

Rental Affordability Snapshot 2026

Anglicare NSW South, NSW West & ACT

From pressure to permanence:
Rental affordability, a structural
challenge for low-income Australians



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This year's snapshot

Each year, Anglicare NSW South, NSW West & ACT evaluates the private rental market to determine the affordability and appropriateness of rental properties for households on low incomes. This process involves taking a snapshot of thousands of rental properties listed on *realestate.com.au* on a single weekend. This year, our Snapshot occurred on the weekend 14/15 March 2026.

The 2026 Snapshot continues to highlight the severe lack of affordable options for low-income households, particularly those reliant on government income support and, increasingly, low-income working households earning the minimum wage. Across regions, these households are priced out of the private rental market, often paying unsustainable proportions of their income in rent or experiencing homelessness through sleeping rough, couch surfing, or severe overcrowding.

This Snapshot covers the following regions:

- ACT and Queanbeyan
- NSW South Coast
- Southern Tablelands (Goulburn Mulwaree, Yass and surrounds)
- Riverina (including the Snowy Mountains)

This report was developed in collaboration with Anglicare partner St John's Care, drawing on their experience delivering emergency relief services in Canberra.

Overview of current rental affordability situation

Rental affordability in Australia remains under severe pressure in 2026, with the private rental market continuing to operate under conditions of chronic undersupply and sustained demand. While the pace of advertised rent increases has moderated in parts of the country since late 2024, this easing has not resulted in improved access to affordable housing for low-income households. Instead, evidence suggests that rental markets are stabilising at historically high price points, leaving affordability out of reach for many renters. (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2025; SQM Research, 2026).

National vacancy rates remain at critically low levels. As of March 2026, Australia's residential vacancy rate stood at approximately 1.0 percent, well below the 2–3 percent range generally associated with a balanced rental market. Vacancy rates in Canberra and many regional and coastal markets remain similarly constrained, intensifying competition for available properties and limiting choice for renters. (SQM Research, 2026)

These market conditions disproportionately affect households on low incomes. National research consistently shows that rental dwellings are now classified as critically unaffordable for households reliant on income support payments such as JobSeeker Payment, Youth Allowance, Parenting Payment Single, Age Pension, and Disability Support Pension across nearly all regions of Australia. For these households, the private rental market offers little realistic opportunity to secure housing without experiencing severe housing stress.

Low-income working households are also facing increasing difficulty. Despite earning wages and, in some cases, accessing government supplements, these households are increasingly unable to compete for lower-priced rental properties. Research indicates that moderate-income households are remaining in the rental sector for longer, reducing turnover and displacing lower-income renters from the affordable end of the market.

Recent policy measures—including increases to Commonwealth Rent Assistance and indexation of income support payments—have provided some relief against rising costs, but have not kept pace with prevailing rental prices. Analysis from Anglicare Australia and other welfare organisations consistently shows that these measures have limited impact where affordable rental properties are largely unavailable. (Australian Government, Department of Social Services, 2025)

Rental unaffordability continues to place sustained pressure on homelessness services across Australia. When households are unable to access affordable private rentals, pathways out of homelessness are blocked, prolonging stays in emergency and temporary accommodation and increasing reliance on crisis services. This is particularly evident for families with children, women and children escaping domestic and family violence, and people exiting institutional settings, for whom access to affordable private rentals is often essential to achieve long-term housing stability.

Overall, current evidence indicates that rental affordability pressures are structural rather than short-term. Persistently low vacancy rates, insufficient construction of new rental housing and population-driven demand continue to outpace income growth for low-income households. As a result, access to affordable and appropriate private rental housing remains highly restricted in 2026, with the greatest impacts falling on those already experiencing financial vulnerability.

What we found

The 2026 Rental Affordability Snapshot shows that access to affordable and appropriate private rental housing remains severely constrained across all four regions assessed. The findings indicate that the private rental market continues to fail households on the lowest incomes, while conditions have also worsened for many low-income working households.

Very limited access for households on income support

Across all regions, households reliant on income support payments—including JobSeeker Payment, Youth Allowance, Parenting Payment Single, Age Pension and Disability Support Pension—have little to no access to affordable and appropriate rental properties.

