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HOUSING

IT'S TIME TO END
HOMELESSNESS



Australian Homelessness Monitor 2022

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the lands on which we live and work. As we create safe and welcoming homes, we honour the people of the Kulin nation and their enduring connection to their home we call Naarm, Melbourne.

We pay our respects to all First Nations Elders, past and present. And we urge all Australians to embrace the Uluru statement from the heart and what it asks of us.

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ABOUT LAUNCH HOUSING

Launch Housing is a Melbourne based, secular and independent community agency formed in July 2015. Launch Housing's mission is to end homelessness. With a combined history of over 75 years serving Melbourne's community, Launch Housing provides high quality housing, support, education and employment services to thousands of people across 14 sites in metropolitan Melbourne. Launch Housing also drives social policy change, advocacy, research and innovation.

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Foreword

The Australian Homelessness Monitor 2022 (AHM 2022) is the third report in Launch Housing's Homelessness Monitor series and covers the period 2018 – 2022.

The AHM 2022 undertakes the first major analysis spanning the COVID crisis years and contains in-depth examination of the changes in the scale and nature of housing markets and homelessness in Australia, including the social and economic drivers impacting homelessness.

While the COVID-19 pandemic prompted a swift response in the cities of Melbourne, Sydney, and Brisbane, to eliminate rough sleeping, other pre-existing trends continued to persist – the growing scale of homelessness nationwide; increases in older Australians experiencing homelessness; and family and domestic violence as the key driver for women and children seeking assistance from specialist homelessness services.

These prevailing issues highlight the need for concerted action from Australian governments and to bring together the community to finding solutions to homelessness.

The AHM 2022 shows that rising homelessness has continued to outstrip Australia's growing population. The average monthly number of people using homelessness services increased by 8 percent in the four years to 2021-22, double the national population increase over that period.

First Nations Australians and people affected by mental ill health have been the fastest growing cohorts among homelessness service users, up by 23 percent and 20 percent, respectively, while family violence was the single most frequently cited reason for homelessness service assistance.

Evidence presented demonstrates that there is a strong case for greater investment in permanent supportive housing models, to provide at-risk cohorts holistic support, combining long-term affordable housing with wrap-around supports. This requires integrating funding mechanisms and collaborative action from all levels of governments and committed partnerships.

Cost of living and housing stress are impacting everyday Australians. The average number of people accessing homelessness services because of their inability to pay rent, rose by a staggering 27 percent in the last four years.

Recent rental market trends have significantly contributed to this growth in homelessness. Between 2020 – 22 there was sizeable spike in rent inflation in the private market across Australia, with rental prices

at rates unobserved since 2008. This is having the greatest impact on low-income households, pushing many into homelessness.

At 2.6%, the expansion of Australia's social housing stock for the period 2016 – 2021 lags both population (5.7%) and household growth (8.2%) and continues to shift downwards. This is cause for grave concern as the private market is evidently unable to respond to the homelessness crisis.

Commitments from the Commonwealth Government to increase social and affordable housing supply through the Housing Australia Future Fund program and to implement Australia's first-ever National Housing and Homelessness Plan has been widely welcomed.

The Fund will generate 20,000 new social dwellings and 10,000 affordable rental dwellings between 2023-24 but renewed investments will be needed beyond 2025.

The National Housing and Homelessness Plan can change the trajectory of homelessness in Australia. The plan should incorporate prevention measures and be underpinned by key policy levers – increasing income support and rent assistance – to improve housing affordability and prevent homelessness for those at risk and to break the cycle of intergenerational disadvantage.

We are at a critical juncture. By ensuring a pipeline of affordable and social housing beyond 2025, making adequate funding available to State, Territory, local governments, and the sector to implement integrated and evidence-based supports, the Federal Government can commit to ending homelessness in Australia.

Launch Housing is proud to have partnered with Professor Hal Pawson from the University of New South Wales and Professor Cameron Parsell from the University of Queensland for this insight into the current state of homelessness in Australia.

We acknowledge our Advisory Committee for volunteering their time and expertise to this important research and report.

We hope that policy and decision makers use the AHM 2022 and its recommendations to implement the changes required to end homelessness in Australia.

Laura Mahoney
Chief Impact Officer
Launch Housing

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List of acronyms

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACT	Australian Capital Territory
AHURI	Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute
AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
CRA	Commonwealth Rent Assistance
CHP	Community Housing Provider
EA	Emergency Accommodation [in response to COVID-19 pandemic]
FDV	Family and domestic violence
HA	Homelessness Australia
H2H	Homeless to a Home [Victoria EA rehousing program]
LGA	Local government authority
NDIA	National Disability Insurance Authority
NDIS	National Disability Insurance Scheme
NHHA	National Housing and Homelessness Agreement
NGO	Non-government organisation
NSW	New South Wales
NT	Northern Territory
PSH	Permanent supportive housing
QLD	Queensland
SA	South Australia
SHS	Specialist Homelessness Services
SHSC	Specialist Homelessness Services [statistics] Collection
TH	Together Home [NSW EA rehousing program]
UKHM	UK Homelessness Monitors
UNSW	University of New South Wales
VIC	Victoria
WA	Western Australia

Executive Summary

Key points

- Across Australia, the average monthly number of specialist homelessness service (SHS) users grew from 84,800 persons in 2017-18 to 91,300 persons in 2021-22, an increase of 8%, double the contemporary growth in national household population.
- Total SHS service user numbers (a proxy for 'people experiencing homelessness') have recently grown at highly contrasting rates across jurisdictions; while South Australia's numbers remained nearly static over the past four years, particularly rapid increases were recorded in Tasmania (24%) and Queensland (22%).
- Nationally, since 2017-18 homelessness (SHS service users) has grown at double the rate in regional Australia as in capital cities (13% compared with 6%); numbers have increased fastest in regional Queensland (up 29%) and in regional Western Australia (up 35%).
- Australia-wide, housing affordability stress stands out as the most rapidly growing homelessness causal factor; over four years to 2021-22, the average monthly number of SHS service users where this issue had triggered the need for aid rose by 27%.
- First Nations Australians and people affected by mental ill health have been the fastest growing cohorts among SHS service users since 2017-18, up by 23% and 20%, respectively. By 2021-22, Indigenous persons (hereafter First Nations) accounted for 27% of all service users – a seven-fold over-representation in relation to the First Nations share of Australia's overall population.
- Recent rental housing market trends have likely contributed to ongoing homelessness growth, and to the risk that this will continue into 2023:
 - The period 2020-22 saw a dramatic spike in private market rent inflation across Australia, with rental prices (asking rents) rising at rates unseen since 2008; latest figures (June 2022) show annual private rent inflation running at 1.5 times the rate of consumer price rises more generally – 9.5% compared with 6.1%.
 - At 2.6%, the marginal expansion of Australia's social housing stock for the period 2016-2021 markedly lagged both population (5.7%) and household growth (8.2%). Consequently, the proportionate share of social housing has continued to drift downwards.
- Service provision innovations triggered by the pandemic have importantly included:
 - Structured housing and support programs in New South Wales and Victoria to assist the most disadvantaged residents of COVID-19 emergency accommodation (EA) in accessing long-term housing; and
 - The de-concentration of emergency housing and enhanced regulation of boarding houses in Queensland, the latter legitimising the use of boarding houses as a private housing outcome for former COVID-19 EA service users.
- The coincidence of state and federal investment programs should generate a net increase of around 9,000 social rental dwellings in 2024, the first year for decades in which production will be sufficient to maintain the sector's share of Australia's overall occupied dwelling stock.
- In order to stave off the resumption of declining social housing representation from 2025, new investment commitments will be needed from Australian governments.
- The role and opportunities for local government authorities (LGAs) in preventing and managing homelessness needs to be made explicit and more coherently integrated within state and national strategies.

Report purpose and methods

Australian Homelessness Monitor (AHM) 2022 presents an independent analysis of this important social problem. Its overarching purpose is to better inform housing and homelessness policymaking. To this end the report investigates the changing scale and nature of the problem and assesses recent policy and practice developments seen in response.

The study involved in-depth interviews with 28 key stakeholder representatives (state and local government, NGOs) across all eight Australian jurisdictions. Primary research components also included an online survey completed by 70 specialist homelessness service provider agencies and a focus group meeting with seven local government staff members. The report also draws on a policy document review and on original statistical analysis of published data on recent housing market conditions as well as on people experiencing homelessness.

Following on from our 2018 and 2020 editions, AHM 2022 is the third in the series of reports commissioned by Launch Housing. While concentrating primarily on the period 2018-2022, the original research for this report was conducted in mid-2022, after the easing of most COVID-19 public health restrictions and pandemic emergency policy settings relevant to homelessness.

In the 4 years to 2021-22:



91,300 average monthly SHS users across Australia.

An increase of 8%.

Including rapid total user increases in:
TAS +24% | QLD +22%

Fastest growing groups of SHS users include:



First Nations
Australians
+23%

People with
mental ill health
+20%

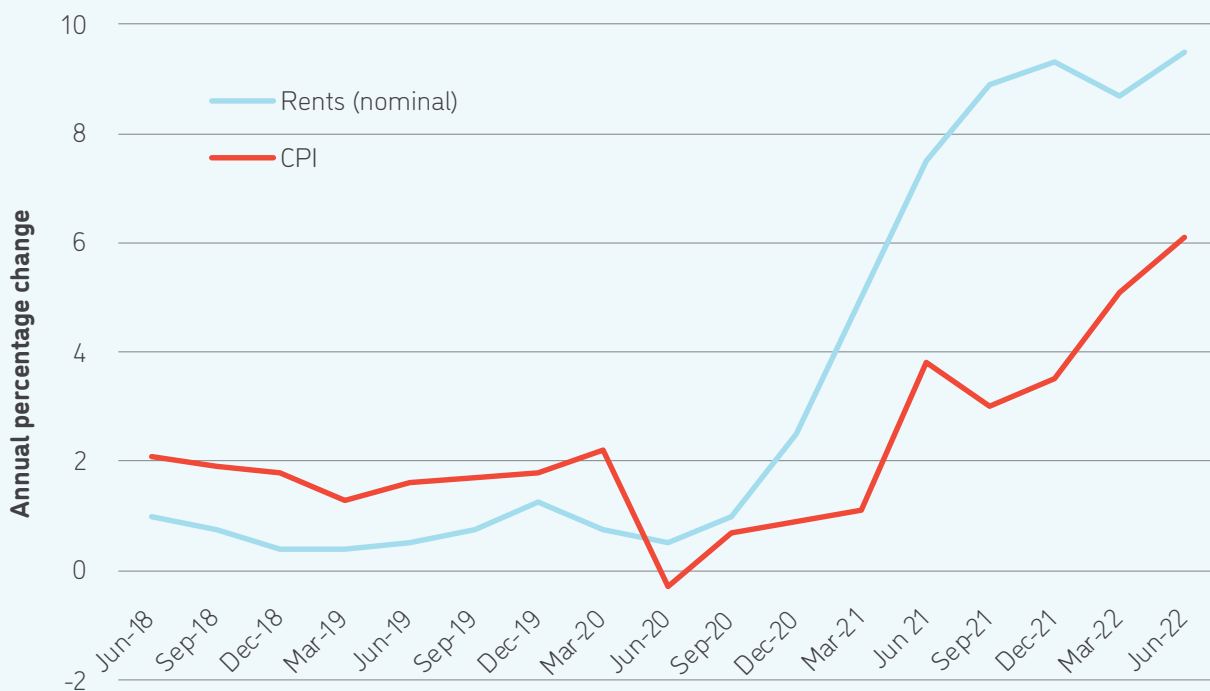
Research findings

Housing market context

Sharply rising house prices during the first 18 months of the COVID-19 pandemic raised the wealth threshold for accessing home ownership (the size of a typical home deposit in relation to average annual earnings) from 8.8 years to 10.2 years during this period. And while Australia has been affected by a general house price downturn from mid-2022, this is unlikely to enhance home ownership affordability due to its coincidence with sharply rising interest rates.

In the rental housing market, of more direct relevance to homelessness pressures, the past two years (2020-2022) have seen a dramatic spike in private tenancy rent inflation across Australia, with rental prices (asking rents) rising at rates unseen since 2008. Latest statistics, for June 2022, show annual private rent inflation running at 1.5 times the rate of consumer price rises more generally – 9.5% compared with 6.1% (see [Figure A](#)).

Figure A: Annual change in advertised rents and consumer prices, 2018-22



For sources and notes see [Figure 2.5](#).

In the two years to June 2022, regional rent increases tended to outpace rising rents in capital cities across Australia, with the high rate of regional rent inflation in Queensland notably exceeding that in Brisbane in successive years. Symptomatic of the supply shortage inflating private rents across many parts of the country, the rental property vacancy rate for non-metropolitan Australia was running at an extraordinarily low 0.6%-0.7% through 2021-22.

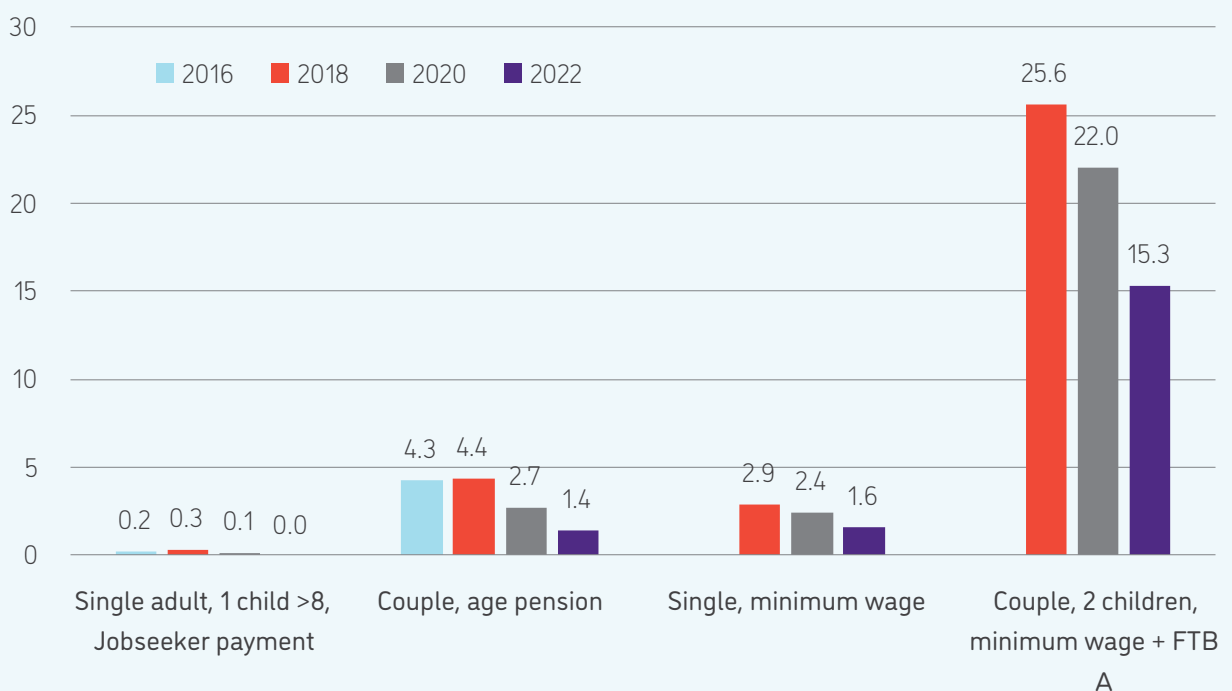
At 2.6%, the marginal expansion of Australia's social housing stock for the period 2016-2021 markedly lagged both population (5.7%) and household growth (8.2%). Consequently, the proportionate share of social housing has continued to drift downwards. Over a longer (30 year) timeframe, the flow of social sector lettings – a more meaningful measure of supply – has been declining much more rapidly. Over the period 1991-2021, social housing lettings plunged by 42% - or proportionate to population, 61%. This reflects the recently minimal flow of newly completed dwellings as well as the very low turnover

of existing tenancies that, in turn, partly reflects the increasingly intense targeting of tenancy allocations towards the most disadvantaged applicants.

As a stark indication of the rental affordability crisis for the lowest income Australians, among the 46,000 private rental properties advertised for let across Australia in March 2022, just 1.4% were affordable to an age pensioner couple. Moreover, the already small share of private rental properties affordable to a range of low-income groups has tended to shrink steadily over recent years (see **Figure B**).

Again, there are indications that these pressures have been recently escalating most markedly in regional, rather than capital city, settings. While equivalent statistics are unavailable for other jurisdictions, the proportion of new private tenancies in regional Victoria affordable to low-income households declined from 58% in Q2 2017 to only 24% in Q1 2022.

Figure B: Proportion of advertised private tenancies affordable to (selected) low-income household types, 2016-2022



For source and notes see **Figure 2.13**.

Homelessness policy and practice responses following from COVID-19

In addition to triggering extraordinary homelessness emergency expenditure and associated action, the COVID-19 pandemic also stimulated official openness towards experimenting with new approaches in homelessness policy and practice. This has been reflected in, for example, the roll-out of programs to rehouse people out of emergency accommodation (EA) in New South Wales and Victoria, and in new approaches to the management of crisis housing in Queensland.

As typically perceived by stakeholder interviewees, the public health crisis also stimulated significantly enhanced cross-sector working practices during 2020-2021, better integrating government and NGO homelessness service planning and provision. In general, as seen by homelessness service providers and other stakeholders, these developments have improved service delivery in lasting ways.

Such advances nevertheless fall far short of the changes needed to adequately address homelessness and rough sleeping in Australia at current levels:

- Improved conditions in crisis accommodation and boarding houses do not, in themselves, enable access to the kind of safe, affordable and long-term housing required to end homelessness.
- Post-EA housing and support programs rolled out by the New South Wales and Victorian governments are designed as discrete interventions, limited in duration and scope. Their benefits will therefore ultimately be restricted to the finite group of people formerly sleeping rough who accessed EA during the pandemic, and their beneficial impacts on long-term rough sleeper numbers in the two states will quickly dissipate. This reflects the reality that there is an ongoing flow of people falling into rough sleeping, some of whom are unable to avoid long-term homelessness.

Stated aspirations for the programs to have a lasting impact on street homelessness would require them to be transformed from one-off emergency programs to institutionalised features of their states' respective homelessness responses. This would call for ongoing funding to enable new clients to be supported by the programs as the need arises.

Recent homelessness policy developments and areas of concern

Although the outputs are only beginning to filter through in late 2022, several state governments made significant commitments to ramp up self-funded social housing supply in the wake of COVID-19. While spending pledges and programs have been highly variable across jurisdictions, these are projected as generating – in aggregate – some 23,000 new social housing units in the three years from 2021-22. This is comparable with the 2009-11 Social Housing Initiative funded by the Rudd Commonwealth Government in response to the Global Financial Crisis. Allowing for public housing sales and demolitions, a net increase of over 15,000 homes should result over the three years to 2024-25.

Moreover, the incoming 2022 Labor administration in Canberra has begun to re-engage the Commonwealth with the homelessness policy challenge facing the whole country. As part of this, and complementing state-funded initiatives, it has pledged a five-year program to construct 20,000 new social housing units, and 10,000 affordable rental dwellings from around 2023-24.

The coincidence of state and federal programs should generate a net increase of around 9,000 social rental dwellings in 2024, the first year for decades in which production will be sufficient to maintain the sector's share of Australia's overall occupied dwelling stock. However, sustainment of this improved situation will depend on the commitment of new resources (e.g. topping up the Housing Australia Future Fund which, based on its initial resourcing, will have exhausted its capacity to support new additional housebuilding after Year 5 of the program).

Australian policy needs to deepen engagement with homelessness prevention, both narrowly and broadly defined. While there is substantial scope for more effective intervention focused on 'at risk' cohorts, it is also important that governments embrace wider prevention measures at the population level. This chimes with the recent Productivity Commission recognition that the causes of homelessness are substantially 'structural' in nature.

The role of local government authorities (LGA) in responding to homelessness is largely un-recognised and undefined in Australia. To contribute towards national efforts to end homelessness, the role and opportunities for LGAs need to be made explicit and more coherently integrated within a national strategy.

There is an urgent need for Australia to develop a framework and set of principles for the wider and potentially enduring provision of intensive tenancy support consistent with the permanent supportive housing model – i.e. extending beyond the current very limited instances of Common Ground projects and other small-scale funded initiatives. Central to this will be clear funding mechanisms to allow the ongoing (long-term) provision of support services that people require for the duration of their needs.

Recent homelessness trends

Given the absence of any up-to-date statistics directly measuring the incidence of homelessness, this report utilises a proxy measure; that is, the caseload of specialist homelessness service (SHS) providers (i.e. persons using SHS services during any given time period). According to this measure, homelessness increased by 8% in the four years to 2021-22.

It is acknowledged that such statistics provide only an imperfect means of tracking changes in the underlying incidence of homelessness – especially because they enumerate people not only seeking, but also provided with, help. Therefore, rising homelessness measured as described above might reflect a situation where services were managing to help a growing proportion of those seeking such assistance. In fact, however, by a margin of two to one, SHS respondents in our online survey agreed that '[e]xcess demand/reduction in service capacity has led to the turning away of more service users in 2022 when compared to 2019'. In other words, the underlying increase in 'homelessness' is likely to be, if anything, larger than that estimated according to SHS caseload numbers. This strengthens the conclusion that, at the national scale, rising homelessness has continued to significantly outpace overall household growth – this having risen by only 4% over the relevant period.

At the same time, homelessness (SHS caseloads) growth rates have varied substantially across jurisdictions and regions. Numbers have recently expanded most markedly in regional Western Australia and regional Queensland. More generally, and seemingly paralleling wider housing market trends (see above), regions have tended to see more rapidly rising homelessness than capital cities over the past four years.

At the national scale, and again largely extending a pre-existing trend, the past four years have seen disproportionate increases in older adults subject to homelessness; SHS service users aged 50-64 and 65+ increased in number at more than twice the rate of younger age groups. This might reflect, for example, the increasingly difficult situation affecting older people subject to divorce or relationship breakdown in housing markets where both rents and house prices are becoming less and less affordable for low-income single people.

First Nations people, and those affected by mental ill health were the fastest growing cohorts among SHS service users over the past four years, extending previously established trends. The seven-fold over-representation of First Nations Australians among those affected by homelessness as quantified here is of a similar order to that portrayed by Census-based homelessness analyses. For example, as reported in AHM 2018, figures based on the 2016 Census showed First Nations people ten times as likely to be affected as the national population-wide norm.



**Homelessness
increased
by 8%
in the 4 years
to 2021-22**

Housing affordability stress is the most rapidly growing homelessness causal factor

increasing by 27%
in the 4 years to 2021-22



Family and domestic violence (FDV) continues to be the single most frequently cited factor prompting applications for SHS assistance. At the same time, housing affordability stress notably stands out as the most rapidly growing homelessness causal factor; over the four years to 2021-22, the average monthly number of SHS service users where this issue had triggered the need for help rose by 27% (see **Figure D**).

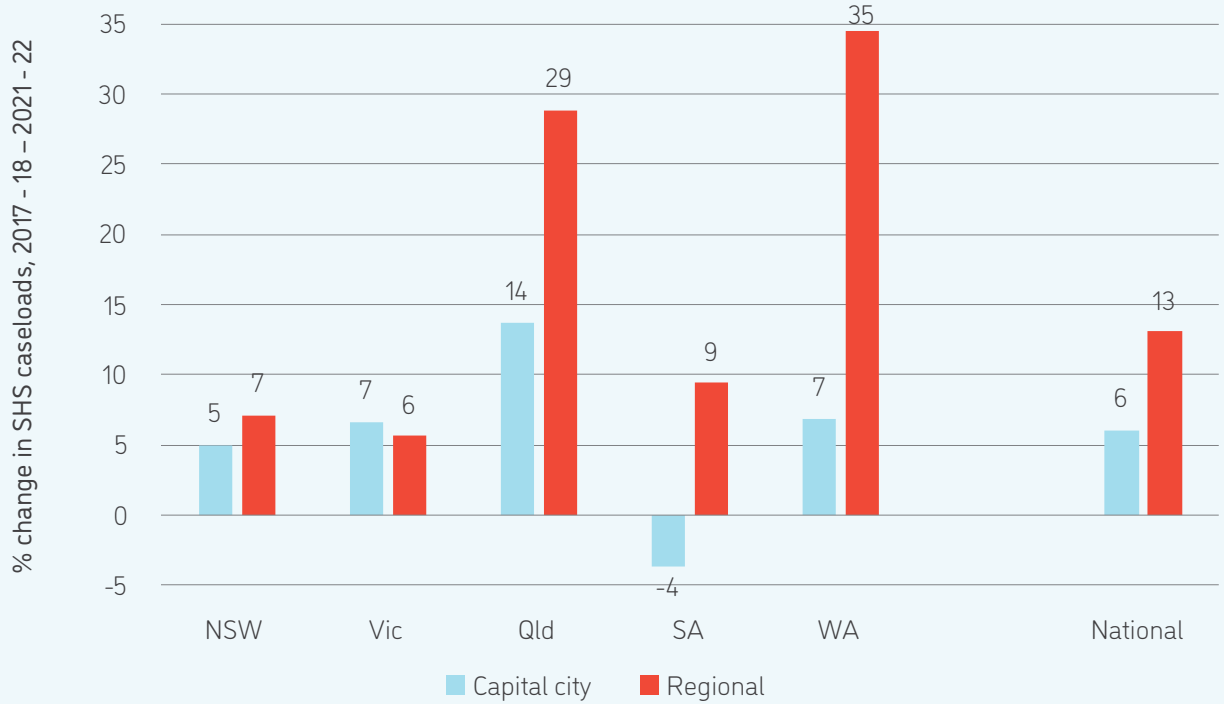
Albeit that the absolute numbers involved apparently remain relatively small, those seeking SHS help due to transitioning from custodial arrangements increased by 17% over the past four years – again, far in excess of the overall norm. This might be no more than the result of Australia’s rising prison population (and, therefore, the number of ex-offenders being released), but it suggests that this group may come to account for a growing share of people experiencing homelessness in the future.

While the paucity of reliable statistics impedes analysis, it is clear that major reductions in street homelessness were achieved in some cities through state government emergency housing programs in 2020 (see above), but that these were brief and unsustainable.

Although comparable statistics on other jurisdictions are unavailable, New South Wales Government surveys suggest that rough sleeping numbers have been recently rising disproportionately in regional areas of the state, with non-metropolitan areas now accounting for the bulk of the statewide rough sleeping population – up from 41% of the state-wide total in 2020 to 59% in 2022.

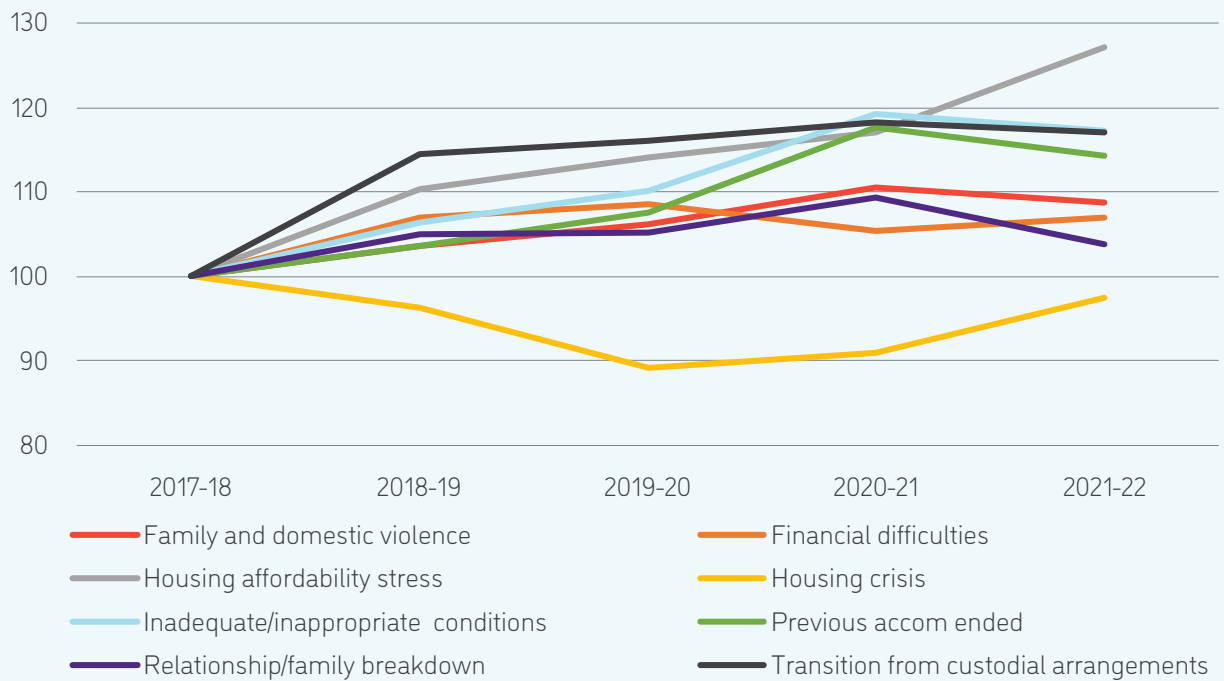
More definitive analysis of recent change in the scale and distribution of rough sleeping will be possible only with the release of relevant results from the 2021 ABS Census, as expected in 2023.

Figure C: Total SHS caseloads (persons), mainland states; % change 2017-18 – 2021-22 broken down by capital city vs. regions



For source and notes see [Figure 5.6](#).

Figure D: SHS caseloads (persons), 2017-18 – 2021-22, breakdown by 'reason(s) for seeking assistance', indexed to 2017-18 (2017-18=100)



For source and notes see [Figure 5.8](#).

Conclusions

Homelessness policies and services have been profoundly affected by the COVID-19 crisis that exploded in 2020. This prompted extraordinary support activity for people experiencing homelessness early in the pandemic. Longer-lasting consequences have also resulted. This is true both in terms of follow-on housing programs for those directly assisted through 2020 EA schemes in New South Wales and Victoria, and with respect to some homelessness strategies and service practices.

More broadly, the pandemic triggered significant commitments to social housing development initiatives on the part of both federal and (some) state governments. This follows a decade of negligible new investment in this vital resource for both resolving and preventing homelessness. These new programs will – at least temporarily – halt the effective contraction of social housing system capacity ongoing for most of the past 25 years.

Some recent trends in homelessness, especially the growing scale of the problem in many parts of regional Australia, appear highly consistent with pandemic-spurred housing market developments. Equally, many other patterns in the scale and nature of the problem pre-date the public health crisis and appear to have been relatively unaffected by it. Examples here include the growing representation of older adults, as well as First Nations peoples and those affected by mental ill-health. Similarly, the expanding role of housing affordability stress as a causal factor.

As the new Federal Government leads the development of Australia's first-ever National Housing and Homelessness Plan during 2023, it is to be hoped that this will be underpinned by recognition that our current mode of developing, operating, and commodifying housing produces homelessness, and this system must be overhauled to tackle the problem. A plan to end homelessness requires a plan to alter our housing system so that it produces sufficient suitable and affordable housing for all Australians.

Key recommendations

- ✓ Building on recently announced commitments, Australian governments should jointly pledge to extending recently stepped-up investment in social housing on a scale at least sufficient to ensure continued social housing representation in the national housing stock at current levels.

- ✓ The National Housing and Homelessness Plan (NHHP) should also endorse the principle that social housing investment and homelessness service funding should be spatially targeted on measured need.

- ✓ In formulating the NHHP, Australian governments should recognize the potentially beneficial role of permanent supportive housing (PSH) and should develop proposals for routine funding for the PSH support element, where required to maximise the prospect of tenancy sustainment – therefore contributing to homelessness prevention.

