



Australian Government

Australian Institute of
Health and Welfare

infocus

2016 National Social
Housing Survey

Social housing: working-age tenants

Published November 2017

In 2016, nearly 3 in 5 (58%) social housing tenants were of 'working age'—that is, they were aged between 15 and 64.

This report presents, for the first time, detailed information on the self-reported characteristics and circumstances of working-age tenants, including their:

- satisfaction with their housing provider
- use of community and support services
- labour force participation
- proximity to facilities and services
- benefits of living in social housing.

This information is drawn from additional analysis of the 2016 National Social Housing Survey. Working-age tenants have been chosen as a population of special interest because different tenants and households respond very differently to certain aspects of the survey. For example, what is important to a young family may not be as important to an older single person who receives the Age Pension.

What is the National Social Housing Survey?

The National Social Housing Survey (NSHS) is a biennial survey undertaken on behalf of the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) and state and territory governments.

The NSHS collects data on the profile of social housing tenants and their satisfaction with services provided by their housing providers and the amenity and location of their dwellings.

The first NSHS, in 1996, surveyed public housing tenants only. The NSHS expanded to include community housing tenants in 2001 and SOMIH tenants in 2005.

3 in 5 working-age tenants are not in the labour force




Of these tenants, 3 in 5 say that staying home to look after children is the strongest influence on their employment status.

Working-age tenants

The NSHS 2016 sample consisted of 9,738 completed surveys:

- 6,116 (58%) of social housing tenants were of *working age* (those aged 15–64):
 - 57% (2,869) of all public housing (PH) tenants surveyed
 - 63% (2,064) of all community housing (CH) tenants surveyed
 - 85% (1,183) of all state owned and managed Indigenous housing (SOMIH) tenants surveyed.
- 3,622 (42%) of social housing tenants were not of working age (aged 14 or under, or 65 and over).

Overall satisfaction

Overall, the majority (74%) of all social housing tenants were satisfied with the services received from their housing provider: PH 73%, SOMIH 68%, CH 80%. 

Satisfaction for those tenants of working age was lower for all housing programs: PH 67%, SOMIH 67%, CH 78%—and higher for those outside working age: PH 81%, SOMIH 71%, CH 84%.

Characteristics of working-age tenants

- 65% were female and 35% were male.



- Almost 1 in 5 (17%) had experienced homelessness in the 5 years before the survey.



- Just over 4 in 10 (41%) lived in households with one or more children.



- 72% lived in *Major cities*, 26% in *Inner/Outer regional areas*, 2% in *Remote or Very remote areas*.



- Half (50%) were either employed part-time, unemployed, or not in the labour force.



Note: These estimates have been derived by weighting the survey responses to ensure that they represent the total population, to the extent possible.

'The unit provided to me by [*Housing organisation*] is a nice, comfortable accommodation in a very convenient location (close to shops, chemist etc.) So far the [*Housing organisation*] has been very quick to respond to all my requests, maintenance has been done quickly and without any major issues.'

Public housing tenant, 2016 NSHS



Employment status

NSHS respondents were asked to indicate their current employment status:

- in the labour force—employed full-time, employed part-time or unemployed but looking for work
- or not in the labour force—not intending or unable to work (for example, retired or with a long-term illness or injury) or not in the labour force (for example, home duties, full-time study or carer responsibilities).

Where a tenant reported they were employed part-time, unemployed, or not in the labour force, they were asked what factors affected their current employment situation, as well as how strong those effects were. These factors included barriers or disincentives to employment (such as job shortages, lack of experience or training); child-care issues; and the financial impact of income on rent and income-support payments.

Tenants in the labour force

In 2016, **just over one-quarter (27%)** of all social housing tenants reported that they were in the labour force—that is, they were *working full-time* (35 hours or more each week), *working part-time* (less than 35 hours each week) or were *unemployed and looking for work* (not currently employed).

Almost three-quarters (73%) of all social housing tenants reported that they were not in the labour force—that is, they were *unable or not intending to work* (for example, retired or with a long-term illness or injury) or were *not in the labour force* (engaged in home duties or carer responsibilities or studying).

For working-age tenants, the proportion **not currently in the labour force remained high, at 60%**. This high proportion of respondents who were outside the labour force reflects the targeting of social housing to people who are vulnerable and/or disadvantaged and who may encounter difficulties in entering the labour force.