In most cases, there were no properties available at all that met both affordability and suitability thresholds for these households. Where listings did exist, they represented a negligible share of the rental market, leaving households with no realistic options in the private sector without experiencing housing stress, overcrowding or homelessness.

These findings reinforce that income support payments remain well below the level required to secure housing in current market conditions, even when supplements and rent assistance are taken into account.



Narrowing access for low-income working households

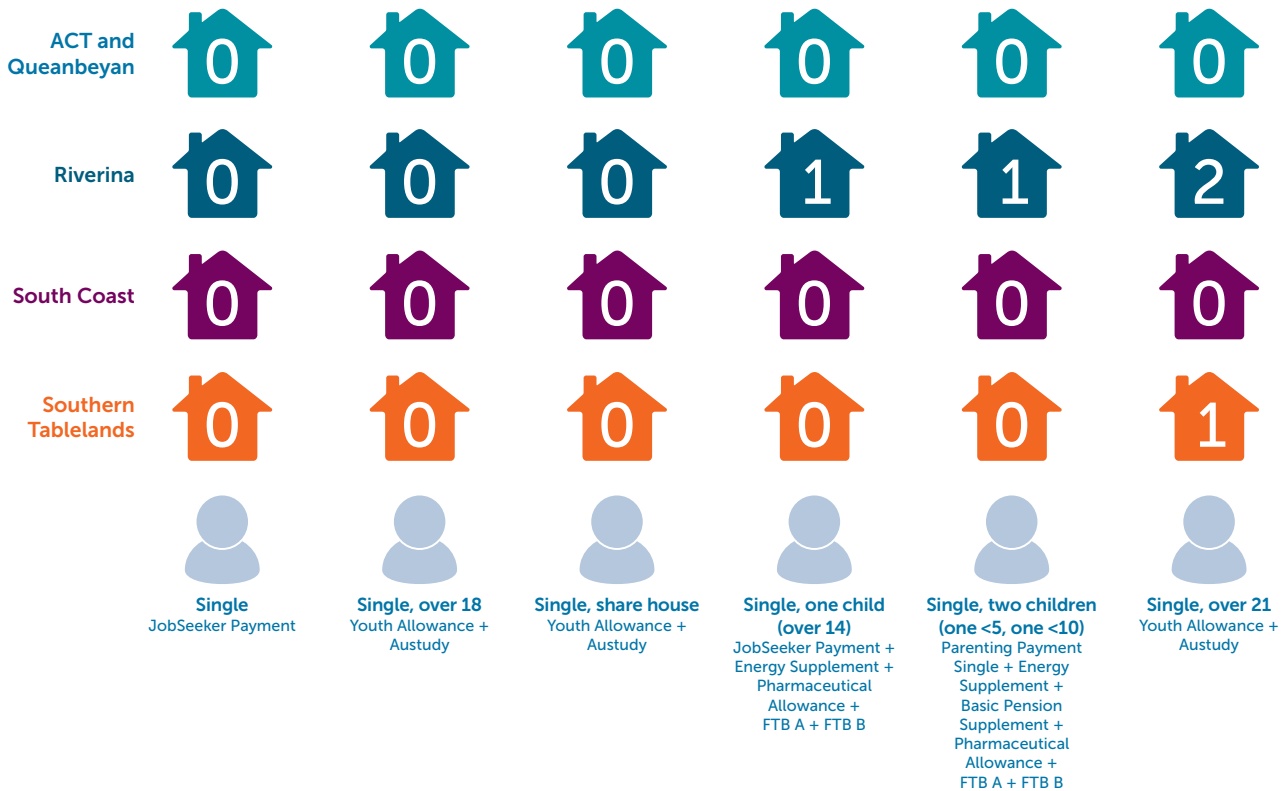
The Snapshot also shows deteriorating outcomes for low-income households in paid work, including single adults and single parents earning the minimum wage or combining wages with government payments.

While these households retain some access to the private rental market, that access is:

- limited to a small and shrinking proportion of listings,
- increasingly restricted to specific dwelling types or locations, and
- highly vulnerable to even modest rent increases.

This indicates that paid employment alone is no longer sufficient to ensure housing security for many low-income renters, particularly in markets characterised by tight supply and intense competition.

Households with the lowest number of affordable and appropriate listings



Dual-income households retain relative advantage, but face constraints

Households combining multiple income sources—particularly dual-income couples with children—continue to have greater access to affordable and appropriate rental properties than other household types.

