

Snapshot: AnglicareCQ – Central QLD

Introduction

Central Queensland’s diverse communities range from major population centres to isolated outback towns, each with their own unique set of housing affordability challenges. The region’s economy revolves around industries such as mining, gas and associated fields, tourism, agriculture and beef production. Health and social services, retail and education are also major employers.

Anglicare Central Queensland (AnglicareCQ) services a 570,000 square kilometre region extending from the Capricorn Coast right across the state to the Northern Territory border. The agency’s services cover child protection, community services including youth, financial supports, homelessness and mental health programs, and a housing portfolio of more than 500 properties. These properties range from short-term crisis accommodation for people who are homeless or otherwise in urgent need of a safe place to stay, to long term family homes leased through the National Rental Affordability Scheme. AnglicareCQ manages housing in Rockhampton and the Capricorn Coast, Gladstone and surrounding communities including Tannum Sands and Calliope, the Central Highlands communities of Emerald and Blackwater, and Barcaldine, Longreach in the state’s west.

Methodology

Every year AnglicareCQ tests if it is possible for people on low incomes to rent a home in the private market. We do this by taking a snapshot of the properties listed for rent on realestate.com.au on one weekend in March. We then assess whether each property is affordable and suitable for fourteen types of households on low incomes.

Those households are:

- single people receiving the Disability Support Pension, Youth Allowance, JobSeeker and the Age Pension, or earning minimum wage
- single parents receiving the Parenting Payment or earning the minimum wage, or a combination of these income sources
- couples without children on the Age Pension, and
- couples with children on JobSeeker, Parenting Payment, earning the minimum wage, or a combination of these income sources.

To test whether a listing is affordable, we calculate the income for our household types using government data. We use these figures to calculate the maximum affordable rent for each household type and compare that against listed properties that are suitable for each household type. The Snapshot follows the internationally accepted benchmark that rent needs to be no more than 30 percent of a household budget to be affordable for people on low incomes.

Findings

On the Snapshot weekend of 16-17 March 2024, 317 private rentals were advertised for rent in Central Queensland. While a property could be affordable and appropriate for more than one household type, any individual property can only be rented out by one household type at any time.

To this end, we found that:

- 9 (3%) individual properties were suitable for at least one household type living on income support payments without placing them in housing stress.

- 127 (40%) individual properties were suitable for at least one household type living on minimum wage without placing them in housing stress.

On the Snapshot weekend, these are the number of unique properties affordable and appropriate for:	
Households on income support payments (#1-10)	Households on minimum wage (#11-14)
9	127

Table 1: Rental Affordability, Central Queensland, by household type and percentage

#	Household Type	Payment Type	Number Affordable & Appropriate	Percentage Affordable & Appropriate
1	Couple, two children (one aged less than 5, one aged less than 10)	Jobseeker Payment (both adults)	4	1%
2	Single, two children (one aged less than 5, one aged less than 10)	Parenting Payment Single	3	1%
3	Couple, no children	Age Pension	9	3%
4	Single, one child (aged less than 5)	Parenting Payment Single	3	1%
5	Single, one child (aged over 14)	Jobseeker Payment	1	0%
6	Single	Age Pension	2	1%
7	Single aged over 21	Disability Support Pension	2	1%
8	Single	Jobseeker Payment	0	0%
9	Single aged over 18	Youth Allowance	0	0%
10	Single in share house	Youth Allowance	0	0%
11	Couple, two children (one aged less than 5, one aged less than 10)	Minimum Wage + FTB A (both adults)	124	39%
12	Single, two children (one aged less than 5, one aged less than 10)	Minimum Wage + FTB A & B + Parenting Payment ¹	19	6%
13	Single	Minimum Wage	3	1%
14	Couple, two children (one aged less than 5, one aged less than 10)	Minimum Wage + Parenting payment (partnered) + FTB A & B	29	9%
Total No of Properties		317		

¹ Single parents earning the minimum wage may also be eligible for the Parenting Payment (Single). From 2024, the Snapshot includes Parenting Payment (Single) in our calculations.

Discussion

Over the past four years, Central Queensland has seen a significant decline in housing affordability across the region. This can be attributed to the low private rental vacancy rates across the region, with our major population centres maintaining under 1% (currently 0.8%) since August 2020. We've seen increased economy recovery projects in the region and people relocating to Queensland, particularly regional areas. This has seen rental prices increase across the region and particularly in the Rockhampton, Capricorn Coast, Emerald and Gladstone regions.

