

PARLIAMENT OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Final report

Inquiry into homelessness in Australia

House of Representatives Standing Committee on
Social Policy and Legal Affairs

July 2021
CANBERRA

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Contents

Foreword vii

Membership of the Committee xi

Terms of reference xiii

List of abbreviations xv

List of recommendations xix

The Report

1 Introduction.....1

Referral and conduct of the inquiry..... 1

Previous inquiries and reports 2

Defining and describing homelessness in Australia 3

Structure of this report 4

2 Context of homelessness 7

Definitions of homelessness..... 7

 Definitions used in the Australian context..... 8

 Evidence on definitions..... 11

Homelessness data..... 25

 Numbers, rates and trends 25

 Data collection and reporting..... 36

Governance and funding 49

 Overview of government responsibilities 49

	Evidence on governance and funding arrangements	60
	Other Australian Government initiatives	69
	Committee comment	77
3	Causes, risks and vulnerable groups	89
	Causes of homelessness.....	89
	Poverty and limited income	92
	Lack of affordable and social housing	94
	Vulnerable groups.....	98
	Women and children affected by family and domestic violence	99
	Children and young people.....	104
	Indigenous Australians	107
	People experiencing repeat homelessness.....	111
	People exiting institutions and other care arrangements.....	113
	People aged 55 or older.....	117
	People living with disability	124
	People living with mental illness.....	128
	Veterans.....	132
	LGBTIQ+ people	134
	Migrants, temporary visa holders and people seeking asylum	137
	Rough sleepers	140
	Rural and remote areas	143
	Other factors and vulnerabilities	148
	Committee comment	150
4	Addressing homelessness	159
	Prevention and early intervention.....	159
	Adopting a ‘Housing First’ approach.....	167
	Enhancing social housing	177
	Need for increased investment in social housing	178
	Public housing.....	183

Community housing	186
Planning and zoning reform	196
Developing a national strategy	199
Committee comment	206
Additional comments – Labor members	215
Appendix A. List of submissions	219
Appendix B. List of public hearings	229

List of Tables

Table 2.1	Number of homeless persons and rate of homeless persons per 10,000 of the population, by state and territory of usual residence.....	26
Table 2.2	Housing policy responsibilities of the three levels of government	50
Table 2.3	Roles and responsibilities set out in the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement	51
Table 2.4	Outstanding state and territory housing-related debts as at 30 June 2018 (\$ million).....	65
Table 3.1	End Street Sleeping Collaboration November 2019 Survey Results..	140
Table 4.1	Numbers of public housing dwellings, by state and territory	183

List of Figures

Figure 4.1	Model of a ‘Housing Led’ systemic approach.....	171
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List of Textboxes

Box 2.1	Canadian National Occupancy Standard.....	14
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Foreword

Each night, tens of thousands of Australians are without a place to call home. Many thousands more are at risk of becoming homeless.

Behind these statistics lies the true cost of homelessness. Homelessness can have profound and long-term impacts on a person's safety and security, physical and mental health, on their connection to the community, and on their ability to thrive in school or in the workplace.

This inquiry was an opportunity to examine Australian governments' collective response to the problem of homelessness—to understand what is and is not working and to hear about best-practice policies and programs both in Australia and overseas.

In its interim report, presented in October 2020, the Committee considered the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on homelessness.

In this final report, the Committee makes 35 recommendations which, taken together, propose a renewed approach to preventing and addressing homelessness in Australia.

The Committee's report concludes with a significant and overarching recommendation for the establishment of a ten-year national strategy on homelessness. While state and territory governments are primarily responsible for housing and homelessness, a clear and consistent message in evidence given to the Committee was that there is a need for a national approach.

The Committee considers that a national strategy would lead to more cohesive policies, better coordination and more accountability, particularly in relation to the use of Australian Government funding. A national strategy could also recognise and harness the important roles of local governments, community organisations and the private sector in preventing and addressing homelessness.

Most importantly, a national strategy would ensure that all Australian governments have a shared focus on achieving better outcomes for those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. In this regard, the Committee identified three main areas for reform.

First, prevention and early intervention represent the most effective and cost-efficient measures to address homelessness. Acknowledging the value of work done to date through integrated ‘place-based’ approaches, the Committee calls for further work to support, strengthen and integrate prevention and early intervention programs.

Second, the principle of ‘Housing First’ should guide all Australian governments’ responses to homelessness. Put simply, this means that housing should be made available to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness as an immediate priority, and a base from which their other needs can be addressed. The Committee particularly recognises the importance of providing flexible ‘wrap-around’ services as part of the Housing First strategy, to prevent homelessness and associated problems from becoming entrenched.

Third, new approaches are needed to address the shortfall in social and affordable housing. While noting that states and territories are responsible for the provision of social housing, the Committee has identified ways in which the Australian Government can work with state, territory and local governments, as well as community housing providers and other private sector investors, to increase the availability of social and affordable housing for those who need it most.

