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Gender-responsive housing the way to tackle rising rates of homelessness

In Homelessness Week back in August, national women's housing and homelessness specialist, YWCA Australia launched [Gender Responsive Design Guidelines](#) for developers of social and affordable housing, offering a blueprint centred in gendered considerations.

YWCA Australia Group CEO Michelle Phillips stated, "Women too often find themselves in unsafe or unsuitable homes."

"These design guidelines offer a practical tool ready to be used across the sector and deliver long-term housing solutions that suit women's needs."

Housing insecurity is gendered: women face distinct risks, needs, and outcomes in the housing system, yet most current housing policy, design, and funding mechanisms remain gender-blind

Women are facing the brunt of the housing crisis, representing 60% of specialist homelessness services clients, with 45% of all women seeking homelessness assistance identifying family and domestic violence as the main cause.

Developed in consultation with Dr Samantha Donnelly, UTS lecturer in the School of Interior Architecture, the guidelines are built on the [YWCA Australia's Women's Housing Framework](#) to offer a practical solution to the gendered nature of the housing crisis.

"One-size-fits-all solutions do not adequately address the intersecting and structural challenges faced by women and gender-diverse people" says Ms Phillips.

"Design matters and it's about so much more than just safety. With women led families, considerations also must be given to what the children need. A lot of homes being built now are 1 or 2 beds as the focus is on value for money. We know that women led families' models like one-bedroom apartments don't meet the needs and this limits the supply of homes suitable.

"Considerations for local schools, public transport, health services, access to green spaces, day cares, grocery stores/supermarkets, and neighbourhood safety also matters.

"All these things need to be in place for social, emotional and physical well-being for women and their families", said Ms Phillips.

The design guidelines are available for use by Government agencies, community housing providers, peak bodies and property development professionals such as architects, planners and builders and includes a checklist to assess key gender responsive design principles.

These design guidelines are also a key part of YWCA Australia's broader [Safe Homes, Equal Futures campaign](#) – a national advocacy initiative that provides a clear roadmap for decision-makers to create gender-responsive housing policies that work for women, gender diverse people, and their families.

Link to guidelines [here](#).

Some recommendations in the Guidelines include

Clearly defined entry points and secure fencing

- Sensor lighting, CCTV in common areas, and passive surveillance design
- Layouts that support parenting, privacy, and visibility for children at play
- Culturally appropriate communal areas
- Access to the community through local parks and communal areas to support women's and children's social, physical, and mental well-being

About YWCA

YWCA Australia is a leading national not-for-profit organisation that has been championing women's rights and gender equality for over 140 years. With a presence in 17 locations across the country and over 200 dedicated employees, we deliver a range of services, including affordable housing, homelessness support, and leadership programs. Our purpose is to enable women and gender diverse people to find stability, safety, and security, allowing them to build the future they envision for themselves and their families.

About Michelle Phillips

Michelle Phillips – CEO

Michelle has almost 20 years' senior executive leadership in I/NGO and commercial organisations with the advancement of women as the common thread. She has extensive international and local business experience in national strategy, change management, community engagement, funding and commercial partnerships.

From Country Director delivering and advocating for lifesaving women's health services in Asia and Africa, to establishing the highly successful national Westfield W-League and CEO roles with the Hyundai A-League football clubs, Michelle is a

true social business leader driven by improving social impact and financial performance.