

2024 IN REVIEW, 2025 IN SIGHT

National Planning Changes

December 2024



With the next Federal election expected in the first half of 2025, there has been significant discussion and movement across the country to boost housing supply. Amid this drive, there have been changes to planning to supercharge housing supply, advanced planning assessments, and ensure timely delivery. Many advocacy groups, research institutes and associations have highlighted the challenges in achieving timely planning outcomes, as Australia faces a once in a generation housing supply crisis. Late last year, Federal and State governments moved to address planning reform through the National Planning Reform Blueprint. Since then, each state and territory has moved to deliver change but has this been effective and what lies ahead for 2025 as we veer ever closer to the federal election?

“URBIS BRINGS A DISTINCT ADVANTAGE BY OFFERING A NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE, DELIVERING DEEP INSIGHTS INTO PLANNING POLICY POSITIONS, REFORMS, AND THEIR IMPACTS BOTH NATIONALLY AND WITHIN INDIVIDUAL JURISDICTIONS.”

Ashley Lane, Planning Group Director

NATIONAL PLANNING REFORM

The national approach to planning reform has gained importance since the announcement of measures to tackle the housing crisis. The Planning Reform Blueprint has been progressing across the states and territories, with the Federal Government introducing additional measures to enhance planning and housing delivery nationwide. Many of these initiatives have emphasised good urban planning, sustainability, and housing delivery supported through precincts, strategic policy, and sound planning principles. Some of the initiatives delivered throughout 2024 included:

- Urban Policy Forum
- National Urban Policy
- Urban Precincts and Partnership Program
- Regional Precincts and Partnerships Program
- Housing Support Program
- Thriving Suburbs Program
- State of the Cities Report (projected by end of 2024)
- Minister for Cities, Hon Jenny McAllister
- National Productivity Fund

Through the actions embedded in the Planning Reform Blueprint, along with the above initiatives, there has been a national focus on addressing the housing crisis and fulfilling promises to enhance housing supply and delivery.

Despite significant challenges, the concerted efforts outlined in the Planning Reform Blueprint and related initiatives demonstrate a strong commitment to improving housing outcomes nationwide. Continued collaboration and innovation will be essential to ensure that these efforts translate into tangible benefits for communities, ultimately leading to a more equitable and sustainable housing landscape.



THE NATIONAL AGENDA DRIVING JURISDICTIONAL CHANGE

The targets set by the National Housing Accord commenced in July this year. Nationally, fundamental steps have been taken by each jurisdiction to drive change in their planning systems. This is promoting the delivery of well-located housing and meeting the agreed targets under the Accord. However, planning policy measures take time to have an effect, and some may not deliver the intended results quickly enough. Consequently, some jurisdictions are exploring ways to expedite the assessment of planning decisions in 2025. NSW and Victoria have made early announcements on potential solutions, including designated pathways and alternative approval authorities.

Much like in 2024, we are still in the grips of a housing crisis, with few measures realising measurable changes in housing supply trends. Current national trends indicate a continued decline in housing supply, and concerning statistics reveal that this is impacting our cities and metropolitan regions the most, as people leave these areas in search of more affordable housing options. This crisis is also being linked to ongoing declines in birth rates, now an all-time low of 1.50. Without continued and sustained intervention, cities are facing an uncertain future. At Urbis, we have analysed these trends and have been monitoring the impact and effectiveness of key planning policy interventions across the nation.

Themes and trends have emerged across jurisdictions to deliver on the Accord, including streamlining planning decision-making, densification around key transport nodes, infrastructure delivery and coordination, addressing collaboration between government agencies, and balancing both greenfield and infill growth.

Understanding government agendas and the interplay between private development and their role in delivering housing and partnerships with government to drive housing supply—both private market and social and affordable housing—is at the core of what Urbis' National Planning team does. Below, we have provided an overview of the key planning and housing reform initiatives in each jurisdiction and provide a barometer on what's in store for 2025.





Australian Capital Territory

The ACT has been actively pursuing a comprehensive reform of its planning system for several years. This ambitious reform agenda aligns with recent agreements aimed at increasing housing supply and enhancing housing diversity. The recent election results saw the re-election of the incumbent government, which is committed to advancing its planning reform initiatives. These initiatives are designed to deliver more strategically located homes and significantly boost housing supply across the territory.