- ✓ The innovative practices developed to meet the needs of people experiencing homelessness during the pandemic (e.g. the re-imagining of crisis and temporary accommodation discussed in [Chapter 3. Homelessness policy and practice responses following from COVID-19](#)) should be examined and where evidence exists for effectiveness, incorporated within the NHHP and in jurisdiction-specific homelessness strategies.

- ✓ Australian policy needs to deepen engagement with homelessness prevention, both narrowly and broadly defined. While there is substantial scope for more effective state and territory intervention focused on 'at risk' cohorts, it is also important that governments embrace wider prevention measures at the population level.

- ✓ The role of local government authorities (LGAs) responding to homelessness in Australia remains largely unrecognised and undefined. To contribute towards national efforts to end homelessness, the role and opportunities for LGAs need to be made explicit and more coherently integrated within national and jurisdiction-specific strategies.

- ✓ Existing housing and broader social service systems fail First Nations people at disproportionate and alarming rates. This trend has been observed consistently in the past three Censuses. First Nations people must play key and leading roles in the design, oversight, and delivery of the housing and support interventions needed to address the profound housing injustices that First Nations people experience.

Introduction



1.1. AIMS AND ORIGIN OF THE RESEARCH

A safe and secure home is fundamental to individual wellbeing, as well as foundational for an individual's contribution to national economic activity. Even if only briefly encountered, homelessness will be often a scarring experience. Long-term exposure will likely result in permanent damage to mental and physical health. Although usually treated by Australian governments as a second order issue, homelessness is in fact a substantial and growing problem for this country – a reality starkly revealed by the COVID-19 crisis.

This is the third report in the Australian Homelessness Monitor (AHM) series, an independent analysis of homelessness commissioned by Launch Housing. In keeping with the two earlier editions (Pawson et al., 2018; 2020), AHM 2022 analyses the changing scale and nature of homelessness across Australia and investigates the underlying housing market dynamics and policy drivers. The report also reviews recent policy and practice developments that reflect changing responses to homelessness by governments and service provider NGOs.

In its statistical and policy analysis the report concentrates mainly on the period 2019-2022. As well as encompassing the height of the COVID-19 emergency (2020 and 2021), this timeslot also covers the first half of 2022, as most public health restrictions were being phased out and homelessness services had resumed operations on more of a 'normal basis', despite the ongoing pandemic.

In its coverage of COVID-19 impacts on housing markets and homelessness policy, the report builds on the extensive research evidence on these topics already published by the research team through the UNSW-ACOSS Poverty and Inequality Partnership (Pawson et al., 2021 a and b; 2022).

In analysing trends in the extent and complexion of homelessness across the country, we draw primarily on homelessness service user caseload data collated by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW). The term caseload, in this instance, refers to people using homelessness services at some point during a given time period. This also reflects project timing in that post-2016 ABS homelessness statistics will become available only with the publication of relevant 2021 Census results expected in 2023.

The AHM series is strongly inspired by the United Kingdom Homelessness Monitor (UKHM) series, initiated in 2010 and funded by Crisis UK and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. AHM research team leader, Hal Pawson, was a UKHM co-founder and has co-authored all of the 25 UKHM reports on England and the other three UK nations subsequently published by Crisis UK¹ - most recently Homelessness Monitor England 2022 (Watts et al., 2022). Albeit adapted to accommodate important dissimilarities in social, economic, and policy contexts², AHM emulates the UKHM model in its remit and aims, as well as in its research methods and reporting structure. The AHM series objective is also held in common with UK counterpart reports: to strengthen the basis for evidence-informed policy in this important area.

1.2. POLICY CONTEXT

With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, homelessness was abruptly pushed into the spotlight as an urgent policy challenge for Australian governments. Prompted by concerns around infection and possible virus transmission by vulnerable people at a time when COVID zero remained the official (if undeclared) objective, rough sleeping and overcrowded homeless shelters were officially acknowledged as the public health problems they had always been. Beyond this, public health orders limiting visitors to private homes may have been recognised as creating a moral obligation on government to house couch-surfers thereby displaced.

1 See: <https://www.crisis.org.uk/ending-homelessness/homelessness-knowledge-hub/homelessness-monitor/>

2 Key features of the Australian context differing from that in the UK include the absence of a statutory homelessness framework, the more limited provision of rental assistance for lower income earners and the highly disproportionate incidence of economic disadvantage and housing stress affecting First Nations Australians. Also, while many Commonwealth Government social security benefit rates are set at relatively low levels and some entitlements have recently experienced reform, there has been no Australian equivalent to the successive waves of 'austerity' benefit cuts rolled out in the UK during the 2010s.

Accordingly, four state governments (New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland and South Australia) quickly designated substantial unprogrammed funding³ to book people lacking secure housing into hotels. In a matter of weeks during April 2020, thousands of people were placed into temporary shelter across Australia. As we have already estimated elsewhere (Pawson et al., 2021b), such assistance extended to at least 12,000 former rough sleepers, as well as many others.

The onset of COVID-19 followed on only very shortly after the national bushfire crisis of 2019-20. Then, when the pandemic emergency had only begun to subside in 2021, numerous settlements were hit by a wave of serious and in some cases unprecedented flood events that continued into 2022. Albeit that homes consequently destroyed or rendered uninhabitable by these disasters were small relative to Australia's overall housing stock, the impacts were severe for many affected communities (Michael, 2020; Ludlow, 2022). In some instances, they triggered substantial homelessness at the local level (McDonnell, 2022), severely straining capacity for relevant government departments and NGO service providers tasked to assist with temporary or in some cases permanent rehousing. Moreover, with thousands of burnt or flood-damaged homes being effectively removed from the housing system in affected areas, this only compounded 2021-22 rent inflation (Knaus, 2022) that has placed many more low-income tenants at greater risk of homelessness in and around these localities (as discussed in **Chapter 2. Housing market context**).

Policy responses prompted by the COVID-19 crisis are analysed in **Chapter 3. Homelessness policy and practice responses following from COVID-19**. In our view, however, the limited visibility of homelessness prior to 2020 in no way implies that the problem was objectively of a low order until that date. Neither should we view homelessness in isolation from the broader issues of housing stress and unmet housing need. This observation is especially valid when it comes to rough sleeping, the form of homelessness that was coming increasingly to the fore as an official concern even in the years preceding the pandemic – as argued in AHM 2020 (Pawson et al., 2020). Nevertheless, street homelessness needs to be recognised as a symptom of a much larger and more fundamental set of problems.

Rough sleeping is only the easily visible part of a much larger homelessness issue. And wider homelessness (for example, as enumerated in the Census) is only the extreme end of a far more extensive problem of serious housing need. For example, some 1.3 million people in low-income households are pushed into poverty purely by 'unaffordable' housing costs – that is, where a household nominally above the poverty line has a rent payment liability that leaves them with insufficient income to meet food, clothing and other basic living costs (Yates, 2019).

As a political issue on the national stage, homelessness has had little visibility since its brief prominence under Prime Minister Rudd around the time of his 2008 flagship Homelessness White Paper, *The Road Home* (Australian Government, 2008). In 2022, however, with a new federal administration recently installed, there are hopes of renewed commitment to tackling the problem at national level. This has been expressed most tangibly in the incoming government's re-establishment of a cabinet level housing and homelessness ministry, in its pledge to a new social housing investment program (see **Chapter 4. Recent homelessness policy developments and areas of concern**) and its declared intention to formulate a National Housing and Homelessness Plan.

Another indirect measure of recent change in the scale of homelessness is public expenditure on services for people experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness. Nationally, this rose from \$888 million in 2016-17 to \$1.2 billion in 2020-21 – constant 2020-21 dollars (Productivity Commission 2022a). In part, of course, this is influenced by the inclusion of 2020-21 as the first full pandemic year which – as described above – saw extraordinary homelessness spending. Nevertheless, with real terms annual spending growth running at 7% even in the four years preceding the COVID-19 crisis (Pawson et al., 2020), this is evidently a growing problem for Australia, even in narrow 'cost to government' terms.

³ That is, expenditure not programmed or accounted for in government forward estimates, and therefore subject to exceptional approval.

1.3. HOMELESSNESS CONCEPTUALISATION, ENUMERATION AND CAUSATION

Defining and measuring homelessness

In keeping with the official conception of 'homelessness' embodied in ABS census definitions, this report adopts a broad interpretation of the term. Thus, while rough sleepers form a prime focus of attention it is crucial to recognise that homelessness extends to a broader population experiencing highly insecure or otherwise fundamentally unsuitable housing. Under the ABS definition (ABS, 2012) 'homelessness' applies to anyone who:

- is entirely roofless, or
- occupies a dwelling that:
 - is physically inadequate,
 - provides no tenure, or only a short and non-extendable tenure,
 - enables the resident no control of, and access to, space for social relations.

This broadly scoped definition is consistent with the concept of primary, secondary, tertiary homelessness developed by Chamberlain and MacKenzie (1992). However, the formal ABS definition draws on Shelley Mallett's (2004) important work to extend the Chamberlain and MacKenzie thinking by conceptualising homelessness as the absence of physical resources and security that enable people to feel at home.

The homelessness statistics most widely cited in Australia are those generated by the five yearly ABS Census of Population and Housing. These 'point-in-time' estimates are built up from the ways that inadequately housed Census respondents describe their living situation on Census night, and from direct enumeration of people lacking accommodation of any kind (i.e. rough sleepers – or, in ABS terminology, 'Persons living in improvised dwellings, tents, or sleeping out') (ABS, 2012). The precise methods employed in Census rough sleeper enumeration were discussed in AHM 2020 (see Section 3.5.2 of that report, Pawson et al., 2020).

The ABS recorded 116,000 people experiencing homelessness on Census night 2016, of whom 8,200 were rough sleepers. Unfortunately, while undertaken in August 2021, relevant results from Australia's latest Census remain unpublished at the time of writing (late 2022). Partly for that reason, this report instead mainly draws on administratively generated homelessness statistics as published by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) from data provided by Specialist Homelessness Service (SHS) organisations in accordance with the Specialist Homelessness Services Collection National Minimum Data Set (**SHSC NMDS**). This SHS Collection (or SHSC) originates from records of service user/service provider interactions where someone seeks and receives some form of 'homelessness service' from one of the many hundreds of non-government agencies tasked to provide such help. Technically, statistics drawn from resulting records can be regarded as a proxy measure of 'homelessness expressed demand'.

In our judgement SHS statistics can provide some meaningful impression of homelessness rates and trends, as well as informative insights on the cohort characteristics of people experiencing homelessness or at risk of doing so. They also have certain important advantages over the Census. Firstly, since SHSC statistics are being constantly updated, they can indicate trends over time that are not limited to five-yearly snapshots. The scope for near 'real time' observation of such changes has been enhanced since 2020 with the AIHW decision to initiate monthly, as well as annual, publication of SHSC summary statistics.

Secondly, there is arguably a positive quality to statistics generated by requests for relevant services, since such requests demonstrate 'felt need', indicating that those concerned perceive their own housing situation as problematic. Thirdly, being drawn from service provider organisations that collect operationally relevant information from people seeking help, the AIHW data about people experiencing or at risk of homelessness is much richer than that available from the Census. Importantly, for example, it can provide some indication of the experiences and situations prompting such applications – i.e. 'homelessness triggers' or immediate reasons for homelessness, as reported. No such data are collected by the Census.

At the same time, as a proxy measure of homelessness expressed demand, it is acknowledged that SHSC data have some limitations. Importantly, like all statistics that enumerate service recipients, they are liable to be influenced by SHS organisational capacity. Thus, the figures analysed in this report relate specifically to those both seeking, and provided with, some form of 'homelessness service' during the relevant time period. They therefore exclude anyone seeking help but turned away due to lack of resources.

Equally, of course, many people at risk of homelessness, or even already in this situation, may seek no assistance from an SHS provider⁴. That is, they may not 'express demand' for such help (perhaps lacking confidence that meaningful assistance is available), and therefore remain uncounted in the AIHW statistics as analysed in **Chapter 5. Recent homelessness trends**. Strikingly, population-wide survey evidence suggests that two-thirds of people experiencing homelessness do not in fact seek support (ABS, 2015).

Conceptualising homelessness processes and causation

As noted above, a prime purpose of the AHM series is to chart changing levels of homelessness and to identify and analyse the factors that underlie such observed trends. In framing our exploration of the research evidence that directly addresses these issues we first need to rehearse our understanding of homelessness as a social problem.

Like many other social issues, homelessness is complex and results from diverse factors including structural, systemic and individual causes. For an individual, loss of suitable accommodation may result from the coincidence of several problematic life events, possibly triggered by a single such event. It can be viewed in aggregate as a societal problem that needs to be quantified and addressed. Alternatively, it may be observed at the individual person level as a process that reflects (and results from) extreme stress, often accompanied by vulnerability and disadvantage.

In this report we draw on the seminal theorising of homelessness first articulated by Suzanne Fitzpatrick (2005) and then developed as a framework driving the analysis of Homelessness Monitors in the United Kingdom. Thus, as articulated in Homelessness Monitor England 2022 (Watts et al., 2022, p. 3):

Theoretical, historical and international perspectives indicate that the causation of homelessness is complex, with no single 'trigger' that is either 'necessary' or 'sufficient' for it to occur. Individual, interpersonal and structural factors all play a role – and interact with each other – and the balance of causes differs over time, across countries, and between demographic groups.

With respect to the main structural factors, international comparative research, and the experience of previous UK recessions, suggests that housing market trends and policies have the most direct impact on levels of homelessness, with the influence of labour-market change more likely to be lagged and diffuse, and strongly mediated by welfare arrangements and other contextual factors. The central role that poverty plays in shaping homelessness risks in the UK is also now well established.

Individual vulnerabilities, support needs, and 'risk taking' behaviours may be implicated in homelessness as experienced by some individuals. Examples might include low educational attainment, mental ill-health or problematic alcohol or drug use. However, these are often rooted in the pressures associated with poverty and other forms of structural disadvantage. At the same time, the 'anchor' social relationships which can act as a primary 'buffer' to homelessness, can be put under considerable strain by stressful financial circumstances (ibid).

Other authors concur noting that research on determinants of homelessness has moved toward a general consensus that individual and structural explanations are not mutually exclusive, and theoretical models have been developed that integrate the two types of factors (Byrne et al., 2013).

⁴ A particular issue here may be the geographical distribution of SHS services; i.e. the absence of any such organisation in the home area of a person in need of such help.

In subsequent chapters we demonstrate how public policy, particularly housing and welfare policy, are: (1) critical drivers of homelessness in Australia, and (2) areas that represent significant opportunities to demonstrably reduce homelessness. Thus, drawing on Watts and colleagues, this report acknowledges the complexity of homelessness causation, while also identifying a suite of public policy changes that can improve the housing and life outcomes of people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

1.4. RESEARCH METHODS

Secondary data analysis

Mainly embodied in **Chapters 2 and 5**, this research is substantially based on a secondary data analysis focused mainly on published data about: (a) homelessness and (b) the housing market factors that we argue constitute potential drivers of (or risk factors for) homelessness.

In our trend over time analysis, we rely mainly on the AIHW Specialist Homelessness Services Collection (SHSC) series. While reference is made to the AIHW published series, our **Chapter 5. Recent homelessness trends** analysis also draws on customised SHS statistics generated by AIHW at our request (**Figure 5.6**).

Our housing market analysis draws on a range of published official and industry sources that calibrate different rental sector indicators.

Primary research

The research involved two main primary research components, as elaborated further below:

- In depth interviews with a wide range of stakeholders – senior government policymakers, service providers, and advocacy organisations; and
- An online survey of homelessness service practitioners.

In addition, we took part in a focus group meeting of local government homelessness staff employed in Australia's eight capital cities, as convened through the Capital City Lord Mayors organisation. Including these colleagues, the fieldwork thus drew upon the informed perspectives of 28 key stakeholder colleagues.

While the above fieldwork spanned all eight Australian jurisdictions (see **Table 1.1**), the balance of this was intentionally weighted towards New South Wales and Victoria – reflecting both the relatively large size of these states and the observable diversity of policy responses to homelessness. Also, only two people from state and territory governments agreed to participate. Several other state government representatives were invited to participate (from Victoria, Queensland, and Western Australia), but they did not consent to be interviewed.

The main purpose of the interviews and focus group discussion was to investigate recent changes in homelessness policy and practice over the period 2019-2022.

In **Table 1.1** and throughout the report we have concealed interviewees' identity to maintain anonymity.

Table 1.1: Key stakeholder interviewees and focus group participants

Location	State and territory government	Local government	Homelessness services NGO/ advocacy org/peak body
New South Wales	1	1	2
Victoria		2	4
Queensland		1	1
South Australia	1	1	
Western Australia			1
Tasmania		2	1
Australian Capital Territory		1	1
Northern Territory			2
National focus			6
Total	2	8	18

Apart from one face-to-face interview, stakeholder interviews were undertaken via video conferencing (Teams or Zoom), utilising a semi-structured topic guide.

To extend the reach of the research an online survey was used to probe 'front line' service provider perspectives on recent change in the nature and scale of homelessness across Australia. Here we took our cue from the UKHM series which includes, as standard to each edition, an online survey of local authority housing options managers (see, for example, Watts et al., 2022).

Emulating the roughly equivalent UKHM surveys, the AHM questionnaire (see Appendix 1) was designed to tap into service provider organisation perceptions of:

- Recent changes in the scale, nature and causality of homelessness; and
- Recently enacted or proposed policy developments (whether at the state or national level) potentially significant for homelessness (either in exacerbating or ameliorating the problem).

The draft questionnaire was piloted with two New South Wales homelessness services provider organisations.

Organisations suitable for inclusion in the main survey were selected with assistance from the Homelessness Australia (HA) national network of state and territory homelessness sector peak bodies and/or jurisdiction representatives, as well as the South Australian Council of Social Service (SACOSS). Peak contacts were asked to recommend a selection of service providers in their jurisdiction, with a preference for 'larger agencies with a significant role in assisting people seeking help with housing'. Beyond this, state and territory contacts were advised that recommended survey participants should ideally include a diverse mix of organisations in terms of their metro/non-metro location, and in terms of their specialisation with particular homelessness client groups – e.g. youth, family violence, First Nations people, and so on.

Through the approach described above, a national dataset of 170 organisations was established. Although not formally scaled to the population of each jurisdiction, the size of the sample in each state and territory bore some relation to this.

HA contacts were then requested to email the listed organisations in their jurisdiction, on behalf of the research team, to invite participation in the survey. Email recipients were requested to click on a link to complete the online survey via the University of New South Wales (UNSW) website. Two rounds of survey invitation emails were sent to each state and territory cohort. With 70 of the 170 invited organisations taking part in the survey, the overall national response rate was 41%.

1.5. REPORT STRUCTURE

Following on from this introduction, **Chapter 2. Housing market context** reviews recent social, economic, and housing market trends with a possible bearing on homelessness. This chapter is largely based on our secondary data analysis as detailed above.

Building on AHM 2020 and subsequent associated work (Pawson et al., 2021a and b), **Chapter 3. Homelessness policy and practice responses following from COVID-19** further examines 2020-2022 policy and practice changes in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. We examine how far these developments may result in enduring institutional changes in how Australia responds to homelessness.

Next, in **Chapter 4. Recent homelessness policy developments and areas of concern** we examine significant homelessness policy developments emerging in Australia over recent years, other than those identifiably prompted by the pandemic. These include the recently renewed federal re-engagement with homelessness policy, along with both federal and state initiatives to expand social housing provision. Also discussed are other policy developments that call for scaling up and/or more clearly defining, including homelessness prevention, the role of local government authorities, and permanent supportive housing.

Largely drawing on AIHW SHSC statistics, and on local council rough sleeper counts, **Chapter 5. Recent homelessness trends** then analyses the changing nature and extent of homelessness across Australia. These analyses are supplemented by online survey evidence. Finally, and in the light of the recently issued Productivity Commission report that can be arguably treated as an authoritative 'official perspective' on homelessness at the national scale, **Chapter 6. Conclusions and key recommendations** reflects on our analyses and findings as set out in previous chapters.

Housing market context

2

Key points

- Sharply rising house prices during the first 18 months of the COVID-19 pandemic raised the wealth threshold for accessing home ownership (the size of a typical home deposit in relation to average annual earnings) from 8.8 years to 10.2 years.
- The house price downturn affecting many parts of Australia from mid-2022 is unlikely to enhance home ownership affordability, being prompted by – and coinciding with, sharply rising interest rates.
- Following on from a period of unusually low growth immediately preceding the pandemic, the past two years (2020-2022) have seen a dramatic spike in private market rent inflation across Australia, with rental prices (advertised rents) rising at rates unseen since 2008.
- Latest figures, for June 2022, show annual private rent inflation running at 1.5 times the rate of consumer price rises more generally – 9.5% compared with 6.1%.
- In the two years to June 2022, regional rent increases tended to outpace rising rents in capital cities across Australia, with the high rate of regional rent inflation in Queensland notably exceeding that in Brisbane in successive years.
- Symptomatic of the supply shortage inflating private rents, the rental property vacancy rate for non-metropolitan Australia was running at an extraordinarily low 0.6%-0.7% through 2021-22.
- At 2.6%, the marginal expansion of Australia's social housing stock for the period 2016-2021 markedly lagged both population (5.7%) and household growth (8.2%). Consequently, the proportionate share of social housing has continued to drift downwards.
- Over a longer (30 year) timeframe, the annual flow of social sector lettings – a more meaningful measure of supply than simple stock figures – has been declining much more rapidly than the proportionate share of social housing stock.
- Of the 46,000 private rental properties advertised for let across Australia in March 2022, just 1.4% were affordable to an age pensioner couple, while the already small share of private rental properties affordable to a range of low-income groups has tended to shrink steadily over recent years.
- Across Australia, latest statistics show that more than half of low-income renters (58%) are paying 'unaffordable' rents – i.e. equating to more than 30% of household income.
- While national time-series statistics are unavailable for other jurisdictions, the proportion of new private tenancies in Victoria affordable to low-income households declined from 17% in Q2 2017 to 11% in Q2 2022. In regional Victoria the proportion fell from 58% to only 24% over the same period.

2.1. CHAPTER SCOPE AND STRUCTURE

This chapter analyses the changing rental housing market conditions of recent years that are an important influence on the incidence and nature of homelessness in Australia. While encompassing the height of the COVID-19 crisis in 2020 and 2021, most of our analyses span the period 2017-22. In this way we aim to contextualise the market developments identified during the public health crisis at its peak and in its immediate aftermath.

Our analysis in this chapter is mainly informed by a wide variety of published statistics, including data originating from both government and private sector sources. This is complemented, in [Section 2.4](#), by brief reference to the recent experience of SHS agencies, as drawn from our online SHS provider survey (see [Section 1.4](#)).

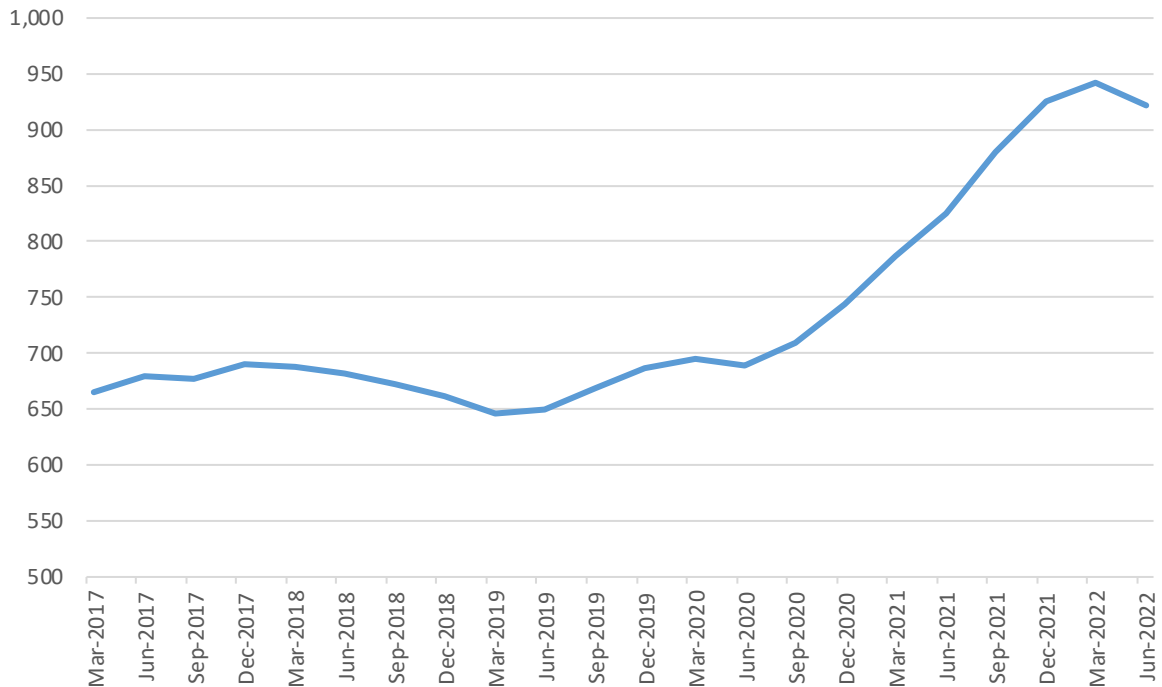
The chapter is structured as follows. First, to provide a fuller analysis of recent trends across the housing system, we briefly review recent trends in the house sales market. Next, in [Section 2.3](#), we analyse private market rent trends over the past few years, at both national and sub-national scales. Complementing this, [Section 2.4](#) summarises recent patterns in private rental property availability. To complete our coverage of the rental housing market, [Section 2.5](#) examines change in social housing sector capacity. [Section 2.6](#) then assesses the impacts of recent market trends on rental affordability for low-income renters potentially vulnerable to homelessness. Finally, drawing on the preceding evidence [Section 2.7](#) concludes the chapter with a summary overview and brief contemplation on future prospects.

2.2. THE HOUSE SALES MARKET

Since homelessness usually involves former tenants rather than owner occupiers, it is the rental housing market that forms the main focus for this chapter.

Home ownership affordability is, admittedly, less obviously pertinent as a direct influence on homelessness. Importantly, however, because the housing system is highly interconnected, there is some indirect relevance. Crucially, over the past 20-30 years, a rising 'wealth threshold' for access to home ownership has contributed to the growing size of the population cohort dependent on rental – predominantly private rental – housing. Moderate income earners with a prospect of attaining home ownership have been needing to spend longer and longer waiting periods before this becomes financially feasible. This, in turn, puts upward pressure on that residential market sector that also accommodates most of Australia's lower income population (Productivity Commission, 2019). Hence, the logic of including within this chapter a brief consideration of home ownership affordability trends.

Figure 2.1: Mean residential property prices, Australia, 2017-22 (\$000s cash)

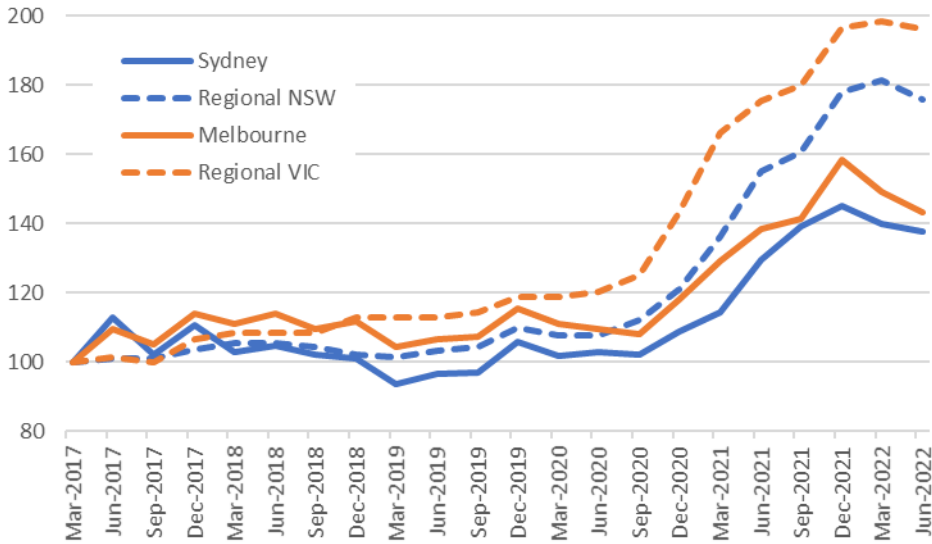


Source: ABS Total value of dwellings, Table 1. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/economy/price-indexes-and-inflation/total-value-dwellings/latest-release#data-download>

Residential property prices rose rapidly during the middle years of the last decade. As shown in **Figure 2.1**, this was followed by a period of relative stability, 2017-19. Contrary to most expectations at the start of the pandemic, however, prices once again escalated sharply from mid-2020, with mean residential property values 36% higher in March 2022 than at the beginning of the public health crisis two years earlier.

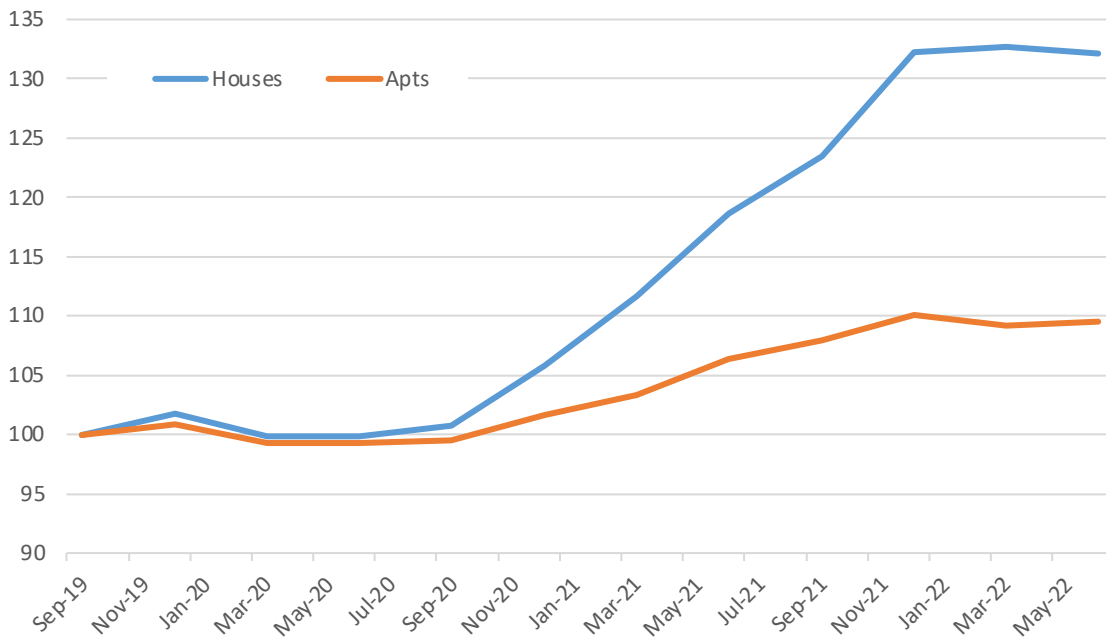
Nevertheless, as shown in **Figure 2.2** and **Figure 2.3**, property price trends were substantially diverse during the first two years of COVID-19. Firstly, as illustrated in **Figure 2.2**, there was a general tendency for prices to rise more markedly in regional markets than in capital cities. For example, while the median ‘established house’ price in Melbourne rose by 27% in the two years to March 2022, the equivalent figure for regional Victoria was no less than 64%. Secondly, it has been houses – as opposed to apartments – that have seen the greatest price inflation. Thus, as shown in **Figure 2.3**, capital city houses were being traded in March 2022 at a median price 33% higher than at the start of the pandemic, as compared with only 10% for apartments. These patterns have been in part attributed to changing housing consumer preferences, influenced by pandemic lockdowns and working from home – developments that placed an additional premium on indoor and outdoor private residential areas – the so-called ‘race for space’ (Pawson et al., 2022a).

