



**University of  
South Australia**

## **YOUNG PEOPLE AND HOUSING SUPPORTS IN AUSTRALIA:**

**Income Support, Social Housing and  
Post-Homelessness Housing Outcomes**



### **AUTHORED BY**

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**Dr Tammy Hand**  
*University of South Australia*

**Associate Professor David MacKenzie**  
*University of South Australia*

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<b>Authors</b>	Tammy Hand, <i>University of South Australia</i> David Mackenzie, <i>University of South Australia</i>
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## ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

<b>ABS</b>	Australian Bureau of Statistics
<b>AIHW</b>	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
<b>AHURI</b>	Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited
<b>CRA</b>	Commonwealth Rental Assistance
<b>DSS</b>	Department of Social Services, Australian Government
<b>HF4Y</b>	Housing First for Youth
<b>MFYH</b>	My Foundations Youth Housing Company
<b>NHHA</b>	National Housing and Homelessness Agreement
<b>OECD</b>	Organisation for Economic Development
<b>SAAP</b>	Supported Accommodation Assistance Program
<b>SHS</b>	Specialist Homelessness Service

## GLOSSARY

A list of definitions for terms commonly used by AHURI is available on the AHURI website [www.ahuri.edu.au/research/glossary](http://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/glossary).

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## KEY FINDINGS

Young people are a significant cohort in the homelessness population as estimated by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, or measured as the number of young people aged 15-24 years, who present alone and seek and receive assistance from Specialist Homelessness Services agencies (42,960/year and 15% of the total number of SHS clients in 2018-19).



Young people (19-24 years) as an age cohort experience the highest rates of homelessness as estimated using ABS census data, while young people aged 15-24 years are the smallest proportion of main tenants across all social housing programs. This is a major discrepancy between the need for housing and access to social housing as a viable option.

The 2018 National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA) identifies 'children and young people' as one of six national priority cohorts but there are no explicit guidelines that state how that priority should be implemented in state and territory planning under NHHA funding.

The levels of income support via Youth Allowance or Newstart benefits are inadequate for young people living independently and have not increased in real terms since the nineteen ninties; a wide range of stakeholders, including a Senate Inquiry (2019) into the 'Adequacy of Newstart and related payments and alternative mechanisms to determine the level of income support payments in Australia', have advocated that these rates should be increased to a more adequate level in terms of current rental and living costs.



Housing support in Australia is a dual system of:

- cash payments via Commonwealth Rental Assistance (CRA) administered by the Department of Social Services; and
- direct funding to the states/territories for public and community housing, with a trend to reduce public housing provision and increase community housing.



The aspirations, attitudes, and behaviours of young adults in the transition to establish viable careers and sustainable living situations, such as home ownership, are shifting. An AHURI study (Parkinson et.al. 2019) found that:



Young adults (18-24 years) are tending to stay at home living with parents for longer. In 2003-4, this was 58 per cent but by 2015-16, it had increased to 66 per cent – only 17 per cent of this group were living in independent households;



Home ownership remains the ideal for the majority of young adults (60%) – fifty-four per cent aspired to live in a stand-alone or semi-detached house, while 34 per cent thought in terms of an apartment;



Few young adults were actively planning to achieve their housing aspiration – education and employment goals were more important at this stage;



For young adults, living in a group (or shared) household was common and accorded with short-term aspirations (82%), but not longer-term aspirations (only 30%);



The low levels and precarity of the incomes of young adults was common, leading to housing instability and a falling back on sharing with friends – while one third of young adults who had lived out of the family home (34%) reported experiencing a period of homelessness.

About ten times more young people are assisted by CRA into private rentals than are accommodated in social housing. In 2018, there were just over 1.3 million CRA recipients, including 122,416 young people 24 years or under (AIHW 2019a) - a program costing \$4.4 billion annually (Productivity Commission 2019) -and nearly 6 out of 10 of these young people experience housing stress (Productivity Commission 2019) - alongside 803,900 individuals and about 398,900 households in social housing (community housing, public housing, and state owned and managed Indigenous housing) (AIHW 2019a) at an annual cost of \$4.1 billion (Productivity Commission 2019), but supporting only 12,176 independent young people aged 15-24 years as main tenants (AIHW 2019a).

Public housing in Australia has declined from a high of eight per cent in 1966 to about four per cent currently. Since about 2000, there has been government investment into creating a community housing sector of mainly not-for-profit providers that by 2017-2018 housed 153,150 tenants in 94,417 community housing and state owned and managed Indigenous housing properties. Social housing consists of both public housing stock as well as the community housing sector. However, despite a growing community housing sector, the supply of social housing has not increased significantly and has not kept up with the need for this tenure, as evidenced by long waiting lists.



## POLICY DEVELOPMENT OPTIONS



Review the levels of income support for young people via Youth Allowance and Newstart to increase these levels within the existing income support system to viable levels for independent living.



Undertake a broad policy review of the approach to income and housing support in Australia in terms of its complexity, its adequacy, and its fiscal viability over time from the perspective of Government budget considerations. A major question for policy is whether shifting to financial support in the private rental market to the extent that this has been done over several decades has been a sustainably successful longer-term solution for housing low-income young people.



Given the difficulties that disadvantaged and homeless young people have in accessing any form of social housing, there is a case for reimagining social housing for young people, not necessarily or mostly as a permanent housing option but as an housing option during their extended transition period to sustainable independent living.



Given the fact that the business model used by mainstream social housing providers does not support young people taking up community housing tenancies, investment into social housing for youth should be preferred for youth-specific social housing providers or partnerships that adequately address the youth support issues.

In Australia, the Youth Foyer Model has been developed as an incorporated accommodation and learning model for young people, aged 16-24 years, who are homeless or at-risk of homelessness. High unit costs are one issue while the effectiveness and impact on youth homelessness is another issue. In order to secure the viability of the Youth Foyer Model and foyer-like initiatives, consideration should be given to dispersed units in the community around a central support hub, as well as client intake coming more strictly connected to young people moving out of SHS settings.

The Housing First for Youth (HF4Y) concept emphasises the policy priority of rapid rehousing accompanied by age appropriate support for the developmental needs of young people. The Youth Foyer Model attends to the support aspects but does not deliver rapid rehousing for homeless youth. In Australia, the My Foundations Youth Housing (MFYH) approach to youth-specific social housing is the closest to the HF4Y concept, however rapid rehousing will remain largely unfulfilled without significantly increased supply.

# 1. YOUNG PEOPLE AND HOUSING SUPPORTS

Considerations of young people's needs and access to social housing and housing supports have been largely absent from the Australian social housing research literature, and not much is known about the cohort of young people who have successfully accessed social housing in Australia as main tenants, including their pathway into social housing, their tenancy length, and their exit pathways. What is well established and accepted is that one group of young people who need access to social housing and housing supports are homeless young people exiting from Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS).

This paper, which has been funded through a University of South Australia AHURI Occasional Grant, starts to address these omissions by collating publicly available data from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) and the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) on young people's access to Commonwealth Rental Assistance (CRA), the rates of youth homelessness, young people's SHS service usage, presentations, and housing outcomes, and young people as main tenants in social housing.



## 1.1 DUAL SYSTEM OF HOUSING SUPPORT

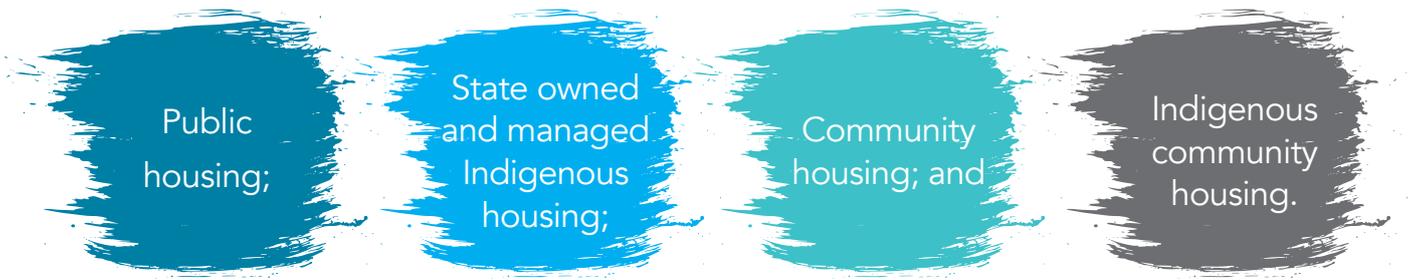
Australia provides a dual system of housing assistance to low income individuals and families who need to live independently. This dual system is via:

1. cash payments via Commonwealth Rental Assistance administered by the Department of Social Services; and
2. direct funding to the states/territories for public and community housing, with a trend to reduce public housing provision and increase community housing.

Rent Assistance is a non-taxable income supplement payable to eligible people who rent in the private rental market or community housing.

Social housing is defined as 'rental housing provided by government or non-government (including not for profit) organisations at below market rates to low-to-medium income Australians' (AIHW 2018:2).

In Australia, there are four main social housing programs:



## 1.2 YOUNG PEOPLE ARE A 'NATIONAL PRIORITY HOMELESSNESS COHORT' IN THE NATIONAL HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS AGREEMENT

Young people are identified as a national priority homelessness cohort in the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA) which commenced 1 July 2018, replacing the National Affordable Housing agreement (DSS 2019). This agreement is scheduled to expire on 30 June 2023 and be replaced for further terms, up to five years, by the written agreement of the Commonwealth and States and Territories.

The National Housing and Homelessness Agreement details the allocation of funding and funding arrangements. About \$1.5 billion each year is to be allocated to territories and states for the purposes of improving people's access to 'secure and affordable housing across the housing spectrum', including \$125 million quarantined for homelessness services in 2019-2020 where states and territories are to match this funding. As outlined in the NHHA, State and Territory governments will need to have publicly available housing and homelessness strategies and contribute to improved data collection and reporting to access this funding.



The territory and state housing strategies must address the NHHA housing priority policy areas relevant to the individual states and territories. The housing priority policy areas include:



AFFORDABLE HOUSING;



SOCIAL HOUSING;



ENCOURAGING GROWTH AND SUPPORTING THE VIABILITY OF THE COMMUNITY HOUSING SECTOR;



TENANCY REFORM;



HOME OWNERSHIP; AND



PLANNING AND ZONING REFORM INITIATIVES.

The state and territory homelessness strategies are required to address the NHHA priority cohorts, and outline reforms or initiatives that reduce the incidence of homelessness. Children and young people are one of the six identified priority homelessness cohorts, as well as people leaving care and institutions, of which many are young people.