Central to these planning system reforms are the introduction of district strategies, the updated Territory Plan, and new design guides. These elements are crucial in supporting sustainable growth and facilitating the development of medium-density housing in desirable locations. The reforms, which received approval last year, are currently in the implementation phase. This ongoing process is set to continue throughout the coming year, ensuring that the ACT's planning framework evolves to meet the needs of its growing population.

The district strategies will provide a clear vision for the development of specific areas within the ACT, ensuring that growth is managed in a way that enhances liveability and meets community needs. The updated Territory Plan will offer a more flexible and responsive framework for land use and development, while the new design guides will ensure that new developments are of high quality and contribute positively to the urban environment. Overall, these reforms represent a significant step forward in the ACT's efforts to create a more efficient, sustainable, and inclusive planning system.

Key reform initiatives:

Implementation of the new planning system
Housing near rapid transport connections
Final Territory Plan
'Missing Middle' design guide

Northern Territory

Over the past few years, the Northern Territory Government has been implementing planning reforms in phases to help deliver a best practice system which delivers better planning outcomes, community engagement and encourage new investment. There has been ongoing consultation for future stages with early stages and phases now implemented.

Key reform initiatives:

Ongoing Planning Reform Implementation
Infrastructure Plan and Pipeline and Infrastructure Audit
Strategic Directions Planning Policy Discussion Paper
Release of Crown Land for residential development

New South Wales

Throughout 2024, NSW has seen significant changes in planning and housing policies. These changes have primarily focused on delivering streamlined planning outcomes and increasing the supply and affordability of homes. With the current government now more than halfway through its first term in over 12 years, there have been consistent announcements regarding both planning and housing reforms—articles [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).

In response to what has been widely regarded as a broken planning system, the NSW Government has taken decisive action to address the housing crisis. Throughout the year, several major initiatives have been unveiled, aimed at pulling planning levers and fostering a streamlined housing market from DA to construction. While some of these measures have sparked controversy and resistance from local councils and community groups, there has been substantial collaboration across all levels of government to drive meaningful change and improvements.

Central to the NSW policy reform agenda has been a comprehensive approach to planning reform. Both Parliament and the NSW Productivity and Equality Commission have identified significant issues within the current system, attributing these problems to the ongoing housing crisis. As a result, the government has prioritised reforms that set the targets, streamline planning processes, and reduce bureaucratic obstacles.

Key initiatives announced in 2024 include the introduction of new zoning laws to facilitate higher-density developments in strategic areas, incentives for developers to build affordable housing, and measures to expedite the approval process for new housing projects. Additionally, there has been a focus on integrating innovative technologies and practices in both planning and construction to enhance efficiency and reduce costs.

Key reform initiatives:

State assessment and state-led rezoning pathway
Low rise medium housing
Housing pattern book and streamlined planning pathway
Housing Delivery Authority (announced)
Commencement of the transport orientated development program
Housing taskforce
Audit of government land
Manufactured homes pilot
Housing targets for metro and regional areas
Budget commitments to social and affordable housing
Revised Urban Development Program
Housing acceleration fund



Queensland

2024 has ushered in a period of significant transformation, highlighted by the election of a new government in Queensland for the first time in over a decade. Throughout the year, the outgoing government had been working on a series of reforms aimed at increasing the supply of housing and released the Homes for Queenslanders policy, spearheading their commitment to deliver 1 million new homes by 2046, including 53,000 social houses. These efforts were part of a broader, ongoing system-wide response to address housing needs that has been in place for some time.

With the new government now taking the reins, Queensland is entering a phase of continued reform and enhancement in both planning and housing delivery. The incoming administration is expected to build on the foundations laid by its predecessor, introducing new initiatives and policies to further improve the state's planning framework as well as a renewed focus on increasing productivity in the construction sector

These initiatives are crucial for ensuring that the planning system is not only effective but also robust enough to handle future challenges. There have been early announcements of efforts to streamline processes, reduce bureaucratic hurdles, and promote sustainable development practices. By doing so, the state hopes to create a more dynamic and responsive planning system to deliver more housing supply to the market, and ease affordability across the board.