Figure 2.2: Median price, established houses, NSW and Victoria, 2017-22, indexed (Mar 2017=100)



Source: ABS Total value of dwellings, Table 2. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/economy/price-indexes-and-inflation/total-value-dwellings/latest-release#data-download>

Figure 2.3: Median residential property prices, Australia (eight capital cities), 2019-2022, indexed (Sep 2019=100)

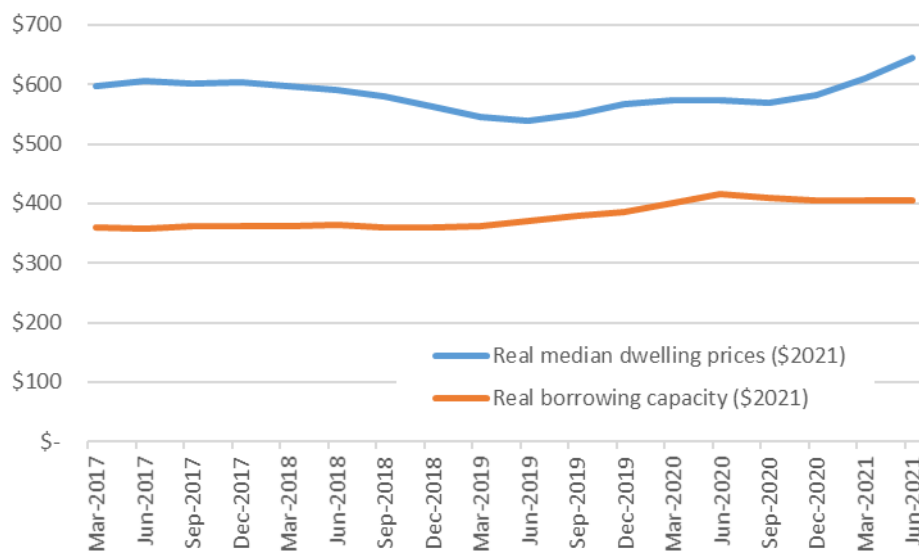


Source: Domain House Price Reports. <https://www.domain.com.au/research/house-price-report/>

To benchmark the national house price trend, it is relevant to note that in the period 2017-2022 the real terms increase in mean house prices was 26% (i.e. **Figure 2.1** values adjusted according to the ABS consumer prices index (all items)), while average earnings in the two years to November 2021 remained essentially flat – a 0.5% real terms decline (ABS, 2022a). However, while this comparison can be considered a crude indication of declining house price affordability, the actual reduction as measured by households’ ability to service debt will have been cushioned by mortgage interest rate reductions immediately preceding the pandemic and immediately after its outbreak.

Partly due to complications such as changing interest rates, house purchase affordability is a notably difficult concept to gauge in terms of meaningful trends over time. However, the metrics graphed in 2.4 provide one way of approaching this. This analysis charts: (a) property prices and (b) the maximum amount a median earner could (theoretically) borrow, factoring in standard mortgage lender rules and prevailing interest rates. The margin between these two figures is one measure of the ‘affordability gap’ measurable in Australia⁵. As shown here, thanks to relative price stability during 2017-19, the gap saw appreciable narrowing in this period, whereas – thanks to pandemic price inflation – it was once again widening rapidly during 2020-21.

Figure 2.4: Affordability gap, Australia, 2017-2021



Source: Pawson et al., (2020) – drawing on original ABS-published data and updated to June 2021.

Note: Table compares typical dwelling prices with borrowing capacity for a household on average weekly earnings.

Another way of calibrating change over time in house purchase affordability is with respect to the value of a required mortgage deposit. This refers to the fact that – irrespective of falling interest rates – prices recently rising ahead of incomes will have lengthened the saving period required for the loan down-payment routinely required by lenders. It is important to appreciate that post-1990s reductions in interest rates to historically low levels during 2020-22 boosted borrowing capacity over this period. But such change has no equivalent moderating impact on the mortgage deposit threshold to home ownership. Scaled in relation to typical annual incomes, therefore, rising house prices during the first 18 months of the pandemic saw the calculated number of years of deposit saving required for a typical property rising from 8.8 years to 10.2 years (Pawson et al., 2022b – drawing on calculations by CoreLogic and ANU Centre for Social Research and Methods).

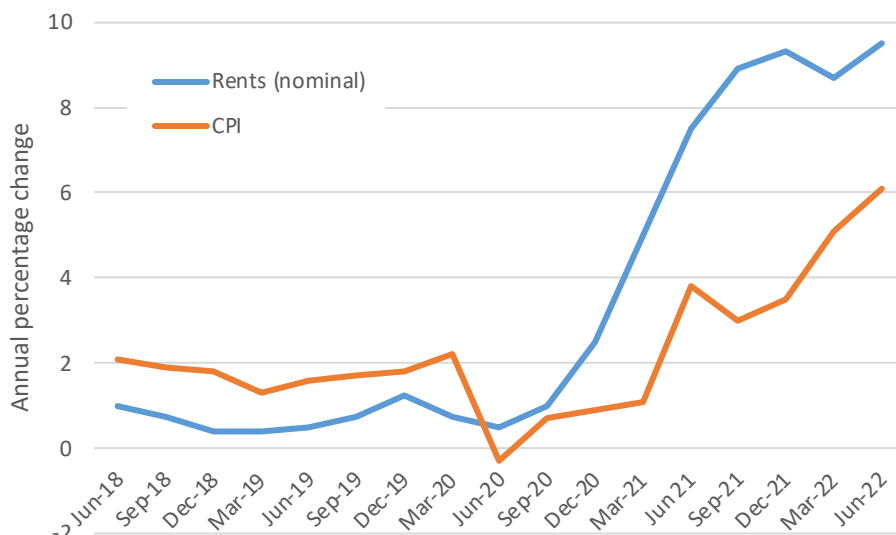
5 A gap which might be bridged, for example, through an aspiring purchaser choosing to acquire a relatively small or less desirably located dwelling, or by a purchaser’s ability to contribute their own equity – whether in the form of household savings or a parental contribution.

2.3. PRIVATE RENT LEVELS AND TRENDS

National trends

There are several different ways of calibrating private rent levels and, thus, changing levels of rent inflation (or deflation). Firstly, there are ‘asking rents’ statistics that refer to the advertised rent for properties available to let, and is the rents metric commonly reported by property data firms (e.g. CoreLogic, Domain, SQM). For clarity, this report uses the term ‘advertised rents’. Secondly, there are ‘agreed rents’, the rents actually contracted at tenancy commencement, as recorded in rental bond lodgement; these data are published by some state governments. Both are usually presented in terms of a median or quartile value. Both measure ‘entry rents’ for new tenancies at (or just before) their initiation. In this way, these metrics contrast from the third rent monitoring statistic: mean or median rents actually charged/paid across the full cohort of existing tenancies at any one time (e.g. as recorded in the ABS Consumer Price Index).

Figure 2.5: Annual change in advertised rents and consumer prices, 2018-22



Sources: Rents – CoreLogic monthly chart-pack series; Consumer Price Index (all items) – ABS Consumer Price Index, Australia. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/economy/price-indexes-and-inflation/consumer-price-index-australia/latest-release#data-download>

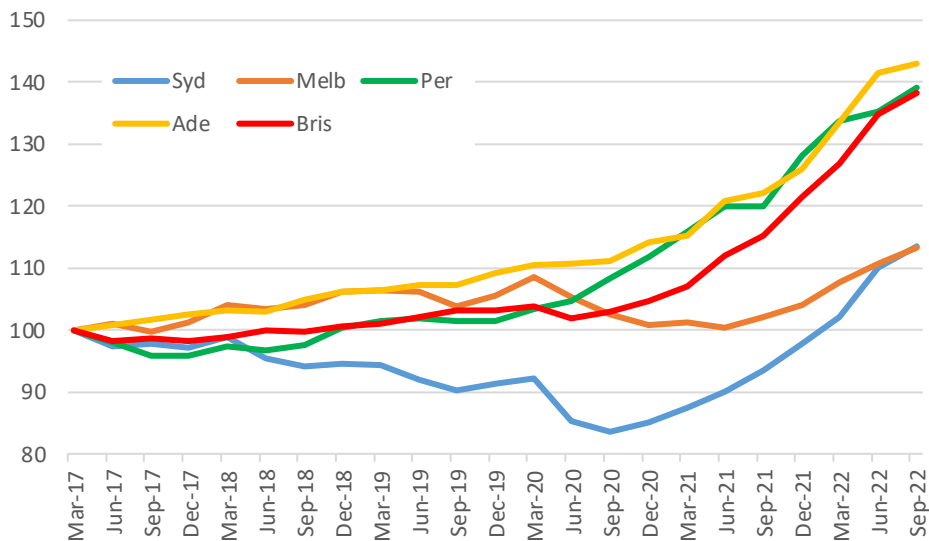
Following on from unusually low growth in the period immediately preceding the pandemic, the past two years (2020-2022) have seen a dramatic spike in private market rent inflation, with rental prices (advertised rents) rising at rates unseen since 2008. Albeit that the wider Consumer Price Index began to rise more rapidly in late 2021 (see **Figure 2.5**), pandemic era rental price increases have – as yet – far exceeded general price inflation. Latest figures, for June 2022, show rents rising at 1.5 times the rate of consumer prices more generally – 9.5% compared with 6.1%.

Capital city trends

The differential economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic across Australia are apparent in 2020-21 rent trends for the five main capital cities. Unlike the other cities, Sydney and Melbourne saw significant reductions in median advertised rents during 2020 in relation to both houses and apartments – see **Figure 2.6** and **Figure 2.7**. The especially marked impacts in these two cities likely reflect their greater vulnerability to the international border closure as from February/March 2020. This refers to their disproportionately large role in accommodating overseas students, working holiday visa holders and other new migrants – groups that traditionally form substantial rental housing demand components in Australia.

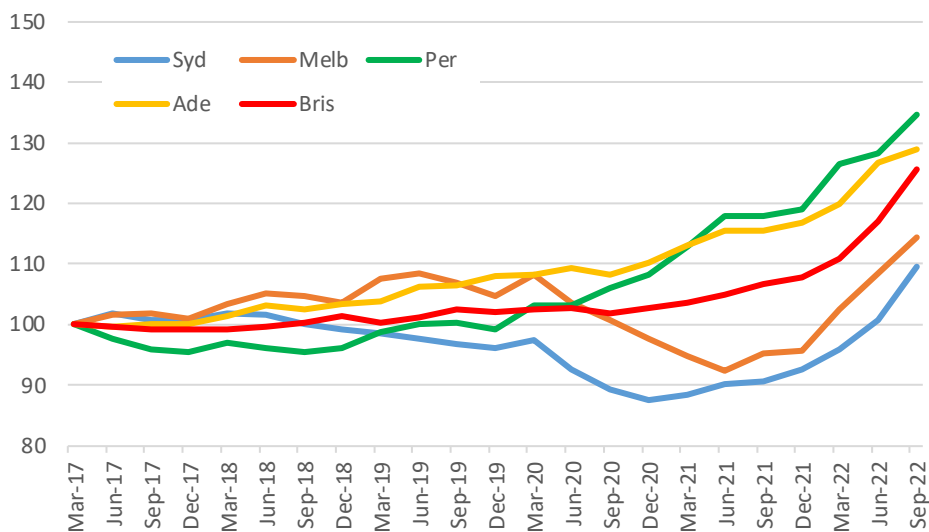
Only by mid-2021 had Sydney (nominal) house rents recovered to their pre-crisis level – although they were continuing to rise steeply through 2022. House rents in Melbourne had regained their March 2020 values only in early 2022. Meanwhile, apartment rents in both cities likewise also regained their (nominal) pre-COVID levels only in the first half of 2022 (see [Figure 2.7](#)).

Figure 2.6: Advertised rents for houses: capital cities, 2017-22 – indexed trends (Mar 2017=100)



Source: SQM free property data. <https://sqmresearch.com.au/weekly-rents.php>

Figure 2.7: Advertised rents for apartments: capital cities, 2017-22 – indexed trends (Mar 2017=100)



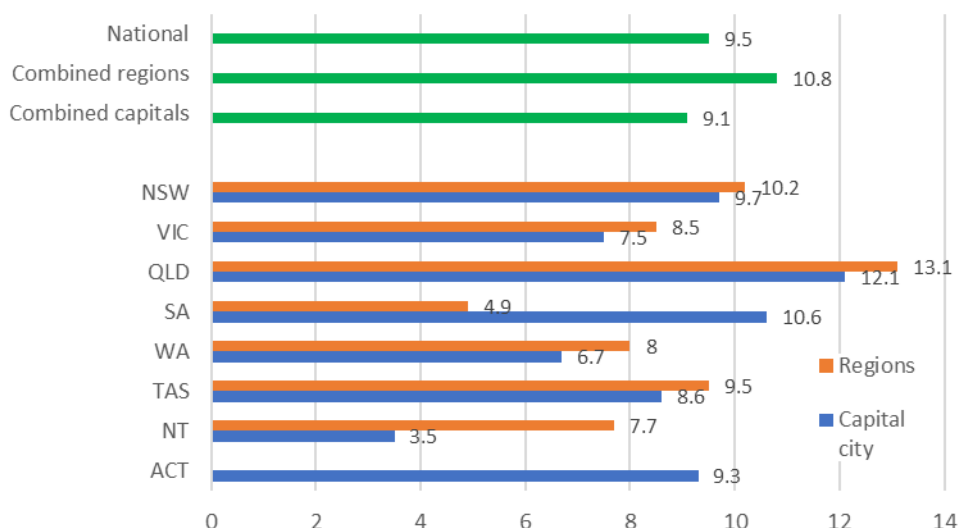
Source: SQM free property data. <https://sqmresearch.com.au/weekly-rents.php>

Cities versus regions

While the period 2020-22 saw substantial inflation in advertised rents across Australia (see **Figure 2.5**), marked property type and inter-city variations have already been documented above. There have also been sharp contrasts between metropolitan and regional markets, with rent rises particularly rapid in the latter, especially in the early phase of the COVID-19 rental market upswing in 2020-21. Thus, according to CoreLogic’s index, market rents across ‘combined capital cities’ increased by 6.4% in the 12 months to August 2021, whereas the comparable ‘combined regional’ figure was a remarkable 12.4% (CoreLogic, 2021 – as cited in Pawson et al., 2021b). This was particularly true in New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland.

In 2021-22 (the year to June 2022), while regional rents have continued to rapidly inflate, capital city rental inflation has also tended to accelerate – see **Figure 2.8**. Notably, the national increase was almost double the latest rate of general (CPI) price inflation (5.1%). Moreover, in almost every capital city and region rent inflation has latterly exceeded general price inflation – albeit most markedly in Queensland. It is also notable that the high rate of regional rent inflation in Queensland has exceeded that in Brisbane for two years in succession – 13% compared with 5% for the year to June 2021, and 13% compared with 12% for the year to June 2022 (see **Figure 2.8**).

Figure 2.8: Annual percentage increase in advertised rents, year to June 2022



Source: CoreLogic monthly chart-pack, July 2022. <https://www.corelogic.com.au/news-research/reports/monthly-housing-chart-pack>

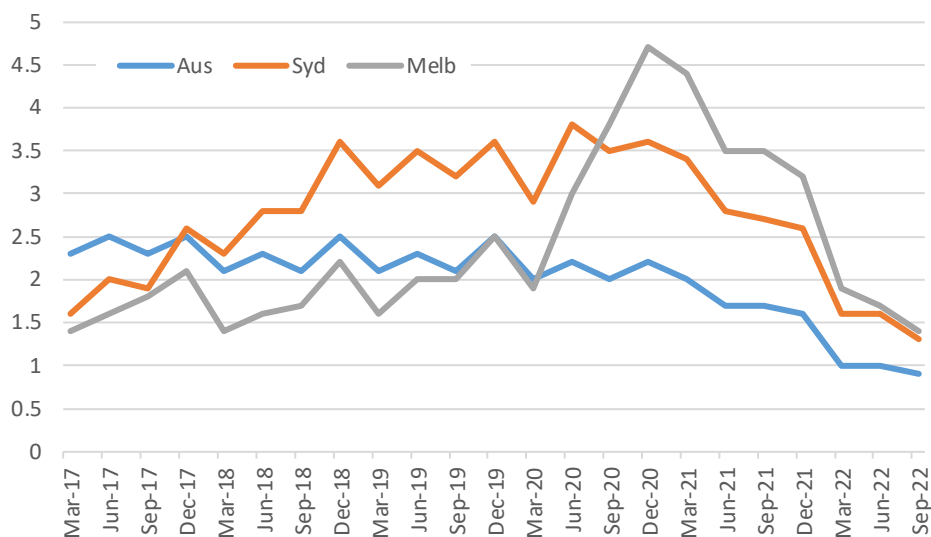
Perhaps significantly, Queensland’s population has seen relatively rapid growth in recent years. In the four years to December 2021 the total person count increased by 6.1%, as compared with only 4.1% for Australia as a whole (ABS, 2022b). In part, this reflects an ongoing revival in internal migration into Queensland which saw annual net interstate migration to the state rising to its highest level since the mid-2000s (ABS, 2022c). Since it is conventionally understood that recent migrants are a key contributor to rental housing demand, this may have been a particularly important factor underpinning recent rental price inflation.

2.4. PRIVATE RENTAL PROPERTY AVAILABILITY

Another indicator of rental market pressure is the rental property vacancy rate. This gauges the number of properties available to let as a proportion of the total stock of rental properties at any given time. Low or falling vacancy rates are typically associated with rent inflation since, unless the number of people seeking tenancies also falls in tandem with property availability, the laws of supply and demand dictate that prices will rise as a result.

At the national level and in Australia's largest cities, vacancy rates trended steeply downwards in the period 2020-22 (see **Figure 2.9**). Perhaps most notably, Melbourne saw a dramatic increase in vacancies early in the pandemic, followed by sharp reductions in 2021-22. Likewise, Sydney's vacancy rate declined steadily from the second half of 2020. While somewhat less volatile, the national vacancy rate halved to under 1% during 2021 and the first three quarters of 2022, its lowest level on record (Domain, 2022).

Figure 2.9: Private rental percentage vacancy rates, 2017-22



Source: SQM free property data. <https://sqmresearch.com.au/free-statistics.php>

While trend data for regional rental markets are unavailable, recently published figures show that the vacancy rate for non-metropolitan Australia was running at an extraordinarily low 0.6%-0.7% through 2021-22 (Power 2022). The capital city norm had meanwhile fallen from 2.1% to 1.1% during the year to June 2022. These levels and trends appear highly consistent with our rental price analysis as presented above.

Complementing all this evidence and emphasising the pressures affecting the lower end of the private rental market, evidence from our online survey indicates the growing challenges recently faced by many SHS providers in securing accommodation for people experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness. Well over half of our respondents (61%) said it had become 'much harder' to find suitable housing for clients since the onset of the pandemic. Notably, this was true for 70% of those operating solely in regional areas as compared with only 29% of those working only in a capital city. Thus:

The current rental crisis has resulted in us being unable to successfully advocate with real estate agents, many real estates will not even answer/return our call (as they have 80-100 applicants for every property) The waitlists for social housing have increased, availability of housing is reduced (due to the rental crisis) (Online survey respondent).

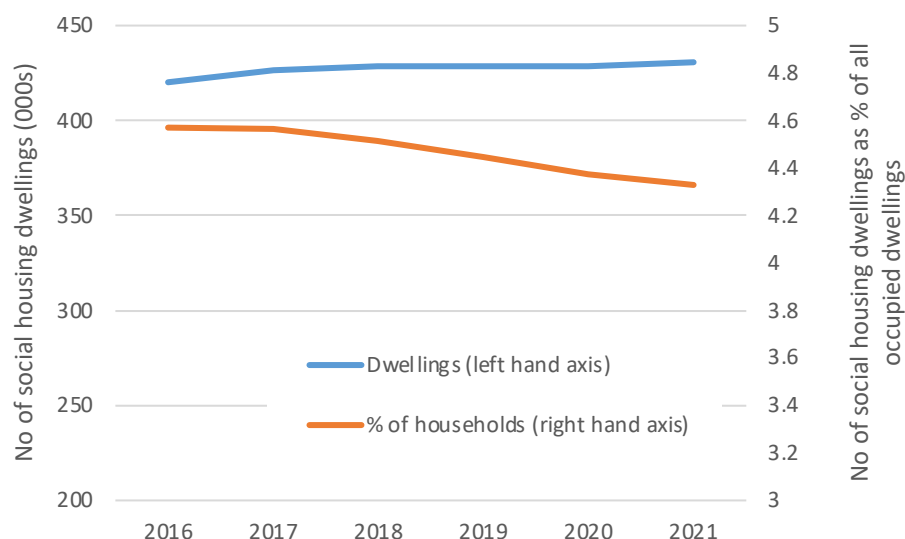
Tree changes after lockdowns have increased the price and competition for rental dramatically making most rental properties unaffordable for those on Centrelink benefits. And those who were from a perceived disadvantaged background were not given a look in at rental properties even if they were working and had a good rental history (Online survey respondent).

2.5. SOCIAL HOUSING SUPPLY

Given its role in providing relatively secure tenancies usually priced well below market rates, social housing has special importance in accommodating socio-economically disadvantaged households who would be placed at risk of homelessness in the private rental market. In the Australian context, social housing refers to dwellings managed by state governments, not-for-profit community housing organisations, and Indigenous rental providers.

Over the most recent five-year period (2016-2021), according to the Productivity Commission’s Annual Report on Government Services, Australia’s social housing stock saw a marginal increase from 420,000 to 431,000⁶. This reflects the fact that new construction narrowly exceeded property sales and demolitions. However, this rate of increase (2.6%) is far below that of both population (5.7%)⁷ and households (8.2%)⁸ as estimated by ABS for the most recent five-year period. Consequently, the proportionate share of social housing has recently continued to drift downwards, as shown in **Figure 2.10**.

Figure 2.10: National social housing portfolio, 2016-2021



Sources: Productivity Commission – Report on Government Services: Housing (various years); Households data from ABS Household and Family Projections. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/population/household-and-family-projections-australia/2016-2041>

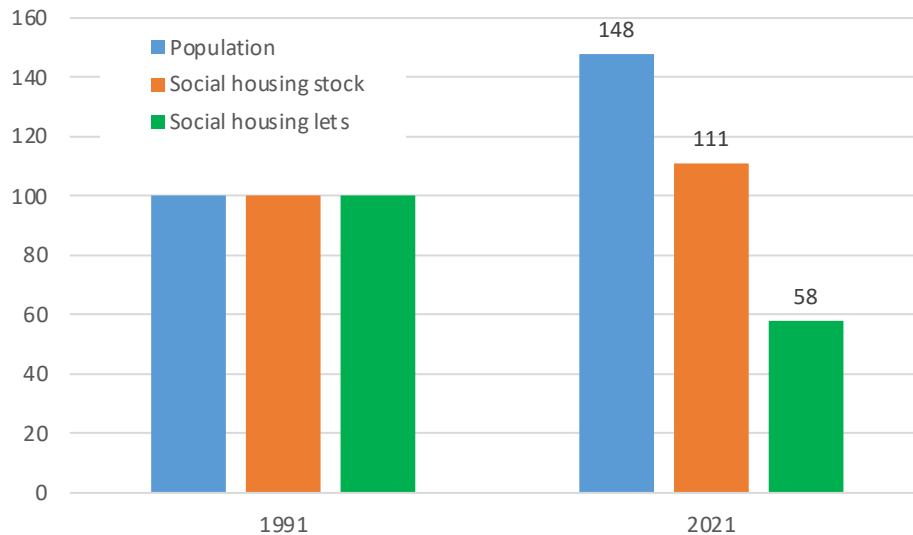
Note: Social housing as a proportion of all occupied dwellings calculated according to total social housing stock in relation to total households.

6 Most of this increase was attributable to NSW, probably largely reflecting one-off state government schemes; in particular, re-investment of proceeds from Millers Point housing privatisation, and delivery of Social and Affordable Housing Fund program.

7 ABS – National, state and territory population statistics <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/population/national-state-and-territory-population/latest-release#data-download>

8 As projected by ABS on the basis of 2016 census data in <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/population/household-and-family-projections-australia/2016-2041>

Figure 2.11: Population, social housing stock, social rental lets: % change over time (1991=100)



Sources: ABS – National, state and territory population; AIHW – Australia's Welfare 1993; Productivity Commission – Report on Government Services (Housing) 18A3, 18A5, 18A6, 18A7

A more direct measure of social housing supply is the annual flow of lettable vacancies (i.e. newly built homes being let for the first time plus existing dwellings being relet after falling vacant). In the period 1991 to 2021, for example, published figures indicate that lettings by social housing providers declined from 52,000 to 30,000, a reduction of 42%⁹. Proportionate to population, this equates to a decline of over 61%¹⁰. As shown in **Figure 2.11**, calibrating social housing sector capacity in this way paints a far starker picture than with respect to simple stock numbers.

Since the main focus of this chapter relates to the past five years, we would ideally graph the national trend on social housing lettings over this period and compare patterns for key states. Unfortunately, however, the annually published statistics for this period are subject to imperfections¹¹ that mean such an analysis cannot be implemented with any degree of confidence.

2.6. HOUSING AFFORDABILITY STRESS FOR LOWER INCOME RENTERS

In the preceding sections we have presented market-wide analyses of for-sale and rental sectors as these have functioned over the past five years. We now move on to examine associated trends in the incidence of housing affordability stress experienced at the lower end of the private rental housing market. A focus on lower income renters (by custom defined as households in the lowest two quintiles of the income distribution) is particularly relevant to the central purpose of this chapter in concentrating attention on that part of the overall population more vulnerable to homelessness due to housing market pressures. Because it is likely to mean having to juggle between paying for housing and for other essential expenditures, a low-income tenant having to contend with an 'unaffordable rent' is at a higher risk of incurring rent arrears that could ultimately lead to tenancy termination and – for some of those affected, homelessness.

9 Sources: 1991: AIHW (1993) Table 3.22; 2021: Productivity Commission (2022) Tables 18A5, 18A6, 18A7.

10 Making reference to ABS estimated resident population statistics, social housing lettings declined from 30 per 10,000 people in 1991 to 11.7 per 10,000 people in 2020-21 – a drop of 61%

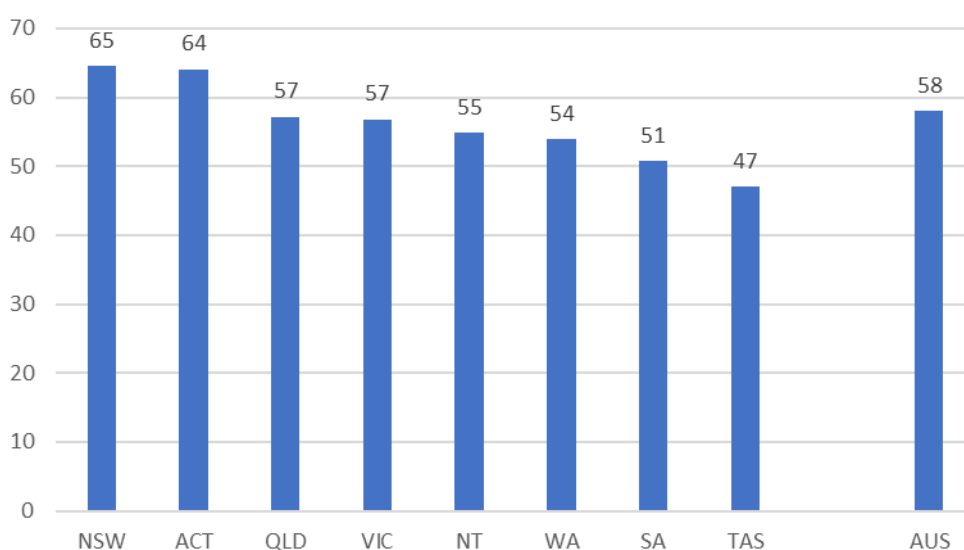
11 In particular, conventions used in the data collection that informs the relevant tables within the annually published Report on Government Services include the curious practice of recording as a community housing letting, every tenanted dwelling received by CHPs via public housing transfers. Inclusion of Indigenous housing sector lettings in the series is also incomplete and inconsistent.

The incidence of rental affordability stress

Latest available official survey data (ABS, 2022d) show that, across Australia, nearly a fifth of low-income private renters (19%) were paying rents equating to *more than half* of their household income. It would be expected that this group – numbering some 185,000 households – would be especially exposed to the risk of homelessness.

Employing the more commonly used measure where 30% of household income is taken as the maximum tolerable share of income payable in rent for a low-income household, this was the situation experienced by some 58% of all such private tenants in 2019-20 – see **Figure 2.12**. Unfortunately, no equivalent historical time series data are available.

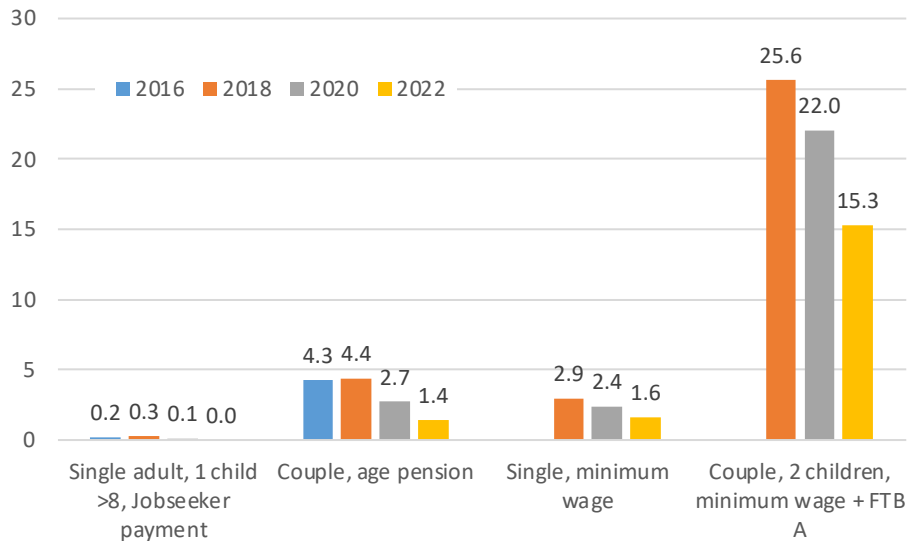
Figure 2.12: Percentage of low-income tenants of private landlords paying >30% of income in rent, 2019-20



Source: ABS Survey of Housing Occupancy and Costs 2019-20 (Table 8.1). <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/housing/housing-occupancy-and-costs/latest-release#data-download> Notes: 1. Low-income renters defined as those in the lowest two quintiles of the national income distribution; 2. Under the ABS classification used in this survey 'private landlords' includes community housing providers; 3. Unlike the definition of rental stress embodied in the annually published Report on Government Services (ROGS), the ABS Survey of Housing Occupancy and Costs defines tenant income as including Commonwealth Rental Assistance (if received). Therefore, rental stress calculations as shown in this graph relate to rent paid as a proportion of income inclusive of CRA.

A distinct, and conceptually simple, way of calibrating rental housing affordability for low-income populations involves gauging the extent to which advertised rental properties are offered by landlords at prices (rents) within the means of households on statutory incomes (e.g. Age Pension or JobSeeker Payment) or in low-waged employment. Here, for each household type in scope, affordability is calibrated on the basis of 30% of household income. Thus, for each household type, the analysis enumerates the proportion of available (and suitable) rental properties advertised at a rent equal to or less than that amount.