In Central Queensland, as is the case across Australia, renters on low incomes are being left behind and forgotten in the private market.

People on income support, especially those who are out of work, have few options. We found that that no rentals were affordable for a person on the JobSeeker payment. The shortage of affordable rentals will condemn people to make difficult decisions to keep a roof over their head.

Families out of work are also facing a dire situation. An out-of-work couple with two children can afford one percent of appropriate rentals. Single parents out of work face even tougher odds, with affordability of just one property across Central Queensland deemed suitable and affordable. This helps explain why the rate of JobSeeker is such a critical factor in child poverty – one in six children now lives in poverty, with those growing up in households that depend on JobSeeker at much greater risk.¹

This year's results again show how brutal the rental market is for young people. A person on Youth Allowance looking for a share house can afford none of the available accommodation options. Youth Allowance is the lowest of all government payments, and year after year, we find young people are at the bottom of the affordability ladder.

People with disabilities face unique challenges in this market. Some will find that the rentals listed in this Snapshot don't meet their needs, and for many people, the Disability Support Pension is too low to allow them to rent a home that does. A person on the Disability Support Pension could afford only two rentals at the time of our Snapshot.

The most generous of government payments is the Age Pension. Yet for a couple living on the Age Pension, only three percent of rentals were affordable. Single retirees have it even worse, with only one percent of the listings left to compete for.

Working people are hardly better off. A single person working full-time on the minimum wage will find that only one percent of rentals are affordable. Of all of the households featured in this Snapshot, families with two parents in full-time work stand the best chance of finding an affordable home. Even they will find they are locked out of 61 percent of rentals we surveyed.

Of course, this Snapshot doesn't tell the whole story. Although we look at the full-time minimum wage, we know that more and more people are working casually. Their plight is likely to be much worse than this Snapshot shows. Nor can the Snapshot consider the competition for each of these properties. In an overheated market, an affordable property can attract dozens of applications.

All of this is a wake-up call. What this Snapshot shows is that finding an affordable home in the private rental market is complete fiction for people on low incomes. It is past time for action to make housing more affordable.

Policy Implications

Raising JobSeeker and related payments over the poverty line

Across Central Queensland people out of work depend on JobSeeker and other payments to get by. Many are likely to be renting, yet this Snapshot shows that the payment is so low that its trapping people in poverty and housing stress.

Raising the rate of JobSeeker and related payments above the poverty line will give badly needed relief to the people on the lowest incomes. It will allow them to afford the essentials they need to live their lives, and plan for their futures. Most importantly, it will give more people the benefits of a secure home.

More social and affordable homes for Central Queensland

We are facing a major shortfall of affordable homes. The Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute has shown we that we have a shortfall of 92,800 social and affordable rentals across Queensland. By 2036, that number is expected to grow to 174,900.ⁱⁱ

With the private rental market failing so many people, we must invest in homes for people those need them most. Ending our affordable housing shortfall would be the most powerful way to tackle the rental crisis – and boost our regional economy. The Federal and State governments must work together end this shortfall.

Fixing tax concessions

Australia's current housing tax concessions contribute to the high costs of housing in Australia. They encourage property investors to speculate on the property market, at the expense of people trying to buy or rent a home.

Negative gearing and capital gains tax concessions cost the federal budget a staggering \$14.85 billion per year, and overwhelmingly favour the wealthiest 20 percent of Australians.

Better targeting negative gearing and capital gains tax exemptions would provide funding for homes for people on low incomes who are struggling to survive in the private rental market or need social housing.

Conclusion

This year's Rental Affordability Snapshot shows that the private rental market is failing people on low incomes. Some people may have shelter or accommodation, but there is very little on the market that could be a place to call home.

The key to making housing more affordable lies in two factors: making sure everyone has a decent income, and providing enough affordable rentals for the people who need them.

It is clear that we must invest in social and affordable housing. The shortfall of social housing and affordable rentals in our region must be tackled. The sobering results of this Snapshot show that this investment is truly urgent.

Anglicare Central Queensland is also calling for an increase to the rate of JobSeeker and other payments. This will help people on the lowest incomes find a secure home.

Nobody should be forced to make impossible sacrifices just to keep a roof over their head. It's time to take real action, and make sure that everyone can have place to call home.

ⁱ Phillips, B. and Narayanan, V. (2021) [Financial Stress and Social Security Settings in Australia](#). Australian National University Centre for Social Research and Methods.

ⁱⁱ Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (2018) [Social housing as infrastructure: an investment pathway](#). See Appendix 4.