<sup>1</sup> The national priority homelessness cohorts identified in the NHHA are: women and children affected by family and domestic violence; children and young people; Indigenous Australians; people experiencing repeat homelessness; people exiting from care or institutions into homelessness; and older people.

### 1.3 AIM OF THE RESEARCH PAPER

For this paper, the authors reviewed and collated publicly available data from several years which specifically pertains to young people and housing supports from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare and the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

This paper focuses on young people who are not the children of a family group seeking service or supports, but rather are young people, aged 15-24 years, who are independent in the sense that they are no longer living with family/parents.

Data on the main tenants in social housing is reported by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare in the *Housing Assistance in Australia* reports (AIHW 2019a, 2018, 2017, 2016, 2015, 2014). This data is limited to only national aggregated data on the number and proportion of main tenants in social housing programs by their age - no other cross-comparisons data by the age of the main tenant is currently publicly available. Such aggregated national statistics do not allow for a more comprehensive or nuanced assessment of the situation.

The aim of the paper is to critically review the housing assistance and supports available to homeless young Australians using data on homelessness and social housing as well as information on Commonwealth Rental Assistance in order to undertake a preliminary assessment of the adequacy of current options and arrangements.

There appears to be a broad consensus amongst nearly all stakeholders that the current arrangements are problematic but little has been done to redress these outstanding issues. This paper makes an argument for a range of reforms and initiatives that would improve the support for disadvantaged and homeless young people making the transition to independent living.



# 2. INCOME SUPPORTS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

## 2.1 THE TRANSITION TO INDEPENDENCE

A key issue for young people needing to live independently is their income, either earned through employment or available to them as Government income support benefits. Although an increasing proportion of young Australians remain for longer in the family home before venturing to live independently; when they do, shared households are common either as part of a couple or with friends and unrelated other young people; and returning to the family parental home several times along the transition is also common (Warner et.al. 2009). However, there is a continuing stream of young people who leave family homes and living situations prior to being able to readily support themselves and therefore experience homelessness or are at-risk of becoming homeless.

There have been some significant sociological shifts in the behavioural and situational aspects of the transition of young people from family living situations to independent living (Cuervo and Wyn 2011; Wyn and Cuervo 2014). As a part of these shifts, there have been changes in the aspirations of young people. An AHURI study led by Parkinson (Parkinson et al. 2019) examined the demographic changes from 2003-4 to 2015-16 from the ABS Survey of Income and Housing (SIH) as well as the expressed aspirations of young Australians collected via the online Australians Housing Aspirations Survey.

The following are the main findings reported in this study:

Young adults (18-24 years) are tending to stay at home living with parents for longer. In 2003-4, this was 58 per cent but by 2015-16, it had increased to 66 per cent – only 17 per cent of this group were living in independent households.

Home ownership remains the ideal for the majority of young adults (60%) – fifty-four per cent aspired to live in a stand-alone or semi-detached house, while 34 per cent thought in terms of an apartment.

Few young adults were actively planning to achieve their housing aspiration – education and employment goals were more important at this stage.

For young adults, living in a group household was common and accorded with short-term aspirations (82%), but not longer-term aspirations (only 30%).

The low levels and precarity of the incomes of young adults was common, leading to housing instability and a falling back on sharing with friends – while one third of young adults who had lived out of the family home (34%) reported experiencing a period of homelessness.

Given major social and economic wrought in the Australian and global economies (Roundtable convened by Australia21 and The Australia Institute 2018), the transition to independence has become more problematic despite remaining framed in terms of shared rental arrangements that are hoped to end with home ownership later on. The fact that one third of young people reported an experience of homelessness at some point highlights the difficulties along the way.

## 2.2 YOUNG PEOPLE AND COMMONWEALTH RENTAL ASSISTANCE

The concept of Youth Allowance was first implemented in 1998 and Newstart Allowance from 1991. Various changes have been successively implemented since then, generally tightening up the criteria and obligations required of recipients. While the level of benefits during the COVID-19 global health pandemic crisis and the institution of Jobkeeper scheme has temporarily replaced Newstart, at some point this will probably revert to something like the pre-existing income support arrangements, possibly with changed levels of benefit. Youth Allowance applies to full-time students and apprentices aged 16-24 years or job seekers under the age of 22 years who are looking for work while studying part-time or who are temporarily unable to work and study. Secondary student under 18 years can access Youth Allowance only if they live away from home. However, prior to COVID-19-related supplementary benefits, the following, detailed in Table 1, were the levels of Youth Allowance and Newstart.



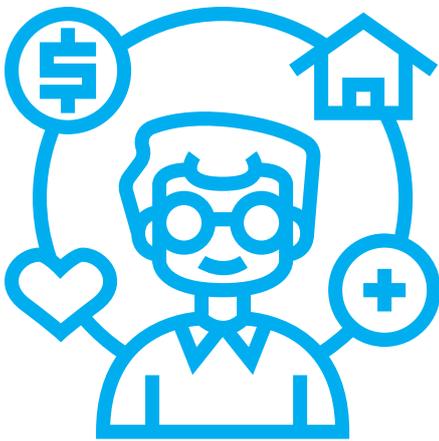
Youth Allowance		
Age Range	Living at home	Living away from home
Single, 16-17 years	\$253.20 /fn	\$462.50/fn
Single, 18-24 year	\$304.60/fn	\$462.50/fn
A member of a couple	\$462.50/fn	\$462.50/fn

Newstart Benefit		
Single, unemployed, aged 22 years or older	\$565.70/fn	\$565.70/fn
A member of a couple	\$510.80/fn	\$510.80/fn

Table 1: Youth Allowance and Newstart, singles and couples, without children, living at or independently away from a family home, 2019

The levels of both Youth Allowance and Newstart have been the subject of sustained criticism. The Australian system of income support is complicated and problematic, and has been criticised by a range of stakeholders including social policy advocates, the Business Council of Australia, some leading economists and recipients such as unemployed young people and students working while studying. As well, these issues have been examined in several government inquiries (Senate Community Affairs References Committee, 21 October 2019), and yet, these problems have remained a neglected set of issues over many years. Deloitte Access Economics senior partner Chris Richardson described unemployment benefits as ‘unnecessarily cruel’ and ‘our standout failure as a nation’, pointing out that unemployment benefits and Youth Allowance have slipped well behind other social security payment over a 25 year period (ABC Online, *Budget repair less urgent than raising dole payments, leading economist Chris Richardson says*, Tom Iggulden, 2 May 2018). An OECD study found that 53.5 per cent of unemployed Australians live in poverty, placing Australia in the second worst position amongst 33 comparable advanced countries (OECD 2015 Fig 3; ACOSS and UNSW 2018, Fig 14).



So far, the Federal Government has resisted higher levels of payments given the large quantum of funding required to meet demands for reform. However, policy tolerance of the gap between Youth Allowance and Newstart appears to derive from an assumption that parents will be subsidizing their children while living away from home, and while that might be the case for some, for the most disadvantaged young people, that seldom is the case. A large proportion of young people on benefits, who are attempting to live independently or who become homeless for a period before being assisted into housing, depend of some form of housing assistance (Burke et.al. 2002).

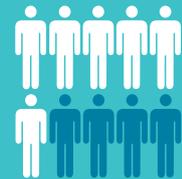
In 2018, there were just over **1.3 million** Commonwealth Rental Assistance (CRA) recipients, including:



**122,416** YOUNG PEOPLE  
24 YEARS OR UNDER  
(AIHW 2019a)



A PROGRAM COSTING **\$4.4**  
**BILLION** ANNUALLY  
(Productivity Commission 2019)

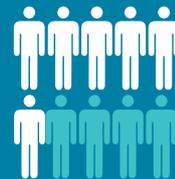


NEARLY **6 OUT OF 10** OF  
THESE YOUNG PEOPLE  
EXPERIENCE HOUSING STRESS  
(Productivity Commission 2019)

alongside **803,900 individuals** and about **398,900 households** in social housing (community housing, public housing, and state owned and managed Indigenous housing)



AT AN ANNUAL COST OF  
**\$4.1 BILLION**  
(Productivity Commission 2019)



BUT SUPPORTING ONLY 12,176  
INDEPENDENT YOUNG PEOPLE  
AGED 15-24 YEARS AS MAIN TENANTS  
(AIHW 2019a)

Commonwealth Rental Assistance is a demand-driven supplement paid to private renters who receive government benefits or pensions and meet the eligibility criteria. The supplementary payment is non-taxable and means-tested with the payment dependent on household and family circumstances. The CRA scheme was designed to provide financial assistance to low-income and highly disadvantaged individuals and families.

Commonwealth Rental Assistance is payable where more than a minimum rent is paid to a private landlord or community housing provider, but tenants in public housing or people living in government funded support facilities are not eligible. For young people, there are some special conditions attached to the receipt of



an ABSTUDY Living Allowance, a Disability Support Pension, the Jobseeker Payment, and Sickness Allowance or Youth Allowance dependent on whether the person is considered to be living with parents or a guardian or not. Independent living means living separate from the dwelling in which parents reside. The minimum and maximum payments are shown for several categories of household in the Table 2.

Presenting Status	Fortnightly rent is at least	Maximum payment if your fortnightly rent is at least	Minimum fortnightly payment is
Single	\$124.60	\$310.73	\$139.60
single, sharer	\$124.60	\$248.69	\$93.07
couple, combined	\$201.80	\$377.27	\$131.60

Table 2: Commonwealth Rental Assistance minimum and maximum payments

The following hypothetical case study illustrates a serious problem.

If a young adult, aged 19 years, receiving a Youth Allowance benefit of \$462.50 per fortnight, wanted to rent a one-bedroom apartment on their own and were faced with paying the median rent in Victoria of about \$340 per week, they would be eligible to receive the maximum fortnightly CRA payment of \$139.60. Their rent per fortnight would be \$540. Without a supplementary source of income, this would not be a viable proposition. In terms of a median rent, this means that half of the rentals would be below this level and the other half above this level. The break-even point is where the rental cost minus the maximum CRA payment equals the Youth Allowance benefit - in this case, a weekly rental of \$300. Either young people in this circumstance can only afford the lowest end rentals (which may present additional issues such as the location of the rental property) or find a share situation, but whichever living situation they manage to find, they will be under pressure to somehow obtain supplementary income from casual or part-time work. This is a precarious position, where young people are under pressure from increasing rents and the low levels of Youth Allowance and Newstart

The Commonwealth Rental Assistance scheme has attracted a range of criticisms such as:

- The complexity of its structure and calculations;
- Failure to allow for regional variations in private rental markets;
- Efficiency as a support payment;
- Steadily declining rates of early homeownership have tended to increase the number of young adults requiring CRA to support their private rentals;
- The proportion of recipients still in rental stress even after receiving CRA, which for young people remains at the highest level of about 65 per cent; and
- Failure to keep up with rental increases that have been higher than the CPI adjustment associated with the CRA payment; this has led to increasing housing stress for CRA recipients especially for a majority of young people under 25 years.