Overall, 2024 marks the beginning of a new chapter for Queensland, one that promises ongoing improvements and advancements in the way the state plans and delivers housing. The commitment to reform and innovation will be essential in ensuring that Queensland remains a vibrant and liveable place for all its residents in the face of significant growth ahead of the 2032 Brisbane Games.

Key reform initiatives:

Incentivising Infill Development Fund
Increase Housing targets under regional plans
Commenced introduction of Distinctly Queensland Design Series to streamline housing delivery and implement best practice design
State Facilitated Development process
Introduction of abilities for Assessment Authorities to condition Affordable Housing into Planning Regulations
Streamlining Planning Minister's Powers to direct local planning instrument changes and reduction in regulatory processes for Planning Scheme Amendments

South Australia

In recent years, South Australia has placed a strong emphasis on planning reform, with the aim of streamlining and modernising the state's planning system. These reforms have touched on various critical aspects, including zoning regulations, development assessment processes, and community engagement practices.

With the Planning and Design Code now firmly in place, the state's focus has shifted towards strategic planning. Currently, South Australia is in the process of updating regional plans that will encompass the entire state. These plans are designed to address the unique needs and opportunities of each region, ensuring that development is both sustainable and aligned with local priorities. In addition, new planning dashboards and methods for tracking and fostering a culture of accountability and transparency are being rolled out. These instruments are fully electronic and dynamic, representing a significant leap forward in how planning information is accessed and utilised.

Furthermore, the state is placing a strong emphasis on infrastructure coordination as a driver for housing supply and delivery. Through the infrastructure coordination group and the creation of the Department of Housing and Urban Development there is an aim to coordinate efforts across multiple government departments and agencies to continue to drive efficiencies.

Key reform initiatives:

Housing Roadmap
Department of Housing and Urban Development
Regional planning portal
Code amendment dashboard
Amendments to limit restrictions on ancillary, student accommodation and built to rent
Greater Adelaide Regional Plan updates
Residential Land Supply Dashboard
Future Living Code Amendment
Infrastructure coordination group
Well located government land



Victoria

Over the past several years, the Victorian Government has progressively adjusted its planning system, first to stimulate development in the wake of COVID-19 and more recently, to address housing challenges and rectify planning shortfalls. The reform initiatives introduced following the release of Victoria's Housing Statement in September 2023 have garnered widespread industry support. Throughout 2024, these initiatives have sought to enhance planning efficiency and facilitate housing delivery in both infill and greenfield locations.

Key reforms include expanding the State Government's Development Facilitation Program, setting draft housing targets for local councils, focusing on activity centres, and implementing a comprehensive greenfield housing plan. These measures are significant steps towards accelerating housing supply across the state. While we await details on how they will be implemented in decision-making, the draft housing targets set clear, ambitious goals for the number of new homes, linking policy and delivery to align planning efforts with growth projections.

The supercharged activity centres program aims to unlock higher-density development in identified areas through a replicable framework, promoting vibrant, mixed-use communities with access to amenities, social infrastructure, and public transport. The initial pilot program of 10 Activity Centres has been expanded with the next 25 by year end.

The 10-year greenfield plan provides increased certainty for developing new residential communities and employment areas in Melbourne's growth corridors, balancing future development between infill and the urban fringe.

In a significant move towards legislative reform, the Housing Reform Bill introduced in the last State Parliament session, proposes changes to various legislation governing property and residential tenancy.

It aims to address housing affordability, protect renter's rights, and make the planning system faster to facilitate more housing and employment opportunities.

In early December, the Victorian Government released its Economic Growth Statement, outlining initiatives to stimulate economic growth through four key action areas:

- 1. Open Doors: Supporting business investment, expansion and innovation.
- 2. Cut Red Tape: Removing regulation to streamline business operations.
- 3. Build New Skills: Supporting workforce development and training.
- 4. Reach Every Community: Supporting regional economies and businesses.

A new industry policy will be released in early 2025 to drive innovation, productivity, competitiveness, and sustainability in priority sectors. These reforms—and those anticipated imminently—have been widely praised as positive steps towards expediting housing supply across Victoria. While more needs to be done, the Victorian Government's proactive approach is making significant strides to address housing shortages and create a more efficient, responsive planning system.

