

COMMON EQUITY NSW

Newsletter

WINTER EDITION // JUNE 2026



2026 Co-op Forum

SOCIAL IMPACT



COMMON EQUITY
CO-OPERATIVE
HOUSING

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Do you have a story to tell?

Let the sector know what your Co-op has been doing!

Contact nicole@commonequity.com.au or call 02 9356 9223

Acknowledgement of Country

Common Equity NSW acknowledges the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the traditional owners of the Country and land on which we operate and meet. We acknowledge their continuing connection to land, waters and community. We pay our respects to the people, the cultures and the Elders past and present.

Acknowledgement: INDIGENOUS.GOV.AU

Front cover: Co-op Forum, 2nd May, attendees working hard
Photo credit: Jamie James and Common Equity NSW



A Message from the CEO

Welcome to the Winter 2026 issue of our Newsletter.

Co-operative Housing in NSW and across Australia is growing momentum — and this reflects just how much is happening across our sector and our communities.

At Common Equity, we've always believed that the strength of Co-operative Housing lies not just in its model, but in its people. This issue brings both into focus. You'll read about the Co-op model's journey from its early beginnings in NSW - as seen through the eyes of the 2026 *Legend of the Sector* Karine Shellshear; the increasing political awareness and support for Co-ops in NSW as we welcomed the NSW Minister for Housing to our Hindu Community Co-op; our 2026 Co-op Forum – with Co-op members collaborating with our Board to shape

our strategic direction and about the remarkable lives being lived by tenants and Co-op members.

Because ultimately that is what it is really all about the impact, strength and achievements of our sector: the Co-op members shaping their communities, the sector leaders driving change, and the tenants whose stories remind us exactly why this work matters.

Enjoy the read!

Nick Sabel
Nick Sabel, CEO

LEGEND OF THE SECTOR

Karine Shellshear

Passionate advocate and early NSW Co-operative Housing leader, Karine Shellshear is the inaugural NSW Co-operative Housing *Legend of the Sector*, acknowledging her deep commitment and pioneering status.



Karine's involvement began in the 1980s as a Housing Officer with the City of Sydney Council, where she became part of a growing movement embracing the Co-operative Housing model — one that offered something genuinely different for tenants:

"... an active say in their housing, along with choice, dignity and a sense of control. It represented an alternative approach — one that empowered tenants and ensured members had a genuine voice."

In 1989, Karine became CEO of the Association to Resource Co-operative Housing (ARCH), a role she held until 2009, as the sector expanded across the state.

"We lived, breathed and dreamed Co-ops because we knew they were worth fighting for. Co-operatives provided affordability, independence and a form of equity, while fostering participation and mutual respect." By the late 2000s, further growth meant structural change was needed, and Common Equity NSW emerged — combining the protections of an umbrella

community housing provider with the independence central to Co-ops preserving core values and enabling growth.

Karine noted the sector is now well-positioned, with supportive governments, growing national advocacy, a capable and compassionate leadership team, and a collaborative structure that ensures grassroots voices continue to be heard.

"The Co-operative Housing family has been my family. It is a great honour to have shared in this journey, and to have contributed to the goals and aspirations of such an important vision."

GROWING AWARENESS

A Ministerial Visit, a Warm Welcome, and a Home Energy Win!

As Co-operative Housing continues to gain momentum in NSW, visits like this one reflect the growing recognition of Co-operative Housing — a tangible sign that our model and our communities are being seen.



Image: Donna Davis, MP: Hon Rose Jackson: Nick Sabel and members of the Hindu Co-op. Image credit: HCC Ltd Vice President K. Kunaseelan.

In April, Common Equity NSW CEO Nick Sabel and Hindu Community Co-operative members proudly welcomed the Hon. Rose Jackson, NSW Minister for Housing, and Donna Davis, State MP for Parramatta, to their Co-op. The Co-op marked the occasion with a traditional ceremony, led by members adorned in vibrant, colourful saris — a powerful reminder

of what Co-op life looks like from the inside.

For Common Equity NSW and our Co-ops, moments like this are invaluable: an opportunity to raise the profile of Co-operative Housing in NSW, build genuine political understanding, and strengthen the support our sector needs to grow.

The visit centred on the Community Housing Energy Performance (CHEP) grant

program, a joint initiative of the Australian and NSW Governments. The Hindu Community Co-op is one of eight Common Equity NSW Co-ops to benefit from Common Equity's successful CHEP application, receiving solar PV installation (solar panels) earlier this year — delivering positive environmental benefits, real financial relief on energy bills and reinforcing the affordable housing foundations Co-operative Housing already provides.