# 3. SOCIAL HOUSING FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

## 3.1 SOCIAL HOUSING IN AUSTRALIA

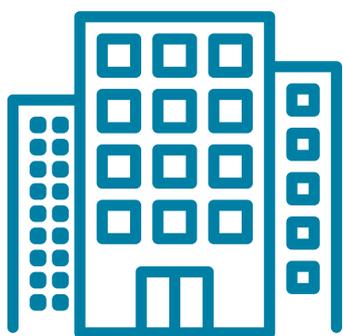
An AHURI study by Groenhart and Burke (2014) traces the historical pattern of public housing provision in Australia over a 30 year period from 4.9 per cent or 228,938 dwellings in 1981 down to 4.1 per cent out of a total number of residential dwellings in Australia of 7.76 million in 2011, although the number of dwellings by 2011 was 314,690. Beginning around the year 2000, Government funding began to flow into a not-for-profit community housing sector which managed 51,373 dwellings in 2011 and 153,150 tenants in 94,417 community housing and state owned and managed Indigenous housing properties in 2017-2018. Groenhart and Burke argue that if the level of investment into public housing had been maintained at the 1981 level for the 30 years to 2011, then there would have been an additional 200,000 dwellings built.

Australia sits at the lower end of the list of countries in terms of the proportion of housing that is social housing, and successive Australian Governments have been described by Hayward (1996) as 'reluctant landlords'. International comparisons can be difficult because of the range of different policies that subsidise housing for low income people. However, social housing has been a greater portion of the total housing stock in a number of West European countries than in the United States, Canada, or Australia and New Zealand (Boelhouwer 1999). Australia reached a high point in the late sixties of about 8 per cent of total residential housing in Australia, but thereafter a slow decline. Table 3 (below) compares the proportion of social housing in 1990-95 to the position in 2015-20 or over about one decade.

Country	Social Housing (%) 1990-95	Social Housing (%) 2015-20
Sweden	40	42
Netherlands	40	32
Germany	25	23
France	23	15
England	22	17
Denmark	18	20
Canada	6	4
New Zealand	6	4
Australia	6	4
United States	5	3

Table 3: International comparison of the proportion of social housing of total housing stock by country, 1990-95 and 2015-20

Apart from the shift from investment into public housing to funding the development of a community housing sector, countries with significant proportions (20-40 percent) of social housing have tended to maintain higher levels of social housing to the present day (Priemus and Boelhouwer 1999). By comparison, Australia has substantially shifted its policy priority to subsidising private rental for low income tenants. Potentially this promised to be a more flexible and efficient response as well as a significant lower per person recurrent unit cost. The average recurrent unit cost per household in social housing (2019) was \$10,076 (ROGS 2020) while the equivalent unit cost per income unit for Commonwealth Rental Assistance is about one third of the former, at \$3,251. However, this comparison does not take into account that many CRA supported renters live in shared households of two, three, or more residents, so the average unit cost per household is likely to be considerably higher. Also, in terms of the quoted unit cost of social housing per household in social housing, about one third of households consist of two adults, some with children. Also, the stock of social housing has a capital value that appreciates annually, apart from recurrent operational costs, whereas CRA assistance is purely a recurrent expense. The above comparison, which is focused on recurrent annual budget comparisons, therefore does attract some caveats and qualifications and is not the only way that the financial comparison calculation and fiscal argument can be constructed (see Lawson et.al. 2018).



The development of public housing in Australia in earlier years has often resulted in high-rise towers, such as in inner suburban Melbourne or suburbs in which public housing properties are most of the houses in the suburb.

A Productivity Commission (1993: 136) report on public housing promoted the idea that the 'allocation of housing assistance would be more responsive to the needs of people who access SAAP services'. This led to measures to prioritise high-need individuals and families such as the clients of the Specialist Homelessness Service system. What this has done is concentrate social disadvantage in certain locations where public housing properties are located. Burke and Hulse (2003) suggest a range of allocation methodologies that might be fairer and less prone to concentrated, or clustered, disadvantage. However, given that public housing stock has not been growing, but remains as a substantial part of the social housing sector, any method that attempts to prioritise allocation on a needs basis will tend to concentrate people with higher needs in certain locations.

Despite a growing community housing sector, the supply of social housing has not kept up with the need for this tenure, as evidenced by long waiting lists.

Social housing has gradually declined to be about 4 per cent of all housing tenures in Australia

(AIHW 2019a).

We know that many people, including young people, who experience homelessness and access services and supports through the Specialist Homelessness Service system need access to social and community housing as a pathway out of homelessness (MacKenzie, Hand et al. 2020; Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2010). This paper presents publicly available data from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare and the Australian Bureau of Statistics. The data reveals that despite being an over-represented cohort in the homelessness population and a significant proportion of clients in the Specialist Homelessness Services system, young people (as main tenants) are not accessing social and community housing in a proportion commensurate with their level of expressed need.

### 3.2 SOCIAL HOUSING MODELS

For young people, who have become homeless and for whom there is no realistic prospect of reconciliation or returning to living with family, and for young people leaving the care and protection system for whom many exit straight into homelessness, the policy imperative is for them to move as quickly as possible to independent living. However, consideration must be given to what housing options are appropriate for such young people. During the transition to adulthood and independent living, family support is important, but family support is not available to these young people. As such, many young people with experiences of homelessness need to have access to supported housing options. There are some services and supports available to homeless youth through the Specialist Homelessness Services system.



Findings from the Journeys Home longitudinal Australian research reported on people's housing tenure prior to entering homelessness and upon exit from homelessness (Bevitt et al. 2015).



About 10 per cent of young people (aged 15-24 years) entered cultural homelessness from a social or public housing tenure, and none (0%) entered primary homelessness from a public or social housing tenure. This might suggest that social housing tenure for young people is protective against future primary homelessness episodes—however more research is needed to substantiate such a relationship.

With regards to exiting homelessness, nearly 10 per cent of young people exited cultural homelessness into public or social housing, while none (0%) exited primary homelessness into public or social housing – which does beg the question, 'where did these young people go?'. Bevitt et al. (2015: 20) note that the young people in the study were 'most likely to exit cultural homelessness to enter an 'other private arrangement' reflecting that they are most likely to stay with friends or family longer term'. However, despite many young people exiting homelessness into arrangements of living with friends or family, it is not specified if these living arrangements are due to young people's preferences or the reality of not being able to access social or public housing as tenants in their own right.

Anecdotally, it appears that many mainstream social housing providers are often reluctant to accept young tenants because of their low and insecure incomes, and in general, they are regarded as high-risk. Social housing managers have privately intimated that from a business perspective they have to limit the number of young tenants for these reasons (and the statistics on young social housing tenants seem to support this thinking). However, due to the dearth of literature, this remains anecdotal and as such, more research on the topic is needed to unpack these issues.

In the broader context, there is an affordable housing crisis in Australia (Pawson et al. 2018). It has become a major concern for the general community and affects young people broadly but particularly disadvantaged young Australians the most. In the current environment, the need for social housing is as present as ever, without any indication of this waning in the near future. However, work is needed to ascertain what this means in terms of young people's need and access to social housing, and how youth-specific social housing might be provided, funded, and sustained in such an environment.



The following sections outline three youth-specific housing models or approaches: Youth Foyers, My Foundations Youth Housing Company, and Housing First For Youth.

### 3.2.1 YOUTH FOYERS

The Youth Foyer Model is an incorporated accommodation and learning model for young people, aged 16-24 years, who are homeless or at-risk of homelessness. The model does not offer rapid rehousing post-homelessness but has become an accepted and mostly supported housing model for young homeless people. Youth Foyers aim to:

Reduce the number of young people cycling through the housing and homelessness system;

Increase the number of young people completing education qualifications; and

Increase the number of young people [who are] productively employed.

(Foyer Foundation 2018)

In Australia, there are about 15 Youth Foyers or foyer-like services, which support about 500 young people. Young people's commitment to education/training and employment pathways is a condition for access to this type of supported transitional housing and while there are limited public evaluations of Australian Youth Foyers, the model does seem to foster the educational outcomes that vulnerable young people need in order to avoid long-term (or even lifetime) disadvantage, including episodes of homelessness.

Australian Youth Foyers have been quietly criticised for some time for being such an expensive model, requiring significant up-front investment, and where each site can only support a limited number of young people. In addition, Youth Foyers are not suitable for all young people because of stringent eligibility criteria related to education and training. Youth Foyers were developed to be part of the homelessness response for young people, however informants of an AHURI study questioned the client intake processes of some foyers, arguing that young people should only come from the SHS system and not at the prerogative of the foyer provider (MacKenzie, Hand et al. 2020).

Queries about how Youth Foyers work in Australia have also been raised:

Should Youth Foyers strictly provide a pathway for young people recovering from homelessness? Or only for young people exiting the Specialist Homelessness Services system? Or should they take in a wider population of at-risk youth?

Do Youth Foyers have to be constructed as congregate facilities? Or could Youth Foyers be constructed as a dispersed set of dwellings connected to a community hub?

(Hand and MacKenzie 2020; MacKenzie, Hand et al 2020; Steen and MacKenzie 2014a; 2014b)

Considering that Youth Foyers are established with 'special project' funding, is it possible for Youth Foyers to be scaled-up to become a substantial part of the youth housing and support sector?

### 3.2.2 MY FOUNDATIONS YOUTH HOUSING

My Foundations Youth Housing (MFYH), established in 2014, is a nationally registered Community Housing Provider, co-developed with the NSW government, currently only operationalised in NSW but with plans to extend to other Australian jurisdictions (MacKenzie and Hand 2020a). MFYH works in partnership with youth agencies that provide support and services to meet the needs of young tenants. As CEO Rebecca Mullins (2016: 30) explains:

*Our constitution, policy and procedures, recruitment processes and services have all been designed to meet and exceed the expectations of the young people we serve. We aim to provide best practice housing services for young people and the communities in which we operate. MFYH is about creating new opportunities for homeless young people to stabilise and rebuild their lives.*

Thus, My Foundations Youth Housing offer young tenants stable community housing and links to support, education, and employment. Nearly all residents (95 per cent) are engaged with support services, and about 85 per cent are engaged in education and training or employment (MFYH 2019). Similar to Youth Foyers, young residents of MFYH are required to sign a contract stipulating their agreement to attend education, training or employment (Finlayson et al. 2016).

