



Snapshot: Anglicare North Queensland — Cairns region

Introduction

Anglicare North Queensland Limited (Anglicare NQ) provides a range of services and programs that support and strengthen local communities within the North and Far North Queensland Regions. The provision of services extends from Cairns, south to Mackay, north to the Cape and west to Mount Isa. For the purposes of this Snapshot the analysis of available rental properties relate to the Cairns Regional Government Area (Cooktown to Innisfail).

The following homelessness services are offered by Anglicare NQ in Cairns:

- Cairns Homelessness Services Hub
- Cairns HomeStay Support Service
- Cairns Integrated Crisis Accommodation Service (Quigley Street Night Shelter).
- St Margaret's House (Crisis accommodation for young women).
- St John's House (Crisis accommodation for young men).

Findings

On the Snapshot weekend of 27th March 2021, 406 private rentals were advertised for rent in the Cairns region. Private rentals were surveyed from realestate.com.au. 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:

- 23 individual properties were suitable for at least one household type living on income support payments without placing them in housing stress.
- 73 individual properties were suitable for at least one household type living on minimum wage without placing them in housing stress.
- Just one property was found to be both affordable and appropriate for a couple with two children on a Jobseeker Allowance, one child aged less than 5, the other aged less than 10.
- There were no properties deemed affordable and appropriate for a single parent on Jobseeker with one child over the age of 8.
- There were no properties deemed affordable for singles with no children, for Jobseeker Allowance, Disability Support Pension or Youth Allowance either for living at home rate or at Independent Rate.

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)
23	73



Table 1: Rental Affordability, Cairns region, 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 Allowance (both adults)	1	0%
2	Single, two children (one aged less than 5, one aged less than 10)	Parenting Payment Single	0	0%
3	Couple, no children	Age Pension	20	5%
4	Single, one child (aged less than 5)	Parenting Payment Single	2	0%
5	Single, one child (aged over 8)	Jobseeker	0	0%
6	Single	Age Pension	3	1%
7	Single aged over 21	Disability Support Pension	0	0%
8	Single	Jobseeker	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)	61	15%
12	Single, two children (one aged less than 5, one aged less than 10)	Minimum Wage + FTB A & B	3	1%
13	Single	Minimum Wage	12	3%
14	Couple, two children (one aged less than 5, one aged less than 10)	Minimum Wage + Parenting payment (partnered) + FTB A & B	17	4%
Total No of Properties		406		

Discussion

Rental affordability and rental availability are the most significant causal factors increasing vulnerability amongst all household types on income support payments or minimum wage who are attempting to access secure and sustainable tenancies. “Cairns has never seen a lower vacancy rate” (March 2020 - Tom Quaid, the REIQ’s Far North Queensland representative). A median weekly rent price for all properties on the date of the snapshot at \$400, the high cost of living including food, medical needs and electricity continues to impact low income household types negatively. This often leads to an increased risk to households in areas such as health and wellbeing, entry into all tiers of homelessness and debt as a result of desperation and the use of same day lenders to make ends meet.



The 2021 snapshot data indicates a 45% overall decrease in available properties to 406 in comparison to the 2020 snapshot. For the 2021 snapshot there was a decrease of 334 properties compared to the 2020 snapshot of 740.

Cairns residents both housed and / or searching for housing continue to share an uncertain economic future. The removal of the Corona Virus Supplement has again highlighted the need for an increase in secure, suitable and appropriate rental market stock as well as raising the rate of Jobseeker. The 45% decrease in rental vacancies over the previous year, suggests that there are multiple contributing factors placing increased pressure on people searching for rentals in the Cairns region. In particular, demand and supply issues confirms competition remains high for the limited available rentals in the region. This can often lead to people on low incomes or Centrelink entitlements being priced out of the market completely, overlooked through application processes or unable to meet affordability criteria. Considering the overall limited rental properties available, interstate migration at *'90% above the decade average'* (Corelogic) to the region could be contributing to an increasing demand and supply issue.

Cohorts contending for security of tenure in this scenario continue to be young people with zero affordable or other appropriate housing options. With ongoing limited rental stock and a shortfall of Social Housing properties, numerous young people continue to exit various arrangements including statutory care and Crisis Accommodation Services into homelessness. Couples with two children on Minimum wage + FTB A will also find it difficult to navigate an appropriate and affordable property with a 62% decrease in overall suitable and sustainable properties identified in the 2021 Snapshot(61) for this group compared to the 2020 Snapshot (159). Family groups experiencing episodes of homelessness often become reliant on hotel/motel accommodation for lack of other options. This type of accommodation has no security of tenure and often exceeds the cost of a rental. The additional cost of this accommodation type means that they can't afford to eat decent food i.e. this accommodation type lacks cooking facilities, fill a prescription, pay for transport or buy clothes. This scenario also presents issues for families with school aged children, often episodes of homelessness can displace family groups outside of their school catchment area increasing risk of disengagement and increasing negative pressures on an already at risk situation.

Policy Implications

In the Cairns Region on the date of the Snapshot, there were no affordable properties for single people on Jobseeker, Youth Allowance or Disability Support Pension; there were no affordable properties for single parents with one child aged over 8 on Jobseeker or with two children parenting payment single. For people on the Age Pension, listings also have little to offer. Just three properties were affordable and appropriate for a single person on an Age Pension (1%), all of which were in boarding houses with shared facilities.

In the wake of the Coronavirus pandemic, earning sufficient income and sustaining employment has become more difficult, this is resulting in increased demand for homelessness related products in an otherwise unseen cohort of service users. We need to raise the rate of Jobseeker to lift people out of poverty and continue to debate employment security strategies so people can pay their rent and to prevent them from falling into homelessness. Even with the \$25/week increase on specific government payments from April 1st 2021, it could be suggested that this will not increase housing affordability across the board.



Finding rentals within the private rental market will remain tough for people experiencing all tiers of homelessness including rough sleepers, people exiting short term accommodation, transitional and or crisis homelessness accommodation models due to ongoing high demand, competitive application processes and decreased supply.

Considering the 45% decrease in available rental properties in the region we must invest in affordable and appropriate homes for everyone.

- Federal Government reviews and increases income support payments relative to the rental market and cost of living
- Invest further into early intervention tenancy support models
- Invest in new social and affordable homes
- Debate employment security strategies

Conclusion

It is clear that, Cairns continues to face a housing and homelessness crisis, with over 2000 people on the social housing register of need, and just 406 properties listed in this year's snapshot and a median rental price of \$400 a week. A flat increase of \$25 a week for all Centrelink payment types, minus the COVID entitlements is unlikely to have a marked increase in the improvement of housing availability and affordability. Simply put, the housing stock just isn't there to meet the housing demand, with the vast majority of people on all payment types being outpriced in this region. A significant investment in social housing infrastructure is required to rectify this, as a suggested policy measure for the Cairns Region.