Figure 2.13: Proportion of advertised private tenancies affordable to (selected) low-income household types, 2016-2022



Source: Anglicare Annual Rental Affordability Snapshot. <https://www.anglicare.asn.au/research-advocacy/rental-affordability/>

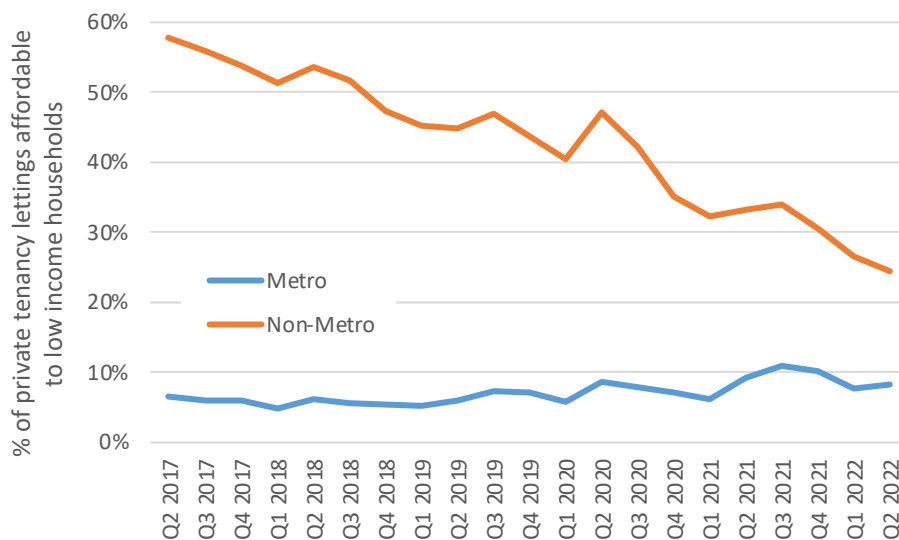
Note: Because there have been some changes in Anglicare's household typology, 2016 entries are not available for all of the selected 2022 categories.

Using the approach described above, Anglicare's annual survey showed that, of the 46,000 properties being marketed for let across Australia in March 2022, just 1.4% would be affordable to a couple on the age pension – see **Figure 2.13**. As shown here, the already small share of private rental properties affordable to the low-income groups identified has tended to shrink steadily over the recent years as rents have run ahead of social security benefit rates and minimum wage incomes¹².

Employing a similar approach, where private rental affordability is calibrated in relation to statutory incomes, Victorian Government statistics demonstrate that – at least in this jurisdiction – low-income regional renters have been facing growing cost pressures, a trend ongoing over several years. Statewide, the proportion of new tenancies affordable to low-income households fell from 17% in Q2 2017 to 11% in Q2 2022. As shown in **Figure 2.14**, the equivalent decline for regional Victoria was especially dramatic, with the proportion affordable falling from 58% to only 24% over the period. For reference, the equivalent regional Victoria figure in Q4 2001 was 88% (Homes Victoria, 2022). More specifically in relation to the recent past, it would appear that – far from initiating it – the COVID-19 era housing market disruption has only compounded a longer-established and problematic trend for regional Victorian renters.

¹² It should be noted that Anglicare's 2020 survey narrowly pre-dated the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in Australia. As a result, the affordability statistics generated for that year are unaffected by Coronavirus Supplement payments to qualifying social security recipients for part of that year.

Figure 2.14: Rental affordability rates, private tenancies let in Victoria, 2017-2022



Source: Homes Victoria, Rent Report Q2 2022 (Figure 8). <https://www.dffh.vic.gov.au/publications/rental-report>

2.7. CHAPTER CONCLUSION

The disruptive economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have importantly included a 2020-22 boom in both house prices and rents, as seen across most parts of Australia. Most directly concerning in relation to homelessness has been the spike in rental prices associated with the exceptionally low vacancy rates recorded during this period. The result will have been recently deteriorating rental affordability for low-income tenant populations, especially in regional areas where 2020-22 rent increases have tended to be sharpest.

Importantly, however, worsening rental affordability for low-income earners recorded over the past two years cannot be solely attributed to the pandemic. Certainly, the problem has been aggravated by the public health crisis during this period. But data for Australia as a whole (from Anglicare’s annual survey) demonstrates that this in fact represents only the continuation of a longer running trend. Similarly, while the generally higher rent inflation recorded in regional Australia in 2021 and 2022 will have inflicted particular damage on housing affordability in these areas, there is evidence that here, too, recent experience only extends an already established pattern.

A detailed analysis of factors underlying recent rent inflation and declining affordability for low-income tenants is beyond the scope of this report. However, as discussed in more depth elsewhere (Pawson et al., 2021b), rapidly rising rents as seen in the past two years substantially reflect unusually depressed supply, as measured in terms of the volume of properties being made available to let. This, in turn, may be partly attributable to relatively low levels of household mobility during the pandemic – that is, relatively few properties becoming available for let due to former tenant departure. In some localities supply may have also been undercut by the burgeoning short-term letting market, where properties are withdrawn from the mainstream rental system for this purpose.

On the demand side of the equation, it is striking that the recent rent price spike has coincided with a period of unusually depressed population growth, mainly due to remarkably low migration into Australia. Indeed, in the year 2020-21, ABS estimates that there was a net outflow of some 89,000 people (ABS, 2022e) – a far cry from the net inflows of 200-250,000 in the period 2016-2019. The particular significance of this is the established understanding that new migrants form an important component of rental housing demand.

Looking to the future, with the (hoped for) dissipation of the pandemic during 2022-23, it would be expected that tenancy turnover rates might return to levels close to their historic norms, hence boosting the flow of private rental properties being made available for let ('supply'). Also, in the medium term, modestly helping to ease rental price pressures at the lower end of the market in certain states (primarily Victoria and Queensland) will be the state-funded social housing economic stimulus construction programs projected as adding over 20,000 new dwellings to the social housing sector by 2025 (Pawson et al., 2021b). Similarly, by the end of this period the first tranche of newly built homes developed under the Commonwealth Government's Housing Australia Future Fund may be also coming on-stream. All these developments may be expected to help ease real terms rental price inflation as seen in the recent past.

On the demand side, though, we should factor in the expected restoration of net migration levels to their pre-pandemic norm. This would be anticipated as inflating the numbers seeking tenancies; in this way, at least partially offsetting the market-cooling impact of higher tenancy turnover and social housing construction.

Homelessness policy and practice responses following from COVID-19



Key points

- As well as triggering extraordinary homelessness emergency expenditure, the COVID-19 pandemic stimulated openness towards experimenting with new approaches in homelessness policy and practice.
- These innovations have importantly included:
 - In some locations the de-concentration of temporary/crisis accommodation and associated practice changes in these contexts;
 - Structured housing and support programs in New South Wales and Victoria to assist the most disadvantaged residents of COVID-19 emergency accommodation (EA) in accessing long-term housing; and
 - The improved regulation of boarding houses in Queensland, legitimising the use of boarding houses as a private housing outcome for former COVID-19 EA service users.
- As typically perceived by stakeholder interviewees, the public health crisis also stimulated significantly enhanced cross-sector working practices, better integrating government and NGO homelessness service planning and provision.
- In general, as seen by homelessness service providers and other stakeholders, these developments have improved service delivery in lasting ways.
- Such advances nevertheless fall far short of the changes needed to adequately address homelessness and rough sleeping in Australia at current levels:
 - Improved conditions in crisis accommodation and boarding houses do not in themselves enable access to the kind of safe, affordable and long-term housing required to end homelessness.
 - New South Wales and Victoria post-EA housing and support programs are designed as discrete interventions, limited in duration and scope. Their benefits will therefore ultimately be restricted to the finite group of former rough sleepers who accessed EA during the pandemic, and their beneficial impacts on long-term rough sleeper numbers in the two states will quickly dissipate.

3.1. CHAPTER INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has represented a significant opportunity in which governments and service providers across Australia have re-imagined possible responses to homelessness. Or, to put it another way, the pandemic temporarily stimulated governments to fund NGOs to respond to people experiencing homelessness in ways that many had always wished to do, consistent with their aspirations and values:

So, what that showed to the sector was that, yes, government knows exactly what needs to happen and they can do it if the resources and the political impetus is there (NGO stakeholder).

There are variations in extensiveness, generosity, and exact timing, but across Australia from 2020 to 2022, many people experiencing homelessness were enabled to access forms of temporary accommodation, in some cases leading to permanent housing. This was most notably the case in New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland and South Australia. Some of the key components of this activity have been already reported in our 2021 research outputs (Pawson et al., 2021a and b).

Building on that work, this chapter further examines policy and practice changes implemented through 2020 to early 2022, particularly as these applied in the above jurisdictions. We examine how far these developments may result in enduring institutional changes in how Australia responds to homelessness. In particular, the chapter examines the COVID-19 triggered changes in policy maker thinking about the accommodation that people who are homeless require, especially in relation to congregate shelters with shared amenity. The chapter also brings to light the changes to practice those new models of accommodation represent.

In framing this new account, it is important to set it within the context of significant policy and practice changes that had already been emerging during the immediate pre-pandemic period (2016-2020), as well as the main dimensions of pandemic-era homelessness emergency actions as reported in our previous work.

As to the first of these, more fully discussed in AHM 2020 (Pawson et al., 2020), the period 2016-2020 saw markedly stepped-up activity to address rough sleeping in several Australian jurisdictions in terms of:

- Expanded assertive outreach – i.e. where rough sleepers are engaged 'on site' with the aim of enabling and supporting a transition from street homelessness to sustainable housing (Phillips and Parsell 2012);
- Boosted private rental subsidy programs – time-limited payments to low-income households to make private renting affordable; and
- Head-leasing of private rental properties – enabling not-for-profit community housing providers (CHPs) to house people who were formerly homeless in dwellings leased from private landlords, e.g. on two-year contracts.

Thus, the extraordinary pandemic homelessness responses quickly initiated from March 2020 were to some extent building on – albeit greatly accelerating – an existing trajectory. As has been already widely documented, the prime focus of this effort involved the mass-scale provision of emergency accommodation (EA) by certain state governments to mitigate health risks for people experiencing homelessness at that time. As reported in our earlier work (Pawson et al., 2021 a and b), huge bureaucratic efforts were made and hundreds of millions of dollars committed, not only to short-term 'sheltering' of former rough sleepers and others at risk – including those occupying homelessness shelters judged unsafe – but also to longer-term housing and support for a substantial number of those temporarily accommodated.

During 2020, by our reckoning, at least 12,000 former rough sleepers benefited from such provision (Pawson et al., 2021b). Moreover, emergency measures prompted by the pandemic in New South Wales and Victoria, alone, will have facilitated safe, secure and supported pathways for around 3,500 former rough sleepers whose needs were unmet by existing systems and practices. Thanks to pledges of extraordinary funding, these programs will have to some extent reduced the accumulated backlog of chronic rough sleepers in cities such as Sydney and Melbourne at the start of the pandemic.

As reported in our previous work as well as in this chapter, some of the programs utilised accommodation with independent amenity, opening up opportunities for new service provision approaches. Indeed, we show that these, on the one hand, inspired the homelessness workforce through enabling positive outcomes, while on the other hand, causing some disillusionment when the underpinning funding expired.

3.2. DE-CONCENTRATION

Enhanced space and amenity standards in temporary and crisis accommodation

An important homelessness policy and practice development to emerge from the pandemic response in parts of New South Wales and Queensland was de-concentration of temporary or crisis accommodation. By de-concentration, we mean the range of practices influenced by the closure or re-thinking of congregate accommodation for people experiencing homelessness. These accommodation types vary across Australia and have changed over time, but they generally share certain common features. In theory, they are: (i) temporary, although in practice they are often used to accommodate people long term; (ii) have some shared amenity such as bathrooms and toilets; (iii) have communal sleeping areas; (iv) have onsite supervision; and (v) have no security of tenure. Homeless accommodation models that have some or all of these features can be observed in all Australian capital cities, such as refuges, boarding/rooming houses, and shelters.

These forms of congregate homeless accommodation, and especially dormitory style accommodation, have long been criticised, both in Australia (Parsell, forthcoming) and internationally (Busch-Geertsema and Sahlin, 2007). Sharing resources means limited control over personal interactions, and this forced contact creates conditions for violence and a sense of insecurity (Watts and Blenkinsopp, 2022). It was the pandemic in some locations in Australia, however, that ultimately challenged their legitimacy, leading to the closure, temporary closure, or restructure of many facilities of this kind:

That concern, I think, led to some changes from both government ... and service provision levels, and looking at sites and going, "Can we any longer have congregate shared facilities, spaces, where there's significant risk?" How do you handle and manage a site like that through COVID? Especially in the start of the pandemic when it was quite unknown (Government stakeholder).

To respond to public health concerns about people who were homeless living in congregate accommodation with shared amenities, residents were instead provided with accommodation typically involving single rooms with independent bathrooms, toilets, and often cooking facilities. This needed to offer residents the space and amenity to socially distance and comply with pandemic-era self-isolation regulations. One government stakeholder suggested that, in this respect, the pandemic expedited existing official plans.

Fieldwork for this research has identified that in Queensland and New South Wales (although not, to our knowledge elsewhere) some of the 'shelter de-concentration' enacted at the height of the pandemic has persisted into 2022. In Brisbane, for example, the three largest shelters funded by the Queensland Government were closed to de-concentrate residents early in the pandemic and have subsequently remained closed. To accommodate displaced former residents, as well as other people experiencing homelessness needing safe spaces at this time, Queensland initially leased a large student accommodation building containing independent bedrooms, bathrooms, toilets, and cooking facilities. With the building lease having expired in 2021, de-concentration has been subsequently maintained by the state government through leasing two hotels as temporary homeless accommodation. As with the student housing, these provide residents with self-contained living spaces.

In New South Wales, de-concentration actioned at the start of the pandemic had reportedly become accepted as ideal practice in 2022. Thus, with reference to the de-concentration of inner-city Sydney hostels and women's refuges across the state:

[Homelessness shelter providers] have negotiated with DCJ [NSW Department of Communities and Justice] that they won't return to the pre-pandemic client numbers because they're getting better outcomes with more independent living (NGO stakeholder).

Even without expanding housing pathways out of homelessness shelters, stakeholders welcomed de-concentrated occupancy in enhancing service user engagement:

If you provide high quality hotels and motels, for example, and, yes, they cost more in a non-lockdown environment, but actually you get a better outcome because people aren't terrified or living in really unsafe conditions (NGO stakeholder).

As noted, congregate forms of homeless accommodation have been widely critiqued as inappropriate for the stigma and undignified state of sharing basic amenity with strangers. A stakeholder observed the corresponding benefits of de-concentration as follows:

[W]ithin that model, you started to see people having basically self-contained accommodation, ability to actually be in your own space, not necessarily impacted from others, the opportunity to actually choose when I leave my room, the opportunity to choose when I want to engage with other people or when I go and engage with the service provider, opportunity to actually cook for myself, have my own bathroom, have my own space, stop and actually think and breathe. Because not a lot of people in homelessness get the opportunity to actually do that. It's nearly a full-time job being homeless (Government stakeholder).

However, the de-concentrated forms of homeless accommodation also raised some concerns. In congregate forms of homeless accommodation where people are in shared and open spaces, service providers can easily interact with residents. This is especially true when residents must attend common areas for meals, or when expected to vacate their rooms at pre-determined times. On the other hand, as one stakeholder observed:

[O]ur services sort of struggling and thinking around, "Well, how do I engage with people when they've got their own room? So, they're in there and they can shut the door and I can't just go and interrupt that, it's their space (Government stakeholder).

In other words, the de-concentrated forms of homeless accommodation, while more consistent with what people who are homeless deserve and need, has forced service providers to consider new ways of working.

Nevertheless, to the extent that these changes are sustained in the wake of the pandemic, they are beneficial to people reliant on emergency accommodation in some of Australia's major cities. The traditional model of accommodating people who are homeless in congregate shelters fits hand in glove with a paternalistic model of working with them – case managing them – an approach at odds with how people want to live both in terms of physical environment and personal autonomy. There is a synergy between congregate forms of living and paternalistic care and control.

De-concentration that has flowed on from COVID-19 thus has provided some opportunities for enhanced approaches to accommodation and practice. Because de-concentrated accommodation provides people independent living arrangements, it forces homelessness service providers to engage with people in a practice model that similarly promotes autonomy and agency for residents.

Importantly, however, de-concentration can diminish the capacity of the temporary accommodation system if achieved by limiting access to existing facilities, without acquiring or developing new ones.

This situation was also identified by an NGO stakeholder interviewee, who stated that: 'there is no question there's less beds, in the inner city in particular'. However, this stakeholder maintained that de-concentration remained overall a positive development, as it produced generally improved outcomes even though — or rather because — crisis accommodation providers are supporting fewer people.

Crisis accommodation for women fleeing domestic and family violence

As noted above, the pandemic-induced move towards de-concentration of crisis accommodation in certain states reflects an emerging broader understanding of the limitations of congregate crisis facilities. Thus, not all emerging initiatives exhibiting de-concentration principles are directly tied to pandemic and lock-down induced transformations to existing crisis facilities. In New South Wales, the state government has launched a new model of crisis accommodation for women and children escaping domestic and family violence that is premised on the principles of de-concentration. Dubbed 'Core and Cluster', this new model provides service users with independent, self-contained units that are 'clustered' around a 'core' of specialist support services (e.g. counselling, legal assistance, employment services) and other facilities (e.g. children's play areas, audio visual equipment of court appearances) (NSW Government, 2022). Following the launch of a set of discrete trial programs in 2020, construction of dedicated Core and Cluster facilities across New South Wales is scheduled to take place over four years from 2022.

Reflecting the broader discourse around the benefits of de-concentration crisis accommodation of all kinds, the Core and Cluster model is intended to enhance the privacy and independence of women and children escaping violence. It also aims to overcome challenges experienced by existing forms of domestic and family violence support that provided communal/congregate living arrangements:

Service providers managing refuges with communal living arrangements need to consider household dynamics and needs of the existing residents as part of the refuge intake processes. In some situations, this can create challenges in providing access to the service. Self-contained accommodation provides greater flexibility with refuge admissions and enhances the capacity of services to accommodate families with varying needs (NSW Government, 2022, p. 5).

Core and Cluster thus represents an important example of the pursuit of de-concentration in the domestic and family violence space.

It is important to note that New South Wales is not the only state expanding its crisis responses to women and children escaping domestic violence. Indeed, in recognition of the fact that domestic and family violence is the leading trigger of homelessness in Australia (see **Chapter 5. Recent homelessness trends**), commitments to develop new crisis and transitional accommodation offerings have been made by all states and territories over the last few years. The Federal Government has also committed \$100 million to boost 'crisis and transitional housing options for women and children fleeing domestic and family violence and older women on low incomes who are at risk of homelessness' (Collins, 2022a). However, to our knowledge, New South Wales' Core and Cluster program is the only new initiative to embed de-concentration principles at this stage.

Given the overall trend towards de-concentration in crisis accommodation provision, it is possible that more states will pursue this approach to responding to domestic and family violence in the coming years. Whilst welcome, we caution to note that de-concentrated crisis accommodation is not a panacea for responding to domestic and family violence, and cannot replace efforts to increase access to long-term, affordable housing for this cohort (as is indeed underway in some states—see for example Victoria's Family Violence Housing Blitz). Nor can it replace efforts to address the structural gender inequalities that underpin domestic and family violence (Kuskoff and Parsell, 2019).

3.3. REMOTE INTERACTION WITH SERVICE USERS

The changed SHS practices intended to mitigate the risks of contact and virus spread during the height of the pandemic had many challenging implications. COVID-19 lock-down 'no-contact restrictions' triggered broader innovations in homelessness service provision. Telehealth was identified as one example. However, although this advantaged some service users, others lost out:

COVID has worsened [the risk of social security under-claiming] because Centrelink won't... let their workers outreach. So, prior to COVID you would have Centrelink workers going to homelessness services and out with outreach people and sorting people's Centrelink out. And Centrelink stopped that. And they also stopped going out to remote communities. So, accessing Centrelink has been through the internet, which is a nightmare for people that aren't necessarily very literate, computer-savvy, and even people like me trying to get onto that website and sort stuff out (NGO stakeholder).

This illustrates clearly the risks posed for people unable – for a range of literacy and infrastructure reasons – to access resources online. Existing research demonstrates the value of assertive outreach approaches to enable people who are homeless to overcome barriers to accessing services provided through mainstream systems (Parsell, 2011). When identifying the benefits that some people who are homeless experienced through accessing independent accommodation during the pandemic, it is important to also understand and address the way others were disadvantaged as a result.

3.4. SERVICE PROVIDER STAFFING STRESS

Our research also identified an enduring impact of the pandemic on homelessness services that is, in fact, a consequence of some of the successes achieved, particularly in 2020 and 2021. Service providers were challenged both by sudden demand to expand activity at the height of the pandemic, and by the stress of rapid contraction when funding expired:

My team were operating the whole time, and you were getting to a point where there was maybe 30 people on the street, and now it's just back to conditional TA [temporary accommodation]... I think it's a bit disheartening, I'd have to say, from going from real great flexibility to back to before it was, when we know that the prior was really effective (NGO stakeholder).

I think the thing that's really burnt the sector out, to be honest, is that they could see what can be done in an emergency and then it reverts to BAU [business as usual], and that's when people aren't seeing outcomes with clients, whereas before they were and all of that. And that is what makes it really challenging (NGO stakeholder).

These two comments point to challenges that, if ignored, will undermine the capacity for similar successes into the future. To utilise the significant extra homelessness services funding provided during the pandemic, society relied on a skilled and dedicated homelessness workforce. As emphasised by stakeholder interviewees, SHS staff members had derived significant satisfaction from assisting service users in achieving satisfactory outcomes, even extending to long-term housing (see below). The exhaustion of associated extraordinary funding was experienced, first and foremost, as an injustice to service users themselves; but also, vicariously, as disheartening for SHS staff. The sector, which is experiencing workforce shortages, can ill-afford the risk that experienced workers, burnt-out and disillusioned by this experience, depart such employment as a result.

3.5. POST-LOCKDOWN HOUSING PROGRAMS IN NEW SOUTH WALES AND VICTORIA

Overview of post-lockdown housing programs

In a highly significant policy development following on from COVID-19 EA programs, several state governments initiated major efforts to provide pathways to longer-term housing for some EA residents. Early moves in this area by the New South Wales and Victorian governments were noted in AHM 2020 (Pawson et al., 2020). In this section, we document how such 'post-lockdown' housing initiatives have subsequently developed and reflect on their possible wider significance. We contend that, whilst significantly transcending 'business-as-usual' homelessness responses, measures of this kind have been limited to essentially transitional, narrowly targeted, and short-term efforts, unlikely to markedly impact levels of homelessness over the longer term.

We also consider Queensland's post-lockdown housing strategy for COVID-19 EA residents, which diverges significantly from the two larger states. Whilst likewise aiming to facilitate longer-term housing pathways for this cohort, Queensland has relied on private boarding houses to accommodate many of those concerned; a process facilitated by recent (but pre-pandemic) changes in boarding house regulation. This has complemented the use of underutilised Brisbane hotels, as part of a broader overhaul of crisis accommodation in the state, discussed above.

Post-lockdown housing programs – Housing First in action?

All four states which initiated large-scale COVID-19 EA programs made efforts to transition people to longer-term housing. However, New South Wales and Victoria stand out as having developed 'structured programs' to this end (Pawson et al., 2021b). These programs are Together Home (TH) in New South Wales, and From Homelessness to Home (H2H) in Victoria.

New South Wales' TH program's stated aim has been to 'provide stable accommodation and wrap-around support to people street sleeping during the COVID-19 pandemic, and to provide ongoing linkages with support services to reduce a program participant's return to homelessness' (NSW Government, 2022, p. 44). Commenced in July 2020, it has received two additional tranches of funding (one in November 2020 and another in the New South Wales state budget in June 2021) taking its total allocation to around \$125.5 million and its date of operation until June 2023. This funding is provided to community housing providers contracted to deliver a finite number of housing and support packages to former EA residents. Piecing together various government announcements, our earlier research estimated that around 1,719 people will be or will have been supported by the program by the time that it is fully implemented; around 35-39% of former rough sleepers supported by the COVID-19 EA program (Pawson et al., 2021b).

Victoria's H2H program similarly aimed to provide 1,845 households with access to 'stable medium- and long-term housing and support packages' to former EA residents 'due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic before 6 December 2020' (Victorian Government, 2021, p. 4). H2H was launched in July 2020 with the intention that all packages would commence by year end 2021. People housed in emergency accommodation during Victoria's 2021 lockdowns were ineligible for such help. Our earlier work estimated that the 1,845 packages available over the life of the project accounted for around 41% of the 4,500 people placed in emergency accommodation in Victoria in the early stages of the pandemic (Pawson et al., 2021b).

New South Wales and Victoria: post-EA program models, underlying principles and program delivery

Both TH and H2H are based on a blend of transitional housing principles and elements of the much-celebrated Housing First approach. Transitional housing typically entails the provision of time-limited housing and support to assist people to transition from homelessness to longer-term housing. It aims to enable people who have experienced long-term homelessness to develop the 'skills' required to sustain long-term housing and live independently (e.g. budgeting skills, domestic skills, etc). Engagement with the support component of the

program is often mandatory, as it is deemed necessary for successful transitions (i.e. for people to be able to transition to maintaining their own tenancy without support). As a non-government stakeholder reflected, in the Australian context transitional housing is often provided 'due to a lack of other housing options', namely long-term social housing.

Housing First, by contrast, prioritises immediate access to long-term housing that does not require any further transitions; nor does it require clients to demonstrate 'housing readiness' through successful engagement with support services and transitional programs or desistance from problematic behaviours (e.g. substance abuse). Housing First is thus often described as providing 'rapid rehousing without conditions'. It also entails access to support services aimed at assisting tenancy sustainment. Importantly, engagement with the support component is typically voluntary rather than mandatory. This model has a strong international evidence base demonstrating its effectiveness, particularly for people with complex needs who have experienced long-term homelessness (for an overview see Padgett et al., 2016).

The aims and logic of transitional housing are clearly present in many aspects of the design of TH and, to a lesser extent, H2H. The TH program guidelines (NSW Government, 2022) explain that most clients were intended to receive time-limited housing and support to assist them to transition to long-term housing elsewhere. It was preferred that most tenants be accommodated in subsidised private rental properties that are head-leased from the private market by community housing providers (CHPs) using state government funds. Such tenancies are not intended as a long-term housing solution for accommodated clients. Rather, there is a two-year time limit placed on each tenancy, at which point the client will be transitioned to their own private rental property or to a social housing property 'if required'.

The support component of TH is oriented to facilitating this transitional process. TH funding also provided for floating support for package recipients for a 24-month term. During this period, CHPs have been expected to assist residents to find longer-term housing, potentially involving a secure community housing tenancy, but otherwise private rental. According to the guidelines, 'A key component of each person's support plan will be identifying housing options for the participant at the end of the two-year period' (NSW Government, 2022, p. 7). Support is also oriented to preparing people for long-term housing: 'Individuals have improved level of daily living skills necessary for long term accommodation and self-management' (NSW Government, 2022, p. 45).

There are some exceptions to these transitional practices. There are provisions for some clients to move directly to a long-term social housing property if their needs are such that a head-leased property is considered inappropriate.

CHPs also have the option of 'absorbing' the head-leased property into their property portfolio with the participant 'remaining in this accommodation' at the end of the two-year support period (NSW Government, 2022, p. 34). Here, the cost of maintaining the head-lease would be borne by the CHP itself, making it a similar option to transitioning the client to another CHP-managed social housing property, except for saving the client the disruption of a house move. Given that CHPs bear the cost of this option, it is likely to be used only in exceptional cases since it would likely necessitate terminating pre-existing head-leases elsewhere in their portfolio (Pawson et al., 2021b). Furthermore, the fact that the act of absorbing the head-lease occurs at the end of the support period means that it remains a transitional arrangement throughout this period (we discuss the significance of this below).

H2H is somewhat less transitional in nature than TH, as many clients (typically those with the greatest support needs) have been moved straight from EA to a long-term social housing tenancy (Victorian Government, 2021, pp. 22-3). In these cases, H2H more closely reflects the principles of Housing First than transitional housing. However, H2H also has a transitional focus for many other clients. Like TH, H2H includes the use of head-leased properties that are subleased to H2H clients for a fixed term. There are also 'general lease properties' that are spot purchased by the Victorian Government and then head-leased to CHPs, who sublease them to H2H clients for a period of 18 months (Victorian Government, 2021, p. 20). In some cases, clients accommodated through these latter two mechanisms will be supported 'to access private rental or other appropriate housing options' (Victorian Government, 2021, p. 20) at the end of their lease period.

Clients accommodated in a head-leased property and deemed as requiring 'more intensive support' are intended to be transitioned to a social housing property at the end of the support period. Even in these latter cases, the H2H design implies an essentially transitional function: it aims 'to help a Client maintain their housing while they await long term social housing options' (Victorian Government, 2021, p. 20). As indicated by a Victorian stakeholder interviewee, for some people, H2H is intended to be a stop gap until additional social housing is made available through Victoria's Big Housing Build program (see [Chapter 4. Recent homelessness policy developments and areas of concern](#)).

In addition to these transitional practices, both programs also incorporate elements of the Housing First approach. TH and H2H are both informed by the Housing First emphasis on rapid rehousing without conditions. Commitment to this principle is particularly strong in the TH program guidelines, which state that:

The program aims to provide equitable and rapid access to housing with no readiness conditions (i.e. sobriety and compliance with health treatment will not be required to obtain housing). This reflects Housing First principles (NSW Government, 2022, p. 17).

A similar commitment is made in the H2H guidelines:

Following Housing First principles, the primary aim is to house people as quickly as possible to prevent further harm from sleeping rough or living in emergency accommodation. Securing a safe place to live means recovery can start and further non-housing needs can be met more effectively (Victorian Government, 2021, p. 7).

Both programs also entail the formal separation of tenancy management and support provision, a feature of the Housing First model intended to ensure that access to housing is not conditional on compliance with support services.

Given the strong evidence of Housing First effectiveness, these provisions constitute positive program features. However, the extent to which TH and H2H can emulate the long-term success demonstrated by Housing First approaches elsewhere is questionable. For, in most cases these Australian programs fail to include the core element of the Housing First approach: namely immediate access to a long-term tenancy. International research evidence emphasises the importance of the security and stability provided by long-term housing as key to Housing First success in assisting people to permanently exit homelessness (Padgett, 2007). Housing security enables people to invest in other, non-housing aspects of their recovery (such as treatment for health issues or re-engaging with employment, training, family and/or community), free from worry about where they are going to live for the foreseeable future.

Importantly, transitional housing programs are often unable to achieve this sense of security and stability, even when they incorporate other aspects of the Housing First model (Padgett, 2007; Anderson-Baron and Collins, 2018; Plage et al., forthcoming). Transitional program service users are unable to fully 'put down their roots', realising that they will have to move again when the program ends (Parsell et al., 2019; Plage et al., forthcoming). This anxiety is perhaps astute, as overseas evidence indicates that people transitioning from time-limited Housing First programs to the private market (as occurs with at least some TH and H2H clients) experience 'jeopardized... housing stability' once they exit the programs (Anderson-Baron and Collins, 2018, p. 603).

The time-limited nature of transitional housing also makes it difficult for programs to fully eschew housing readiness eligibility restrictions (Cheshire et al., 2020). The need to transition clients within a certain period creates an imperative for program providers to select people deemed as having the capacity to achieve this transition. This can be seen in TH, where it is stated that:

While readiness is not required, the CRAG [Client Referral Assessment Group] will need to determine if the person is suitable for the program. Suitability for the program will be assessed in part on the potential for the person's existing support needs to be addressed during their tenancy (NSW Government, 2022, p. 10).

While readiness conditions are explicitly avoided here, it is hard to see how the assessment of the serviceability of a person's support needs is not about determining their capacity to achieve housing readiness within the program timeframe. The program also appears to be oriented to supporting people to become housing ready before they transition to long-term housing. For instance, one of the intended outcomes of the program is that 'Individuals have [an] improved level of daily living skills necessary for long term accommodation and self-management' (NSW Government, 2022, p. 45). In this way, TH is more closely aligned to traditional housing programs – whose function has long been to ensure people have the 'skills' required to maintain housing before they are offered long-term housing – than with Housing First, which is premised on an explicit rejection of this transitional logic (Padgett et al., 2016).