The 'signature' rent and tenure model offered by My Foundations Youth Housing is Transitional Housing Plus. MFYH currently have about 100 Transitional Housing Plus properties, which are managed on behalf of SHS partners (MacKenzie and Hand 2020a). Transitional Housing Plus offers an adaptable five-year maximum tenure with a rent model that scales up annually to approach market rent in the fifth year to help prepare the young people's post-MFYH transition to independent living (Mullins 2016).

The criteria for Transitional Housing Plus (Youth) are that participants must:

be 16–25 years at time of referral;

be experiencing homelessness or be at-risk of homelessness;

be unable to resolve their own housing needs in the short- to medium-term;

have the capacity to transition to private market housing within five years through active involvement in a personal case plan; and

be able to be housed safely with the Transitional Housing Plus property (Housing NSW 2014:2).

Priority is given to:

- young people aged 16 to 20 years; and
- young people who are receiving, or have received, an Out-of-Home Care service, and/or who are, or have been, a client of Juvenile Justice. (Housing NSW 2014:2)

On top of the 100 Transitional Housing Plus properties, at April 2020, Rebecca Mullins detailed the additional properties managed by My Foundations Youth Housing:

*We've got some affordable housing. We've got funding from the New South Wales Government to provide about 120 leasehold properties, about half of which we've secured so far. And we're about to take over management of some social housing for young people on the mid-North Coast through a Fee for Service partnership with Community Housing Limited... we also manage a 42-room hotel in Kensington provided to us by Toga and Qualitas, where we have delivered Australia's first 'Pop-Up' or 'Meanwhile Use' youth housing project. (MacKenzie and Hand 2020a:76-77).*

Over the first five years, MFYH has gone from three staff, an operating revenue of \$300,000, 74 properties and 100 tenants, to 15 staff, an operating revenue of \$4.8 million, 300 properties under management and 450 young tenants accommodated with a range of supports available for those young people who want and need such assistance (MacKenzie and Hand 2020b:44).



### 3.2.3 HOUSING FIRST FOR YOUTH

Beginning in the United States in the 1990s, Housing First achieved international recognition as an alternative to a crisis-shelter-based system as a response to homelessness premised on the idea that homeless people are more successful recovering from homelessness if they are rapidly moved into permanent housing with appropriate supports (Gaetz 2014; Stefanic and Tsemberis 2007). Housing First frames housing as a human right, and thus the premise is not based on readiness or compliance but the provision of safe and stable housing as a first priority regardless of the persons perceived 'readiness' or other compliance issues or requirements. Once housed, tenants are provided with services and supports to help sustain their transition to sustainable independence. There is a copious body of evidence that Housing First, when it can be delivered with fidelity, is effective (Goering and Streiner 2015). By comparison, 'treatment first' approaches are more costly and less effective (Ly and Latimer 2015).



The *Housing First* model and approaches have been discussed and promoted in Australia since around 2006 (see for example, Australian Capital Territory Government 2011; Calder 2006, 2008; Gordon 2008; HomeGround Services 2010; Kahn 2011; Naidoo 2008; New South Wales Government 2009; Queensland Government 2008; Reynolds 2009; Wallis-Smith and Grant 2007; Walsh et al. 2012). A few papers have also been published highlighting potential pitfalls, complexity, risks, and challenges with implementation in Australia, highlighting, for example, issues with fidelity (see for example Johnson et al. 2012; Johnson 2012).

There is growing evidence on the appropriateness and effectiveness of Housing First specifically for youth largely stemming from the Canadian work led by Professor Stephen Gaetz (2014, 2017, 2019). Housing First for Youth (HF4Y) is a rapid-rehousing alternative for young people who are homeless, including those whose homelessness can be characterised as a chronic condition. HF4Y adapts a Housing First model and approach specifically to meet the needs of young people.

Gaetz (2019:57-58) outlines the five core principles of a Housing First for Youth Model:

- 1. A right to housing with no preconditions.** All young people have the human right to housing that is safe, affordable, and appropriate. This housing should reflect the needs and abilities of developing adolescents and young adults. Housing is not conditional on housing 'readiness,' sobriety, or abstinence.

- 2. Youth choice, youth voice and self-determination.** HF4Y emphasises youth choice regarding housing and supports, as well as provides a framework for young people to bring their ideas, opinions, and knowledge to bear on the services and housing they access.
- 3. Positive youth development and wellness orientation.** HF4Y is not simply focused on providing housing and meeting basic needs, but on supporting recovery and wellness. Through HF4Y, young people have access to a range of supports that enable them to nurture and maintain social, recreational, educational, occupational, and vocational activities. The HF4Y model employs a 'positive youth development' orientation — a strengths-based approach that focuses not just on risk and vulnerability, but also youth's assets. This orientation means focusing on building assets, confidence, health, and resilience.
- 4. Individualised, client-driven supports with no time limits.** Supports are client-driven and individually-tailored to young people and their expressed needs. The central philosophy of Housing First is that people have access to the supports they need as they choose, and these supports should be flexible and adaptable with respect to timeframes.
- 5. Social inclusion and community integration.** HF4Y promotes social inclusion through helping young people build strengths, skills, and relationships that will enable them to fully integrate into and participate in their community, in education, and employment. This requires socially supportive engagement and the opportunity to participate in meaningful activities.

A crucial factor in Housing First for Youth is the rapid movement of homeless young people into housing, regardless and irrespective of perceived readiness or other entry conditions – 'rapid rehousing'. The nature or type of the accommodation itself is not necessarily the primary concern, as long as it is suitable for young people, and it could range from congregate living to scattered units within the community.

There are some similar practices and principles between Youth Foyers and Housing First for Youth – however, there are key differences. A significant difference is that HF4Y prioritises 'rapid rehousing' as the first priority. This is not the case for Youth Foyers, which detail a commitment to education, training or employment as a priority criterion for foyer residency.

Specifically, with regards to an Australian Housing First for Youth model, My Foundations Youth Housing Company, as discussed above, is arguably the closest Australian housing model to what Gaetz outlines in the Canadian Housing First for Youth model (Hand and MacKenzie 2020; MacKenzie, Hand et al. 2020). However, the caveat to this assessment is to what extent rapid rehousing can be provided to young people (MacKenzie, Hand et al. 2020) especially considering the low stock of available social housing dwellings (Bullen and Baldry 2019) and the reality that young people rarely get into social housing as main tenants in the first place (Hand and MacKenzie 2020 forthcoming).

### 3.3 YOUNG PEOPLE AS MAIN TENANTS IN SOCIAL HOUSING DATA

Little is known about the cohort of young people who are the main tenants in social housing. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare's *Housing Assistance in Australia Reports* (AIHW 2019a, 2018, 2017, 2016, 2015, 2014). provide data pertaining to tenants and main tenants in Australian social housing. However, with reference to the age cohorts of main tenants, cross tabulations are limited to only the number and proportion of main tenants in three social housing programs by their age. This data is national aggregated data and thus does not allow for more nuanced examinations, such as at the state or territory level. The social housing programs for which there is data are: public housing, state owned and managed Indigenous housing, and community housing.



Using this AIHW data, the following sections report on the age cohorts of main tenants across the three social housing programs, highlighting the proportion of young people as main tenants over time.

#### 3.3.1 MAIN TENANTS ACROSS ALL SOCIAL HOUSING PROGRAMS BETWEEN 2014-2018

The data from the most recent reporting period reveals that at 30 June 2018, there were 398,086 main tenants in 'ongoing' (meaning that the tenancy has not been concluded) social housing across three social housing programs (i.e. public housing, state owned and managed Indigenous housing, and community housing) (AIHW 2019a). Only 12,176 of the main tenants, or 3.1 per cent, were young people aged 15-24 years. The majority (52.7%) of social housing main tenants were older people aged 55 years and over.

The proportion of young people aged 15-24 years as main tenants has remained relatively stable since 2014, with young people as main tenants accounting for about 3 per cent of all main tenants across the social housing programs between 2013-2018, see Figure 1.

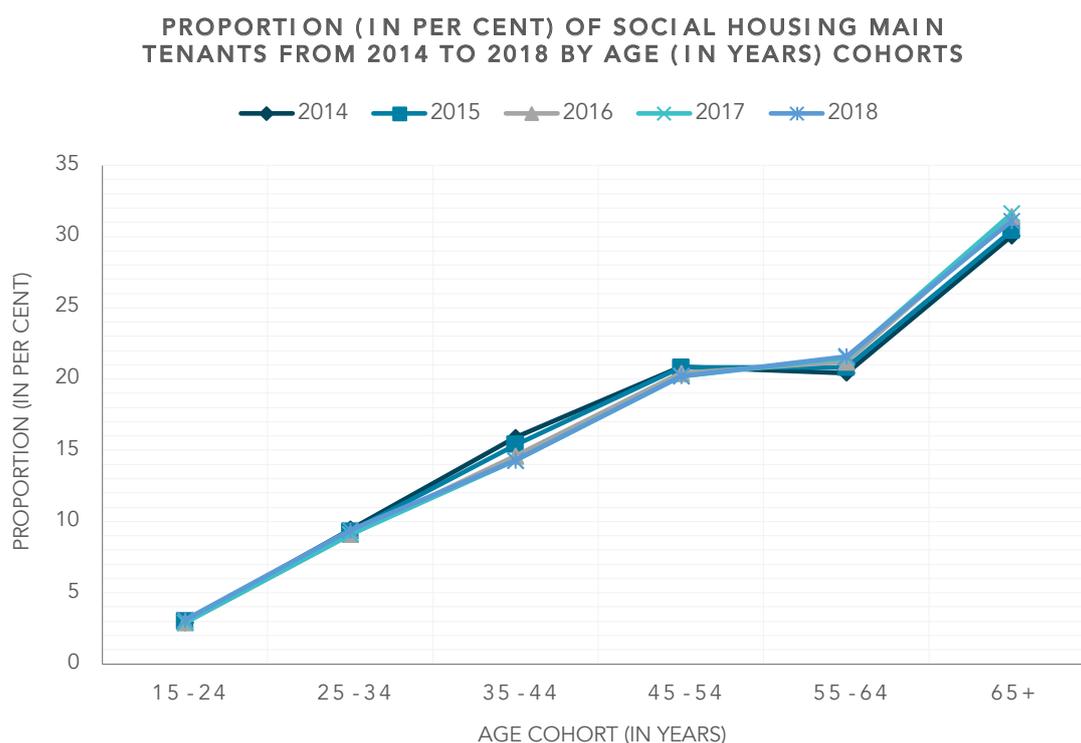


Figure 1: Proportion of social housing main tenants by age cohorts, 2014 - 2018



As shown in Figure 1, young people 15-24 years are consistently the smallest cohort of main tenants. In contrast, older people aged 65 years and over are consistently the largest proportion of all main tenants, representing approximately 30 per cent of all main tenants between 2014 to 2018; older people aged 55-64 years are the second largest cohort of social housing tenants, representing a median average of 21 per cent; followed by social housing tenants aged between 45-54 years with a median average of 20 per cent.