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.



Proximity to services

Tenants of working age rated proximity to the following facilities or services as important to them:

- Public transport:
PH 84%, SOMIH 77%,
CH 82%.



- Employment/
place of work: PH 59%,
SOMIH 59%, CH 59%.



- Education/training
facilities: PH 56%,
SOMIH 72%, CH 55%.



- Child-care facilities:
PH 33%, SOMIH 42%,
CH 29%.



'Close for our doctor surgery and hospitals and clinics and everything, friends and family members and walking distance to shops etc. easy to use the transport for appointments with housing, doctors etc.'

Social housing tenant, 2016 NSHS

While the importance of proximity to child-care and education facilities or services was low for most social housing tenants, it was higher for SOMIH tenants. This reflects the higher proportion of SOMIH tenants of working age (85%), compared with PH (57%) and CH (63%) tenants.

Use of community services

Tenants of working age were more likely to access certain community services than tenants outside of working age.

Services accessed	Tenants of working age	Tenants outside of working age
Life skills/personal development services	9%	3%
Information, advice and referral services	17%	7%
Training and employment support services	14%	2%
Financial and material assistance	12%	3%



Remoteness

In general, for social housing tenants of working age in the labour force, the importance of location to:

- employment or place of work was rated higher in *Major cities* and *Regional areas* and lower in *Remote* areas
- education and training facilities was rated lower in *Major cities* and *Regional areas* and higher in *Remote* areas
- child-care facilities was rated lower in *Major cities* and *Regional areas* and higher in *Remote* areas.

In comparison, social housing tenants of working age *outside the labour force* rated the importance of location—in relation to all facilities and services—higher in *Remote* areas than in *Major cities* and *Regional areas*, perhaps reflecting a lack of services or support in those areas.

Need for assistance

Around 1 in 3 social housing tenants of working age *always* or *sometimes* needed assistance with *self-care* (31%), *body movement* (33%) or *communication* activities (27%). More than one-third (38%) reported a *long-term health condition* as the reason for this need for assistance, while 58% reported *disability*.

Of those social housing tenants not of working age, 26% *always* or *sometimes* needed assistance with *self-care*, 29% with *body movement* and 26% with *communication* activities. More than one-third (38%) reported a *long-term health condition* as the reason for this need for assistance, while 34% reported *disability*.

Of those tenants of working age with a need for assistance because of *disability*, very few (15%) were in the labour force.

Importance of location to:	Major cities		Regional areas		Remote areas	
	In labour force	Not in labour force	In labour force	Not in labour force	In labour force	Not in labour force
Employment or place of work	88%	42%	80%	39%	79%	48%
Education and training facilities	66%	50%	62%	51%	82%	67%
Child-care facilities	36%	28%	35%	32%	51%	46%

Regional areas include *Inner regional areas* and *Outer regional areas*. *Remote areas* include *Remote* and *Very remote* areas.



Benefits and the labour force

Social housing tenants reported a range of benefits from living in social housing. These included an increased sense of stability, security and connection to community, the focus here is on benefits that relate to a tenant's participation in the labour force. These include an increased ability to *improve their job situation* as well as to *start or continue education or training*. It is important to note that a large proportion (73%) of social housing tenants are not in the labour force but may be engaged in unpaid volunteer or other work or study activities; these activities were not considered here.

Benefits of social housing

Two-thirds or more of social housing tenants of *working age* rated the following as benefits of living in social housing:

- Feel more able to improve job situation (for example, get a better job or a second income): PH 65%, SOMIH 76%, CH 68%.
- Feel more able to start or continue education/training: PH 72%, SOMIH 82%, CH 76%.

In comparison, tenants outside *working age* rated these benefits lower:

- Feel more able to improve job situation: PH 55%, SOMIH 65%, CH 46%.
- Feel more able to start or continue education/training: PH 63%, SOMIH 67%, CH 47%.

'Affordable housing has improved my options and (allows) me to train in the career of my choice.'

Social housing tenant, 2016 NSHS

Regardless of their circumstance, when compared with public or community housing tenants, SOMIH tenants were more likely to report the ability to *improve their job situation* or *start or continue education or training* as a benefit of living in social housing. This may reflect both the increased likelihood of SOMIH tenants being of working age, as well as the higher proportion of SOMIH tenants in the labour force (41% of SOMIH tenants compared with 25% of PH and 31% of CH).

