

WHAT CAN VANUATU LEARN FROM AUSTRALIA'S APPROACH TO SOCIAL HOUSING ?

Vanuatu is different from Australia, but its housing crisis is heading in a similar direction. Both countries face a gap that keeps growing between housing supply and population growth. In Australia, large-scale government-funded social housing are being slowed down because of land issues and opposition from locals and private sectors.

Since Vanuatu has a different land system, the goal should not be to replicate Australia's social housing model. Rather, we should understand how Australia's housing system is struggling, to avoid repeating its mistakes.

WHY IS SOCIAL HOUSING IMPORTANT?

Not everyone can afford a house that costs over 10 million VUV. This is one of the reasons why social housing has been created. Funded by **governments or non-profit groups**, affordable housing helps the lower-class people to have a proper place to call home.

By investing in social housing, a country helps its population in having access to **safe and secure housing**, regardless of their financial situation.

These housing units need to be placed within **high-amenity locations**. The location and design of these homes can therefore have a significant impact on residents' quality of life.



Wardle Street | Mount Gravatt East, Brisbane, QLD: An example of great social housing complex

"I GREW UP IN SOCIAL HOUSING – I KNOW HOW IMPORTANT A ROOF OVER YOUR HEAD IS AND THE OPPORTUNITIES IT CREATES." - Anthony Albanese

THE STATE OF SOCIAL HOUSING IN AUSTRALIA

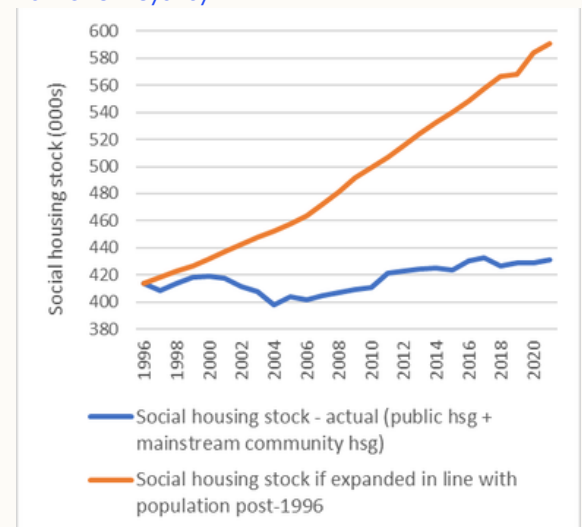
According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the average price for a dwelling in Australia is approximately **93 million VUV**, making it one of the world's most expensive housing markets.

There are not enough affordable housing complexes in Australia to house everyone. Building more social housing units is part of the solution to solving the crisis. It creates a **safety net** for those in need while reducing competition for low-income rentals in the **private market**.

Under the **Housing Australia Future Fund**, the country has set a goal to build 40 000 social housing units before 2030.

Despite massive contract funding, actual construction has **slowed down**. Data from the Australian National Audit Office in mid-2026 revealed that only 1,432 homes had been fully completed in the first two years of the scheme.

"Population has outpaced social housing supply"- data from UNSW Sydney



WHAT DOES THIS SITUATION TELL US?

Implementing more social housing units in Australia is a real challenge. Many factors such as **NIMBYism (Not In My Backyard)***, the slow development approval processes and the limited direct state control over land, stall advancements. These issues signal the risks Vanuatu might face by following the same top-down approach.

***NIMBYism : A term used to qualify local residents that are against any development or housing projects occurring in their neighbourhood.**

VANUATU’S RESIDENTIAL LANDSCAPE

While Australia has a much larger overall population, its annual growth rate is substantially lower than Vanuatu’s. The population, with an **annual growth of 2.3%**, is projected to reach 420 000 by 2035. This puts a huge pressure on the housing sector. The table on the right conveys the housing stock needed by 2035.

If we do not meet the required number of housing units before 2035, the housing market will skyrocket, just like in Australia. However, in Vanuatu, traditional social housing system may not be the best solution to help the lower-class people, as it would need a strong support from the government. Moreover, the **communal life** and the **customary land** will render the process very difficult.

Indeed, approximately **97%** of the land in Vanuatu is under **kastom land tenure**. This makes it very difficult for the state to start projects that require land, such as building more affordable housing units, since the government must have the authorization from customary landowners. Therefore, a lot of time and money is spent on negotiating with the indeginous owners. This is quite similar to the challenge that Australia is facing; a great portion of the **developable land** belongs to private sectors, making it demanding for the state to have easy access to ready land.

Housing Stock*	National	
	Required by 2035	Annual Average
New housing units to meet demand	21,500	2,150
Upgrading sub-standard housing units	15,700	1,570
Replacing or repairing of traditional housing units	36,000	3,600
Totals	73,200	

Data from the DUAP National Housing Policy (2025-2035)

In Greater Port-Vila, more than 35% of the population lives in **informal settlements**. These communal areas, with a high concentration of poverty can be seen in Seaside, Ohlen Mataso, Tokyo and Anamboru. This creates many **safety and health issues**, especially when cyclones and heavy rain often occur in our country.



Screenshot from SARS Film O1 Render O4 Low Res, a video on YouTube, used on the website for the VARS project.

THE VARS PROJECT:

Rather than directly building affordable houses, Vanuatu Affordable and Resilient Settlements (VARS) reflects another way of helping lower-income families that Vanuatu needs.

Their goal is to **enhance the life quality** of the communities who live in informal settlements by improving the infrastructure they use such as the roads, the drainage system, the street lights and the sanitation facilities. Additionally, the project includes subdividing state land in Etas into **affordable, climate-resilient plots** for first-time buyers and lower-income families.

This project operates under the Department of Urban Affairs and Planning (DUAP), who established the **National Housing Policy** (2025 – 2035). This framework provides important data on Vanuatu’s housing market and presents the projects that are planned to enhance the population’s overall access to resilient, safe and affordable houses.

TO CONCLUDE:

Australia’s housing crisis shows us that relying on direct government social housing creates long delays and high costs, especially when the **state has little control over the land**. This system is not the right fit for Vanuatu, where customary land and community life play a central role.

Instead of copying Australia’s approach, Vanuatu can **learn from its challenges** while using Australian financial and

technical support. Through initiatives like the VARS project, this partnership helps us upgrade informal settlements and develop affordable land .

Finally, there is a need to reinforce **agreements** between the government, the customary landowners and the private sector to facilitate large scale projects that are in favour of building more affordable houses.