



The National Social Housing Survey

Housing is a basic need for all, and is fundamental to peoples' wellbeing. Governments play a crucial role in ensuring that all Australians have access to affordable, safe and sustainable housing. Part of this role is to provide assistance to the many Australians who find it difficult to afford housing in the private market.

The provision and funding of social housing is a significant component of the housing assistance programs available to low-income households.

What is the National Social Housing Survey?

The National Social Housing Survey (NSHS) is run every 2 years on behalf of the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) and state and territory governments.

It collects data on the profile of social housing tenants, and records their satisfaction with their housing providers and their dwellings.

The NSHS complements other data—such as administrative data from social housing providers and reported by the AIHW and other agencies. These administrative data provide information on the social housing dwellings, tenant characteristics and accessibility for people in special-needs groups. The NSHS contributes information on tenants' experiences of social housing to the overall picture.

History of the NSHS

The NSHS began in 1996 as a survey mailed to public housing (PH) tenants. It has grown to include community housing (CH) and state owned and managed Indigenous housing (SOMIH) tenants, and face-to-face surveys.

NSHS respondents

In general, NSHS respondents are more likely than tenants recorded in administrative data to be:



- female
- older (although this is less likely for SOMIH tenants)
- living in single-person households
- living in social housing for longer (particularly for PH survey respondents).

These demographic differences are expected, as NSHS respondents are not required to be the main tenant of the household (the person who signed or co-signed the lease).

Note: the estimates have been derived by applying 'weights' to the survey responses to ensure that estimates represent the total population, to the extent possible.

Year	Method	Program included and respondent size		
		PH	CH	SOMIH
1996	Mail	10,374	-	-
2001	Mail/Face-to-face	9,588	1,792	-
2002	Mail	-	1,916	-
2003	Mail/Face-to-face	9,003	-	-
2005	Mail/Face-to-face	15,436	2,935	897
2007	Mail/Face-to-face	13,246	3,100	1,259
2010	Mail	9,681	4,090	-
2012	Mail	8,975	3,037	1,183
2014	Mail/Face-to-face	9,232	2,937	1,391
2016	Mail/Face-to-face	5,163	3,153	1,422

The social housing sector

In 2015–16, there were 432,800 social housing dwellings across Australia—5,000 more than in 2014–15 (427,800), and around 5% more dwellings than in 2009–10. Despite growth, social housing stock has not met Australian household growth—the proportion of houses that are social housing dwellings fell from 5.1% in 2007–08 to 4.7% in 2015–16.

Between 2009–10 and 2015–16, the number of dwellings for:

- PH fell by 4% (333,400 to 320,000) ↓
- CH rose by 81% (44,300 to 80,200) ↑
- SOMIH fell 17% (12,000 to 9,900) ↓
- ICH fell by 6% (18,700 to 17,600). ↓

There has been a gradual but steady change in policy focus, to grow the community housing sector and transfer ownership or management of public housing stock to community housing organisations, providing community organisations with an opportunity to expand their operational capacity and demonstrate flexible delivery of social housing.

Housing policy

The focus of social housing policy has moved from low-income working families to households in greatest need. 'Greatest need' applies to low-income households if household members were experiencing homelessness, had high rental costs relative to their income or their current accommodation:

- threatened their life or safety
- exacerbated a health condition
- was inappropriate for their needs.

Households in 'greatest need' may also have members with special needs, including:

- a member who has a disability
- a main tenant under 25 or older than 75
- 1 or more Indigenous members.

For the SOMIH program, special needs households are those with a member who has a disability and/or a main tenant under 24 or aged 50 or over.

'Special needs' and 'greatest needs' categories are not mutually exclusive. Tenants may fit into a number of categories within each group or across groups.

What are the different social housing programs?

Social housing is all rental housing owned and managed by government, or by not-for-profit community organisations, which can be let to eligible households. It includes but is not limited to:

- **Public housing (PH)** (also called 'public rental housing'): publicly owned or leased dwellings, funded and managed by state and territory governments.
- **State owned and managed Indigenous housing (SOMIH)**: housing administered by state and territory governments specifically targeted to Indigenous households (with at least 1 Indigenous member). Currently, SOMIH is provided by New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia and Tasmania.
- **Mainstream community housing (CH)**: is managed by not-for-profit organisations (except for in the Northern Territory) and included in the NSHS where organisations received capital or recurrent funding from government.
- **Indigenous community housing (ICH)**: is owned and/or managed by Indigenous communities to provide housing services to Indigenous Australians.

Note: Indigenous community housing is out of scope of the 2016 National Social Housing Survey.

This fact sheet is part of the NSHS 2016 release, which includes a range of publications and supplementary data tables. For more information see <http://www.aihw.gov.au/housing-assistance-publications/>.

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