However, even for these households, affordable options make up only a minority of total listings, indicating that the private rental market is becoming increasingly selective. This relative advantage highlights that housing affordability is now more strongly determined by income pooling than by wage growth or rental availability alone.

A pattern of entrenchment across regions

Across all regions, the Snapshot reveals a consistent pattern:

- exclusion for households on income support is **persistent**,
- access for low-income workers is **diminishing**, and
- affordability pressures are **not easing**, despite moderation in rent growth or income indexation.

Together, these findings demonstrate that the rental affordability crisis in 2026 is structural rather than temporary. Without significant intervention—particularly increased investment in social and affordable housing—these pressures are likely to continue.

The following sections examine how these findings play out across the four regions assessed in the 2026 Snapshot, highlighting both shared pressures and region-specific challenges.

TABLE 1.
Rental affordability by household type

Household Type	Payment Type	ACT and Queanbeyan		Riverina		South Coast		Southern Tablelands	
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Single	JobSeeker Payment	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Single	Age Pension + Pension Supplement + Energy Supplement	0	0	3	0.6	0	0	1	0.9
Single aged over 18	Youth Allowance + Austudy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Single aged over 21	Disability Support Pension + Energy Supplement + Pension Supplement	0	0	2	0.4	0	0	1	0.9
Single in share house	Youth Allowance + Austudy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Single, one child (aged over 14)	JobSeeker Payment + Energy Supplement + Pharmaceutical Allowance + FTB A + FTB B	0	0	1	0.2	0	0	0	0
Single, one child (aged less than 5)	Parenting Payment Single + Energy Supplement + Basic Pension Supplement + Pharmaceutical Allowance + FTB A + FTB B	0	0	3	0.6	0	0	0	0
Single, two children (one aged less than 5, one aged less than 10)	Parenting Payment Single + Energy Supplement + Basic Pension Supplement + Pharmaceutical Allowance + FTB A + FTB B	0	0	1	0.2	0	0	0	0
Couple	Age Pension + Pension Supplement + Energy Supplement	0	0	14	2.9	0	0	1	0.9
Couple, two children (one aged less than 5, one aged less than 10)	JobSeeker Payment (both) + Energy Supplements + FTB A + FTB B	0	0	2	0.4	0	0	0	0
Single	Minimum Wage	1	0.1	9	1.9	0	0	1	0.9
Single, two children (one aged less than 5, one aged less than 10)	Minimum Wage + Parenting Payment Single + Energy Supplement + Basic Pension Supplement + Pharmaceutical Allowance + FTB A + FTB B	0	0	30	6.3	0	0	5	4.6
Couple, two children (one aged less than 5, one aged less than 10)	Minimum Wage (both adults) + FTB A	10	1	176	37	0	0	34	31
Couple, two children (one aged less than 5, one aged less than 10)	Minimum Wage + Parenting Payment Partnered + Energy Supplement + FTB A + FTB B	0	0	30	6.3	13	16	5	4.6

ACT and Queanbeyan

In ACT & Queanbeyan, the 2026 Snapshot confirms that rental affordability has shifted from acute pressure to structural exclusion, leaving low-income households with little realistic access to the private rental market.

While advertised rent growth in Canberra has slowed at points since late 2024, evidence suggests this reflects households reaching the limits of affordability rather than any meaningful improvement in housing supply. Rental supply in the ACT remains critically tight, with vacancy rates around 1.1 percent, sustaining strong upward pressure on rents and limiting choice for renters. (SQM Research, 2026)

Low-income working households face strong competition for a limited share of rental properties, as moderate-income households remain in the rental sector for longer, reducing turnover at the lower end of the market. Even for dual-income households, affordable and appropriate properties remain a minority of listings.

While the ACT has some of the strongest renter protections in Australia, the Snapshot reinforces that regulatory safeguards cannot compensate for a lack of affordable rental supply. Protections against no-cause evictions and limits on rent increases may improve stability for existing tenants, but they do not improve access for households locked out of the market entirely.