Households with children

Tenants of working age *living in households with children* rated the following benefits of living in social housing higher, compared with tenants *living in households without children*:

- Feel more able to improve job situation:
 - *with children*—PH 68%, SOMIH 75%, CH 71%
 - *without children*—PH 63%, SOMIH 78%, CH 67%.
- Feel more able to start or continue/education/training:
 - *with children*—PH 76%, SOMIH 82%, CH 79%
 - *without children*—PH 67%, SOMIH 80%, CH 73%.

'Being able to have a roof over my kids' heads and focus on building a better future for them.'

Social housing tenant, 2016 NSHS



Influences on current employment situation

Tenants employed part-time, unemployed or not in the labour force were asked about influences on their current employment situation, as well as the strength of those influences. The influences listed in the survey included employment barriers or disincentives to work such as job shortages, lack of experience or training; child-care issues; and the financial impact of employment on rent assessments and income-support payments.

Those who were employed full-time, or who were not intending or unable to work, were excluded from this analysis.

For working-age tenants

The strongest influences on current employment situation for those who were:

- unemployed:
 - need more training, education or work experience (33%)
 - concern that rent will increase (27%)
 - lack of jobs in the area (24%)
- employed part time:
 - concern that rent will increase (25%)
 - pay might be too low/benefits reduced (18%)
 - might have to leave current housing (17%)
- not in the labour force:
 - want/need to stay home to look after children (60%)
 - need more training, education or work experience (38%)
 - concern that rent will increase (28%).

Households with children

Two-thirds (66%) of those both *living with children* and *not in the labour force* reported that the fact that they *want or need to stay home to take care of children* had 'a lot of influence' on their current employment situation.

'I am a single mother with a 1-year-old child. Not able to work full-time yet.'

Social housing tenant, 2016 NSHS

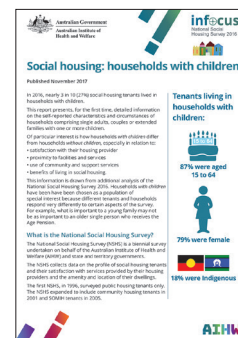
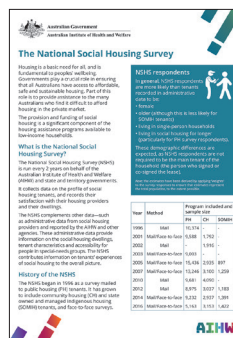
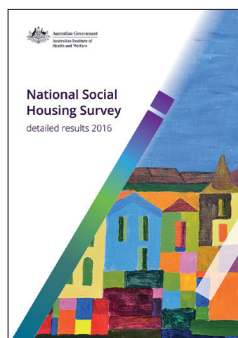
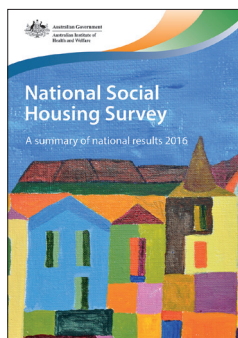
Males and females

Female tenants *not in the labour force* were more likely than male tenants to report the following have 'a lot of influence' on their current employment situation:

- I *don't work* because 'child care is too expensive or unavailable' (25% compared with 14%)
- I *can't work* because I 'want to/need to stay home to take care of my children' (61% compared with 51%).



This *In focus* report 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/>>.



© Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2017 

This product, excluding the AIHW logo, Commonwealth Coat of Arms and any material owned by a third party or protected by a trademark, has been released under a Creative Commons BY 3.0 (CC BY 3.0) licence (<<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/au/>>). You may distribute, remix and build upon this work. However, you must attribute the AIHW as the copyright holder of the work in compliance with our attribution policy available at <www.aihw.gov.au/copyright/>. The full terms and conditions of this licence are available at <<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/au/>>.

Suggested citation

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2017. Social housing: working-age tenants. Cat. no. HOU 291. Canberra: AIHW.

ISBN 978-1-76054-240-5 (PDF)

ISBN 978-1-76054-241-2 (Print)

Any enquiries about copyright should be directed to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, GPO Box 570, Canberra ACT 2601, Tel: (02) 6244 1000, Email: <info@aihw.gov.au>.



Stronger evidence,
better decisions,
improved health and welfare