### 3.3.2 MAIN TENANTS IN PUBLIC HOUSING FROM 2013-2018

The most recent data shows that at 30 June 2018 there were 304,381 main tenants in public housing dwellings (AIHW 2019a). People 65 years and over were the largest age cohort, with 101,852 individual main tenants, representing 33.4 per cent of all community housing main tenants. Only 7,559 of the main tenants, or 2.5 per cent, were young people aged 15-24 years.

The proportion of young people aged 15-24 years as main tenants in public housing has remained stable at 2.4-2.5 per cent of all community housing main tenants between 2013-2018, see Figure 2.

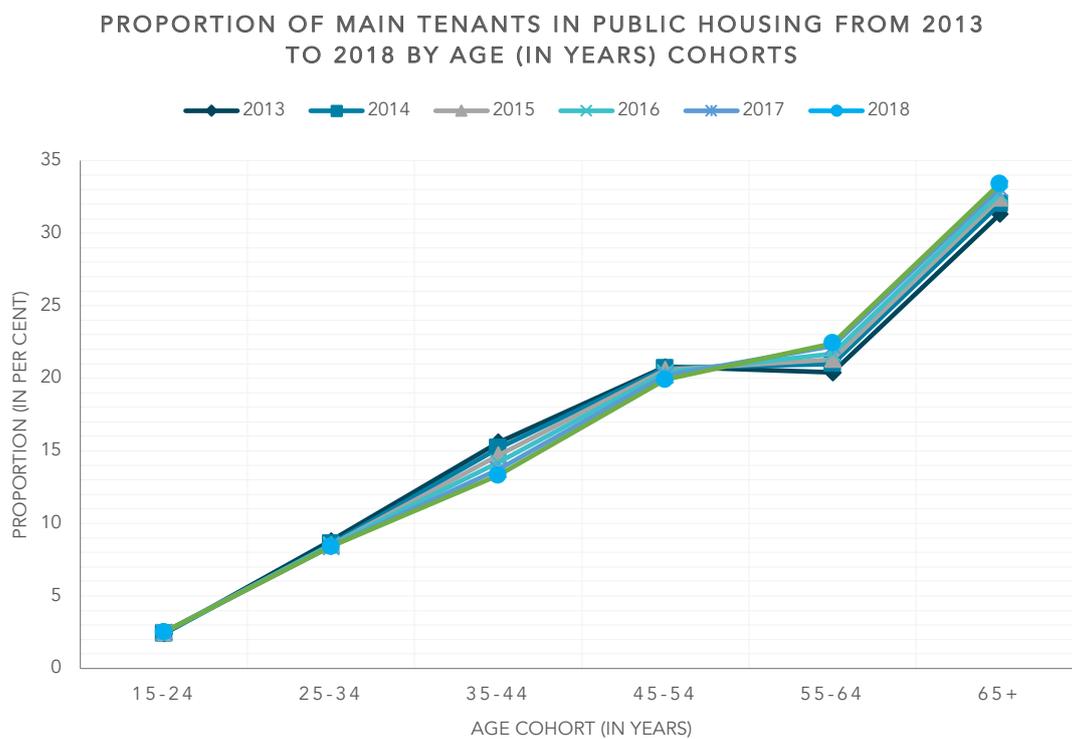


Figure 2: Proportion of main tenants in public housing by age cohorts, 2013 - 2018

Between 2013-2018, young people aged 15-24 years were consistently the smallest cohort (2.5%) of main tenants in public housing and young adults aged 25-34 years are consistently the second to smallest cohort (8.5%). Older people aged 65 years and over are consistently the largest proportion of all public housing main tenants, representing about a third (32.4%) of all public housing main tenants between 2013 to 2018.

### 3.3.3 MAIN TENANTS IN STATE OWNED AND MANAGED INDIGENOUS HOUSING FROM 2013-2018

The most recent data shows that at 30 June 2018 there were 13,817 main tenants in state owned and managed Indigenous housing dwellings (AIHW 2019a). Only 460 of the main tenants, or 3.3 per cent, were young people aged 15-24 years.

The proportion of young people aged 15-24 years as main tenants in state owned and managed Indigenous housing has dropped from 5 per cent in 2013 to 3.3 per cent in 2018, see Figure 3.

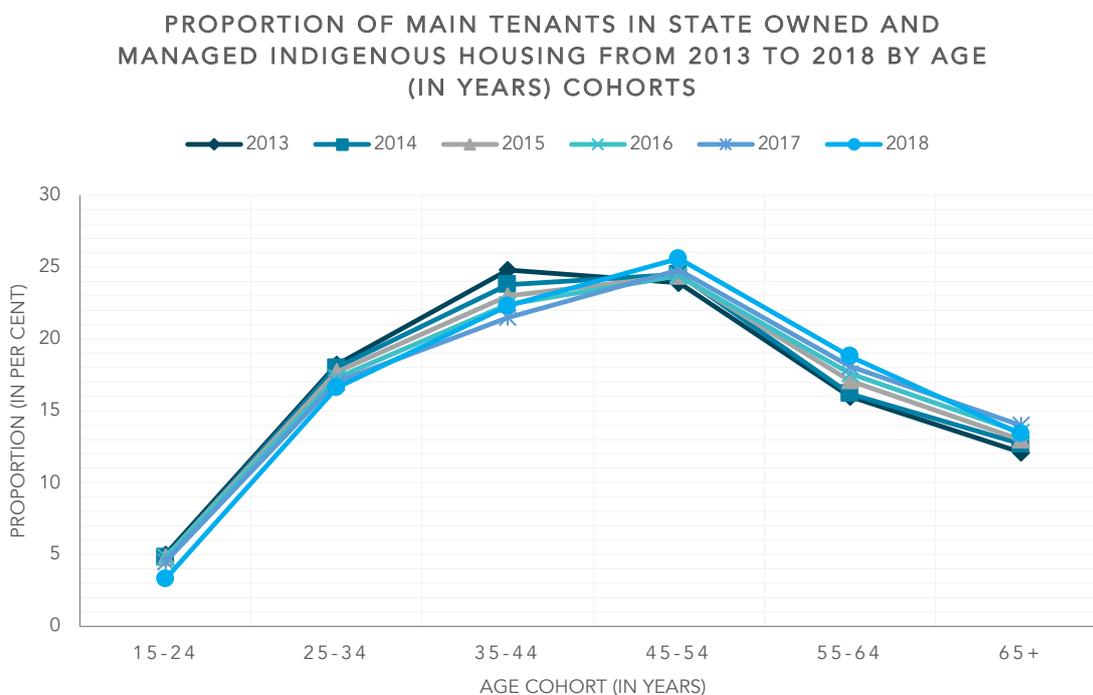


Figure 3: Proportion of main tenants in state owned and managed Indigenous housing by age cohorts, 2013 - 2018

Young people aged 15-24 years are consistently the smallest cohort (2.5%) of main tenants in state owned and managed Indigenous housing between 2013-2018. The two largest age cohorts over this time are 35-44 year olds (22.9%) and 45-54 year olds (24.6%). This is the only social housing program where older people aged 65 years and over are not the largest proportion of main tenants.



### 3.3.4 MAIN TENANTS IN COMMUNITY HOUSING FROM 2014-2018

Looking at just community housing, the most recent data shows that at 30 June 2018 there were 79,737 main tenants in community housing dwellings (AIHW 2019a). People 65 years and over were the largest age cohort, representing 27.9 per cent of all community housing main tenants. Only 4,157 of the main tenants, or 4.7 per cent, were young people aged 15-24 years.

The proportion of young people aged 15-24 years as main tenants in community housing has remained relatively stable since 2014, with young people as main tenants accounting for about 5 per cent of all community housing main tenants between 2014-2018, see Figure 4.

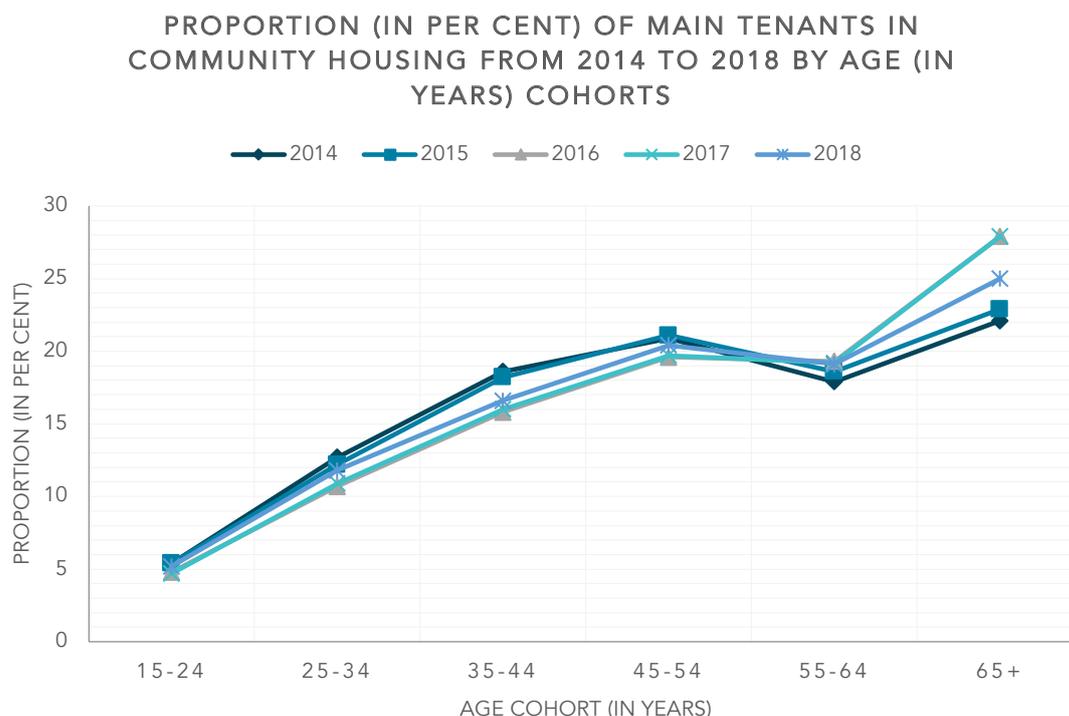


Figure 4: Proportion of main tenants in community housing by age cohorts, 2014 to 2018

As highlighted in Figure 4, young people are consistently the smallest cohort of main tenants in community housing. In comparison, and again the same is true for all social housing programs with the exception of SOMIH, older people aged 65 years and over are consistently the largest proportion of all community housing main tenants, representing a median average of about 26 per cent of all main tenants between 2014 to 2018. Main tenants aged between 45-54 were the second largest cohort of community housing tenants at a median average of about 20 per cent, followed by older people aged 55-64 years representing about 19 per cent of community housing tenants between 2014 to 2018.