Key reform initiatives:

Activity Centres program
Future Homes Program
10-year Greenfield Plan
Disbanding of the VPA – to be consolidated into the Department of Transport and Planning
Development Contributions Reform
Draft Housing Targets





Tasmania

Following the state election in March 2024, the returning Tasmanian Government has been continuing their work to advance planning reform to make the system more efficient with a stronger emphasis on strategic planning. Several reforms announced in 2023 have continued to be implemented, with many of these due to be completed throughout 2025.

The ongoing reforms include measures to simplify planning regulations, improve coordination between different levels of government, and enhance community engagement in the planning process. By focusing on strategic planning, the government aims to create a more coherent and forward-looking framework that can better accommodate growth and development while preserving Tasmania's unique environmental and cultural heritage.

As these reforms progress, the Tasmanian Government remains committed to working closely with stakeholders, including local councils, industry representatives, and the broader community, to ensure that the new planning system is both effective and responsive to the needs of all Tasmanians.

Key reform initiatives:

Land Use Planning and Approvals (Development Assessment Panels) Bill
Tasmanian Planning Scheme Rollout
Review of Regional Land Use Strategies
Tasmanian Housing Strategy
Regional Land Use Strategies Review
State Planning Provisions Review implementation

Western Australia

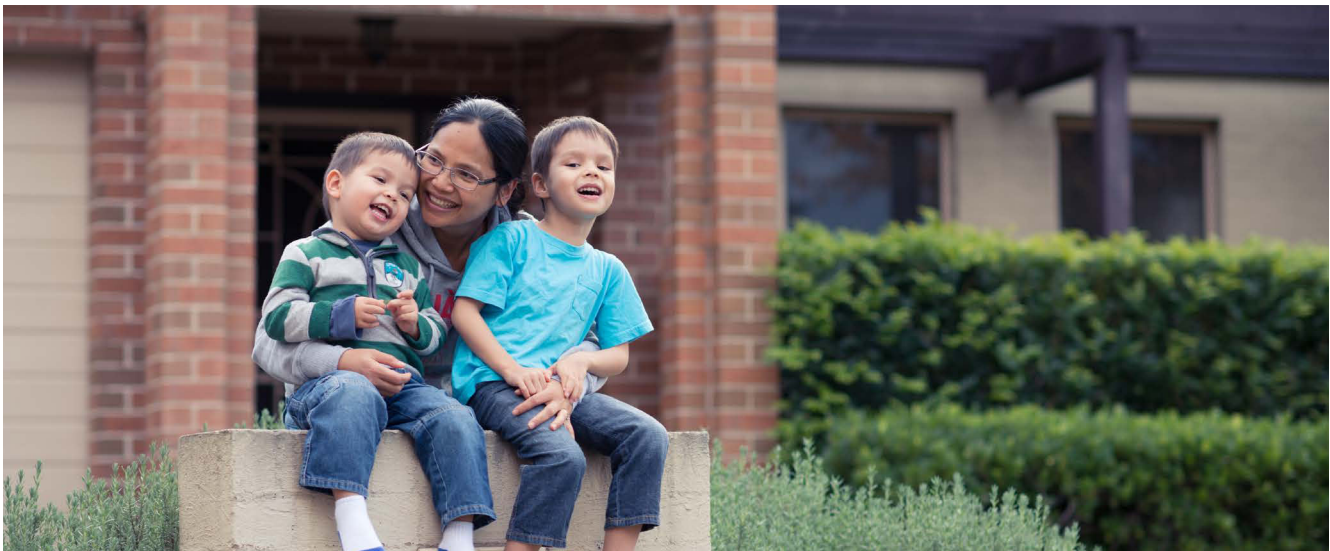
Over the past decade, Western Australia has been actively engaged in a comprehensive planning reform initiative. These efforts have intensified over the past year, focusing on several key objectives: promoting consistency across the numerous local government areas, simplifying planning processes, enhancing design outcomes, and creating more opportunities for higher and medium-density development.

Throughout 2024, the momentum of planning reform has continued. A significant milestone in this ongoing effort has been the finalisation of key amendments to the Planning and Development Act 2005, along with its associated regulations. This updated legislative framework is designed to deliver a modern, efficient, and more consistent planning system. It represents a significant step forward in realising the goals outlined in the National Planning Reform Blueprint and advancing the government's 2019 Action Plan for Planning Reform.