None of this is to deny the positive outcomes being delivered via TH and H2H. While unlikely to fully reproduce the success of fully formed Housing First initiatives, they have undoubtedly played an important role in providing pathways to longer term housing for at least some people. H2H has been operated in a more favourable context than TH in this respect, given that, by mid-2022, the Victorian Government's Big Housing Build, was well under way, meaning that a significant boost in permanent social housing provision is in prospect in that state. No significantly expanded provision has been pledged by the New South Wales Government. Therefore, to the extent that TH is able to transition high needs clients to a secure social housing property, this will come at the expense of other high needs households currently on the social housing waitlist (Pawson et al., 2021b).

Scope, longevity, and lasting impacts

Whilst TH and H2H emerge directly from their state's respective pandemic homelessness responses, both aspire to generate longer-term street sleeping reductions. The TH guidelines, for instance, state that:

Using evidence-based interventions, the program presents an opportunity to both manage immediate public health risks and create a lasting change to address street sleeping, in line with the Premier's Priority to reduce street homelessness (NSW Government, 2022, p. 7).

The H2H guidelines similarly declare that 'The program is an opportunity to make a significant, lasting impact on homelessness and rough sleeping in Victoria' (Victorian Government, 2021, p. 7).

In terms of impacts, both programs are producing positive outcomes for their target groups: rough sleepers and other vulnerable cohorts supported by the states' emergency accommodation initiatives during the respective COVID-19 lockdowns:

It's been big, and I think it's made a huge impact. I think the street count[s] over the last couple of years ... have seen the numbers gradually decrease. So, I think it's about 230 something at the moment, or 220, from, I think it was about 270 when the pandemic started (Local Government stakeholder).

It's mind-blowing. We're talking about a cohort of single adults, particularly single adults with a long history of transience, lots and lots of intersections with emergency departments, detox, mental health, they've been overlooked again and again and again in terms of dedicated funding. And so [H2H] was, and continues to be, a mind-blowing investment (NGO stakeholder).

Notwithstanding these achievements, it seems unlikely that these post-lockdown initiatives can realise longer-term rough sleeping reductions. Indeed, longer-term aspirations for reduced street homelessness are largely incongruent with the restricted and 'one-off' nature of both projects. Both offer only a finite number of places, with eligibility for the most part limited to former COVID-19 EA residents¹³. There has been no suggestion that either state government will extend their program by opening it up to others with similar needs. Thus, with reference to Melbourne and Port Phillip, and relating to the situation in mid-2022:

13 Both programs do make exceptions wherein other vulnerable groups not supported by lockdown EA measures can be included in the program, but only if there are packages left over after the primary target group have been approached. The finite number of places in each program is not altered by these exceptions.

A large number of [former EA residents] transitioned into H2H. Then from the start of this year, when all of the hotel funding ceased, when all the H2H packages were allocated, we've actually now started to see [an] increase ... in the rough sleeping numbers ... Particularly in the CBD [Central Business District]. So, we probably are now getting close to pre-pandemic levels of rough sleeping in the CBD in particular (NGO stakeholder).

While commending the positive achievements of H2H, some also reflected on its limitations:

That was radical and facilitated by the kind of circumstances of the time. And I guess what's worrying me is about the transition now. We did this big radical thing, but we haven't built the systems and structures underneath that say this is our approach forever (NGO stakeholder).

Failure to institutionalise successful one-off programs has been identified as a recurrent failing of Australian homelessness policy (Parkinson and Parsell, 2018). Despite positive evaluations attesting to their effectiveness, many innovative pilot schemes tried out over the recent decades have been either quietly abandoned or left as bespoke, small-scale interventions that operate only in specific regions or with overly narrow target populations. Accordingly, such policy innovations typically have little impact on overall rates of rough sleeping or other forms of homelessness. TH and H2H are likely to continue this trend unless they are reoriented from COVID-19 emergency measures to the longer-term challenge of addressing street homelessness in non-pandemic conditions.

3.6. TRANSITIONING FORMER EA RESIDENTS INTO LONGER-TERM HOUSING IN QUEENSLAND

As in New South Wales and Victoria, the Queensland Government sought to help transition people housed in its EA initiatives during lockdowns into stable housing. Queensland did not develop a structured program for this purpose (i.e. there is no Queensland equivalent to TH and H2H). However, the state government has developed a set of practices and policy mechanisms aimed at managing this population and other similar cohorts that require consideration.

In addition to what a stakeholder described as a 'small number' of social housing allocations, the Queensland Government prioritised supporting EA service users to access private rental tenancies. The focus on private rental here is, of course, orthodox practice. As noted above, support to access private rental tenancies played a key role in both New South Wales' and Victoria's post-lockdown programs for former rough sleepers accommodated in EA. What is unusual about Queensland's approach is that it has included boarding houses as an acceptable private rental housing outcome. This does not appear to be an explicit or publicly announced policy, and we were unable to secure any on-the-record Queensland Government comment on the topic. However, NGO stakeholder interviewees indicated that it is a strategy that was implemented at the practice level and communicated to non-government stakeholders informally:

So, quite a few people went into boarding houses after the initial COVID lockdown and Department of Housing counted that as a housing placement (NGO stakeholder).

The interviewee went on to suggest that boarding houses were the most common private rental outcome achieved for people rehoused from EA premises:

Only two or three people that we support who were in hotel accommodation that went into private rentals (NGO stakeholder).

Another stakeholder observed that the closing down of Brisbane's three shelters (described above) reduced system capacity, leading to greater utilisation of boarding houses:

The pressure is really to move people through much quicker... And a lot of people are getting put into boarding houses as the outcome (NGO stakeholder).

The apparent designation of boarding houses as an acceptable long-term housing outcome is questionable, especially since boarding houses are officially classified in Australia as a form of homelessness (ABS, 2012). This reflects the fact that boarding house occupants lack the protections of a standard lease agreement that guarantees security of tenure for a specified period; and, in the official Australian conceptualisation, 'security of tenure' is a key criterion differentiating housed from homeless households (ABS, 2012, p. 7 and pp. 32-33). Instead, most boarding (or 'rooming') house residents are accommodated under 'occupancy agreements' that can be terminated at short notice. Residents of traditional boarding houses¹⁴ are also classified as homeless because they typically have shared living facilities, such as kitchens, bathrooms and living rooms, meaning residents lack privacy and 'control of, and access to space for social relations' (ABS, 2012, p. 7).

Moreover, the fact that many boarding houses have shared amenity, their designation as a housing outcome contradicts the move towards de-concentrated forms of homeless accommodation noted above.

The use of boarding houses as an acceptable private rental housing outcome in Queensland appears to have been facilitated by Queensland Government efforts to strengthen boarding house regulation. This was a process already under way prior to the pandemic. These regulatory changes appear to have been first listed as a key objective in the first Action Plan (2017-2020) arising from the current Queensland Housing Strategy. This commitment has since been reiterated in the most recent Action Plan (2021-2025):

We are committed to a fair and sustainable residential sector giving people who reside in residential services (such as boarding houses), retirement villages and residential (manufactured home) parks, and those who operate them, a regulatory framework that delivers the best possible outcomes for consumers... We will build on the improvements delivered under Housing Action Plan 2017-2020 and continue to enhance the regulatory system to deliver reforms, to build protections and generate better housing outcomes for Queenslanders (Queensland Government, 2021a, p. 22).

As this quote infers, the boarding house reforms are part of a broader effort¹⁵ to 'enhance' the regulatory systems surrounding various forms of informal accommodation – referred to as 'residential services' – that have expanded in the context of the current housing crisis (Mallinson, 2020).

According to the Queensland Government, residential services regulation reforms were aimed 'to ensure that vulnerable Queenslanders can access safe, secure and affordable accommodation' (Queensland Government, 2021b, n.p.). Changes to the Act focused on 'improving the standard of accommodation' in terms of physical amenity and social conditions (e.g. specifying maximum number of residents); and 'clarifying the responsibilities of staff working in these services'.

These changes constitute welcome and necessary efforts to improve the physical and social conditions of boarding houses (and other 'residential services') used by people experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity. However, they do not alter the fundamental characteristics of boarding houses that qualify them as a form of homelessness. There are no discernible improvements to security of tenure or residents' 'control of, and access to space for social relations' (ABS, 2012, p. 7). Given this, boarding house residents in Queensland will continue to be counted as homeless by the ABS, notwithstanding regulatory enhancements.

The reforms are nevertheless clearly intended by the Queensland Government to enable boarding houses to be classed as an acceptable longer-term accommodation option for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness. In addition to the stated aim of the changes being 'to ensure that vulnerable Queenslanders can access safe, secure and affordable accommodation' (see above), policy 'implementation' is said to involve 'work[ing] with referral agencies to promote the benefits of referring their clients to accredited residential services' (Queensland Government, 2021b, n.p.). All of this provides important context for NGO stakeholder claims that boarding house referrals have been employed for some of those supported during lockdown EA initiatives.

¹⁴ As opposed to the 'new generation boarding houses' as termed in NSW planning legislation, which typically provide self-contained studio units.

¹⁵ This was achieved in 2017-18 by updating the Residential Services (Accreditation) Act 2002 and developing the Residential Services (Accreditation) Regulation 2018 to supplement it.

For some NGO interviewees, the use of boarding houses as such was concerning:

The argument is that the boarding houses are regulated under the RTA [Residential Tenancy Authority], therefore they're appropriate referral pathways. They're not appropriate referral pathways for a lot of people that go [into them]. In fact, I have never heard people so desperate. People leave messages on our phone 24/7 saying they're going to kill themselves, they hate it so much, or they're so unwell. So, the sense of safety and security that might have been in some of the other places certainly isn't in boarding houses (NGO stakeholder).

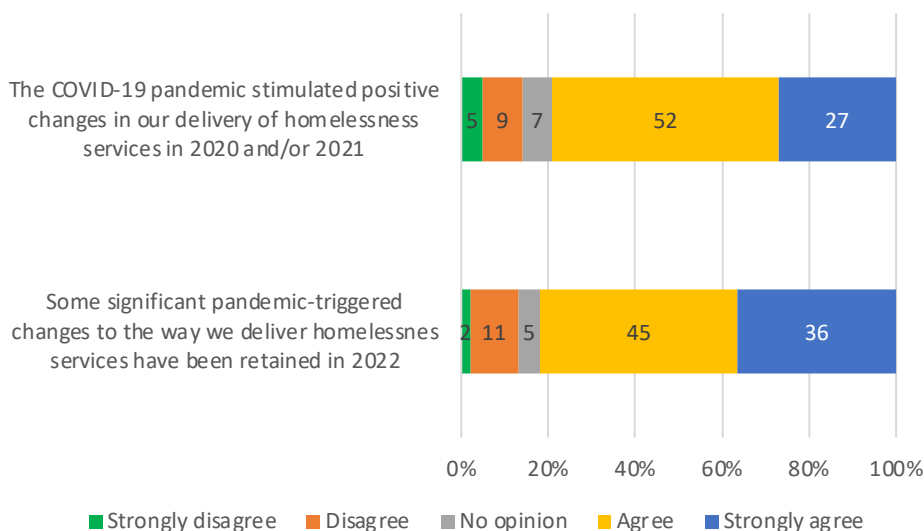
Another stakeholder indicated that many clients placed in boarding houses were unable to sustain their occupancy: 'And now we've seen, after that lockdown stuff happened, a lot of people have been evicted or left the boarding houses'. While we lack the data to independently verify these accounts, they are consistent with previous studies, both Australian and international, on how similar forms of temporary congregate accommodation with shared facilities is experienced by people who are homeless (Clarke and Parsell, 2020; McMordie, 2020; Parsell and Clarke, 2019).

3.7. OVERALL APPRAISAL OF COVID-INDUCED POLICY AND PRACTICE INNOVATIONS

As we have outlined in this chapter, the innovations in homelessness policy and practice induced by the COVID-19 pandemic have been diverse in both their form and impacts. Moreover, each has produced some positive transformations and/or impacts, whilst also containing its own limitations and shortcomings.

Notwithstanding this complexity, we found that the homelessness sector stakeholders generally reflected positively on the overall impact of these developments. More than three quarters of SHS agencies responding in our online survey (77%) believed the COVID-19 pandemic had stimulated positive innovations in the delivery of homelessness services in 2020 and 2021 – see **Figure 3.1**. Moreover, more than four out of five (81%) reported that significant associated changes had been retained in 2022.

Figure 3.1: SHS agency views on COVID-19-triggered SHS service delivery impacts (% of total respondents)

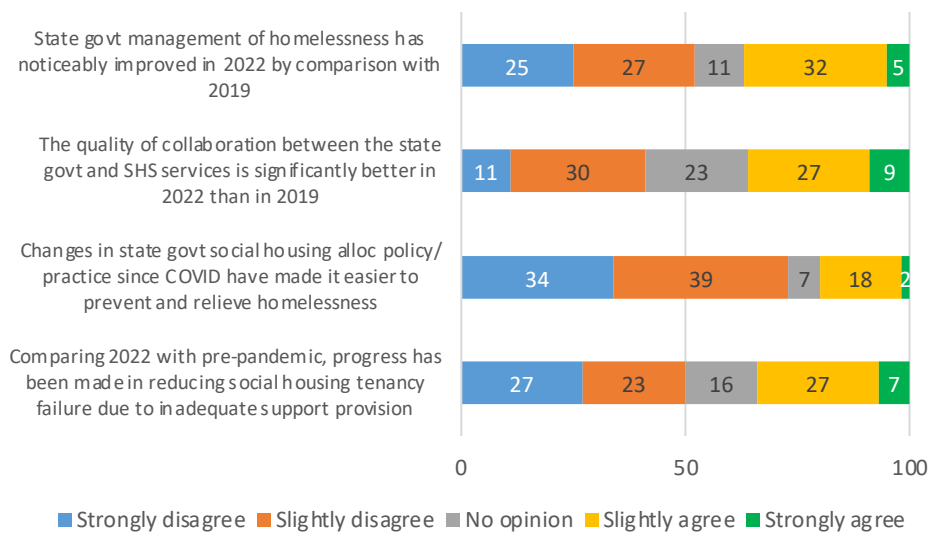


Source: Authors' survey of SHS agencies, 2022 – see Section 1.4.

However, survey respondents were less sanguine about the impact of the pandemic on other aspects of housing and homelessness policy and practice. Survey respondents were asked to reflect on several questions comparing the current operation of social housing policy and practice to the pre-pandemic period. For example, half of respondents (50%) disagreed with the suggestion of recent progress in reducing the incidence of social housing tenancy failure due to inadequate support provision, while only a third (34%) agreed – see **Figure 3.2**. Moreover, 73% disagreed that post-pandemic changes in social housing policy and practice have made it easier to prevent and relieve homelessness. Only 20% agreed.

The survey also contained two other propositions relating to state and territory governments responses to homelessness. On the quality of collaboration (or joint working) between government and SHS services, respondents were more-or-less evenly split as to whether this had 'significantly improved' in 2022 as compared with 2019 (41% disagreed, while 38% agreed). Meanwhile, the balance of responses was slightly more negative regarding the overall quality of state and territory government management of homelessness. Here, 52% disagreed that this had 'noticeably improved' while 37% agreed (see **Figure 3.2**).

Figure 3.2: SHS agency views on broader COVID-19-triggered homelessness policy and practice impacts (% of total respondents)



Source: Authors' survey of SHS agencies, 2022 – see Section 1.4.

3.8. CHAPTER CONCLUSION

The chapter has examined changes in homelessness responses in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic in the period from 2020 to mid-2022. We have highlighted how the pandemic provided an impetus for homelessness policy and practice innovation, thanks to increased resourcing of homelessness initiatives by governments coupled with a willingness to experiment with new approaches.

As acknowledged, sustained moves towards de-concentration were identified only in Queensland and New South Wales. Other than via provision of often good quality hotel accommodation to people experiencing homelessness during the height of the pandemic, we found little evidence of similar moves in Victoria or other jurisdictions. Nevertheless, the experiences of de-concentration in Queensland and New South Wales convey important lessons with broader implications. The single rooms with independent amenity are both consistent with the ideals in the international literature and the aspirations that professionals in the SHS hold for the people they work with and support through and out of homelessness. The examples of de-concentration in parts of Australia can thus represent an opportunity for a reimagining of what accommodation for people who are homeless can and should look like.

Similarly, the TH and H2H programs in New South Wales and Victoria have responsibly extended upon the remarkably strong action on homelessness seen in these states at the height of the pandemic. Nevertheless, stated aspirations for the programs to have a lasting impact on street homelessness would require them to be transformed from one-off emergency programs to institutionalised features of their states' respective homelessness responses. This would call for ongoing funding to enable new clients to be supported by the programs as the need arises

More generally, innovations triggered by the pandemic have engendered some positive changes, also including a move towards client-focused practice in temporary accommodation provision, as well as access to well-resourced housing and support initiatives for rough sleepers and associated cohorts accommodated in emergency accommodation during the COVID-19 lockdowns in Australia's two largest states.

Equally, notwithstanding their positive direction, these pandemic-induced innovations fall well short of the changes required to adequately address homelessness and rough sleeping in Australia in the long-term. Ensuring immediate access to safe, affordable and long-term housing is the necessary first step in supporting people to permanently exit or avoid homelessness, yet this is a feature absent from recent innovations, except for when dealing with a few exceptional 'very high-needs' cases. For this reason, we do not expect these modest and in some cases time-limited improvements to have a significant impact on homelessness long term.

Recent homelessness policy developments and areas of concern



Key points

- Although there is yet little new stock on the ground, during and in the wake of COVID several state governments have made significant commitments and funding announcements to ramp up social housing supply.
- The incoming 2022 Labor administration in Canberra has begun to re-engage the Commonwealth with the homelessness policy challenge facing all Australian governments.
- Complementing state-funded initiatives, the new federal government has pledged a five-year program to construct 20,000 new social housing units, and 10,000 affordable rental dwellings.
- The coincidence of state and federal programs should generate a net increase of around 9,000 social rental dwellings in 2024, the first year for decades in which production will be sufficient to maintain the sector's share of Australia's overall occupied dwelling stock. Subsequently, however, a declining trend is likely to be re-established.
- Australian policy needs to deepen engagement with homelessness prevention, both narrowly and broadly defined. While there is substantial scope for more effective state and territory intervention focused on 'at risk' cohorts, it is also important that governments embrace wider prevention measures at the population level.
- The role of local government authorities responding to homelessness in Australia is largely unrecognised and undefined. To contribute towards national efforts to end homelessness, the role and opportunities for LGAs need to be made explicit and more coherently integrated within a national strategy.
- There is an urgent need for Australia to develop a framework and set of principles for permanent supportive housing. Central to this will be clear funding mechanisms to allow the ongoing (long-term) provision of support services that people require for the duration of their need.

4.1. CHAPTER INTRODUCTION

Drawing on our document review and stakeholder interviews, this chapter examines significant homelessness policy developments emerging in Australia over the past few years. Augmenting the previous chapter's discussion of homelessness policy and practice in the wake of COVID-19, we begin here by reviewing the recently renewed federal interest in homelessness policy along with federal and state initiatives to expand social housing provision. Both areas represent promising progression that must be understood to ensure they are leveraged and extended in subsequent years.

Then, in the second half of the chapter we turn to areas of potential significance that call for demonstrable extension; these are: homelessness prevention, the role of local government authorities, and permanent supportive housing. These three areas represent latent opportunities to develop to assist in building the policy and practice capacities in Australia to contribute to ending homelessness.

4.2. RENEWED FEDERAL ENGAGEMENT

While emerging only late in the piece, one of the most significant developments in homelessness policy in our period of interest is the Federal Government re-engagement with Australia's homelessness challenge following the 2022 election and change of government. This follows on from more than a decade of Federal disinterest in, or contribution to, homelessness policy since the first Rudd Labor Government (2007-2010) (Parsell and Jones, 2014). During this period, as noted in AHM 2020, Federal Government reticence has been a major barrier to addressing homelessness in Australia, given its superior resources (in terms of revenue-raising and borrowing capacity), its control over crucial policy levers (especially in tax and social security) and overarching responsibility for national economic and social welfare (Pawson, et al., 2020). It is therefore significant that the new Albanese Labor Government has made a clear commitment to elevate housing and homelessness as federal policy concerns.

National Housing and Homelessness Plan now in prospect

The new federal administration has restored the cabinet-rank status of Housing and Homelessness and committed to developing a National Housing and Homelessness Plan (National Plan), to 'set out the key short-, medium- and longer-term reforms needed to improve housing and homelessness outcomes across the spectrum' (Collins, 2022b, n.p.). Whilst the National Plan's remit and ambition remain to be clarified, the responsible Minister has indicated that it will be developed 'in collaboration with key stakeholders' including 'state and territory governments, local government, not for profit and civil society organisations, industry bodies, superannuation funds and other experts in housing, finance and urban development' (Collins, 2022b, n.p.). It is also implied that the National Plan will interface with the Government's planned investments in new social and affordable housing supply (discussed below).

The development of a national plan for addressing homelessness is significant for several reasons. First, it complies with the key overarching recommendation of the recent Parliamentary Inquiry into Homelessness under the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs. The Inquiry stated that a 'ten-year national strategy on homelessness' is required to 'ensure that all Australian governments have a shared focus on achieving better outcomes for those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness' (Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, 2021, p. vii). It argued that such a strategy 'would lead to more cohesive policies, better coordination and more accountability, particularly in relation to the use of Australian Government funding' (p. viii). It is to be hoped that the Federal Government's National Plan will incorporate the three main areas of reform recommended by the Inquiry: 1) greater focus on prevention and early intervention; 2) embedding the principles of Housing First in all Australian governments' responses to homelessness; and 3) developing 'new approaches' to 'address the shortfall in social and affordable housing' (p. viii).

Second, the development of a National Plan is potentially significant as it suggests an explicit change of direction at the national scale. In its official response, the Coalition Government in office at the time of the Inquiry rejected its recommendation for a national strategy, along with most of its other recommendations (Australian Government, 2022). It argued that the existing National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA)¹⁶, was an adequate means of national coordination.

It is true that the NHHA has required states to develop their own housing and homelessness strategies and identifies national 'policy priority areas' and 'priority cohorts' to guide this process. However, these aspirations are phrased very broadly and do not prescribe specific policy approaches, principles, or frameworks to align or coordinate state policies in the way that a genuine national strategy or plan would. Consistent with these observations, the Productivity Commission has recently assessed the NHHA as 'ineffective' and therefore in need of a major shakeup (Productivity Commission 2022b). This is not withstanding the fact that the former government had argued that the NHHA remains preferable to a national strategy because it 'enables localised approaches to place-based issues' that allow for more 'flexible and targeted responses to better address homelessness' (Australian Government, 2022, point 35).

More generally, in both its response to the Inquiry and in a multitude of other pronouncements, the former government repeatedly asserted that housing and homelessness was a 'state responsibility' and that it was therefore inappropriate for the Federal Government to take a leading role. This claim was made 21 times in the 26-page response to the Inquiry recommendations, often as a justification for rejecting or simply 'noting' (rather than 'supporting') the recommendations received. A stakeholder illustrated the distant role played by the former Federal Government in asserting:

'We exist in a federal context that has been purposely disinterested. We have been in a policy-free vacuum' (NGO stakeholder).

The new government's commitment to establish a National Plan thus marks a fundamental shift in perspective on the Federal Government's role.

Evidence supports the plan for a National Plan

Third, the development of a National Plan brings the new Federal Government's position on homelessness into closer alignment with national and international best practice. The establishment of robust national policy frameworks has been identified as an important contributor to positive homelessness outcomes overseas. In Finland, for example, significant reductions in homelessness have been achieved through the development of a national framework requiring all homelessness responses be configured in accordance with Housing First principles and, importantly, couples this with dedicated increases in social housing (Allen et al., 2020). Similarly, Scotland has used its national strategy to shift local service providers away from conditional and crisis-oriented service delivery models and towards evidence-based, housing-led approaches (Clarke et al., 2020).

Conversely, research shows that downgrading of national coordination in favour of devolved and localised responses to homelessness can have negative consequences. For example, the post-2010 localisation of homelessness policy making in England has in significant ways compounded the problem by: a) displacing structural problems like housing affordability to local actors who lack the capacity and resources to address them; b) impeding knowledge about effective local policy responses from being shared and institutionalised at a national level; and c) leaving vulnerable populations exposed to the vagaries of local politics, local budgets, and the discretion of local actors (Fitzpatrick et al., 2020). Australia's lack of national coordination has also been linked to variation in responses and outcomes across localities, and to a lack of recognition for the structural drivers of homelessness (Spinney et al., 2020). All of this suggests that the former government's position that the NHHA is sufficient and preferable to a national strategy because it allows greater flexibility and local responsiveness was misguided.

¹⁶ The mechanism through which federal funding is delivered to state/territory governments to support housing and homelessness services.

Considerations for ensuring the National Plan is effective

Considering its alignment with both the research evidence and the recommendations of the recent Parliamentary Inquiry, we believe that federal re-engagement with the problem of homelessness is a very promising development. Fulfilment of this promise will, however, ultimately depend on what policy principles and mechanisms make it into the National Plan, as well as what resources are committed to implement resulting initiatives. Much will depend on whether measures advocated to prevent and manage homelessness in the plan are accompanied by mechanisms and funding support to expand social and affordable housing provision. As emphasised by one of our stakeholder interviewees:

[I]t's straightforward. We need the state government to partner with the federal government and produce a pipeline of social housing that will grow the proportion of housing, that is social housing, and remain affordable to people on our lowest incomes (NGO stakeholder).

Reflecting these sentiments, research evidence has shown time and again that access to safe, secure and affordable housing is a necessary (if not sufficient) condition for the success of homelessness interventions, including those based on Housing First principles (Allen et al., 2020; Clarke and Parsell, 2020; Clarke et al., 2020). We discuss current federal and state government commitments to social and affordable housing investment in [Section 4.3](#).

The impact of new homelessness policy interventions will also depend on initiatives in other key areas of social policy. The inadequate, and internationally minimal, level of federal income support payments is consistently identified in research and advocacy as an important contributor to homelessness (Anglicare, 2022; Parliament of Victoria, 2021; Parsell, Clarke and Perales, 2021). It is even identified by some state government homelessness strategies as a key constraint – for example:

Responsibility for welfare and income support systems sit with the Commonwealth Government. Multiple sources of evidence highlight that income support levels are not adequate for most people and the basic cost of living means that many people subsist near or below the poverty line (Government of Western Australia, 2020, p. 18).

The broader point here is that the incidence of housing unaffordability and homelessness in Australia reflects major structural problems in relation to both income inequality and housing system performance; problems that have tended to remain officially unacknowledged or downplayed. Government willingness to recognize and address such issues will be crucial to the success of its re-engagement with homelessness as a policy challenge.

4.3. INVESTMENT IN NEW SOCIAL AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING

State and federal initiatives – an overview

A key barrier to both preventing and responding to homelessness in Australia is the dearth of housing affordable and accessible to people on low incomes. As shown in [Chapter 2. Housing market context](#), a true measure of social housing supply demonstrates that this has drastically declined over recent decades. This largely reflects the effective end of an ongoing national social housing investment program under the Howard Government of the late 1990s. This has been particularly detrimental because of the very limited capacity for state/territory governments to fill this breach, with the latter possessing revenue-raising and borrowing capacity far inferior to the Federal Government. This only compounds the problem that – far from expanding to fill the growing gap created by declining social rental supply – private rental housing affordable to low-income Australians has also been shrinking over time (Hulse et al., 2019).

Prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic, however, some state governments have broken with precedent by recently committing substantial sums from general funds to social and affordable housing investment programs. In a series of initiatives announced by the Victorian, Queensland, Western Australian and Tasmanian governments in 2020 and 2021, some \$10 billion was committed to programs likely to generate more than

20,000 new homes by 2025, expanding the national housing stock by over 15,000 net (allowing for sales and demolitions) (Pawson et al., 2021b).

Beyond this, the new Federal Government has also pledged funding for new social housing supply. Specifically, it has committed to funding 20,000 new social housing and 10,000 affordable housing properties over five years (2022-2027). Of the social housing properties built, 4,000 'will be allocated for women and children fleeing domestic and family violence and older women on low incomes who are at risk of homelessness' (Collins, 2022a). The 'affordable' properties will be targeted to 'frontline workers like police, nurses and cleaners who kept us safe during the pandemic'.

It is also encouraging that the new Federal Government has pledged to establish a National Housing Supply and Affordability Council with a remit to include 'Report[ing] the number of new social and affordable homes being built annually and advis[ing] on ways to boost the construction of social and affordable housing' (AHURI, 2022). Nevertheless, like the National Housing and Homelessness Plan discussed above, the ultimate value of the new Federal Government's re-engagement with social housing provision will depend on the scale of investment provided and to what extent it is institutionalised as a routine program extending beyond the five-year commitment so far pledged.

State level social housing supply initiatives

Returning to the state-level initiatives mentioned above and already under way at the time of the research, the largest (in absolute terms) and most publicly visible of these has been the Victorian Government's 'Big Housing Build'. This program is set to see development of some 12,000 new homes across the state, approximately 9,300 of which will be social housing properties. According to the Victorian Government (2020), this will constitute a 10% increase in social housing stock over a four-year period. This investment has been welcomed by housing advocates and other observers as a much-needed boost to the state's dwindling social housing supply. However, it is also noted that the investment is building from a low base, with Victoria having the lowest proportion of social housing in the country at the time of the announcement in 2020:

[It's] bloody incredible. Like in terms of the scale of investment that's gone into social housing, it's something that our country hasn't seen since nation building. It's transformational, but it's transformational off the back of 10 years of nothing (NGO stakeholder).

Moreover, as highlighted by the Victorian Parliament's recent Inquiry into Homelessness:

...despite the unprecedented size of the program, [the Big Housing Build] will still not ensure that Victoria will meet the national average of social housing as a percentage of total dwellings, at 4.5%. In addition, it remains to be seen what proportion of the over 80,000 individuals on the social housing waiting list will be housed in the new dwellings (Parliament of Victoria, 2021, p. 288).

Notably, the proportion of social housing in Victoria will remain below the national average despite the 'Big Housing Build', a significant observation given that the national average is far from adequate in meeting current and projected need (Lawson et al., 2018; Pawson, Parsell, et al., 2020). Also, important to bear in mind is that the 'Big Housing Build' is, at this stage, a one-off project. The Victorian Government had envisaged funding a longer-term social housing program through a levy on private development. However, this was withdrawn in 2022 in the face of strong opposition from the Victorian development industry (Willingham and Johnson, 2022). It is therefore unclear what social housing investment will look like in the state post the 'Big Housing Build'.

Queensland is another state that has committed to boosting social housing supply. It announced a housing investment pandemic stimulus program in July 2021, which blended new funding with existing commitments dating back to 2017. Pawson and colleagues (2021) estimate that Queensland will contribute a total of 6,365 new social housing properties in the 2021-25 period. However, a portion of these were already slated to be delivered under Queensland Housing Strategy 2017-2027, meaning that not all of these 6,365 new dwellings can be attributed to the pandemic stimulus initiative. Pre-figuring Federal Government plans, the Queensland

Government has established a new '\$1 billion Housing Investment Fund', the returns from which will be used to help fund these commitments and to 'drive new supply to support current and future housing needs across the state' (Queensland Government, 2021c, p.9).

In late 2022, the Queensland Government further expanded its associated commitment by doubling its 'future fund' investment that will yield annual subsidy for social and affordable housing investment (ABC News, 2022). However, while this remains to be officially confirmed, we believe that all or most of the resulting increase in available subsidy is likely to be directed to affordable rental, rather than social, housing. And, considering the higher rents involved, this will have limited direct relevance to people experiencing homelessness.