In the ACT, limited access to affordable private rentals is compounded by extended waiting periods for public housing. While applicants assessed as being in immediate crisis may be housed more quickly, overall wait times remain substantial and vary significantly by level of need and property requirements. Recent ACT Government data indicates that applicants assessed under standard public housing categories routinely face waits exceeding five years, while even households with high or complex needs may wait several years before being offered appropriate housing. Property size, household composition and preferred location further influence waiting times, particularly for families requiring larger dwellings. (ACT Government, 2026)

For residents in Queanbeyan, access to public housing is governed by the NSW system, where wait times for general applicants are also lengthy. As part of a high-demand allocation zone, general housing applicants commonly face waits of five to ten years or longer, depending on household size, property type and availability. While priority applicants experiencing acute need may be housed more quickly, demand continues to exceed supply across the region. The combination of limited affordable private rentals in Queanbeyan and prolonged public housing wait times leaves many low-income households with few realistic alternatives to secure stable housing. (NSW Government, Department of Communities and Justice, 2026)



of ACT and Queanbeyan properties are both affordable *and* appropriate across all household types

Key findings: ACT and Queanbeyan

- **No properties** were affordable and appropriate for households reliant on Youth Allowance, JobSeeker Payment, Parenting Payment, Age Pension or Disability Support Payment
- Only **one property** (0.1 percent of listings) was affordable and appropriate for a single adult earning the minimum wage
- Even for dual-income families where both adults earned the minimum wage, affordable and appropriate properties accounted for **less than 1 percent of all listings**, demonstrating near-total exclusion from the private rental market

The findings indicate that the private rental market in the ACT and Queanbeyan is functionally inaccessible to low-income households, including those in paid employment. While regulatory protections provide greater stability for existing tenants, they do not expand access for those unable to secure a tenancy in the first place. For households on low incomes, particularly those reliant on income support, the private rental market in the ACT increasingly functions as a barrier rather than a pathway to housing security.

Riverina (including the Snowy Mountains)

The Riverina rental market remains under sustained affordability pressure in 2026, with limited supply and persistently low vacancy rates constraining access for low-income households. Vacancy rates remain at or below 1 percent, maintaining strong competition and limiting renter choice.

Affordability pressures in the Riverina are intensified by incomes that sit below metropolitan averages. While rents may appear lower in absolute terms, these costs consume an unsustainable share of low-income household budgets, demonstrating that affordability must be assessed in relation to income adequacy as well as price.

Low-income working households also face increasing difficulty accessing rentals, as ongoing population pressures and limited new supply intensify competition for lower-priced properties.

Constraints in the private rental market are further compounded by lengthy public housing wait times across the Riverina. General applicants in the region commonly face waits ranging from five to more than ten years, with particularly long delays in high-demand centres such as Wagga Wagga. Available evidence indicates that two-bedroom properties in Wagga Wagga may attract wait times of up to a decade, while even smaller dwellings can involve several years of waiting, depending on household composition and availability (NSW Government, Department of Communities and Justice, 2026; Committee 4 Wagga, 2024). These extended wait times leave many low-income households with limited alternatives when private rental options are unaffordable or unavailable, increasing the likelihood of prolonged housing stress and reliance on temporary or insecure accommodation. (NSW Government, Department of Communities and Justice, 2026)

Key findings: Riverina

- **No properties** were affordable and appropriate for a single person reliant on Youth Allowance or JobSeeker Payment
- **Less than 1 percent** of listings were affordable and appropriate for households reliant on Parenting Payment, Disability Support Payment or Aged Pension
- **Less than 2 percent** of listings were affordable and appropriate for single adults on the minimum wage
- Dual-income families had greater access, though affordable properties still accounted for just over a third of listings

Overall, in the Riverina the Snapshot illustrates how tightening rental conditions and below-average regional incomes intersect to constrain housing options for low-income households. Even where rents remain lower than in metropolitan areas, limited supply and low vacancy rates leave little flexibility for renters. Those on low-incomes face ongoing exclusion from the private rental market, with only limited and fragile access for some low-income working families.

South Coast NSW

The South Coast continues to experience some of the most acute rental affordability pressures in the 2026 Snapshot. Limited housing supply, persistently low vacancy rates, disaster-related displacement and tourism-driven demand continue to constrain access for low-income households.

Lingering impacts from natural disasters and ongoing pressure from short-term letting reduce the availability of long-term rental housing, intensifying competition. For low-income households, this limits pathways out of crisis accommodation and into stable housing.