Another critical aspect of the reform is the creation of more opportunities for higher and medium-density development. The new regulations provide clearer guidelines and incentives for such developments, helping to meet the diverse housing needs of Western Australia's growing population. Ongoing planning reform in Western Australia, highlighted by the raft of legislative amendments progressed in 2024, is a transformative effort aimed at creating a more consistent, efficient, and high-quality planning system.

Key reform initiatives:

Planning Reform Bill 2024
Development Assessment Panels reform
Metropolitan Region Scheme modernisation
State Referral Coordination Unit to centralise referral process and provide 'single sector' advice
Western Australian Planning Commission amendments to modernise membership
Revised medium density provisions



WHERE TO NOW?

Since the signing of the Housing Accord, planning reform has picked up pace across all jurisdictions. This has been driven by agreements on the National Planning Reform Blueprint and an agreed urgency to address the housing crisis. We have witnessed encouraging levels of collaboration and a shared responsibility to boost housing supply and delivery.

While it is acknowledged that planning is just one facet of addressing the housing crisis, there has been consistent calls across jurisdictions stating that planning systems must evolve to deliver faster and more efficient decisions on housing. Planning reform alone is not a silver bullet, but through well-considered and executed interventions, enhancements can yield positive outcomes.

Nationally, the planning policy space has been rapidly shifting over the course of 2024, and the coming year looks to continue this trend with further interventions and announcements expected to leverage work already in the pipeline. At Urbis, we have a lens on national planning and are ready to address changes as they happen. With the benefit of foresight, we anticipate that 2025 will be transformative and fast-paced, with the key items below expected to have impact across jurisdictions.

National Urban Policy - Implementation

The final National Urban Policy (NUP) is seen as a key policy document which cements the Commonwealth's commitment to achieving liveable, productive, sustainable, equitable and resilient urban areas. Urbis has been a strong advocate for the NUP and the finalisation of this document in late 2024, enshrines good planning principles, effective governance and outlines the key ways the Federal government can support and drive good outcomes for urban areas. However, the policy has been finalised without a detailed implementation plan and for it to be effective and impactful, this is required for its merit to be felt nationwide.

National Housing Support Program

The housing support program has been rolled out in 2024 and over 2025 will continue to accept applications through future streams. The program is aimed at state, territory and local governments to support the delivery of increased housing supply by funding projects that improve planning capabilities or enabling infrastructure. Early streams have been dedicated to improving planning capacity and community enabling infrastructure with the final stream due to be announced in 2025 to round out the funding agreement.

Continued Transit Oriented Development

Transit or Transport Oriented Development (TOD) has seen a renewed focus in government policy, driven by national ambitions to deliver an increase in well-located homes. 2024 has seen policy agendas accelerate, with both NSW and Victoria intensifying efforts to capitalise on investments in major public infrastructure. As we move into 2025, TOD precincts are expected to remain a key focus of government planning and housing delivery policies. We expect other jurisdictions will be observing the rollout of these closely and may implement their own versions. For NSW, there is an expectation that the TOD program will be expanded and potentially supercharged with increased height and development potential in announced precincts.

Streamlined Assessments

Streamlining planning assessments has been crucial for delivering on the Accord since its signing in 2022. Efficient planning systems are universally recognised as essential to meet targets within the set timeframe. Simplifying and expediting these processes helps avoid delays, reduce costs, and seize economic opportunities. Key measures include adopting digital tools for faster application reviews, establishing clear guidelines for consistent decision-making, and fostering collaboration among government agencies, developers, and communities. These efforts create a more transparent, predictable, and efficient planning system. This focus is expected to continue throughout 2025, with ongoing efforts to reduce delays and deliver on housing targets and approvals.



