaping domestic violence), Rent Start Bond Loan (interest free bond loan) and Rent Advance (up to two weeks rent), which require Australian citizenship or permanent residency.

The tragic death of international student Bikram Lama in Sydney's Hyde Park has highlighted the serious consequences when people fall through these gaps. Temporary visa holders and people seeking asylum, like anyone else, can experience crisis in their lives. They can face homelessness, financial hardship, insecure work, complex health needs, domestic and family violence, exploitation and modern slavery.

Refugee Welcome Zone councils understand the importance of ensuring people are treated with dignity and have access to support when they are experiencing hardship. However, councils cannot address these gaps alone. Stronger action is needed from state and federal governments, including greater access to Homes NSW products, increased funding for Specialist Homelessness Services

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The Refugee Council of Australia
is the national umbrella body
for refugees, people seeking asylum
and the organisations and individuals
who support them • Founded 1981

and frontline asylum seeker organisations, and access to essential supports such as work rights and Medicare.

We have previously raised these issues with the NSW Minister for Housing and Homelessness. Our letter is attached for your information and to support advocacy on this issue.

Supporting this motion is an opportunity for Refugee Welcome Zone councils to collectively advocate for practical solutions that address homelessness, reduce pressure on local communities and services, and ensure that people facing crisis are not left without support because of their visa status.

Thank you for your consideration for the upcoming motion, and for the important work councils undertake in responding to homelessness in our communities.

Yours faithfully,

Adama Kamara
Co-Chief Executive Officer
Refugee Council of Australia