Another state that has announced a significant boost to social housing investment is Tasmania – particularly notable as the largest such recent commitment relative to population. As outlined in its 2022-2023 State Budget, this involves 10,000 new social housing dwellings over ten years from 2022 to 2032, a scale of development considered by one important local stakeholder, TasCOSS (Tasmanian Council of Social Services), as commensurate with need (Alvaro and Ross, 2022).

Finally, the Government of Western Australia also committed to a significant investment in new social housing supply as part of post-COVID economic recovery efforts. Following its commitment to develop 250 social properties in 2020, the WA Government announced in 2021 an expanded commitment totaling 3,300 new properties over four years. Funding will be sourced through a combination of \$228 million of direct expenditure and through returns from a new '\$750 million Social Housing Investment Fund', like those of Queensland and other states (WA Government, 2021). As in the other named states, of course, early implementation of stepped-up investment has been hampered in 2022 by supply chain constraints, as well as building industry skills shortages. For these reasons it may be that in all the named states funded programs take longer to ramp up in their initial stages.

Recent social and affordable housing development initiatives: summing up

As we estimated in late 2021, social housing development pipelines mainly arising from post-COVID state-funded programs were likely to generate 23,000 social housing units over the three years from 2021-22; a threefold increase on national social housing building rates during the late 2010s (Pawson et al., 2021b). Allowing for stock losses due to demolitions and sales, this equated to a prospective increment to social housing provision of some 15,000 dwellings during the period, or 5,000 per year.

The Commonwealth Government's subsequently announced Housing Australia Future Fund program aspires to generate 20,000 new social dwellings (4,000 per year), together with 10,000 affordable rental dwellings over a five-year period from 2023-24. Somewhere around 2024 will likely mark a peak year when state and national programs will overlap, potentially generating a net increase of some 9,000 social housing units. Unless new, extended or enlarged programs are announced in the interim, annual social housing construction numbers will drop back to about 4,000 from around 2025.

In 2018, factoring in population growth rates being recorded at that time, we estimated that annual social housing construction would need to be ramped up to 15,000 dwellings simply to maintain the sector's representation within Australia's overall dwelling stock (Lawson et al., 2018, p. 64). More recently, based on scaled-back population projections, the Grattan Institute estimated that a net annual increment of around 6,000 dwellings would be sufficient to achieve this (Coates, 2021). Allowing for sales and demolitions that probably translates to around 8,000 gross social housing starts/completions. Treating this as a benchmark, and applying it to the estimated social housing pipeline enumerated above, 2024 might turn out to be the first year for decades where the scale of construction activity matches that needed to maintain sector representation (i.e. share of all dwellings). However, unless new investments are announced in the meantime, that will be short-lived, with 2025 seeing a reversion to the long-established declining trend.

4.4. HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION

There have long been calls for a greater focus on prevention and early intervention in Australian homelessness policy. It was one of the three overarching themes of the Rudd Labor Government's 2008 white paper on addressing homelessness, *The Road Home*. Here, prevention was framed as being about 'turning off the tap', i.e. reducing new entrants into homelessness (Australian Government, 2008). It was seen as a necessary complement to efforts to end homelessness for those already experiencing it if lasting reductions in homelessness were to be achieved.

Prevention continues to be a focal point of Australian homelessness policy today. The current NHHA identifies 'early intervention and prevention' as a 'homelessness policy priority reform area' for state and territory governments (Council of Australian Governments, 2018, p. 17). It recommends this is implemented by 'actions ... taken through homelessness services and mainstream services (may include a focus on particular client groups or services)'. Reflecting this, prevention and early intervention initiatives not surprisingly feature as strategic priorities in each state and territory's housing and/or homelessness strategy documents.

Targeting 'at risk' cohorts

When we look at how the problem of homelessness prevention is approached within these state and territory policies, there is a clear tendency to preference what is sometimes called 'secondary prevention' approaches. Such approaches entail identifying and responding to cohorts who are deemed most 'at risk' of homelessness due to specific individual/household vulnerabilities or crises (Parsell and Marston, 2012). They are typically distinguished from 'primary prevention' initiatives that focus on addressing the 'structural causes' of the problem, such as the supply of affordable housing (Parsell and Marston, 2012, p. 34). The NSW Homelessness Strategy 2018-2023, for instance, aspires to provide 'a new approach to identifying people at risk of homelessness and putting effective supports in place to reduce that risk', citing 'prevention and early intervention' as one of 'three focus areas for delivering our new approach' (NSW Government, 2018, pp. 6-7).

There is a particular focus across state and territory policies on at-risk youth, based on recognition that people experiencing homelessness in childhood are more at risk of being affected as an adult (Chamberlain and Johnson, 2013). Thus, one current plan prioritises:

...assisting individuals and cohorts who are at a higher risk of homelessness and where targeted interventions can have the greatest impact, such as young people (Western Australia Government, 2020, p. 13).

This concern with the long-term impacts of homelessness on young people often extends to families with children, including families escaping domestic violence. For example, another government commits to:

Prioritise young people, including young mothers, and women and children escaping domestic and family violence to provide assistance early to minimise the intergenerational impacts of experiencing homelessness (ACT Government, 2018, p. 25).

People transitioning from institutional accommodation, such as prisons, health-care institutions, and out-of-home care, are another consistent focus of prevention policies across the states and territories. This, too, reflects evidence that people exiting such settings are at a high risk of experiencing homelessness (Fitzpatrick et al., 2013; Martin et al., 2021). Thus, one current plan commits to:

Strengthen interagency responses and support to reduce exits into homelessness from out-of-home care, health services and correctional settings (Northern Territory Government, 2018, p. 13).

Similarly, another states:

We will better coordinate and integrate services across government and the sector and develop a new framework to ensure no person exits from another government service to homelessness (Queensland Government, 2021a, p. 14).

Privileging 'early intervention'

Consistent with the logic of secondary prevention (Parsell and Marston, 2012), the policy focus on at-risk cohorts is coupled with a preference for targeted 'early intervention' measures that aim at supporting vulnerable households from slipping into homelessness. Such strategies tend to come in two main forms. The first is the development of mechanisms for identifying at-risk households. At the broadest level, this involves analysis of administrative datasets to identify homelessness risk. The NSW Government, for example, commissioned an actuarial analysis of homelessness service usage across the state, using data collected from SHS providers and other government services. The resultant *Pathways to Homelessness* report 'aims to increase early identification of groups at risk of homelessness' by identifying key 'risk factors' (Taylor Fry, 2021, p. 1). It has a particular focus on whether people's use of 'other government services' can be used to predict their risk of homelessness.

Other mechanisms for identifying at-risk households include encouraging mainstream services, such as schools and hospitals, to act as referral points for homelessness services. For example, Victoria's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Plan aims to engage 'justice, health and human service systems that have contact with people who are at greater risk of homelessness and rough sleeping... This includes allied services – such as Jobactive employment assistance providers – proactively referring their clients who are sleeping rough to specialist homelessness services for assistance' (Victorian Government, 2018, p. 14).

The NSW Government similarly commits to 'use mainstream services to maximise opportunities to identify people who are at risk early, particularly young people' (2018, p. 13). This includes the use of 'the universal screening tools for homelessness and risk of homelessness in schools' (NSW Government, 2018, p. 15) and to support real estate agents to identify and refer vulnerable tenants at risk of eviction.

The second form of early intervention approach common across state and territory strategies is initiatives to assist at-risk groups to sustain current tenancies. This typically entails the provision of 'wrap around support' to assist service users in addressing the issues endangering their tenancies. For example, the Northern Territory's Homelessness Strategy 2018-2025, places an emphasis on such support, stating that:

Tailored and targeted tenancy support and other wraparound support can assist people who are vulnerable to sustain their housing (Northern Territory Government, 2018, p. 17).

Similarly, Tasmania's Housing Connect service provides 'case management support to help maintain tenancies that may be at risk of ending' (Tasmanian Government, 2015, p. 28).

The need for greater attention to primary prevention

The current preference for secondary prevention approaches to preventing homelessness reflects a longer trend in Australian homelessness policy (Parsell and Marston, 2012). As explained there, such approaches are favoured because of their perceived cost-effectiveness and their consistency with the broader social policy tendency to treat disadvantage as an individual problem rather than social-structural one. However, given that secondary prevention and early intervention are highly targeted and amelioratory in nature, we previously argued that these are 'inadequate to alter the overall prevalence of homelessness and to address the structural causes that underpin it' (Ibid p. 41). To achieve such an outcome will require a focus on primary prevention measures that address structural issues, such as the supply of affordable housing and access to an adequate income. It will also require additional targeted interventions to address the structural disadvantage experienced by specific cohorts, such as First Nations Australians and people with a disability or chronic poor health (Batterham et al., 2021).

Unfortunately, primary prevention is largely eschewed in the formal homelessness prevention strategies of Australian states and territories. The one clear exception to this is Tasmania. The Tasmanian Government couples secondary prevention/early intervention measures with an explicit commitment to primary prevention through the bolstering of access to affordable housing. *Tasmania's Affordable Housing Strategy, 2015-2025* states:

What is the goal of prevention? To ensure an adequate supply of affordable homes for low-income Tasmanians to prevent them from falling into housing stress and insecurity. The Tasmanian Government can facilitate the supply of new affordable homes – for both private rental and home ownership – in well serviced areas with liveability and universal design features. Over time, adequate supply of affordable homes will reduce pressure on the social housing system and homelessness services (Tasmanian Government, 2015, p. 17).

This commitment is reiterated in Tasmania's latest *Affordable Housing Action Plan, 2019-2023*, which lists 'Preventing housing stress for low-income earners by increasing the supply of affordable homes' as one of its overarching strategies (Tasmanian Government, 2019, p. 6).

In terms of mechanisms for achieving primary prevention, both the Tasmanian documents place an emphasis on the release of land for private development and the use of planning mechanisms to promote affordable housing construction. There is also an aspiration for 'improved access' to affordable housing through schemes aimed at assisting better-off segments of the population into homeownership and private rental, on the assumption that this will mean they are not competing with vulnerable households for cheaper rentals. Assessing the effectiveness of such measures is beyond the scope of this research. However, it is worth noting that recent research casts doubt on the idea that these kinds of 'filtering' strategies, wherein provision of newer housing to better-off households frees up older stock for lower-income groups, can reliably improve the availability of affordable housing for low-income groups (Nygaard et al., 2022).

Interestingly, investment in new social housing is classified in Tasmania's Affordable Housing Strategy, as a form of 'early intervention' rather than primary prevention; however, this language is absent from the most recent Action Plan. Tasmania's recently promised large-scale investment in social and affordable housing (see above), whilst not an initiative arising from these strategy documents, will likely be the most effective step the state takes to prevent further increases in homelessness over the coming decade.

4.5. THE POTENTIAL CONTRIBUTION OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The possible roles of local government authorities (LGAs) in responding to homelessness in Australia is both undefined and unrecognised. As one of our stakeholders observed, there is:

[An] absence of a clearly defined role for local government within federal policy, so the agreement, the NHHA agreement between the states, the role of local government is just simply not defined. If you look at the various different policies under that agreement that states and territories subsequently have to have as their commitment for receiving funding, there's almost zero acknowledgement of the role of local governance within those state-based plans (Local Government stakeholder).

The huge diversity in their size, their wealth, and the extent to which homelessness is a local problem clearly means that there is no one-size-fits-all approach that cities and LGAs should adopt to respond to homelessness. However, especially in some inner cities and certain resort areas, LGAs are already significantly involved in local efforts to manage and ameliorate homelessness. As one prominent example, the Council of Capital City Lord Mayors has a Housing and Homelessness Working Group. The working group is mandated to advise the Council of Capital City Lord Mayors (the grouping that brings together all eight of Australia's state and territory capital cities) to advocate for more affordable housing for people who are homeless and experiencing exclusion.

The Working Group strongly advocates for more social and affordable housing, recognising that the current practice of 'relying on emergency and crisis support services to meet the demands of people experiencing homelessness in cities is not sustainable' (Council of Capital City Lord Mayors, 2022, p. 1). Australia's capital

cities have the greatest proportion of the national homeless population, yet there is limited recognition or detail for what role they can and do play addressing homelessness. LGAs may be largely excluded from consultation on homelessness policy and funding programs, but many observe significant levels of homelessness within their own boundaries and are, therefore, in no position to ignore the issue. A stakeholder observed:

And we are not waiting for permission, and we are taking action and we're knocking on the door and we're saying we want a seat at the table (Local Government stakeholder).

In some areas, LGA constituents push them to be involved. There is pressure on elected representatives to act:

We're starting to think about our own resources and what we have internally to respond to homelessness. Obviously, the pressure from the community, the pressure from our elected members is increasing, and we're starting to see that we don't actually have enough capacity within the organisation to manage that (Local Government stakeholder).

LGAs face challenges in addition to being compelled to respond to homelessness without holding the resources to end homelessness at scale. They often try to negotiate a balance of ensuring all people have a right to public space with ensuring all citizens can access clean and orderly public space (see also Clarke and Parsell, 2020). They constantly seek to negotiate this balance of what might otherwise be seen as competing priorities.

And so, I think the push from all Australian cities is, yes, about the human rights of people. And it's just, in Australia's context, how can we have the issues that we do when we're such a wealthy country? But it's also about trying to protect the public realm. And I think it's a challenge for cities to balance those dual responsibilities (Local Government stakeholder).

In some circumstances, LGAs can address these competing priorities by actively working to ensure that the public spaces that people who are homeless use are kept clean and accessible to all citizens. As one stakeholder observed, 'we can bring in cleaning services,' because 'a lot of the community angst comes from how messy places get. So, if we can keep it tidy.' In addition to this, and as we now demonstrate, the capacity of cities and LGAs to successfully negotiate the balancing of ensuring access to public space relies upon close collaboration between them and other levels of government and homelessness and other service providers. A LGA stakeholder made this clear when they asserted, 'we don't do anything on our own. It's a real coordinat[ion].'

Coordination is evident at least among the small number of LGAs across Australia that have participated in by-name-list collaborations and related coordinated efforts to enumerate and reduce rough sleeping (Pawson, Parsell, et al., 2020). Adelaide City Council was an early collaborator here with the establishment of the Adelaide Zero Project. Many other LGAs across Australia have subsequently played strong roles in facilitating by-name-lists, Zero Projects, and other activities supported through the Australian Alliance to End Homelessness (AAEH).

Beyond this, our 2022 fieldwork suggests that coordination and directly facilitating collaboration among diverse stakeholders are some of the key and significant outcomes that LGAs contribute to homelessness responses. For example, the City of Melbourne recently brought together 14 inner city agencies, including two hospitals, Homes Victoria, and specialist homelessness services, to implement a tailored rough sleeping project referred to as the 'Melbourne Service Coordination Project'. Associated with collaborations of this kind, LGA stakeholders assert that they sometimes play important system coordination roles around local homelessness responses.

Both LGA staff members and other stakeholders participating in this research stressed that these jurisdictions have limited capacities.

Some LGA research participants, however, even saw scope for a council role more directly in the housing and accommodation sector. Cited examples of such activity already ongoing included the City of Melbourne's, the Make a Room project which is transitional accommodation in a repurposed building. In Hobart meanwhile, the city council has been actively involved in advocating for change in the regulation of short term and holiday letting to influence affordable housing supply.

Western Australia has recently established a local government homelessness resources hub; an online portal for LGAs to share resources and information with the homelessness sector. This was created in response to local government requests for assistance in addressing homelessness at the local level: <https://www.lghomelessnesshub.com.au/>.

Given their responsibility for development control, LGAs can influence planning laws and norms that influence housing (including affordable housing) development. The diversity notwithstanding, this research suggests a need for a clearer role for LGAs to be defined, and indeed offers some suggestions for innovation moving forward.

It will be appropriate for the National Housing and Homelessness Plan to articulate the potential roles of local government in support of designated strategic priorities.

4.6. PERMANENT SUPPORTIVE HOUSING

A recurring theme from our stakeholder interviews was the urgent need for Australia to develop a coherent policy towards Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH). This term, originating in the USA, was broadly framed by interviewees as the close integration of long-term affordable housing with the capacity for ongoing support. In this way, Housing First is a specific type of PSH. Within the academic literature, PSH assumes multiple forms and is available for multiple groups of people, and it broadly takes the form of integrating long-term affordable housing with a range of health and psycho-social support services. Many research participants identified the absence of a systematic and comprehensive approach to PSH as a major impediment to more effectively tackling homelessness in Australia. Thus:

I think that the holy grail of all forms of homelessness is to have housing and support linked (NGO stakeholder).

Yet a participant reflected a widely expressed observation in commenting that:

I know of nowhere in Australia where [PSH] works well at scale. Nowhere... I think it's the missing piece (Government stakeholder).

Enthusiasm for PSH followed from the widely experienced scenario where the unavailability of support impeded homelessness solutions for vulnerable people. For some, this makes it unlikely that they will be offered housing – due to the perceived risk of consequential tenancy failure. Equally, if not denied a tenancy on these grounds, the absence of needed support all too often led to people falling out of housing and back into homelessness:

We know that people who go into social housing with those complexities, without support, have fallen out of it. Usually, half of them within two years (NGO stakeholder).

Because we know how often that they may be housed, but then when you don't have wraparound of services that they don't sustain their tenancy (NGO stakeholder).

These observations are consistent with published homelessness research evidence, some of it originating in Australia (Aubry et al., 2020; Parsell et al., 2016; Rog et al., 2014). This literature importantly demonstrates the feasibility of ending homelessness for some of the most marginalised cohorts within the homeless population. Rather than requiring people who are homeless to conform with existing housing application and/or management systems, PSH can enable people otherwise defined as 'not housing ready' to maintain a tenancy. Housing readiness is determined not by people experiencing homelessness, but rather by how we design and deliver housing and support.

Importantly, new research evidence adds substantial weight to the case that people with a history of chronic homelessness and who are assisted via Housing First programs (secure housing and support package) are likely to need longer-term or permanent assistance to ensure tenancy sustainment. Thus, as this randomised control study concluded:

'the abrupt decline in housing among the [housing first service user] group after the [support] program had ended emphasises the importance of providing ongoing access to support for some individuals ...the abrupt drop in public housing rates for this group highlights the importance of continuity of care with a caseworker, at least for those individuals with the highest support needs' (Kuehnle et al., 2022, p. 19).

It is the integration of ongoing support with ongoing (affordable) housing that is critical. This can help ensure that threats to a resident's tenancy are addressed before becoming unmanageable. The integration of support and housing in PSH models means that – with tenant consent – support providers can better meet a resident's needs because their housing needs are met, and housing providers can better meet the resident's shelter needs because their support needs are met.

According to stakeholder interviewees, the most fundamental challenge to implementing PSH in Australia at scale is the absence of support funding.

It was also acknowledged by research participants that the level of support needed to assure tenancy sustainment for some people exiting homelessness can be high. Moreover, it may be needed for the long term:

I do think that one of the learnings for us out of this, is that the level of tenacious support that's required to sustain people in housing, we probably didn't realise just how intensive that was and we didn't probably realise that we don't necessarily have a workforce sufficient to meet that (NGO stakeholder).

Indeed, it is not self-evident that a homelessness workforce is best placed to provide ongoing support to people in housing who are no longer homeless. A stakeholder with long experience in the national sector observed:

Our workforce still isn't expert at providing permanent support. We're much more experienced in the crisis end of things (NGO stakeholder).

Another stakeholder working in an organisation with national reach in the homelessness sector explained:

If the housing can be secured through social housing ongoing, then the next question is who can provide that ongoing support. And look, this remains to be probably the biggest gap in the homelessness system, is that there's no recognition that people may need permanent support (NGO stakeholder).

Australia has, in fact, successfully piloted a range of different PSH models, whether or not branded as such. These include Street to Home initiatives, and the Journey to Social Inclusion program (Johnson et al., 2014; Parsell et al., 2014). There are many other similar initiatives that provide support to tenants in housing, often transitional housing. The rationales for these have differed over time, such as to sustain tenancies, reduce antisocial behaviour, and to provide targeted resources for certain groups, such as women leaving domestic violence or young people through the Foyer model for example. Although these initiatives are rarely labelled permanent supportive housing, they do share many of the characteristics of PSH, albeit with the important exception that the support provided is not intended to be ongoing.

There is strong evidence for the success of such models in enabling people to exit homelessness and sustain housing. These programs have limited capacity to provide support for the duration of people's needs. Street to Home programs, for example, rarely have the funding to provide support to people for more than 12 months. There are vague assumptions that Street to Home and other programs will simply link people into other support services, without thought to what those services are, how they are funded, and whether there is indeed any link between the proposed support and ongoing provision of housing.

Aside from the investment needed to grow social and affordable housing stock (see [Section 4.3](#)), all of this raises a big question on how the support component of expanded PSH provision could and should be funded. In the United States, for example, many people in PSH have diagnosed disabilities, and it is funding associated with their diagnoses that is leveraged to make PSH financially viable. In theory, some people exiting homelessness in Australia and requiring ongoing support (to maintain their tenancy, among other things) would be eligible for the NDIS. Indeed, efforts to enable some of those transitioning into longer term housing under the NSW Government's Together Home program have been previously reported (Pawson et al., 2021b, p. 89).

The NDIS could indeed be a funding source enabling people to receive ongoing support and to underpin ongoing funding as part of PSH. However, in practice this is challenging to achieve:

The other issue is this is the group of people that aren't able to get a NDIS package. So, they're not eligible because their psychosocial disability is episodic or not significant, but it's significant enough to stop them maintaining and retaining stable housing (NGO stakeholder).

Patterson (2017) notes that the realities of homelessness only compound the challenges of accessing NDIS support. The scheme was designed for people living in the 'mainstream', particularly those with advocates and family members who can offer instrumental support. There is significant work involved in negotiating the system and providing required eligibility evidence. Referring to people who exited homelessness through the NSW Together Home program, a stakeholder observed that their organisation found:

There are a number of people identified who would also be eligible for NDIS, so there are some targeted efforts with working with the National Disability Insurance Agency at the moment to get some people on a plan. So, that's an ongoing piece of work (Government stakeholder).

Despite the practical challenges involved, the NDIS is one existing structure with the potential capacity to enable the growth of PSH to meet the housing and other needs of some people who are homeless. As reflected in the above comment, when people are provided housing, they are likely to be in a place where they can be supported to overcome the barriers to accessing the scheme. However, there are many limitations here. These include the principle that the NDIS will provide funding to cover support only in instances where there is no other agency of government that might be responsible. For example, in the case of children with learning difficulties NDIS will not fund support that could be the responsibility of the Department of Education. Any prospect that the NDIS might provide a more widely applicable funding source for the support component of PSH would likely require a high-level decision by the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) on eligibility for people experiencing homelessness and needing psychosocial supports.

Australian governments need to better recognise the case for expanded provision of PSH, and the associated need to develop a funding framework to enable this. Possibly chiming with this observation is the Productivity Commission's recent advocacy for a 'high-needs based [social] housing subsidy to ensure housing is affordable and tenancies can be sustained' (Productivity Commission 2022b, p. 45). This resembles an idea mooted by the 2010 Henry Tax Review. Being outlined only rather briefly in its report, the Commission's suggestion leaves some doubt on whether the proposed payment is in fact intended to offset support costs associated with tenant vulnerabilities (as seemingly implied by the wording 'high-need'). The Commission is, however, clear that the cost of such a payment should be met by state and territory governments and not by the Commonwealth. This would be consistent with the logic of conceptualising such needs as a social work (rather than a social security) responsibility. Moreover, to the extent that tenancy non-sustainability attributable to inadequate support may lead to recurrent homelessness, the associated costs to government (e.g. health, justice) will bear on state and territory budgets (Parsell 2016).

Beyond this, there needs to be clear recognition of what types of support are required to meet diverse populations, including non-Indigenous and First Nations people. Our stakeholder interviewees emphasised the need to consider how support is appropriately configured in First Nations communities, including support that is provided by Indigenous Controlled Organisations¹⁷.

In the context of remote regional Australia, questions about what support is required and how it could be provided are especially urgent. In remote Indigenous communities such as those in the Northern Territory, the form such services usually take is impossible to imagine, as reflected in this comment from a Northern Territory stakeholder:

So, the assumption seems to be we just build houses out in these remote communities and that'll fix it. But we are going to need supports. We're going to need people out there to help support people to stay in housing, just like we do elsewhere in Australia. We recognise that Housing First is important. What we're really doing actually in those remote communities is Housing First. The exception is, they're not getting the support service to go with the Housing First (NGO stakeholder).

This comment points to the non-existence of support services in some parts of the country.

¹⁷ As, for example, officially defined in New South Wales (New South Wales Government 2022a).

4.7. CHAPTER CONCLUSION

This chapter has highlighted the potential significance of the National Plan for addressing homelessness, as pledged by the new Federal Government, as well as notable federal and state commitments to new investment in social housing. These are promising developments that could shift Australia towards more effective homelessness responses. However, realisation of this potential will demand that key areas of ongoing policy concern are addressed in the National Plan and in homelessness policy and practice more broadly over coming years. This chapter outlined three such areas: greater focus on population level interventions in homelessness prevention policy; greater attention to, and clarification of the (actual or potential) role of local government in addressing homelessness; and the establishment of a set of principles and funding mechanisms to underpin expanded permanent supportive housing provision.

There are, of course, many other homelessness issues that will also require serious consideration over the coming years. Chief among these is how best to guarantee investment in new social housing at a level sufficient to meet both the existing backlog and emerging need (Lawson et al., 2018).

Recent commitments from both federal and state and territory governments signal notable short-to-medium term expansion in new social housing supply, thereby potentially enhancing stable housing prospects for people experiencing homelessness. Indeed, these were precisely the outcomes of the last significant investment in social housing under the Rudd Labour Government, delivered as part of its economic stimulus response to the Global Financial Crisis (Parsell et al., 2013). Unfortunately, the one-off nature of the Rudd-era investment meant that these positive gains were ultimately short-lived: as the boosted supply of new properties dried up, people experiencing homelessness and the services who support them once again struggled to find affordable, long-term housing. This should serve as a warning for policy makers regarding the present round of investment – also precipitated by a global crisis – that short-term/one-off boosts in social housing can at best ‘kick the can down the road’, and that making real inroads in addressing homelessness requires ongoing investment at a scale that keeps up with need. For this continued progress to be realised, a National Homelessness Plan must receive bipartisan support so that it can be a guiding framework over the long term.

Recent homelessness trends



Key points

- Across Australia, the average monthly number of specialist homelessness service (SHS) users grew from 84,800 persons in 2017-18 to 91,300 persons in 2021-22, an increase of 8%, double the growth in Australia's overall household population.
- By a margin of more than two to one (53% compared with 25%), respondents in our online survey agreed with the statement that 'excess demand/reduction in service capacity has led to the turning away of more service users in 2022 when compared to 2019'.
- Australia-wide, SHS service users deemed 'homeless' have recently increased substantially more rapidly than those judged 'at risk of homelessness' – the former rising by 16% in the period 2017-18 – 2021-22 compared with a 6% increase in the latter.
- Total SHS service user numbers (a proxy for 'people experiencing homelessness') have grown at highly contrasting rates across jurisdictions; while South Australia's numbers remained static over the past four years, particularly rapid increases were recorded in Tasmania (24%) and Queensland (22%).
- Over the past four years homelessness has grown at double the rate in regional Australia as in capital cities (13% compared with 6%); regional growth rates have exceeded metropolitan increases in all mainland states except Victoria.
- Homelessness has grown most rapidly in regional Queensland (up 29% since 2017-18) and in regional Western Australia (up 35%).
- Largely extending a pre-existing trend, the past four years have seen disproportionate increases in older adults subject to homelessness; SHS service users aged 50-64 and 65+ increased in number at more than twice the rate of younger age groups.
- Housing affordability stress stands out as the most rapidly growing homelessness causal factor; over four years to 2021-22, the average monthly number of SHS service users where this issue had triggered the need for help rose by 27%.
- First Nations people and those affected by mental ill health were the fastest growing cohorts among SHS service users over the past four years, up by 23% and 20%, respectively. By 2021-22, First Nations persons accounted for 27% of all service users – a seven-fold over-representation in relation to the First Nations share of Australia's overall population.
- While the paucity of reliable statistics impedes analysis, it appears that major reductions in street homelessness were achieved in some cities through state government emergency housing programs in 2020, but that these were brief and unsustainable.
- Tentative evidence for the City of Sydney nevertheless indicates ongoing progress towards the New South Wales Government's target of halving rough sleeping during 2019-2025.
- Rough sleeping numbers, nevertheless, appear to be on the rise in regional New South Wales, with non-metropolitan areas now accounting for the bulk of the state's street homelessness population – up from 41% of the state-wide total in 2020 to 59% in 2022.

5.1. CHAPTER OVERVIEW AND DATA SOURCES

This chapter reviews the latest statistical data on homelessness across Australia, both as broadly defined to encompass the wider homeless population, and as narrowly defined to focus specifically on people literally roofless at a point in time – i.e. sleeping rough.

The chapter is structured in three main sections. First, we discuss the key sources of statistical data on homelessness in Australia, explaining the strengths and limitations of those used in this report. Next, in the chapter centrepiece, we review the changing incidence and nature of homelessness across the country, where 'homelessness' is broadly defined to include all those seeking – and receiving – help from relevant service provider organisations. Then, in the third main section, albeit more briefly, we present statistics on trends in rough sleeping in certain parts of Australia where such numbers have been collected for sustained periods.

Data sources: broader homelessness

Partly because the homelessness statistics drawing on the 2021 Census will become available only in 2023, the 'broader homelessness' analysis reported in this chapter is largely based on data about homelessness service users, as published by Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) in its Specialist Homelessness Services Collection (SHSC). As more fully discussed in [Section 1.3](#), these data may be regarded as a proxy measure of homelessness expressed demand. It should be acknowledged that SHS service users include both those assessed as homeless and those judged 'at risk of homelessness' when assisted. To some extent this parallels the way that, as further explained in [Chapter 1. Introduction](#), ABS Census-based homelessness statistics include housed people in highly unsatisfactory conditions, and therefore at high risk of becoming roofless, as well as those literally unsheltered on census night.

A second source of evidence on the changing incidence of homelessness drawn upon in this chapter is the online survey of SHS agencies undertaken as part of the research itself – as detailed in [Section 1.4](#).

Data sources: rough sleeping

Once again, with relevant 2021 Census data yet to be published (see above and [Section 1.3](#)), this edition of the Monitor is necessarily reliant on other less comprehensive and in some other respects less satisfactory sources that can provide only partial indications of rough sleeping numbers and trends across the country.

Firstly, there are a few cities across Australia where longstanding local government and/or civil society concerns around homelessness have motivated periodic rough sleeper 'street counts', both reliably undertaken and recently updated. Secondly, we draw on point-in-time rough sleeping statistics annually collected by the New South Wales Government in 2020, 2021 and 2022 in connection with the State's officially pledged rough sleeping reduction target; a statewide 50% cut in 2019 rough sleeping numbers, to be achieved by 2025 (NSW Government, 2020). In the latest such survey, for example, it is reported that this was undertaken 'in more than 300 towns and suburbs in 76 local government areas (LGA) across NSW' (NSW Government, 2022). In undertaking this work it appears that the NSW Department of Communities and Justice has attempted to apply consistent methodology capable of generating meaningful comparisons between localities and across time for particular places or geographies (NSW Government, 2022).

A third potential source of data on the incidence of rough sleeping has emerged in recent years in the shape of local homelessness services consortia operating pooled service user data systems. This refers to what are generally termed 'by-name-lists' (BNLs), effectively local databases shared across homelessness services provider organisations and containing records on the local population of service users. Such records detail applicant characteristics, vulnerabilities, housing histories and current circumstances – ideally, updatable by any participating agency. BNL collaborations have been set up in numerous localities, notably those covering inner city areas in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide and Perth.