Greenfield Precincts

While much of the focus for the last number of years has been on infill precincts, some jurisdictions have in turn, been pulling back from driving delivery of greenfield precincts. However, 2024 has seen some jurisdictions increasing a focus on greenfield. Victoria has aimed to reemphasise the importance of greenfield developments in delivering equitable and balanced outcomes when it comes to housing supply. The housing crisis cannot be solved through a single approach to infill development and 2025 is expected to see the reemergence of greenfield as a priority in addressing housing supply and affordability. Housing choice is becoming a key issue, and maintaining a steady supply of greenfield developments is essential to ensure adequate options are available. NSW, which has had a mantra of building up not out, is expected to revamp its approach to greenfield development and address the needs of the growing population by revisiting existing greenfield precincts.

Social and Affordable Housing

The provision of social and affordable housing has been a central priority across all jurisdictions, and this emphasis is set to continue throughout the coming year. Governments are actively seeking ways to incentivise and expedite the delivery of social and affordable housing, ensuring it remains a focal point of policy initiatives.

With sustained budget commitments and national objectives to increase the availability of social and affordable housing, there is a strong expectation that inclusionary zoning and other planning mechanisms will continue to evolve and expand. These measures are designed to integrate affordable housing requirements into new developments, ensuring that a portion of new housing projects is dedicated to lower-income households.

Governments are also exploring various strategies to support this growth, including public-private partnerships, streamlined approval processes, and financial incentives for developers. These efforts are intended to address the growing demand for affordable housing including key worker housing. As part of these initiatives, there is also a focus on improving the quality and sustainability of social and affordable housing. This includes incorporating energy-efficient designs, enhancing community amenities, and ensuring that housing developments are well-connected to public transport and essential services.

The commitment to expanding social and affordable housing is expected to drive significant policy developments and investments in the coming year, reflecting a broader commitment to addressing housing affordability and supporting vulnerable populations.



Strategic Planning

Effective strategic planning is the cornerstone of preparing for future population growth and ensuring sustainable development. In recent years, numerous jurisdictions have significantly bolstered their strategic planning frameworks, initiating efforts to refine and enhance their current approaches. As we approach 2025, we anticipate a nationwide enhancement in strategic planning, with many states and territories already engaged in comprehensive reviews of their strategic planning processes.

This evolution in strategic planning is particularly crucial for Victoria and NSW, where significant revisions to regional plans are underway. These revisions aim to restructure growth around key transport hubs and growth centres, ensuring that development is both sustainable and well-coordinated with infrastructure improvements.

Infrastructure Coordination

Effective infrastructure coordination has emerged as a significant challenge in delivering housing across the nation. Rising costs for major infrastructure projects and delays in agency referrals are impacting the timeframes for decisions on applications. In response, national interventions have been initiated with a strong focus on aligning and coordinating infrastructure with planning efforts, encompassing both transport and social infrastructure and aligning Federal Government funds with projects unlocking housing supply.

Many jurisdictions are actively exploring opportunities to better integrate infrastructure coordination with planning processes, and this will continue into 2025. This involves developing strategies to ensure that infrastructure development keeps pace with housing growth. By improving the alignment between infrastructure and planning, governments aim to streamline project delivery, reduce delays, and manage costs more effectively and align closer with budgeted commitments.

Unlocking government land

Unlocking government land has emerged as a pivotal trend in planning and housing delivery across various jurisdictions. Many governments have completed comprehensive audits of their property portfolios and have initiated processes to expedite zoning and planning changes. This strategic move aims to release government-owned land for housing development, with a particular focus on increasing the supply of affordable housing.

Throughout 2025, the investigation and utilisation of government land will continue to be a critical strategy in addressing the housing crisis. This approach is not only being adopted at the state and local levels but also includes Federal Government land, which is often well-located and suitable for residential development. By leveraging these assets, governments aim to alleviate housing shortages and provide more affordable housing options for communities.

The process involves identifying underutilised or surplus government land, assessing its potential for residential development, and fast-tracking the necessary zoning and planning approvals. This ensures that the land can be quickly transformed into viable housing projects. Additionally, partnerships with private developers and community housing providers are being explored to maximise the impact and efficiency of these initiatives.

In 2025, we can expect to see a more coordinated and strategic approach to unlocking government land. This will include detailed feasibility studies, community consultations, and the implementation of innovative planning mechanisms to ensure that the released land meets the diverse needs of the population.



With 2025 now in clear sight, Urbis' National Planning team will be on hand to offer insights and perspectives both from a national level and for individual jurisdictions.

If you'd like to know more, please reach out to our team below.



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