# 4. YOUTH HOMELESSNESS AND POST-HOMELESSNESS OUTCOMES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

## 4.1 ESTIMATING HOMELESSNESS IN AUSTRALIA – ABS CENSUS

In Australia, homelessness is widely understood as broader than rooflessness. Most people experiencing homelessness will be temporarily sheltered but do not live in a home they own or accommodation that they rent and have tenure over. Using Census data, the Australia Bureau of Statistics (2018) provides estimates of the homeless population.

For the purpose of the Census of Population and Housing, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) uses a statistical definition of homelessness that classifies someone as 'homelessness' if their situation lacks one or more of the elements that define a 'home'.



The ABS (2012) statistical definition of homelessness is 'when a person does not have suitable accommodation alternatives they are considered homeless if their current living arrangement:

is in a dwelling that is inadequate;

has no tenure, or if their initial tenure is short and not extendable; or

does not allow them to have control of, and access to space for social relations'.

The methodological and definitional issues of the ABS figures on homelessness have been well documented and debated, highlighting that ABS data under-represents the homeless population who are sleeping rough or are in temporary shelter, while including a controversial category of people living in overcrowded dwellings as 'homeless' by definition.

The numbers of homeless people in ABS data does not take into consideration population growth and movement (if looking at state/territory figures) but is useful to consider, for example, when looking at how many people might potentially need services or assistance. In comparison, the rate of homelessness per 10,000 of the population is the more useful way of comparing the size of the homelessness population over time.

## 4.2 SPECIALIST HOMELESSNESS SERVICES – STOCKS AND FLOWS

Many young people who experience homelessness and access services and supports through the Specialist Homelessness Service system are the young people who need access to social housing.

The Specialist Homelessness Services system is defined as:

Assistance provided by a specialist homelessness agency to a client aimed at responding to or preventing homelessness. The Specialist Homelessness Services in scope for this collection include accommodation provision, assistance to sustain housing, domestic/family violence services, mental health services, family/relationship assistance, disability services, drug/alcohol counselling, legal/financial services, immigration/cultural services, other specialist services and general assistance and support. (AIHW 2019b)

A specialist homelessness agency is a profit or not-for-profit organisation which delivers Specialist Homelessness Services to a client and receives government funding to do so.

Data collected by Specialist Homelessness Services agencies and reported by the AIHW is not an indication of the homelessness prevalence rates in Australia. Rather, this data captures only the numbers and proportions of clients who access homeless support and/or accommodation services through a SHS agency. The ABS (2014) notes that not all homeless people seek services or support during episodes of homelessness.

A useful way to conceptualise and represent the system dynamics in the Specialist Homelessness Services system is a stock and flow diagram, see Figure 5 (MacKenzie, Hand et al. 2020; MacKenzie and Hand 2020b). The 'stock'—which is the SHS system and is depicted in the figure in red - is the number of young people who become homeless and for whom the local service system has the capacity to support and/or accommodate. The 'flows' are the streams of young people becoming homeless and entering and leaving Specialist Homelessness Services.



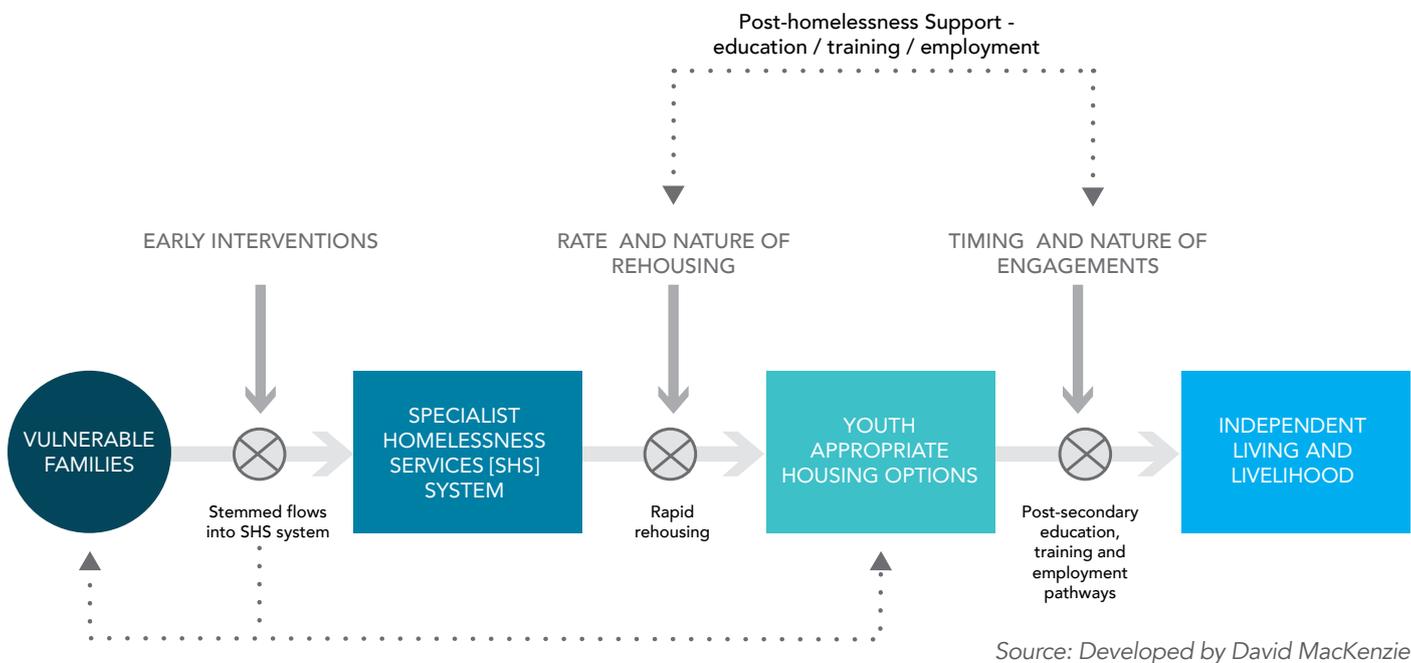


Figure 5: Stock and Flow Diagram of Specialist Homelessness Service System for Young People

The current homelessness service system is largely crisis-oriented comprising crisis and transitional services funded through bilateral agreements and delivered via the Specialist Homelessness Service system. This fact, which carries an implied critique, does not diminish the work of crisis services or the workers in crisis services and crisis services are a necessary component in any homelessness service system (Hand and MacKenzie 2020; MacKenzie, Hand et al. 2020).

Figure 6 depicts the existing balance amongst prevention and early intervention, emergency response, and post-homelessness housing and support options. This diagram shows that emergency or crisis responses are the dominant proportion of available services with relative little in the way of early intervention and prevention and only limited housing options available for those moving out of homelessness services.



Figure 6: The Status Quo – the current balance of the Homelessness Service System

A recent AHURI research project, *Redesign of a Homelessness Services System for young people* (MacKenzie, Hand et al. 2020) undertook a system rethink of homelessness in terms of local ecosystems of services and supports rather than the current arrangements of crisis and transitional services and targeted programs. A common view expressed by some workers who were interviewed was that there is ‘a massive need for more emergency and crisis services’. This is an understandable view from professionals working in crisis and emergency response settings who are often overwhelmed and unable to accommodate demand. Their argument was that if more investment is made into crisis responses, then this will reduce the high turn away rate (Hand and MacKenzie 2020).

Investing more into crisis services is never going to reduce the numbers of young people becoming homeless.

From a systems-thinking standpoint, however, increasing investments into crisis services and responses cannot solve homelessness. Investing more into crisis services will never reduce the numbers of young people becoming homeless. Investing more into crisis services is never going to reduce the numbers of young people entering the SHS, needing support, and access to social housing (Hand and MacKenzie 2020; MacKenzie and Hand 2019a, 2019b, 2020b, 2020c; MacKenzie, Hand et al. 2020; MacKenzie, Waters et al. 2020).

To better meet the needs of young people, and to divert them from the SHS and to enable them adequate access to support and social housing, a rebalancing of the Specialist Homelessness Services system is required. Figure 7 depicts what a rebalanced SHS would look like, with a recalibration of prevention, emergency response, and post-homelessness housing and supports.



Figure 7: A reformed and redeveloped Homelessness Services System to better meet young people's needs



## 4.3 HOMELESS YOUNG PEOPLE: CENSUS RATES AND SHS CLIENT DATA

The ABS census gathers data on the Australian population every five years. Using the ABS statistical definition of homelessness, estimates of homelessness can be derived, giving a point-in-time estimate of the extent of homelessness in Australia. Some of the individuals counted in the ABS estimate are being assisted in SHS agencies on Census night, but apart from rough sleepers, most people are in circumstances where they may be sheltered but do not have secure and stable accommodation – or what is accepted as a home – hence they are regarded as in situations of 'homelessness' (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2012).

A second measure of homelessness comes from the administrative data on clients of the Specialist Homelessness Services system which collects a range of data as people (i.e. clients) enter and leave the SHS agencies. This data is reported on an annual basis. In 2019, 290,300 men, women and children in total were assisted by SHS agencies. The number of clients seeking assistance is a measure of expressed demand.