While the primary purpose of BNL systems is the operational objective of effective service coordination and targeting, they also have the potential to generate valuable statistical data on caseload size and profile. Thus, as stated by one important local government authority playing a BNL coordinating role:

The By-Name-List is the most accurate, complete and timely list possible of all individuals experiencing rough sleeping in the City of Melbourne. It is an efficient method for monitoring outcomes for people experiencing rough sleeping homelessness (City of Melbourne, 2022).

Fulfilment of this potential will, however, depend on the extent to which such databases are routinely, consistently and comprehensively utilised by all such organisations operating in a given locality. Only once this has been achieved and maintained for a substantial period will it be possible to generate meaningful time-series statistics. In practice, most of Australia's BNL systems have been initiated only recently, with a 'bottom-up' aspiration for organic growth in their home locality, progressing towards the involvement of all local service providers. Thus, with the possible exception of the inner Adelaide collaboration now established for some time, the comprehensiveness of BNL coverage remains uncertain in most cases, even for tightly defined localities (e.g. City of Sydney, City of Melbourne)¹⁸. Further, the immaturity of BNL-derived databases as reliable research sources is implicitly or explicitly acknowledged by the relevant collaborations operating in several cities, as contacted by the research team. With all of this in mind, recent rough sleeping time series statistics for various local BNL partnerships are presented towards the end of this chapter on an indicative basis.

5.2. RECENT HOMELESSNESS TRENDS AT NATIONAL AND JURISDICTION LEVELS

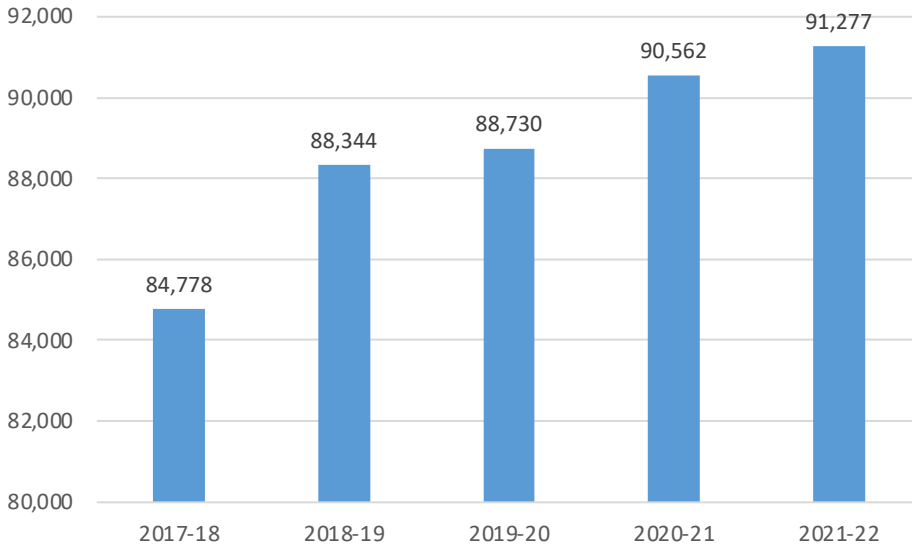
Recent change in the incidence of homelessness, broadly defined

This section is informed primarily by statistics derived from SHSC data, as introduced above. Most of the observed trends and profiles are drawn from the published monthly statistics series as initiated by the AIHW in 2021. Partly to iron out seasonal fluctuations (which are significant for data of this kind), the analyses have been mainly undertaken based on monthly figures converted to annual averages. Except where otherwise explained (**Figure 5.2** and **Figure 5.3**), the analyses relate to service users (persons) recorded during each calendar month since July 2017 when the AIHW-published monthly SHSC statistics sequence began. Reference is also made to findings from our online survey of SHS agencies (see **Section 1.4**).

Across Australia, the average monthly number of homelessness service users grew from 84,800 persons in 2017-18 to 91,300 persons in 2021-22, an increase of some 8% (see **Figure 5.1**). Given that national estimated resident population (ERP) increased by only 4% over the period December 2017-December 2021 (ABS, 2022b), it appears that rising homelessness has continued to outpace Australia's growing population. In other words, the true incidence of homelessness continues to increase.

¹⁸ This seems evident from the fact that the City of Sydney's February 2022 rough sleeper count enumerated 225 individuals whereas the NSW BNL database for 31 Dec 2021 showed 16 people, and for 31 Mar 2022, 78 people.

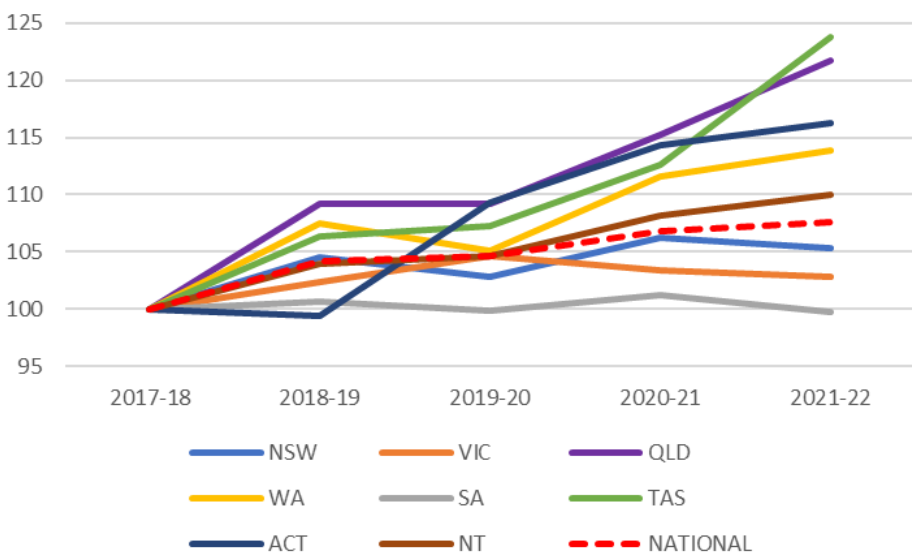
Figure 5.1: Total SHS caseloads – average monthly no. of service users (persons), 2017-18 – 2021-22



Source: AIHW monthly SHSC statistics – figures show average monthly service user numbers for each financial year.

However, as also shown in **Figure 5.2**, service user caseloads have grown at highly contrasting rates across jurisdictions. Indeed, South Australia’s numbers remained static over the period. Conversely, meanwhile, particularly rapid increases were recorded in Tasmania (24%) and Queensland (22%). More broadly, as presented in **Figure 5.1** there is notably little evidence of any marked discontinuity attributable to onset of the COVID-19 pandemic or to public health restrictions in 2020 and 2021.

Figure 5.2: SHS service users: average total monthly caseloads (persons) by jurisdiction, 2017-18 – 2021-22, indexed to 2017-18 (2017-18=100)



Source: AIHW monthly SHSC statistics – figures based on average monthly service user numbers for each financial year.

It also bears repetition that the statistics graphed in **Figure 5.1** and **Figure 5.2** represent trends in the numbers of people who have both sought help from a homelessness agency and been provided with some form of assistance. They are, therefore, only an imperfect proxy for the underlying incidence of homelessness.

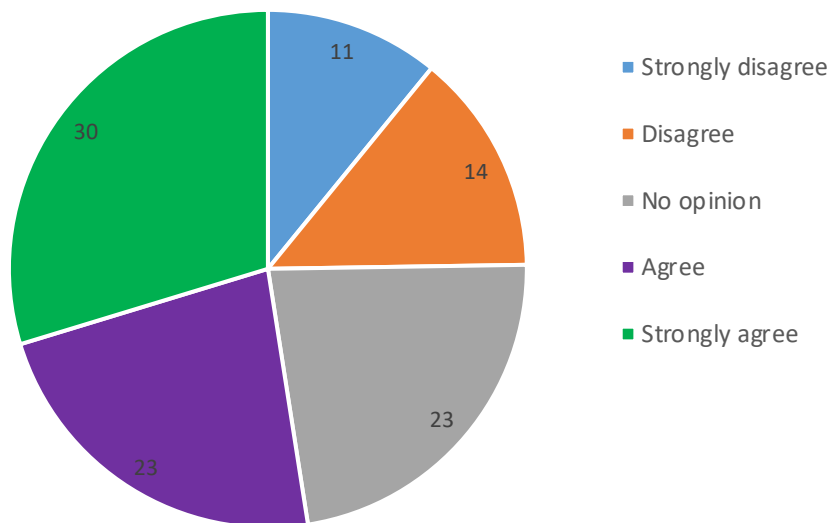
As noted in **Section 1.3**, population-wide survey evidence suggests that many people experiencing homelessness do not even seek support (ABS 2015). Moreover, because agency capacity is limited, it is not always possible to provide help even when requested. For example:

... our family and domestic violence service in Karratha has reported having to turn away individuals on 600 occasions in the last 12 months, while the family accommodation program is currently turning away five to ten families a week and has closed the waitlist as they do not want to give families a false hope (Salvation Army submission cited in Productivity Commission, 2022).

The Productivity Commission's report, as cited above, also laid stress on SHSC figures suggesting that the scale of 'unassisted demand' (i.e. people seeking SHS help but turned away) has grown in recent years (ibid, p. 6).

Similarly, it is notable that some 53% of respondents in our online survey (see **Section 1.4**) agreed with the statement that 'Excess demand/reduction in service capacity has led to the turning away of more service users in 2022 when compared to 2019', as compared with only 25% who disagreed – see **Figure 5.3**.

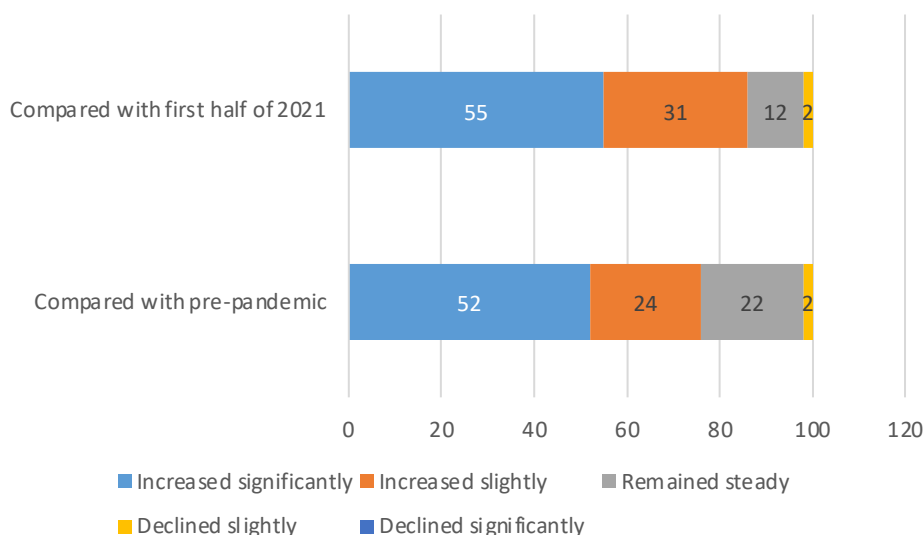
Figure 5.3: SHS agency responses to proposition: 'Excess demand/reduction in service capacity has led to the turning away of more service users in 2022 when compared to 2019'



Source: Authors' survey of SHS agencies, 2022 – see Section 1.4.

Survey respondent perceptions on recent change in service user demand were generally consistent with the overall upward trend in most jurisdictions over recent years, as evident from SHSC statistics. For example, 55% of participants reported that numbers seeking homelessness services in the first half of 2022 had 'increased significantly' since the equivalent period in 2021 – see **Figure 5.4**. Similarly, 52% believed that recently experienced demand was significantly higher than in the immediate pre-pandemic period.

Figure 5.4: SHS agencies: perceived change in homelessness demand Jan-Jun 2022 compared with earlier benchmarks



Source: Authors' survey of SHS agencies, 2022 – see Section 1.4.

In seeking to explain this trend, survey respondents generally cited factors familiar to those working in the field:

- | *The continued lack of investment in social housing is creating an increasing backlog of people in need (Online survey respondent).*
- | *Private rentals are becoming less affordable in our area. We now have more people who are employed seeking housing assistance. This puts further pressure on the public housing waitlist as many of our clients on Centrelink benefits can't compete with someone who can offer to pay six or more months rent in advance (Online survey respondent).*
- | *There has been an increase in ... people with disability (due to lack of accessible homes, expectation that NDIS will assist with accommodation), hospitals and jails discharging people into homelessness. Combined with a decrease in social housing stock, support is needed for longer periods of time (Online survey respondent).*

Beyond this, perceived shifts in the characteristics of SHS applicants also provide some hints about the possible drivers of ongoing rising homelessness numbers. Some 63% of participants – and an even higher proportion (67%) of regional providers – reported observing 'significant change' in the profile of recent service applicants, as compared with pre-pandemic experience.

Some respondents, for example, noted an increase in the representation of low to moderate wage earners experiencing homelessness for the first time. For example:

- | *We are getting more families and low to middle wage earners. Private rental affordability had been worsening for many years. The price brackets for rental stress had reached families receiving government payments and low to middle income wage earners (Online survey respondent).*
- | *We are seeing people seeking assistance who have not accessed homelessness services previously, people who were working and maintaining housing but have lost jobs or been forced out of the private rental market (Online survey respondent).*

Others reported rising numbers of older applicants, particularly older women:

We have been seeing a significant increase in late-stage homelessness in the women we work with (women 55+ entering into homelessness for the first time in their lives). This may be due to a variety of issues: ongoing wage-gaps, limited financial literacy, changes in marital relationships, leaving DV settings, age discrimination in the workplace (Online survey respondent).

Another emergent theme among responses highlighted rising numbers of clients from migrant backgrounds, in some cases experiencing complex visa situations which complicated their housing options:

We have seen an enormous uptick in women experiencing complex visa matters which limit their access to government funded supports such as Centrelink benefits and social housing options (Online survey respondent).

Finally, as might be expected in the light of recent extreme weather events affecting many parts of Australia, some respondents highlighted the growing frequency of natural disasters as an increasingly important factor:

Responding to natural disasters used to be a once in a generation type of thing. With climate change we are seeing more and more flooding which results in more people with homes destroyed and more homeless people. As a service we are having to see this as an ongoing part of our service delivery (Online survey respondent).

Homeless versus 'at risk of homelessness'

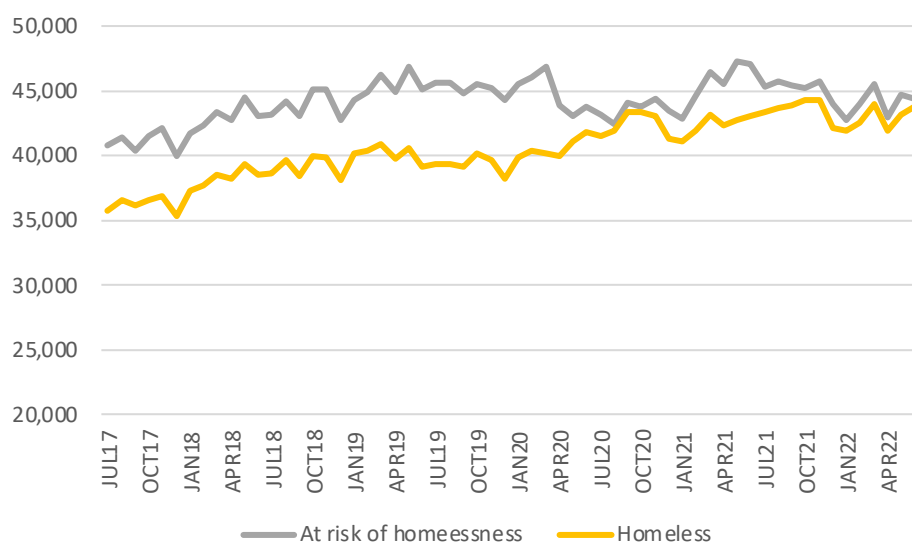
Resuming our analysis of SHSC statistics, **Figure 5.5** picks up on the distinction between service users 'at risk of homelessness' versus those actually 'homeless', as judged by service provider agencies. In making such a distinction, it would be expected that agencies will be applying the definitions set out in the **SHS NMDS** on the circumstances considered as amounting to 'homelessness'; that is, people:

- Occupying non-conventional accommodation or sleeping rough (such as living on the street, sleeping in parks, squatting, staying in cars or railway carriages, living in improvised dwellings and 'living in the long grass'), or
- Living in short-term or emergency accommodation due to a lack of other options (such as refuges, crisis shelters, couch surfing, living temporarily with friends and relatives, insecure accommodation on a short-term basis and emergency accommodation arranged by a specialist homelessness agency).

AIHW (2021a).

As revealed in **Figure 5.4**, the overall representation of people experiencing homelessness and those 'at risk' is fairly similar at the national scale. Nevertheless, during the period covered by our analysis, the cohort deemed 'homeless' grew substantially faster than those judged 'at risk' (16% compared with 6%). Notably, the relative stability of the 'at risk' cohort as shown in **Figure 5.5** coincided with the height of the pandemic when lockdowns and other unusual circumstances may have temporarily suppressed demand for services from people not actually roofless.

Figure 5.5: SHS service users (persons), broken down by 'homeless' versus 'at risk of homelessness' – monthly statistics



Source: AIHW monthly SHSC statistics.

Geographic and demographic aspects

Drilling down below state level reveals further marked contrasts in rates of change in overall homelessness service user numbers. Across the mainland states¹⁹, caseloads have recently increased substantially more rapidly in regional areas compared with capital cities – see [Table 5.1](#) and [Figure 5.6](#). Only in Victoria did capital city numbers increase slightly more rapidly than regional numbers over the period. Regional Queensland and regional Western Australia stand out particularly in this respect.

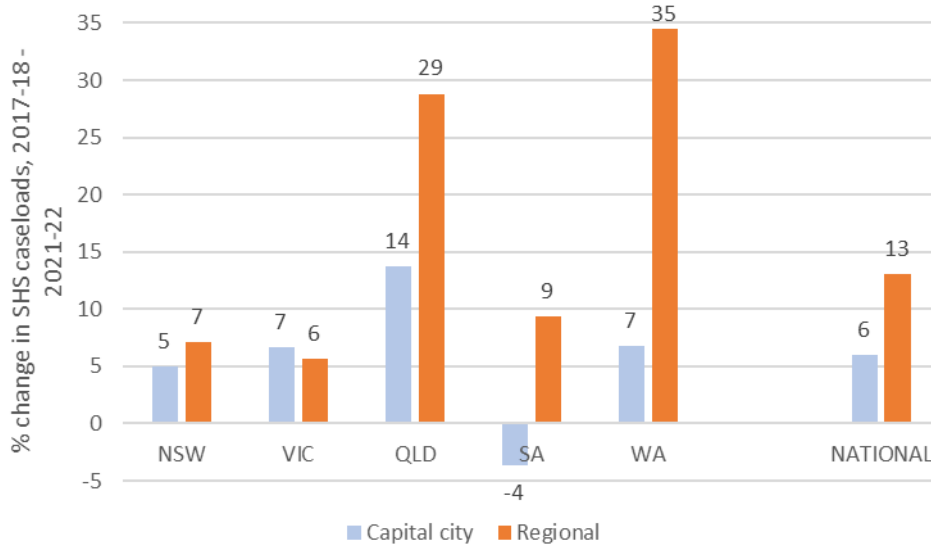
Table 5.1: Total SHS monthly caseloads (persons), mainland states; % change 2017-18 – 2021-22 broken down by capital city vs. regions

	Capital city			Regional		
	2017-18	2021-22	% change	2017-18	2021-22	% change
NSW	12,020	12,614	5	8,750	9,372	7
Vic	18,803	20,053	7	9,419	9,949	6
Qld	5,022	5,712	14	5,455	7,027	29
SA	4,341	4,183	-4	1,841	2,013	9
WA	3,478	3,714	7	1,990	2,676	35
All	43,664	46,277	6	27,454	31,036	13

Source: AIHW monthly SHSC statistics – special tabulation. Figures based on monthly average figures for the two cited financial years.

¹⁹ There are no 'capital city' versus 'rest of state' data available for Tasmania, ACT and the Northern Territory.

Figure 5.6: Total SHS caseloads (persons), mainland states; % change 2017-18 – 2021-22 broken down by capital city vs. regions



Source: AIHW monthly SHSC statistics – special tabulation. Figures based on monthly average figures for the two cited financial years.

While homelessness service user numbers have recently risen most substantially in regional Western Australia, the post-2017 increase in regional Queensland is arguably more significant, since the regions of this state account for more than four times the population of regional Western Australia (2.9 million compared with 0.7 million). Similarly, as shown in [Table 5.1](#), the numerical increase in Queensland regional homelessness service users over the four-year period was almost three times that of regional Western Australia. Equally, it may be that the pattern here is affected by expanded SHS capacity in some regional Queensland communities (Queensland Government 2021a).

While many other factors will have likely influenced the pattern shown in [Figure 5.6](#), it is relevant to note that the past two years have seen particularly rapid rent inflation in regional Australia, notably in Queensland (see [Chapter 2. Housing market context](#)).

Uneven patterns of recent change in homelessness numbers are also apparent in relation to the age of those seeking SHS help. Somewhat consistent with equivalent analysis for the preceding four-year period as published in AHM 2020 (Pawson et al., 2020), the most recent four-year period has seen a marked tendency for higher rates of increase in the older adult age groups – see [Table 5.2](#) and [Figure 5.7](#). In the period 2017-18 – 2021-22 the only age cohorts growing at rates markedly above the all-age group norm were those aged 50-64 and 65+. Notably, this was true for both males and females. But while the absolute numbers involved are relatively small, in contrast with the 2011-16 period, as revealed by the 2016 Census, growth rates for men in each of the two oldest age groups were somewhat higher than for women (see [Table 5.2](#)).

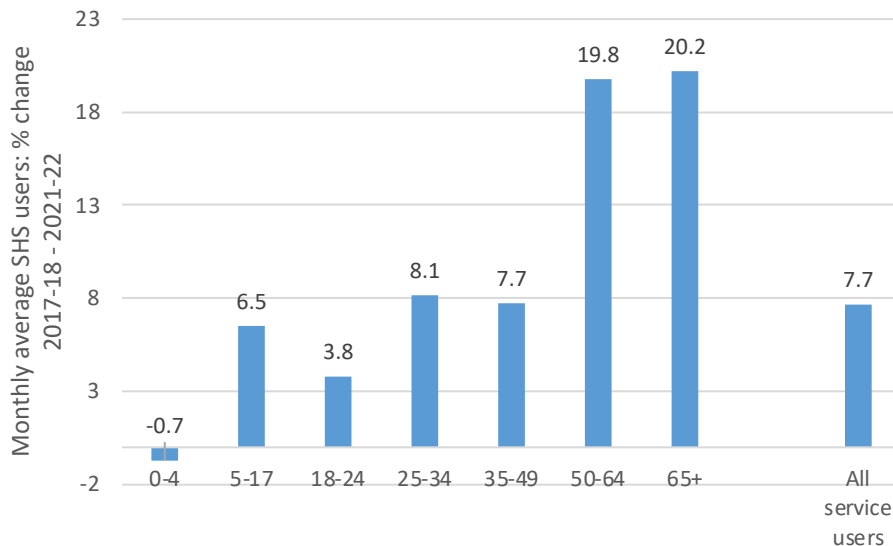
More broadly, gender-specific rates of increase have been almost identical in recent years, with female adults and children continuing to account for around 61% of all service users. Considering that most of the adults affected by family and domestic violence will be women, this implies that the gender balance among those affected by homelessness arising for all other reasons may be quite even.

Table 5.2: Average monthly caseloads (persons), age group breakdown; % change 2017-18 – 2021-22

Age group	Male			Female			Total		
	2017-18	2021-22	% change	2017-18	2021-22	% change	2017-18	2021-22	% change
0-4	4,101	4,044	-1.4	3,812	3,812	0.0	7,914	7,857	-0.7
5-17	8,066	8,618	6.8	8,813	9,358	6.2	16,879	17,976	6.5
18-24	4,622	4,564	-1.3	8,879	9,450	6.4	13,501	14,015	3.8
5-34	4,011	4,414	10.1	10,766	11,563	7.4	14,777	15,977	8.1
35-49	7,588	8,152	7.4	13,384	14,435	7.9	20,972	22,587	7.7
50-64	3,832	4,634	20.9	4,580	5,439	18.8	8,412	10,074	19.8
65+	1,025	1,309	27.7	1,298	1,484	14.3	2,323	2,793	20.2
Total	33,245	35,736	7.5	51,532	55,542	7.8	84,777	91,278	7.7

Source: AIHW monthly SHSC statistics. Figures based on monthly average caseload numbers for each age cohort for each of the two cited financial years.

Figure 5.7: Total SHS caseloads (persons), age group breakdown; % change 2017-18 – 2021-22



Source: AIHW monthly SHSC statistics. Figures based on monthly average caseload numbers for each age cohort for each of the two cited financial years.

Factors prompting homelessness and issues associated with applications

Clues to the factors underlying ongoing increases in homelessness – as measured by service user numbers – can be discerned in the SHSC statistics on the reason(s) prompting someone to seek SHS help. As shown in **Table 5.3**, the most cited ‘trigger factor’ in 2021-22 was family and domestic violence (FDV), an issue that had prompted applications for assistance involving some 32,000 people in the typical SHS monthly caseload during that year. Since 2017-18, the rate of increase in applications for homelessness services prompted by FDV was similar to that of the caseload overall – 9% compared with 8%. Among the trigger factors that increased at substantially faster rates over this period were ‘housing affordability stress’ (27%) and ‘inadequate or inappropriate dwelling conditions’ – see also **Figure 5.8**.

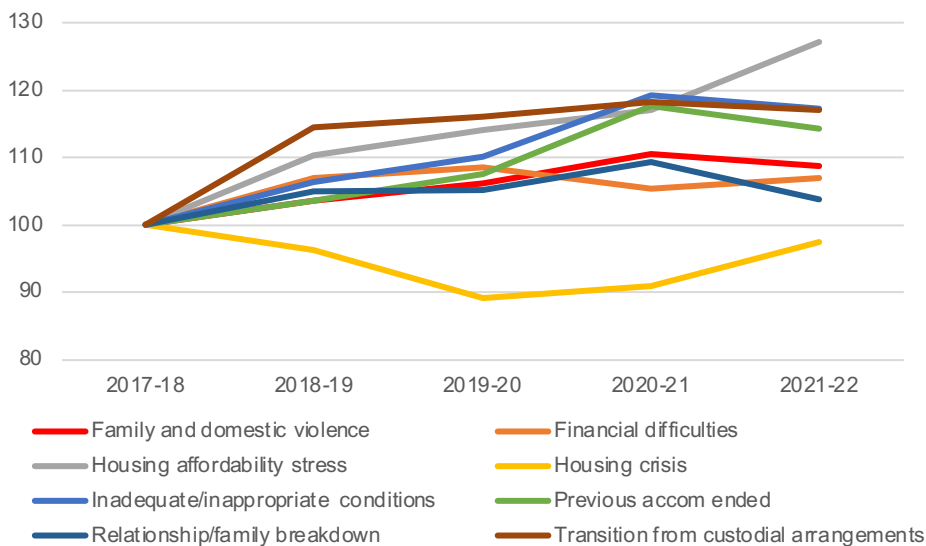
Table 5.3: Average monthly caseloads (persons), 2017-18 and 2021-22, breakdown by ‘reason(s) for seeking assistance’

	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	% change 2017-18 – 2021-22
Family and domestic violence	29,166	30,223	30,940	32,230	31,732	8.8
Financial difficulties	28,343	30,329	30,740	29,876	30,315	7.0
Housing affordability stress	20,545	22,665	23,442	24,042	26,121	27.1
Housing crisis	31,414	30,231	28,002	28,569	30,595	-2.6
Inadequate or inappropriate dwelling conditions	19,589	20,820	21,581	23,338	22,986	17.3
Previous accommodation ended	11,991	12,429	12,909	14,111	13,703	14.3
Relationship/family breakdown	16,834	17,675	17,723	18,404	17,472	3.8
Transition from custodial arrangements	2,146	2,456	2,491	2,538	2,510	17.0

Source: AIHW monthly SHSC statistics. Figures based on monthly average caseload numbers for each age cohort for each of the two cited financial years.

Note: because two or more factors may have prompted a service user to seek help, the caseload numbers in this table cannot be summed.

Figure 5.8: SHS caseloads (persons), 2017-18 – 2021-22, breakdown by 'reason(s) for seeking assistance', indexed to 2017-18 (2017-18=100)



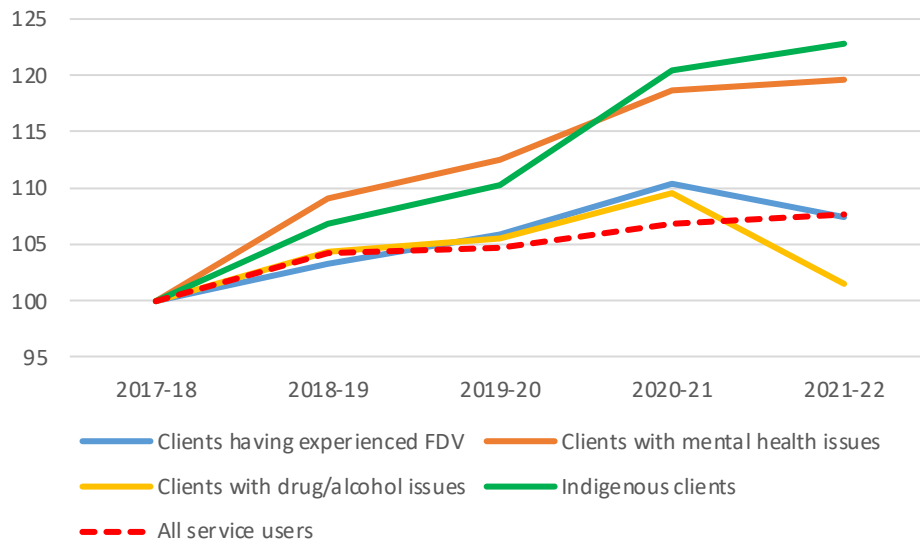
Source: AIHW monthly SHSC statistics – figures based on average monthly service user numbers for each financial year. Note: Service users may cite more than one 'trigger factor' if applicable.

Conversely, those for whom applications were triggered by 'housing crisis' fell sharply in 2018-19 and 2019-20, only partially recovering subsequently. According to the SHSC user guide, this is a synonym for rental eviction. It might have been expected that numbers affected would be running at depressed levels during the height of the pandemic, thanks to government-imposed eviction moratoriums in place across Australia for much of 2020 and running into 2021 in some jurisdictions (see Pawson et al., 2021a and b). This is probably part of the explanation for the 2019-20 dip, as graphed in **Figure 5.8**. Nevertheless, the decline in assisted persons affected by 'housing crisis' appears to have begun in 2018-19, well before the onset of COVID-19, so other factors must have been involved.

Another category of homelessness subject to recently rapid increase is people transitioning from custodial arrangements (see **Figure 5.8**). Albeit that in any given month the number of people seeking SHS help for this reason remains relatively small, over a typical year, the number of SHS service users acknowledging recent prison release totals some 9,000 (8,900 during 2020-21) (AIHW, 2021b), a number that can be related to the estimated 65,000 persons released from incarceration annually (Martin et al., 2021, p. 8). Relevant here is the separately published AIHW finding that less than half (46%) of prisoners being released expect to be housed in their own home (owned or rented) once discharged (Ibid p. 23).

Further clues as to the changing profile of the SHS service user cohort can be found in the SHSC statistics on certain specified characteristics of each assisted person. As shown in **Figure 5.9**, certain groups have expanded much more significantly over the past four years than the all-applicant norm. Service users identifying themselves as of First Nations origin rose in number by 23% over the period, while people affected by a mental health issue grew in number by 20%. Both increases not only far exceed the cohort-wide 8% norm but represent a continuation of trends identified from earlier in the 2010s in AHM 2020 (Pawson et al., 2020).

