Anglicare report shows deepening rental crisis for Australian workers and welfare recipients

Jessicah Green
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The 2026 “Rental Affordability Snapshot” released by the Anglicare charity found almost no rental properties that were affordable for people relying on meagre government welfare payments.

The Snapshot examined all 48,776 properties listed on the national rental market over one weekend in March, comparing the asking prices to average incomes and welfare payments. It uses the common definition of “affordability” as housing expenditure not exceeding 30 percent of gross income.

Just 351 listings (0.7 percent) were affordable for a childless couple on the age pension. A single person reliant on JobSeeker unemployment payments could afford just one property in the entire country, while those on Youth Allowance were completely locked out of the market.

A single adult on the Disability Support Pension could afford just 17 properties nationwide (less than 0.1 percent), while a single age pensioner could afford just 88 (0.2 percent).

Increasingly, even workers with full-time jobs are being priced out of the rental market. The Snapshot found that households with two full-time minimum wage workers—earning a combined weekly income of $2009.80 per week—could afford to rent only 7,227 of the listed homes (14.8 percent). Anglicare noted that while this was a marginal increase from 12.8 percent in the 2025 Snapshot, the long-term trend is one of sustained decline. A decade ago, 26.2 percent of listed rentals were affordable for couples earning minimum wage.

For single-income households, the pressure is particularly acute, with workers earning a single minimum wage being largely priced out of metropolitan and regional centres. This can lead to workers being driven out to more remote areas, limiting their accessibility not only to work, but essential services needed for daily life from healthcare facilities, emergency services, and grocery stores to schools and childcare centres.

Workers’ comments in the Anglicare report reveal the stark reality of this crisis.

One worker in regional Queensland described applying for more than 30 rental properties without success, despite being in full-time employment, noting that “every inspection has dozens of people, and anything affordable disappears immediately.”

In New South Wales (NSW), a single mother working in aged care reported spending well over half her income on rent, explaining that “if I don’t take what I can get, I’ll have nowhere for my kids.”

Other workers outlined the constant instability created by rising rents.

A hospitality worker in Victoria reported being forced to move three times in two years due to repeated rent increases, each time relocating further from their workplace.

A retail worker in Western Australia described commuting long distances after being priced out of their local area, stating that cheaper housing options were only available “hours away from where the jobs are.”

For some, the pressure has already resulted in outright housing insecurity. Regional reports include accounts of workers living in overcrowded share houses, sleeping in cars, or relying on temporary arrangements with friends and family. These testimonies make clear that the housing crisis is not confined to those outside the workforce. It is a crisis deepening to the point where workers in steady employment are facing homelessness.

This dire situation is the result of decades in which

Labor and Liberal-National governments have kept welfare payments and minimum wage rates at sub-poverty levels, destroyed public housing and enacted housing policies that serve the interests of property developers and financial institutions, not the working class. This is only deepening under the current federal Labor government of Anthony Albanese.

As recent reporting on Australia's record housing unaffordability shows, Labor's expanded first home buyers scheme has driven prices up, as the Treasury's own internal modelling confirmed it would do. Yet the policy was implemented regardless, because its actual purpose was never affordability. It was about boosting the profits made by the banks through interest payments, while workers bear the risk of being indebted to an asset worth less than their mortgage should the market fall.

The federal Labor government's $10 billion Housing Australia Future Fund (HAFF) had delivered just 1,432 "social and affordable" homes as of April—more than two years after its launch. Even if achieved, its target of 40,000 dwellings by 2029 would be a drop in the ocean compared with the national shortage of affordable housing, widely estimated at well over half a million homes.

While the federal Labor government pays lip service to "affordable housing," its state counterparts are destroying what little remains of public housing stock, in order to hand over valuable inner-city real estate to property developers.

The Victorian Labor government is carrying out the largest demolition of public housing in Australian history, tearing down 44 Melbourne housing towers and displacing more than 10,000 residents, many of them elderly people, immigrants, people with disabilities and low-income families.

In NSW, 750 public housing dwellings at Waterloo South are being torn down. In June, the state Labor government sent in riot police to smash up a protest encampment by evicted residents and supporters, to enable the demolition to proceed.

The destruction of public housing and the worsening housing affordability crisis are part of a broader assault on the living conditions of the working class. This was sharply expressed in the Albanese government's May budget, which contained $63.8 billion in social spending cuts, including $38 billion slashed from the National Disability Insurance Scheme. At the same time, Labor raised annual military spending to $60 billion and committed an additional $53 billion over the next decade to war preparations.

The cumulative effect is a deepening social catastrophe. For growing numbers of people, including those in full-time employment, decent, secure housing is totally out of reach. Financial stress, instability, and the risk of homelessness are becoming defining features of working-class life.

No reform within the existing parliamentary framework can resolve this crisis. Every party of the political establishment is committed to protecting the profits of the banks, developers, and property investors, and capitalism itself.

A genuine solution requires a struggle against the source of the crisis: the vast concentration of wealth in the hands of a corporate oligarchy, while millions are priced out of a basic necessity. That means a fight for a socialist program, placing the banks and property developers under public ownership and democratic workers' control so that the resources currently being siphoned into private fortunes can be used to meet social need, including for decent secure housing as a basic social right.

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