Public and social housing wait times on the NSW South Coast further intensify housing insecurity for low-income households in the region. Under the NSW social housing system, many South Coast locations—including parts of the Illawarra and surrounding coastal areas—are classified in the highest waiting-time categories, with general applicants commonly facing waits of ten years or more. Demand for social housing in regional NSW continues to exceed available supply, and the South Coast's high housing demand, driven by its coastal location and limited stock, places additional pressure on an already constrained system (NSW Government, Department of Communities and Justice, 2026)

In this context, prolonged social housing wait times significantly limit exit pathways for households unable to secure affordable private rentals. For low-income renters on the South Coast, extended waits for public housing compound the effects of rental market exclusion, increasing the likelihood of prolonged housing stress, overcrowding or reliance on temporary and crisis accommodation.

Key findings: South Coast NSW

- **No affordable and appropriate properties** were available for households on income support
- Only a very small proportion of listings were affordable for low-income working households
- Dual-income families had the greatest access, but affordable options remained low, with just 13 listings meeting affordability and appropriateness thresholds

In the South Coast region, the Snapshot highlights a rental environment shaped by persistent supply shortages, strong competition and the lasting effects of disaster-related displacement. These pressures have narrowed the availability of long-term rentals and heightened competition at the lower end of the market. Overall, low-income households on the South Coast continue to face effective exclusion from the private rental market and demonstrate that regional and coastal areas can no longer provide an affordable alternative to metropolitan housing markets.

Southern Tablelands (Goulburn Mulwaree, Yass and surrounds)

Rental affordability pressures have intensified in Goulburn, Yass and surrounding areas, reflecting the spread of housing stress into commuter-adjacent regional centres. Increased demand from households priced out of metropolitan markets, combined with limited supply and low vacancy rates, has reduced access for local low-income renters.

Competition is exacerbated by commuter demand, inter-regional housing placements, and constrained new supply, reinforcing displacement rather than alleviating it.

Public housing wait times further compound housing insecurity for low-income households in the Goulburn region, which is currently classified as a high-demand area. General applicants in this zone typically face wait times of five to more than ten years, depending on household size, dwelling type and location requirements (NSW Government, Department of Communities and Justice, 2026)

With limited access to affordable private rentals and prolonged waits for social housing, many low-income households have no viable pathway to secure housing, increasing the risk of prolonged housing stress, overcrowding and reliance on temporary or inappropriate accommodation.

Key findings: Southern Tablelands

- **No affordable and appropriate properties** were available for families on Parenting Payment or JobSeeker Payment
- Single adults without dependents had limited access, largely constrained to small or shared dwellings
- Families reliant on a single minimum-wage income faced near-total exclusion

Taken together, the Snapshot findings show that low-income households in Goulburn, Yass and surrounding areas are increasingly caught between a highly competitive private rental market and prolonged waits for public housing. Growing commuter demand, limited new supply and restricted rental turnover have narrowed options for local renters on low incomes, leaving many households with few viable housing pathways. In this context, affordability challenges in the region are becoming more entrenched, particularly for families and single-income households, who face heightened risks of displacement and prolonged housing insecurity.

Key findings across all regions

- Affordable and appropriate rental housing is scarce for all low-income households.
- Families with children, especially those reliant on income support, face the greatest disadvantage.
- Single adults are more likely than families to find affordable rentals, though options are limited and often unsuitable.
- Commonwealth Rent Assistance remains insufficient to bridge the gap between incomes and rents.
- Regional areas no longer provide consistent affordability relief for low-income renters.
- The private rental market is failing to meet the housing needs of people on low incomes.

Conclusion

The 2026 Rental Affordability Snapshot demonstrates that housing affordability remains a severe and growing challenge across the ACT and southern New South Wales. Without substantial policy intervention—including increased investment in social and affordable housing, stronger renter protections and more adequate income support payments—low-income households will continue to be locked out of safe, stable and affordable housing.

Housing unaffordability has consequences far beyond shelter alone. Anglicare Australia has consistently highlighted the links between housing insecurity and poorer health outcomes, reduced workforce participation, increased demand on crisis services and long-term public cost. Without decisive action, the ongoing exclusion of low-income households from secure housing will continue to undermine social and economic wellbeing across communities.

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