CONNECTING WITH CO-OPS ACROSS THE STATE



Common Equity's All Regions Meetings Return

Tuesday 24 March saw the return of Common Equity's *All Regions Co-op Meeting*, bringing together Co-operative Housing members from across New South Wales for a much-anticipated face-to-face gathering. For those unable to attend in-person, an online option was provided.

While representatives of our member Co-ops have had regular opportunities to connect through the AGM, and group collaboration and workshops, it has been a couple of years since the whole sector has come together in this format.

Co-op Support Manager, Lily Canon says "The All Regions Meeting offered an opportunity to provide sector updates, respond to questions, and participate in discussions building the relationships that keep our sector strong and

fostering 'co-operation amongst co-operatives'. The energy and conversations from the day were a reminder of just how critical it is for people to come together in person. For our Co-op members, it is an opportunity to be heard and to hear from others navigating similar challenges and experiences.

Looking ahead, Common Equity is committed to building on this momentum. Common Equity will continue to create opportunities for connection throughout the year, including region-specific

meetings and sector-wide events such as our *2026 Forum: Social Impact* and upcoming *Co-op Boosting Member Participation Workshops*.

These gatherings are not just about information sharing — they are about building a stronger, more connected, and more resilient Co-operative Housing sector across NSW. Common Equity is committed to the All Regions Meetings being back to stay and look forward to the 2027's Meeting building on this year's success.

PARTNERING WITH CO-OPS: 2026 CO-OP FORUM

Collaborating for Impact: Shaping the Future of Co-op Housing in NSW

On Saturday 2 May, Common Equity NSW brought together 21 Co-op representatives for the *2026 Co-op Forum: Social Impact*. Held in Sydney, the Forum turned Common Equity's commitment into action — giving Co-ops a genuine role in shaping Common Equity's strategic direction.

Through facilitated discussion and structured activities, participants explored a central enquiry: what specific needs does the Co-op Housing sector respond to, who experiences these needs, and how is the sector uniquely positioned to respond?

Common Equity Chairperson Lisa Danker reflected on why Co-op input is so vital: "We believe that good leadership starts with active listening — ensuring that our decisions are informed by the people that live Co-op Housing every day. It was a privilege to hear from our members, and the generosity of their contributions will be immensely valuable as we move through the next two stages of our planning."

The day brought all three tiers of the NSW Co-op Housing sector

Jean-Piere Khoury, Ningana Housing Co-operative Chairperson, said: "What was really important about the Forum was the open dialogue."

The insights gathered will be integrated into Common Equity's next strategic plan, ensuring Co-op voices sit alongside technical considerations so the plan is both sector-informed and practically sound — proof that good sector governance isn't top-down, it's a partnership.



Forum attendees hard at work

ESTHER'S STORY

A Life of Giving Back

Long before Esther found a safe place to call home with Common Equity in Sydney's western suburbs, she was building one for others. Born into the Karen community in the jungles of Burma — now Myanmar — Esther's life has been shaped by displacement, courage, and an unwavering commitment to the people around her.



Esther and Maung at home.

In 1987, Esther became a teacher in a makeshift school on the Burma-Thai border, serving a community forced to flee their homes. What began with two teachers and 30 students grew over a decade into a school of more than 600 children and 24 teachers. For the Karen people —

amongst Burma's most persecuted ethnic minorities — safety was never guaranteed. Not even in the school they'd spent a decade building. Overrun by the Burmese military in 1997, the community fled to the Tam Hin refugee camp in Thailand. Esther fled with them.

Even in exile, she kept giving. Recognised for her leadership, Esther became a spokesperson for the Karen people — travelling to Geneva to bring the story of her people to the international stage. In 1992, she undertook a Diplomacy Training Program at the University of New South Wales, where she first encountered the formal language of human rights — concepts she had been fighting for all along.

In 1995, Esther finally settled in Australia. But the giving never stopped. Into her retirement, she has continued to volunteer, peace-build, and help establish forums focused on ethnic women's rights — none of it, she is quick to recognise, without the steadfast support of her husband Maung.

Today, Esther and Maung live in a Common Equity NSW property in Western Sydney — a world away from years of substandard private rentals and uncertain leases. As Esther says, they are "very, very happy because it's clean and safe." Simple words. But for someone who has spent a lifetime fighting for home and safety — for herself, her students, her community — they mean the world.