Figure 5.9: SHS caseloads (persons), 2017-18 – 2021-22, breakdown by specified personal characteristics, indexed to 2017-18 (2017-18=100)



Source: AIHW monthly SHSC statistics – figures based on average monthly service user numbers for each financial year. Note: Service users may cite more than one of the specified characteristics if applicable.

Moreover, by 2021-22, people experiencing mental health problems accounted for 30% of all SHS assisted persons. First Nations people, meanwhile, made up 27% of all service users. Considering that Indigenous people are estimated as accounting for 3.8% of Australia’s total population (ABS, 2022f), they are seven times as likely to be SHS service users as implied by their overall representation in Australia’s population.

These are striking figures, especially given the longstanding declared whole of government efforts to ‘close the gap’ between First Nations people and other Australians across a range of socio-economic indicators. Consistent with that objective, as might be expected, First Nations people are specifically identified as a ‘priority cohort’ in the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement in place since 2018. Most state and territory housing strategies acknowledge the need for responses to homelessness amongst First Nations communities to be culturally appropriate; and there is growing recognition for greater control over housing programs and support services by First Nations organisations (for example in Western Australia and Queensland). Continuing disproportionate increases in First Nations homelessness suggests that efforts to better prevent and manage the problem need to be stepped-up.

The large and rapidly growing size of the First Nations and mental ill health cohorts has implications for the task faced by SHS agencies in seeking to discharge their responsibilities. In other words, the challenge posed to the sector in managing caseloads is expanding disproportionately to the simple size of those caseloads.

While the underlying factors that might explain these patterns are not immediately apparent, more focused research on the rising SHS caseload representation of First Nations people and those experiencing mental ill health would appear to be highly justified. It would be hoped, for example, that such an investigation might be commissioned to contribute to the evidence base informing the Commonwealth Government’s promised National Housing and Homelessness Plan.

There is also a link to the discussion on permanent supportive housing in [Chapter 4. Recent homelessness policy developments and areas of concern](#). Especially as regards the growing representation of people with mental health issues among SHS service users, this only adds weight to the case for expanding supportive housing provision and for developing a funding mechanism to enable this.

5.3. ROUGH SLEEPING NUMBERS AND TRENDS

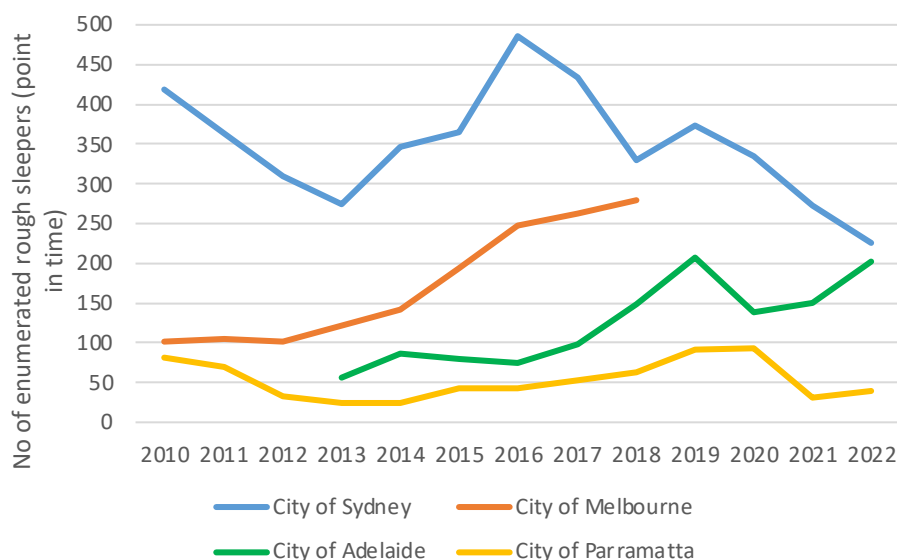
It is visible rough sleeping (sometimes termed ‘street homelessness’) that traditionally forms the main focus of media and policymaker attention on homelessness in Australia. As noted above, according to the 2016 ABS Census some 8,200 people were recorded as experiencing rough sleeping on Census night 2016²⁰. According to AIHW SHSC statistics, however, during 2020-21 some 42,000 people seeking help from SHS agencies (and provided with such assistance) reported having slept rough in the preceding month (AIHW 2021b).

These figures re-confirm existing Australian and international evidence that the population affected by rough sleeping during any given time period is far greater than the number of people sleeping out on any specific night (see AHM 2020, Pawson et al., 2020, p.74). In other words, street homelessness involves a shifting population that usually includes a proportion of long-term chronic rough sleepers, alongside others lacking settled housing and therefore liable to cycle in and out of actual rooflessness.

Despite episodically intense official concern around rough sleeping as a policy problem, there are few data sources that can provide a reliable and spatially specific measure of changing rough sleeping numbers during intercensal periods. It is, however, established from existing published research that – at least in certain cities – numbers fell markedly during the early phase of the COVID-19 pandemic due to the mass emergency accommodation (EA) programs rolled out by certain state governments, as reported in **Chapter 3. Homelessness policy and practice responses following from COVID-19** and more fully documented elsewhere (Pawson et al., 2021a and b).

While few in number, the sources the research team has managed to identify as providing indications of longer-term rough sleeping trends are somewhat weighted towards New South Wales. As more fully described in **Section 5.1**, these originate largely from city councils and from the state government.

Figure 5.10: Local government periodic (e.g. annual) rough sleeper counts in selected urban localities, persons, 2010-2022



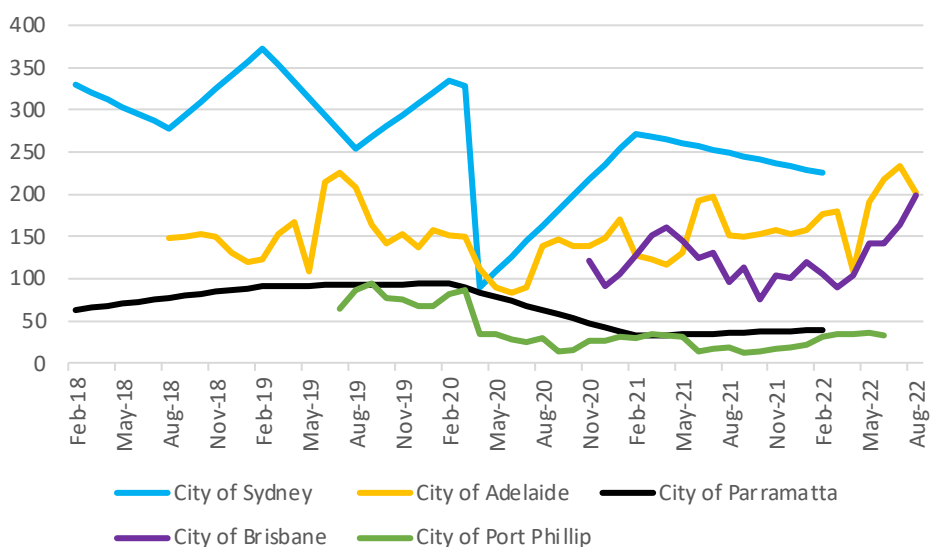
Sources: **Sydney**, Parramatta, Melbourne: City Council Street counts; Adelaide: City of Adelaide Street counts to 2016; thereafter, Adelaide Zero Project (by-name-list database).

Notes: 1. Figures for Sydney relate to February counts; figures for Adelaide relate to August each year. 2. The Melbourne series ended in 2018. 3. Some pre-2018 figures interpolated to substitute missing data.

20 That is, classed by ABS as ‘living in improvised dwellings, tents, or sleeping out’, a recognised proxy for rough sleeping.

The statistical sequences set out in [Figure 5.10](#) suggest that levels of rough sleeping have been volatile during the past decade, especially since annual point-in-time numbers will understate true variability. Moreover, monitored across this period there are few signs of any sustained or common trends. However, it has been previously noted that the monitored incidence of rough sleeping in the City of Sydney during the 2010s was significantly influenced by periodic state government initiatives to accommodate those with the highest needs (Parsell et al., 2013), with at least temporarily reduced street homelessness numbers enumerated as a result.

Figure 5.11: Rough sleeper counts in selected capital city localities, 2018-2022



Sources: City of Sydney – [City of Sydney Council streetcounts](#) plus April 2020 estimate by Homelessness NSW (Pawson et al., 2021a, p. 123); City of Brisbane: [Brisbane Zero Project](#); Adelaide: [Adelaide Zero Project](#); City of Port Phillip: Launch Housing (unpublished).

Note: Figures for Sydney and Parramatta largely based on six-monthly or twelve-monthly street counts; figures for other cities generated from BNL databases.

As reported at the time, the COVID-19 EA programs rolled out in early 2020 by the New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland and South Australia state governments had dramatic impacts in temporarily reduced rough sleeper numbers, at least in the capital cities concerned. In terms of the statistical trends graphed in [Figure 5.11](#), this is most clearly apparent for the City of Sydney. A more modest temporary 2020 dip in numbers can be seen for Adelaide. Unfortunately, the Brisbane statistical series published by the Brisbane Zero project commences only later in that year.

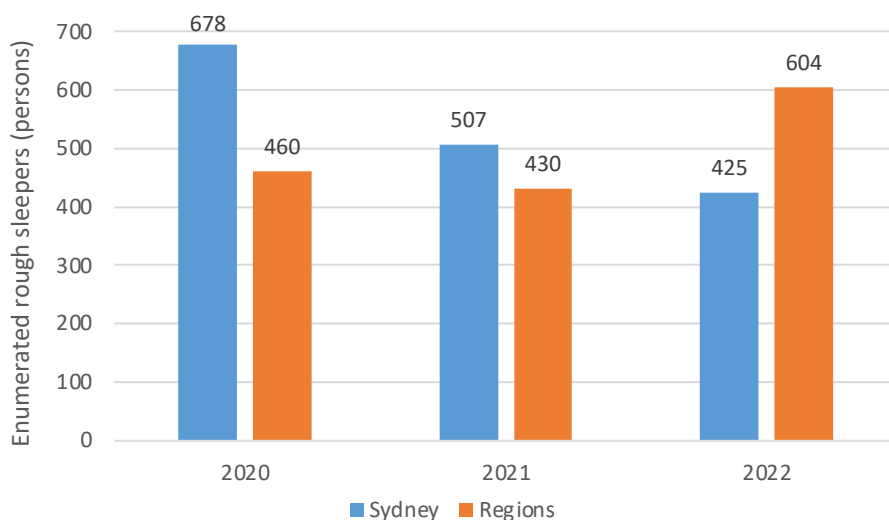
It is, in any case, important to re-iterate the major qualifications that must be attached to BNL-generated statistics because of questions about system coverage and data collection consistency (see [Section 5.1](#)). To the extent that these data are meaningful, their trends as shown in [Figure 5.11](#) appear to raise some questions about the factors underlying the apparent increase in numbers recorded for Brisbane in the months to August 2022. It will also be apparent that, because of being largely restricted to six-monthly or annual counts, the statistics presented here for Sydney and Parramatta infer trends which probably fail to capture the extent of volatility in these localities.

The longer-term (2018-2022) patterns suggested by the statistics for Adelaide, Parramatta, Port Phillip and Sydney seem to indicate somewhat contrasting trajectories. Except during the height of the pandemic, City of Adelaide numbers have largely continued to oscillate in the 100-200 range, if anything trending upwards during 2022. Latest figures for both Parramatta and Port Phillip could indicate that a reduction in rough sleeping achieved early in the COVID-19 period may have been subsequently sustained.

As for the City of Sydney, it appears that numbers have been continuing to trend down since 2019, albeit with a sharp discontinuity in 2020 due to EA activity. The 225 people counted as sleeping rough in the February 2022 Street count, represented a 40% reduction on the equivalent number three years previously. At least on the face of it, this seems to indicate progress towards the official ambition to halve rough sleeping, statewide, between 2019 and 2025 (as further discussed in AHM 2020, Pawson et al., 2020). At the same time, this highly tentative conclusion must be qualified by noting that the COVID-enforced absence of counts in August 2021 and August 2022 means that the evidence base for such an observation is currently thin.

As noted in Section 5.1, a novel source of rough sleeping data for the years 2020, 2021 and 2022 has recently become available, through New South Wales State Government efforts to monitor progress against its officially pledged statewide street homelessness reduction target (see above). Across New South Wales, the Department for Communities and Justice (DCJ) count enumerated 1,314, 1,141 and 1,207 persons sleeping rough in February 2020, February 2021 and February 2022, respectively. However, due to local flooding and other factors counts in a few regional localities were impossible to fully complete across all three years. To create a comparable trend over time series, therefore, we have re-calculated the regional and state-wide totals to include only settlements/localities where counts were completed in all three years – see Figure 5.12.

Figure 5.12: New South Wales Government statewide street counts 2020-2022



Source: New South Wales Government (2022b);

Note: Figures for localities where counts were incomplete for one or more years in the sequence have been excluded for comparability.

Adjusted as described above, the data suggests that rough sleeping was 10% higher in February 2022 than a year earlier, albeit still 10% below the equivalent (pre-pandemic) figure in February 2020. At a sub-state scale, the counts suggest a sharp contrast between trends in Sydney and those in regional New South Wales, with rough sleeping down by 16% in the former but up by 40% in the latter over the past two years. Notwithstanding that it relates to the whole metropolitan area, rather than the inner city only, the Sydney trend here seems consistent with the 2019-2022 pattern indicated by the City of Sydney Street count statistics restricted to the council’s much more geographically limited inner urban area.

Another inference that can be drawn from Figure 5.12, is that the geographical balance of rough sleeping in New South Wales has apparently shifted markedly from Sydney to the regions, with the regional proportion of the statewide total rising from 41% in 2020 to 59% in 2022. The validity of this tentative finding is difficult to know. However, if meaningful, it could result from recently more active (and/or effective) efforts to address the problem in Sydney, or more intense pressures generating homelessness in regional locations.

5.4. CHAPTER CONCLUSION

In this chapter we have reviewed recent change in the scale and causes of homelessness, as far as these can be discerned from available data. While it evoked a dramatic homelessness policy response in some states, the COVID-19 pandemic does not appear to have markedly affected longer-term trends in the incidence of the problem. Perhaps partly thanks to effective restriction of evictions and rent increases at the height of the crisis, there has been little evidence of any surge in new homelessness triggered by the pandemic. At the same time, however, the major reductions in street homelessness achieved in some cities in 2020 were largely temporary and unsustainable.

Homelessness, more broadly defined, has by-and-large continued to increase at a rate well in excess of population growth. However, the past few years have seen particularly rapid increases in certain states – especially Queensland – and in regional Australia more generally. To some degree, these patterns may be explicable in relation to spatial variations in population growth and housing market pressures.

Conclusions and key recommendations



Much of the evidence presented in this report gives cause for profound concern. At the same time, certain recent developments are a reason for guarded optimism. In terms of the former, multiple data sources demonstrate that housing is becoming more unaffordable to low-income Australians; in turn, pushing more people into homelessness. Whether we look at demand and unmet need for specialist homelessness services, the major recent increases in the cost of both buying or renting, and the tightening squeeze on access to social housing, the declining availability of housing within the means of low-income earners is the overriding structural driver of rising homelessness in Australia. The immediate trigger precipitating recourse to homelessness services might be a more specific issue – most commonly family and domestic violence (see **Chapter 5. Recent homelessness trends**) – but it is often the (structurally influenced) shortage of affordable housing that makes it impossible for this situation to be managed without SHS assistance. While some of the structural mechanisms were exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic, most were underlying problems already evident in the years prior to the crisis.

In the light of these structural mechanisms, this Monitor concurs with the recent analysis from the United States that puts it simply yet powerfully: homelessness is a housing problem (Colburn and Aldern, 2022). It is indeed the case that the risk of homelessness is far from evenly distributed across society, contrary to the idea that ‘we are all only two pay cheques away from homelessness’ (Bramley and Fitzpatrick, 2018). Homelessness is patterned among certain groups that experience other forms of marginalisation; most over-ridingly, poverty. Moreover, there are clear triggers that push many people into homelessness; family and domestic violence being one of the most glaring examples in Australia.

Nevertheless, the people who are disproportionately likely to end up homeless, and the triggers that push people into this situation, are activated under certain housing conditions. Thus ‘[p]eople becoming and remaining homeless is often the result of failures in other parts of the housing market’ (Productivity Commission, 2022b, p. 27). When the housing market provides a sufficient supply of affordable housing, there are low rates of homelessness even when there are high rates of poverty (Colburn and Aldern, 2022). This situation has recently become increasingly common in regional Australia, as evidenced by the close association between rapidly rising housing costs in the past three years with rapidly escalating homelessness.

The concerning structural drivers of homelessness also offer a glimmer of hope for something different. Given that homelessness is so closely related to inadequate affordable housing units available for people who are economically and socially excluded, we can address the problem by attending to the lack of suitable accommodation. Perhaps somewhat ironically stimulated by the challenges of COVID-19, the past three years have, indeed, seen a new push to do just that, at least moving toward that direction. Recognising the increasing stress that partly reflects a decade of near-zero construction, several states – most notably Victoria and Tasmania – have made significant self-funded commitments to boost social housing provision. As observed in **Chapter 4. Recent homelessness policy developments and areas of concern**, these state announcements sit alongside the proposed increase of 20,000 new social housing dwellings thanks to the new Commonwealth Government’s Housing Australia Future Fund.

This Monitor has likewise identified optimism for creating the conditions to address the housing market drivers of homelessness through the recent wider re-engagement with homelessness by the new Federal Government. This active role is critical, not only because the Commonwealth Government has significant capacity to tackle the problem by deploying its unrivalled financial firepower, but because it can also play a lead role in reimagining homelessness services provided or commissioned by state and territory colleagues.

These positive developments arguably come off the back of a growing societal understanding of homelessness as an urgent problem, on the one hand, and the recognition of housing market failures, on the other. These housing system flaws became increasingly widely known and discussed during the pandemic. There has been significant media attention on both the cost of housing and the ‘ordinary’ Australians who are, in consequence, locked out of the market (Kuskoff et al., forthcoming). The pandemic has served as an impetus for many Australians to recognise the centrality of affordable housing for all.

The wide policy interest in unaffordable housing and homelessness was particularly evident with the September 2022 release of The Productivity Commission's National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA) Review. Commissioned by the Commonwealth Government, this report pulled no punches in asserting that 'Australia has a housing affordability problem'. Indeed, the Commission also asserts that, as Australia's primary mechanism to fund homelessness services, the NHHA, is 'ineffective'. Also on point, the Commission strikingly advocates that government support to home ownership delivered through demand-side first home buyer assistance schemes could be more effectively spent preventing homelessness.

At the broad level, the NHHA review endorses the sentiments of this Monitor: homelessness is largely a structural problem, and one that therefore demands significant reform to address it. We are, however, far from convinced that, as argued by the Commission, solutions are to be found through further attempts to 'enable markets' rather than to step up direct affordable housing provision. So, while strongly supporting the Commission's analysis that the problem demands an expanded housing provision within the means of low-income Australians, we do not accept that the market is the most effective or advantageous way to achieve this. To pursue this course would be to simply double down on the dominant strategy of the past 25 years, one that has seen the problems of homelessness and rental stress only worsen.

Many of the supposed limitations of social housing could be addressed if there was supply more congruent with demand. Asserting that social housing has shortcomings because people cannot access it (Productivity Commission, 2022b, p. 28) is akin to suggesting that hospitals have shortcomings because of ambulance ramping. Yes, such ramping is a problem, but there is a wide understanding that the solution is to expand ambulance provision to meet need. We need to adopt a similar frame to solve the current problems that people trying to access social housing experience.

To resume a more optimistic tone, the current conversation in Australia that homes in on the housing market as the driver of homelessness is promising. It is promising because problem framing is key to policy change and policy opportunity (Head, 2022). For too long homelessness has been framed as a problem of personal inadequacy among those affected, or the crisis system we require them to navigate and endure. This framing diverts attention from the need to intervene in the housing market to increase appropriate supply. In fact, by focusing on people who are homeless and the Specialist Homelessness Service system, we are distracted from thinking about, much less fixing, the fundamental flaws in the housing system where homelessness is produced. As part of this Monitor, we have identified that a clear contribution of the Australian Alliance to End Homelessness (AAEH) is the framing of the problem and the opportunities this opens for an ambitious way forward. As one of our stakeholders argued, Australia should use language that emphasises 'ending homelessness':

And we can argue till the cows come home about how you measure that and what it means. But as long as that's the strategy, that actually changes – if that's the goal, it changes the strategy (NGO stakeholder).

The stakeholder observed that language is important, and so too is the agreement among diverse stakeholders that ending homelessness is the ultimate objective. The AAEH identifies ending homelessness as making it 'rare, brief, and nonrecurring. Thus:

Our strategy should not just be that we want a plan on homelessness and housing, which has been our strategy generally, as a sector. Our strategy should be we want to end homelessness (NGO stakeholder).

The explicit commitment to end homelessness fits hand in glove with the necessity to demonstrably increase the supply of affordable housing, ideally social housing. As this Monitor argued in **Chapter 4. Recent homelessness policy developments and areas of concern**, ending homelessness for some people will also require integrating forms of social housing with policy and funding mechanisms that enable people to access the support they need for as long as they require it: permanent supportive housing.

The unaffordable housing market currently means that, as a research participant pointed out, the homelessness sector constantly operates in 'crisis focused' mode. Twin commitments to end homelessness and to increase the supply of affordable housing are needed in recognition that what is required is structural change, not simply enhancing the functioning of the status quo. Thus, another participant argued that:

[E]veryone is sick to death of working in a system that is broken. And we need to change the system as opposed to just constantly fishing people out of the river. What we want to do is go upstream and find out who's pushing them in (NGO stakeholder).

This sentiment is echoed in the Productivity Commission report which rightly concluded that the only way government can reduce homelessness is by addressing the structural determinants. Homelessness cannot be addressed, much less ended, by refining the existing service system. The broken system is the broken housing sector that does not provide affordable housing for all Australians who require it.

As Australia collectively develops its first-ever National Housing and Homelessness Plan, it is to be hoped that this will be underpinned by recognition that our current mode of developing, operating, and commodifying housing produces homelessness, and this system must be overhauled to tackle the problem. A plan to end homelessness requires a plan to alter our housing system so that it produces sufficient suitable and affordable housing for all Australians.

Key recommendations

- Building on recently announced commitments, Australian governments should jointly pledge to extending recently stepped-up investment in social housing on a scale at least sufficient to ensure continued social housing representation in the national housing stock at current levels.
- The National Housing and Homelessness Plan (NHHP) should also endorse the principle that social housing investment and homelessness service funding should be spatially targeted on measured need.
- In formulating the NHHP, Australian governments should recognise the potentially beneficial role of permanent supportive housing (PSH) and should develop proposals for routine funding for the PSH support element, where required to maximise the prospect of tenancy sustainment – therefore contributing to homelessness prevention.
- The experimental and innovative practices developed to meet the needs of people experiencing homelessness during the pandemic (e.g. the re-imagining of crisis and temporary accommodation discussed in [Chapter 3. Homelessness policy and practice responses following from COVID-19](#)) should be examined and where evidence exists for effectiveness, incorporated within the NHHP and in jurisdiction-specific homelessness strategies.
- Australian policy needs to deepen engagement with homelessness prevention, both narrowly and broadly defined. While there is substantial scope for more effective state and territory intervention focused on 'at risk' cohorts, it is also important that governments embrace wider prevention measures at the population level.
- The role of local government authorities (LGAs) in responding to homelessness in Australia remains largely unrecognised and undefined. To contribute towards national efforts to end homelessness, the role and opportunities for LGAs need to be made explicit and more coherently integrated within national and jurisdiction-specific strategies.
- Existing housing and broader social service systems fail First Nations people at disproportionate and alarming rates. This trend has been observed consistently in the past three Censuses. First Nations people must play key and leading roles in the design, oversight, and delivery of the housing and support interventions needed to address the profound housing injustices that First Nations people experience.

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Appendix 1 – Online survey of Specialist Homelessness Service agencies: questionnaire



PISCF

1. What is the research study about?

You are invited to take part in this research study. In updating Australian Homelessness Monitor 2022, this research will investigate recent changes in the nature and incidence of homelessness, together with homelessness-related policy developments.

2. Who is conducting this research?

The study is being carried out by the following researchers:

- City Futures Research Centre UNSW: Prof Hal Pawson
- Centre for Social Impact UNSW: Mr Chris Hartley
- Institute of Social Science Research, University of Queensland: Prof Cameron Parsell
- School of Social Sciences UNSW: Dr Andrew Clarke

Research Funder: This research is being funded by Launch Housing, Melbourne.

3. Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

Before you decide to participate in this research study, we need to ensure that it is ok for you to take part.

The research study is looking recruit people who meet the following criteria:

- Aged 18 years or older
- Work for a Specialist Homelessness Service (SHS) provider

Participants who meet the following criteria will be excluded from the study:

- Aged under 18 years
- Work for a community service organization that does not provide SHS services

4. Do I have to take part in this research study?

Participation in this research study is voluntary. If you do not want to take part, there is no obligation to do so. If you decide to take part and later change your mind, you are free to withdraw from the study at any stage.

If you decide that you do not wish to participate, it will not impact upon your relationship with research team, UNSW, the peak agency who provided you with information about the online survey or other any other relevant actors.

We will send a reminder email in one week's time. You can ignore this reminder if prefer not to participate or if you have already completed the online survey.

If you decide you want to take part in the research study, you will be asked to:

- Read the information carefully (ask questions if necessary);
- Complete the online survey

5. What does participation in this research require, and are there any risks involved?

If you decide to take part in the research study, we will ask you to complete an online survey. The Survey will ask you questions about recent changes in the scale, nature, and causality of homelessness you have identified within your service.

It will also ask you about your perceptions about recently enacted or proposed policy developments potentially significant for homelessness that are either exacerbating or ameliorating the problem.

The survey should take less than 30 minutes to complete. The risks associated with participation in the survey are small. Survey questions will ask about the policy development of the sector, no personal questions will be asked and no statistical data will be requested. Individual survey responses will be confidential. However, at any stage if you feel uncomfortable you may skip any question that you do not wish to answer or stop doing the survey.

6. What are the possible benefits to participation?

By filling out the survey you will be helping us to identify recent changes in the nature, and causality of homelessness, and in homelessness policy. This will indirectly be of benefit to your service and the clients you support.

7. What will happen to information about me?

Submission of the online survey is an indication of your consent. By clicking the 'I agree to participate' button you are providing your permission for the research team to collect and use information about you for the research study. The research team will store the data collected from you for this research project for a minimum of 5 years after the publication of the results. The information about you will be stored in de-identifiable format, only accessible by the researchers. Survey findings will only be reported in an aggregated way, no identifying information will be published.

8. How and when will I find out what the results of the research study are? The research team intend to publish and/ report the results of the research in the Australian Homelessness Monitor 2022. All Information will be published in a way that will not identify you. If you wish to receive a copy of the results please provide your contact details below, or you can find the report here when it is released
<https://cityfutures.adu.unsw.edu.au/research/projects/australian-homelessness-monitor-2022/>

9. What if I want to withdraw from the research study?

If you do consent to participate, you may withdraw at any time. You can do this by closing the questionnaire.

If you withdraw from the research, we will destroy any information that has already been collected.

10. What should I do if I have further questions about my involvement in the research study?

The person you may need to contact will depend on the nature of your query. If you require further information regarding this study or if you have any problems which may be related to your involvement in the study, you can contact the following member/s of the research team:

Chief Investigator Contact Details Professor Hal Pawson Position *Professor of Housing Research and*

Policy Telephone +61 2 9065 1618 Email h.pawson@unsw.edu.au

Consent

I agree, start questionnaire

Respondent details

Name:

Name:

Organisation:

Email address:

Head office location (postcode):

Questions

1. In which jurisdiction(s) does your organisation provide homelessness services? – please tick all that apply

- a. NSW
- b. Vic
- c. Qld
- d. SA
- e. WA
- f. TAS
- g. ACT
- h. NT

2. In which jurisdiction(s) does your organisation have its largest homelessness services caseload?

- a. NSW
- b. Vic
- c. Qld
- d. SA
- e. WA
- f. TAS
- g. ACT
- h. NT

3. In what type(s) of area does your organisation operate?

- a. Capital city (or cities) only
- b. Regional area(s) only
- c. Mix of capital and regional areas

4. Does your organisation specifically target its homelessness services towards any particular client group(s)?

- a. Yes
- b. No

5. Which group(s) does your organisation particularly serve? – please check all that apply

- a. Young people
- b. Women
- c. Parents with dependent children
- d. Older people
- e. People sleeping rough
- f. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- g. CALD communities
- h. People who are LGBTQI

6. Is your organisation an Aboriginal-controlled organisation?

- a. Yes
- b. No

7. Does your organization implement any cultural safety measures for Aboriginal service users?

- a. Yes
- b. No

8. Please briefly describe the cultural safety measures your organisation implements for Aboriginal service users

9. Thinking about the past six months (January – June 2022), how does the scale of ‘homelessness demand’

(people seeking homelessness services) **compare with the first half of 2021?**

- a. Increased significantly
- b. Increased slightly
- c. Remained fairly steady
- d. Declined slightly
- e. Declined significantly

10. Thinking about the past six months (January – June 2022), how does the scale of ‘homelessness demand’ (people seeking homelessness services) compare with **the period immediately prior to the pandemic?**

- a. Increased significantly
- b. Increased slightly
- c. Remained fairly steady
- d. Declined slightly
- e. Declined significantly

11. In relation to the changed scale of homelessness demand in 2022 please briefly describe (a) the nature of that change and (b) its possible cause(s)

12. How far has the mix of people seeking homelessness assistance from your organisation changed compared with prior to the pandemic? (e.g. in terms of profile such as age or type/complexity of need)

- a. Profile of new caseload essentially unchanged from pre-pandemic
- b. Profile of new caseload significantly changed from pre-pandemic
- c. NA- not providing services prior to 2020 pandemic

13. In relation to the changed mix of people seeking homelessness assistance please briefly describe (a) the nature of that change and (b) its possible cause(s)

14. Does your organisation's role include providing housing advice for people at risk of homelessness ?

- a. Yes
- b. No

15. Please comment on whether the challenge of finding suitable accommodation for homelessness service users has changed since the onset of the pandemic – how has the situation in the first half of 2022 compared with the period immediately prior to the pandemic?

- a. It has become much easier to find suitable accommodation
- b. It has become somewhat easier to find suitable accommodation
- c. No change
- d. It has become somewhat harder to find suitable accommodation
- e. It has become much harder to find suitable accommodation

16. Please elaborate on your answer above and state the likely main cause of this change

17. How far do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your organisation

	strongly disagree	slightly disagree	no opinion	slightly agree	strong agree
i. The COVID-19 pandemic stimulated positive innovations in our delivery of homelessness services in 2020 and/or 2021	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
ii. Some significant pandemic-triggered changes to the way we deliver homelessness services have been retained in 2022	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
iii. Excess demand and/or reduced service capacity means we have been turning away more service user applications in 2022 than in 2019	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
iv. The quality of services we are able to provide in 2022 has declined by comparison with 2019	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

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18. Thinking about your organisation’s locality, or main state/territory of operation, how far do you agree or disagree with the following statements

strongly disagree slightly disagree no opinion slightly agree strongly agree

i. State/territory government management of homelessness has noticeably improved in 2022 by comparison with 2019

ii. The quality of collaboration (or joint working) between the state/territory government and SHS services is significantly better in 2022 compared with 2019

iii. Changes in state/territory government social housing allocation policy/practice since COVID have made it easier to prevent and relieve homelessness

iv. Comparing the 2022 situation with pre-pandemic, progress has been made in reducing the incidence of social housing tenancy failure due to inadequate support provision

19. Is there anything else you would like to add about your experience of running your service over the last three years?

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