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**GOVERNMENT RESPONDS FASTER TO THOSE IN NEED**

The Stanhope Government has announced significant changes to Housing ACT operations to ensure that the housing requirements of Canberrans most in need are better met, hopefully within three months.

These changes address the issues raised in the Housing Summit and in the recent Auditor General's report on Housing ACT. Minister for Housing John Hargreaves said the Stanhope Government would make changes to ensure that those most in need are housed — and within reasonable timeframes.

“The eligibility criteria for Housing ACT will undergo a significant change. The income criterion for singles will be tightened to be 60 per cent of Australian Average Weekly Earnings. The criterion will be changed to 75 per cent of Australian Average Weekly Earnings for couples,” Mr Hargreaves said.

“This change to income-based eligibility will allow housing allocations to be focussed on those within the community who are most in need.

“The Housing ACT priority allocation system will also be revised to address the waiting times for people who need it the most. Those applicants judged to have the highest — and most immediate need — will be placed in the priority category. It is hoped this will enable those most in need to be housed within three months, rather than having to wait up to a year for housing.”

Mr Hargreaves said people to be included within this category are those facing complex needs including individuals and families facing primary homelessness (including those in homelessness services), Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders with complex needs, women and children feeling domestic violence, the frail and aged, and people with a disability where natural support mechanisms are in danger of failing.

“In conjunction with the changes to the priority allocation system, the Government is re-emphasising homelessness services as the primary response to crisis. A key for Housing ACT will then be to assist people to move out of the homelessness services once their crisis has been addressed,” he said.

“This re-emphasis will include developing a transitional housing model in conjunction with the homelessness sector providing a home like environment while people wait for their final housing allocation. This approach will provide a faster response to homelessness and also provide a service to more homeless people.

“Further changes include more effectively matching the changing needs of tenants and their families with housing stock. Through assigning a higher priority to existing tenants who wish to downsize and to tenants seeking to move from a high demand areas to a lower demand areas.”

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