EMOH RUO HOUSING CO-OP

30 Years and Still Going Strong!

On Sunday 10 May 2026 we celebrated 30 years of Emoh Ruo Housing Co-operative. Co-op members, friends, neighbours and some of the Common Equity team gathered in the central garden courtyard to mark this significant milestone.

Forming in 1986, members worked together to secure a permanent home for the Co-op, moving into the completed buildings in 1995. Ahead of their time, members were active participants in the original design planning, resulting in homes adaptable to tenants' changing needs. Reflections from Co-op members:

Oliver: The new generation making their mark

Oliver moved into the Co-op four months ago. At 23, he's keen to become a Board Member and work with other Co-op members. He values the diversity at Emoh Ruo: "if everyone in the Co-op was the same it wouldn't run very well." As a key worker, secure and affordable housing is invaluable to him.

Margaret: The power of commitment

Margaret is a long-term member who was part of the original group that fought hard to establish the Co-op. In her words, it "needed great commitment... unheard of at the time, working with the architects."

Michael: Participation for future success

Michael is one of the original members — currently Secretary and a recurring Board member. With only 15 members, participation is vital. He still appreciates receiving the keys to Emoh Ruo's homes after 9 years of "fighting," and now welcomes the new 20-year lease. He values the Co-op's stable, multigenerational tenancies saying: "it's looking good for the future."



Co-op members, neighbours and friends celebrating

Global Trends, Local Impact:

Identifying Future Challenges for Housing

In the last CENSW Newsletter (February 2026) we shared Part 1 of Co-op Member Liz Bradshaw's 'Towards 2050: The Megatrends Transforming Community Housing' summary - featuring an overview of the first five areas of concern it raises. In this issue we continue with Part 2 of her summary and the last five areas as identified as well as how Common Equity NSW is already engaging with the report findings.

Common Equity's Commitment to Future-Ready Housing

Common Equity appreciates Liz's work summarising this report, it is a timely contribution to our sector's thinking.

The Board and Business are actively engaging with the report's findings and insights as to how much the environment in which we operate is changing.

Our planning will continue to recognise that the decisions we make today must consider the decades to come.

The final five of the ten key areas of concern...

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Designing for Future Needs in Community Housing

Community Housing Providers (CHPs) must focus on adaptability and sustainability in their designs to meet future demands.

- New buildings are expected to last 50 years or more, necessitating forward-thinking design.
- CHPs should integrate circular economy principles to enhance sustainability.
- Financial support options should be explored to fund these initiatives.
- Building community resilience to climate change is essential, with a particular focus on prioritising vulnerable locations and groups.
- Partnerships with existing community resilience networks can strengthen disaster preparedness.

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Involving Residents in Decision-Making

CHPs need to establish clear mechanisms for resident involvement in decision-making, such as advisory groups or structured feedback systems, and active participation to inform climate resilience initiatives.

- Community concerns about the impacts of climate change must be acknowledged and addressed.
- Effective communication strategies can enhance resident participation in housing initiatives.

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The Impact of Digital Technology on Community Housing

Digital advancements are transforming service delivery and operational efficiency for CHPs.

- Connectivity improvements, such as 5G and future 6G technology, will enhance access to services.
- AI (artificial intelligence) and data analytics will enable personalised services and improve resident experiences.
- Smart home technologies can optimize energy management and enhance security for residents. Data-driven approaches will improve operational efficiency for CHPs.

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Addressing Health Challenges in Community Housing

The healthcare system faces increasing strain due to demographic changes and climate impacts, necessitating innovative solutions.

- An ageing population and rising chronic diseases will stress healthcare resources.
- Climate change is expected to exacerbate health issues, particularly for vulnerable populations.
- Telehealth and digital health services can improve access to care for residents.
- CHPs should consider integrating assistive technologies to support residents with disabilities.

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Navigating Economic and Geopolitical Volatility

Community housing must adapt to a rapidly changing economic and geopolitical landscape.

- Economic shocks may increase poverty levels, necessitating proactive measures from CHPs.
- Funding environments are becoming more challenging, requiring strategic planning and resilience.
- Advocacy for long-term structural plans is essential to counteract political short-termism.
- Building trust and fostering community engagement is vital to gaining support for community housing initiatives.

The report was commissioned and published by the Community Housing Industry Association NSW.



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