### 4.3.1 AUSTRALIAN RATES OF HOMELESSNESS BY AGE COHORTS FROM 2006-2016

Using ABS Census data, from a national perspective, the rate of homelessness per 10,000 of the population has increased from 45.2 in 2006 to 49.8 in 2016. Rates of homelessness in the 2006, 2011, and 2016 ABS data by age cohorts, see Figure 8, reveal that young people aged 19-24 years are the biggest age cohort in the homeless population. The rate of 19-24 year old homeless people in 2016 (95.3) is nearly double the rate in comparison to the rate of the total homeless population in 2016 (49.8), thus, highlighting that young people are over-represented in the homeless population.

By comparison, and despite an aging Australian population, older people are the smallest proportion of the homeless population. The 2016 rate of homelessness among young people aged 15-24 years (95.3) is:



more than twice  
the rate of  
homeless people  
aged 55-64  
years (38.8)

more than three  
times the rate of  
homeless people  
aged 65-74 years  
(27.2)

more than six  
times the rate of  
homeless people  
aged 75 years  
and over (14.3)

HOMELESS PERSONS BY AGE COHORT (IN YEARS) AND BY RATE PER 10,000 OF THE POPULATION IN CENSUS DATA FROM 2006, 2011, AND 2016

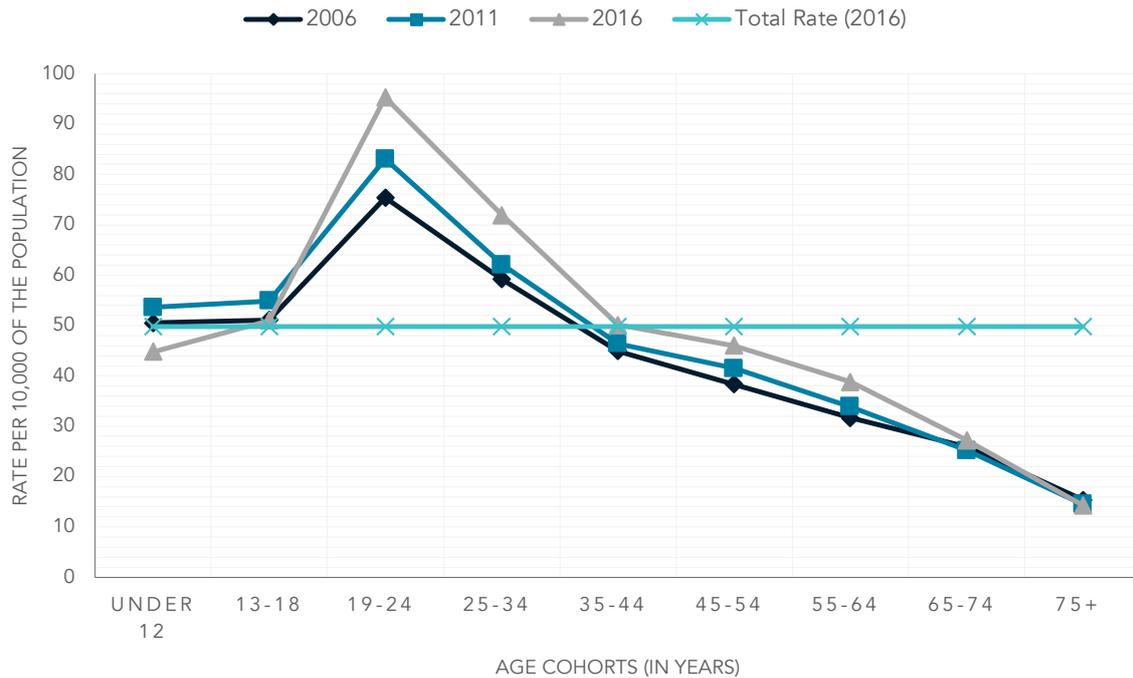


Figure 8: Homeless persons by age cohort and by rate per 10,000 of the population

### 4.3.2 SPECIALIST HOMELESSNESS SERVICES CLIENTS

The Supplementary Tables in the *AIHW's Specialist Homelessness Services 2018-19* (2019b) report provide information on the clients who were in receipt of a service through a specialist homelessness agency between 2011-12 to 2018-19. The data provides numbers of clients and rates per 10,000 estimated residential population, cross-tabulating this data against a limited range of characteristics, including two age cohorts - young people (aged 15-24 years) who present to the SHS alone and older people (aged 55+ years).

This data reveals that young people aged 15-24 years who present to the SHS alone (i.e. not as part of a presenting family/group unit) accounted for 15-18 per cent of all SHS clients between 2011-12 to 2018-19. In numbers, this is a median average of about 44,000 individual clients every year from 2011-12 to 2018-19.

In comparison, older people aged 55 years and over, accounted for 6-8 per cent of all SHS clients, or a median average of about 19,600 individual clients each year from 2011-12 to 2018-19.

Data from the most recent 2018-19 reporting period shows that there were 290,300 SHS clients. Young people presenting alone were 15 per cent of all SHS clients and half (51%) of these young people were already homeless at first SHS presentation. The majority (56%) of these young people had previously received a service or support from a SHS agency since 2011-12.

The 2018-19 data shows that nearly double the number of young people (42,960) presented to the SHS alone in comparison to older people aged 55 years and over (24,169), representing rates per 10,000 estimated residential population of 17.2 for young people and 9.7 for older people.

In 2018-19 over half (56%) of all young people who presented to the SHS alone were returning clients. Young women aged 18-24 years were the largest cohort (29%) of all male and female new and returning clients. In this same period, 62 per cent of all young people presenting alone to the SHS were women, and nearly half of all presentations by single young people were young people aged between 18-24 years (AIHW 2019b), see Figure 9.

## SEX & AGE CHARACTERISTICS OF YOUNG PEOPLE PRESENTING ALONE TO SHS 2018-19



Figure 9: Sex and Age Characteristics of Young People Presenting alone to the SHS in 2018-19

Indigenous young people represent about one quarter (26.5%) of all young people who presented alone to the SHS in 2018-19 (AIHW 2019b), comprised of Indigenous young men at 9.3 per cent and Indigenous young women at 17.6 per cent. The largest cohort of Indigenous young people to present alone to the SHS in 2018-19 was Indigenous women aged 18-24 years, see Figure 10.

## YOUNG PEOPLE (IN NUMBERS) PRESENTING ALONE TO SHS BY INDIGENOUS STATUS, SEX, AND AGE: 2018-19

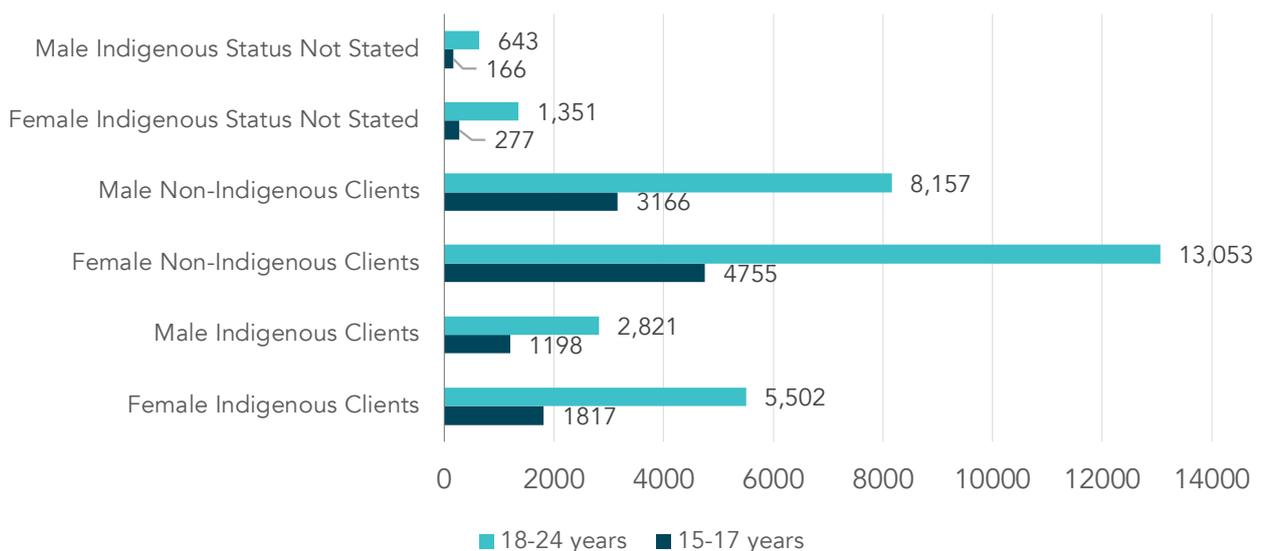


Figure 10: Young People (in numbers) Presenting alone to the SHS by Indigenous Status, Sex, and Age: 2018 - 2019

Clients approaching the Specialist Homelessness Services present as either at-risk of homelessness or they are already homeless at presentation. For the five financial year periods from 2014-2015 to 2018-2019, the housing situation at first SHS presentation for young people has been relatively stable with 52 per cent of young people already homeless and 48 per cent at-risk of homelessness.

In comparison, across this same time period, only about one third of older people (aged 55+ years) are homeless at first SHS presentation with two-thirds at-risk of homelessness.

Specialist Homelessness Services agencies record data on the reasons for client presentations, although this data has been critiqued for not being overly reliable. The top ten main reason for seeking assistance at first SHS presentation varies between the at-risk and homeless status cohorts. In 2018-19, over half of all young people who were already homeless presented to the SHS for a housing related issue. In comparison, the reason for first SHS presentation by young people who were at-risk of homeless was mostly due to family and relationship breakdown related issues, see Figure 11. This indicates that the main reason that at-risk young people access homelessness services is not due to a housing issue.

For the five financial year periods from 2014-2015 to 2018-2019, the housing situation at first SHS presentation for young people has been relatively stable with 52 per cent of young people already homeless and 48 per cent at-risk of homelessness.

