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A Community Development Framework for Community Housing Providers (CHPs)

Vision

To co-create a sector-wide Community Development Framework for Community Housing Providers that strengthens practice, inspires innovation and embeds community development as core business.

Purpose

To share practical, real-world examples of community development strategies that:

- Inspires effective practice across diverse CHP contexts
- Improves sector-wide knowledge and outcomes
- Supports strategic and operational planning aligned with regulatory requirements (e.g., NRC Performance Outcome 3: Community Engagement (National Regulatory System for Community Housing, 2025))
- Aligns with broader initiatives, including placemaking
- Provides a tested repository of tools and ideas

Context

This Framework is informed by the Community Development stream of the CHIA NSW Conference (June 2025) and the Community Development Australia CHP Network, drawing on workshop outputs and participant contributions.

The term *Community Development* is used inclusively to encompass a wide spectrum of tenant-related work, including tenant engagement, community engagement, participation, place-making, community development and strategic communications. These dimensions are consistent with the NRSCH's requirement for CHPs to demonstrate active and inclusive community engagement as a key element of sustainable tenancies and place-based outcomes.

Strategic Recommendations

- **Link community development directly** to tenancy sustainment, safety, wellbeing and service outcomes.
- **Develop and finalise a shared language and outcomes framework**; circulate a draft for sector feedback.
- **Design future learning sessions** focused on asset-based community development (ABCD), outcomes measurement and implementation strategies.
- **Establish a resource-sharing mechanism** for tools, case studies and models.
- **Explore joint workforce development** including onboarding, training and peer-learning models across CHPs.

Topic 1: Cost of Living and the Impact on Arrears

Key Themes

- **Financial Strain and Prioritisation**
 - Tenants struggle to pay rent due to rising living costs.
 - Food and medical expenses are prioritised over rent, leading to arrears in utilities and water.
- **Community Support and Resource Sharing**
 - Community responses (e.g., food banks, local food cooperatives) help alleviate pressure.
 - Need for directories of low-cost/free meals and groceries for tenants.
- **Education and Budgeting**
 - Suggestions for innovative budgeting training and education to help manage finances. Consideration to low-literacy levels and lack of interest.
- **Policy and Systemic Barriers**
 - Federal budget responses, fund allocation complexities and lack of choice in spending.
 - Some tenants prioritise non-essential expenses over essentials; others believe they do not need to pay rent.
- **Community-Led Solutions**
 - Community greening programs (e.g., Botanic Gardens) help reduce food costs and foster connection.
- **Actions to Explore**
 - Map existing financial capability and emergency relief supports across regions.
 - Identify feasibility of adapting models like benefit maximisation officers (e.g. Scottish model).
 - Compile examples of partnerships with food security and energy efficiency programs.

Topic 2: Property Care

Key Themes

- **Challenges in Property Care**
 - Cost, transport, lack of education and management issues.
 - Waste management – inc. site dumping, hoarding and lack of cleaning resources.
 - Overcrowding, knowledge gaps and lack of support.
- **Education and Upskilling**
 - Greater education at tenancy commencement – sign up.

- Workshops, upskilling, and peer modeling of good behaviors.
- Tenant-led initiatives and empowerment through self-repair skills.
- **Community and Service Partnerships**
 - Clean-up days with councils and contractors. Tip Voucher distribution.
 - Social outcomes clauses in contractor tenders.
 - Partnerships with NDIS, aged care and other services.
- **Incentives and Recognition**
 - Awards and incentives for good property care.
 - Community hubs and tool libraries to support maintenance.
- **Support for Vulnerable Tenants**
 - Case management for mental health and disability support.
 - Additional support for older tenants or those with disabilities.
- **Actions to Explore**
 - Pilot joint tenancy sign-up and maintenance education sessions.
 - Explore tenant-led initiatives (e.g. “bin champions”, shared clean-up days).
 - Share tools used for managing hoarding and squalor in a supportive way.

Topic 3: Community Safety

Key Themes

- **Challenges to Safety**
 - Lack of resources, maintenance, lighting and internal support.
 - Antisocial behavior (ASB), violence, stigma and distrust of authorities.
 - Overcrowding and inappropriate allocations.
- **Community Engagement and Empowerment**
 - Increased community engagement, consultation and participation.
 - Empowering locals to contribute to community upliftment.
 - Place making plan using asset-based community development.
- **Partnerships and Proactive Measures**
 - Collaboration with police, crime prevention teams and councils.
 - Building trust and social cohesion through regular engagement.
- **Cultural and Social Considerations**
 - Cultural understanding, sensitivity and safety.
 - Safe spaces and activities for youth and vulnerable groups.
- **Measurement and Outcomes**
 - Metrics: social impact, vacancy reduction, school attendance, break-ins.

- Improved health, wellbeing and community pride.
- **Actions to Explore**
 - Collate and share successful early intervention and community cohesion models (e.g. skate school, trusted local partners).
 - Advocate for more flexible community safety funding that supports relationship-based work.
 - Capture examples where tenant trust led to reduced incident escalation.

Topic 4: Digital Access

Key Themes

- **Access and Affordability**
 - Need for affordable devices, internet and phone plans.
 - Free Wi-Fi in communal areas and community rooms.
- **Education and Support**
 - Digital literacy workshops and peer education.
 - Intergenerational support (young helping old).
 - Language support and face-to-face education sessions.
- **Community and Organisational Partnerships**
 - Partnerships with IT providers, TAFE and libraries.
 - Grants for laptops and digital resources.
- **Challenges**
 - Older tenants lack skills; limited access in regional areas.
 - Scam awareness and identity theft concerns.
- **Innovation and Resource Sharing**
 - Tool libraries, phone musters and digital storytelling.
 - Use of AI for upskilling and community engagement.
- **Actions to Explore**
 - Explore shared procurement or donation partnerships for low-cost digital devices and Wi-Fi access.
 - Promote peer learning models for digital skills training, avoiding reliance on formal sessions.
 - Investigate potential for digital inclusion funding or corporate partnerships.

Topic 5: How Do We Support and Fund Community Development Actions?

Key Themes

- **Funding Mechanisms**
 - Grants, collaborative grants and donations.

- Internal budget allocation and long-term funding.
- Benchmarking: How much is allocated to community development/engagement including staffing, scholarship events, trainings, etc?
- **Demonstrating Impact**
 - Evidence-based practice and standardised metrics.
 - Social Return on Investment (SROI) and ESG reporting.
- **Partnerships and Collaboration**
 - Stakeholder collaborations, MOUs and pooling resources.
 - Partnerships with councils, philanthropic groups and property developers.
- **Community Involvement and Advocacy**
 - Advocating for place making backbone infrastructure.
 - Asking tenants what they need to thrive.
 - Supporting community spokespersons and fostering relationships.
 - Encouraging local MPs and boards to advocate for funding.
- **Innovation and Policy**
 - Social outcomes clauses in contracts.
 - Community development as core business.
 - Policy embedding (e.g., written into Homes NSW policy).
- **Resource Sharing and Capacity Building**
 - Online platforms for sharing resources.
 - Tool libraries and community hubs.
 - Leveraging industry donations and corporate volunteers.
- **Actions to Explore**
 - Conduct a sector-wide scan of how CHPs resource community development (FTEs, partnerships, project funding).
 - Engage with ACH, CHIA and government stakeholders about creating a minimum investment standard.
 - Incorporate outcome metrics aligned to tenancy sustainment and safety into project proposals.