TOP TEN REASONS FOR SHS PRESENTATION BY YOUNG PEOPLE (IN NUMBERS) PRESENTING ALONE, BY HOMELESSNESS STATUS AT FIRST PRESENTATION: 2018-19

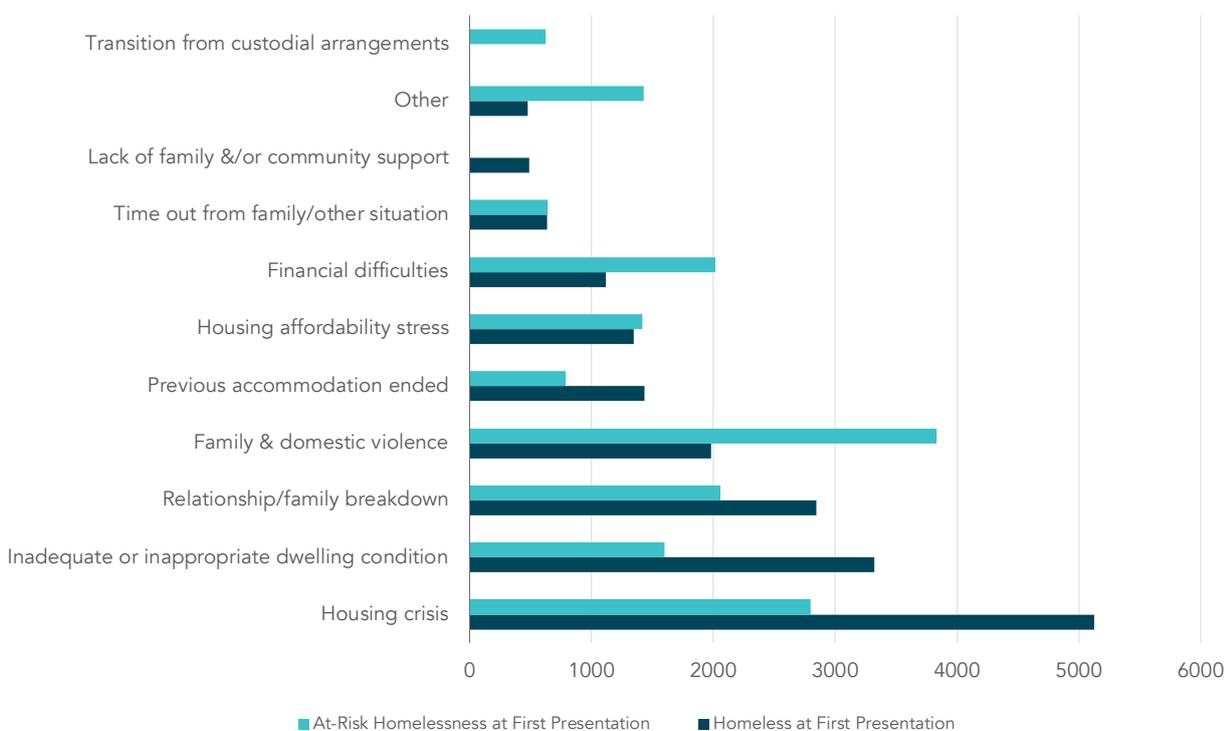


Figure 11: Top Ten Reasons for First SHS Presentation by Young People (in numbers) Presenting Alone, by Homelessness Status at First Presentation: 2018-19

### 4.3.3 SPECIALIST HOMELESSNESS SERVICES CLIENT HOUSING OUTCOMES

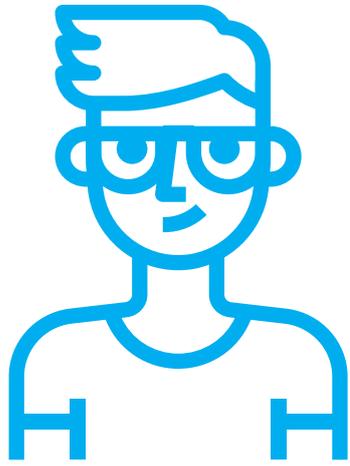
The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2019b) reports data on SHS client outcomes against a small range of variables and client characteristics including housing status at first presentation (i.e. at-risk of homelessness or homeless) and the housing outcomes for all SHS clients whose support was ended in 2018-19 and for two age cohorts - young people (aged 15-24 years) presenting to the SHS alone and older clients (aged 55+ years), as shown in Table 4.



Housing outcomes at SHS discharge	All SHS clients whose support ended in 2018-19 (%)	Older people (55+) whose support ended in 2018-19 (%)	Young people (15-24yrs) presenting alone whose support ended in 2018-19 (%)
Homeless	31.9	24.5	39.7
Public / Community Housing	21.2	28.5	14.7
Private housing	44.0	43.6	42.4
Institutional Settings	2.9	3.3	3.1

Table 4: Housing outcomes for SHS clients whose support was ended in 2018-19 – all clients, older clients (55+ years), and young clients (15-24 years)





This data shows that young people experience somewhat lower housing outcomes, in comparison to all SHS clients and older SHS clients. Young people are more likely to exit the SHS straight into a state of homelessness (rough sleeping, couch surfing, or short-term accommodation) and are proportionally less likely to be living in public/ community housing after discharge from the SHS. In terms of a number, during the 2018-19 period, 10,099 young people who presented alone to the SHS for support and whose support periods ended were discharged from the SHS straight into a state of homelessness.

The data reveals significant contrasts in the housing outcomes for young people depending on their housing status at first presentation for the 2018-19 reporting period, as shown in Table 5.

Housing outcomes at SHS discharge	Young people - at-risk of homelessness at first presentation (%)	Young people - homeless at first presentation (%)
Homeless	13.7	63.9
Public / Community Housing	21.1	8.8
Private housing	60.2	25.9
Institutional Settings	4.9	1.5

Table 5: Housing outcomes at SHS discharge of young people (15-24 years), at-risk of homelessness or already homeless at first SHS presentation, 2018-19

Young people, who are already homeless when they present to the SHS, experience much poorer housing outcomes at the end of their SHS support, with nearly two thirds of these young people being exited from the SHS straight into a state of homelessness and only a small proportion (8.8%) gaining access to public/ community housing.

# 5. POLICY DEVELOPMENT OPTIONS AND FINAL REMARKS

## 5.1 POLICY DEVELOPMENT OPTIONS

There has been a sustained stream of criticism of the income support system in Australia particularly about the low level of Newstart benefits for unemployed people seeking work and young people on Youth Allowance. However, apart from the inadequate levels of benefits, the increased complexity of the income support programs has also been subject to criticism by many stakeholders from unions, to social service organisations, to business sector representatives. A 2019 Senate Inquiry into the 'Adequacy of Newstart and related payments and alternative mechanisms to determine the level of income support payments in Australia', provides a good starting basis for improving the levels of income support for young people as well as beginning to rethink the complexity and dubious viability of 'mutual obligation' requirements.

Over many years Australia has developed a dual system of income support with (a) cash payments via Commonwealth Rental Assistance administered by the Department of Social Services; and (b) direct funding to the states/territories for public and community housing, with a trend to reduce public housing provision and increase community housing. On an annual budget outlay, the unit cost comparison appears to be in favour of CRA but this may not be quite as favourable as presented, and no account is taken of the capital value of social housing assets. A major question for policy is whether shifting to financial support in the private rental market to the extent that this has been done over several decades has been a sustainably successful longer-term solution for housing low-income young people. There is a case for undertaking a broad policy review of the approach to income and housing support in Australia in terms of its complexity, its adequacy, and its fiscal viability over time from the perspective of Government budget considerations.

Given the difficulties that disadvantaged and homeless young people have in accessing any form of social housing, there is a case for reimagining social housing for young people, not necessarily or mostly as a permanent housing option, but as an housing option during their extended transition period to sustainable independent living. Young people are increasingly participating in the labour market as part-time and casual workers, even while studying full-time, and shared housing as well as flexibility are all important features of the transition to stable independent living, which for many will still end up with home ownership. However, for the most disadvantaged young Australians, social housing could be an important housing option during their transition if it were more accessible and operated differently.

The business model used by mainstream social housing providers does not support young people taking up community housing tenancies. While there is no suggestion that this exclusion is malevolent, and probably derives from a series of eligibility criteria and decision points in the selection process, more research is arguably needed to clarify this question and test out various assumptions being made about why young people achieve so little access to social housing. The low levels of youth incomes is clearly a major factor though. This research might yield practical operational changes for mainstream providers that would increase the access of young people. However, in the meantime, investment into social housing for youth should be preferenced for youth-specific social housing providers or partnerships that adequately address the youth support issues.

In Australia, the Youth Foyer Model has been developed as an incorporated accommodation and learning model for young people, aged 16-24 years, who are homeless or at-risk of homelessness. The reason foyers have been embraced as a model is that the supported accommodation is strongly linked to education, training and employment. This is the attractive design advantage of the model. Over the past decade or so, some 15 foyer projects have been funded and developed in Australia. On critical reflection and with future viability in mind, the high capital and unit costs are one issue, while the effectiveness and impact on youth homelessness is another issue. In order to secure the viability of the Youth Foyer Model and foyer-like initiatives, consideration should be given to dispersed units in the community around a central support hub, as well as client intake to be more strictly connected to young people moving out of SHS settings. A general policy parameter should be that all youth programs and initiatives ought to be considered in terms of how they link to education, training and/or employment pathways.

The Housing First for Youth concept emphasises the policy priority of rapid rehousing accompanied by age appropriate support for the developmental needs of young people. In Canada, Housing First for Youth has been strongly advocated and attracted international interest and support for clarifying the importance of developmental support for young people as they transition to adulthood and independent living. The Youth Foyer Model attends to the support aspects, but does not deliver rapid rehousing for homeless youth. In Australia, the My Foundations Youth Housing approach to youth-specific social housing is the closest to the HF4Y concept, however rapid rehousing will remain largely unfulfilled without significantly increased supply.

## 5.2 FINAL REMARKS

The primary aim of this UniSA AHURI funded research paper was to critically review the housing assistance and supports available to homeless young Australians in order to undertake a preliminary assessment of the adequacy of current options and arrangements. There is a broad consensus amongst nearly all stakeholders that the current arrangements are problematic. The COVID-19 global health pandemic crisis has dramatically exposed the inadequacies of these arrangements and some radical temporary remedial measures have been implemented, backed by a bipartisan consensus. This paper makes an argument for a range of reforms and initiatives that would improve the support for disadvantaged and homeless young people making the transition to independent living. There are some promising supported housing initiatives for young people that could be scaled up, but a reform agenda for youth homelessness seems trapped in a twilight zone of social policy inertia when it comes to changing income support and housing support arrangements overall. On the other hand, the challenges of recovery from the social and economic impacts of COVID-19 potentially provide a unique opportunity for overcoming this inertia.

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For more information about housing options for young people,  
please email [info@upstreamaustralia.org.au](mailto:info@upstreamaustralia.org.au)

**Dr Tammy Hand** - 0419 526 922

**Associate Professor David MacKenzie** - 0412 104 873