The report includes a range of other observations and recommendations. The Committee recognises that certain groups are at greater risk of homelessness than others, and that the experience of homelessness can differ from the cities and suburbs to the regional and remote parts of Australia. As such, the Committee recommends the design of a new needs-based funding model for future funding agreements, as well as particular measures to assist groups such as victim-survivors of family, domestic and sexual violence, and Indigenous Australians.

Importantly, the report also makes recommendations to improve data collection and reporting to better inform all Australian governments’ responses to homelessness. This includes a review of how homelessness is defined and how the homeless population is counted through the Census.

The Committee recognises that there is no quick fix to end homelessness in Australia. Nevertheless, the recommendations in this report highlight a range of ways in which Australian governments can work together to reduce the number of people experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness in this country.

The Committee expresses its appreciation to the many individuals and organisations who shared their views with the Committee and informed the Committee's inquiry. The Committee especially thanks those who shared their lived experience of homelessness with the Committee.

Mr Andrew Wallace MP
Chair

Membership of the Committee

Chair

Mr Andrew Wallace MP

Deputy Chair

Ms Sharon Claydon MP

Members

Dr Mike Freeland MP

Mr Andrew Laming MP

Ms Peta Murphy MP

Mr Rowan Ramsey MP

Mr Julian Simmonds MP

Dr Anne Webster MP

Terms of reference

The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs will inquire into and report on homelessness in Australia. The inquiry will have particular regard to:

- 1 the incidence of homelessness in Australia;
- 2 factors affecting the incidence of homelessness, including housing-market factors;
- 3 the causes of, and contributing factors to, housing overcrowding;
- 4 opportunities for early intervention and prevention of homelessness;
- 5 services to support people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, including housing assistance, social housing, and specialist homelessness services;
- 6 support and services for people at particular risk of homelessness, including:
 - a. women and children affected by family and domestic violence;
 - b. children and young people;
 - c. Indigenous Australians;
 - d. people experiencing repeat homelessness;
 - e. people exiting institutions and other care arrangements;
 - f. people aged 55 or older;
 - g. people living with disability; and
 - h. people living with mental illness;

- 7 the suitability of mainstream services for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness;
- 8 examples of best-practice approaches in Australia and internationally for preventing and addressing homelessness;
- 9 the adequacy of the collection and publication of housing, homelessness, and housing affordability related data; and
- 10 governance and funding arrangements in relation to housing and homelessness, particularly as they relate to the responsibility of Local, State, Territory and Federal Governments.

List of abbreviations

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACH	aged care and housing
ACOSS	Australian Council of Social Service
ACRO	Australian Community Safety & Research Organisation
AHBA	Affordable Housing Bond Aggregator
AHURI	Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute
ALGA	Australian Local Government Association
AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
ASRC	Asylum Seeker Resource Centre
AWAVA	Australian Women Against Violence Alliance
CAAFLU	Central Australian Aboriginal Family Legal Unit
CCCLM	Council of Capital City Lord Mayors
CFRC	City Futures Research Centre
CHIA	Community Housing Industry Association
CHP	community housing providers
CLA	Civil Liberties Australia
CNOS	Canadian National Occupancy Standard
COSS	Community of Schools and Services
CRA	Commonwealth Rent Assistance
CRC	Community Restorative Centre

DSS	Department of Social Services
DVA	Department of Veterans' Affairs
ERO	equal remuneration order
GSS	General Social Survey
HAA	Housing All Australians
HAAG	Housing for the Aged Action Group
HHS	Haven; Home, Safe
JRS	Jesuit Refugee Services Australia
LGBTIQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer
MAV	Municipal Association of Victoria
MIZ	mandatory inclusionary zoning
NACCHO	National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation
NATSILS	National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Legal Services
NATSISS	National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey
NCC	National Construction Code
NDIS	National Disability Insurance Scheme
NGO	non-governmental organisation
NHFIC	National Housing Finance and Investment Corporation
NHHA	National Housing and Homelessness Agreement
NHIF	National Housing Infrastructure Facility
NIHG	National Indigenous Housing Guide
NMHC	National Mental Health Commission
NOWHHWG	National Older Women's Housing and Homelessness Working Group
NPA	national partnership agreement
NPARIH	National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PIAC	Public Interest Advocacy Centre
PRADS	Permanent Rental Affordability Development Solution

RANZCP	Royal Australia and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists
RMIT	Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology
SACS	Social, Community and Disability Services
SDA	specialist disability accommodation
SHS	specialist homelessness service
SHM	Sacred Heart Mission
SHSC	Specialist Homelessness Services Collection
SHSN	Southern Homelessness Services Network
SRSS	status resolution support services
TCAC	Tangentyere Council Aboriginal Corporation
VACCA	Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency
VCOSS	Victorian Council of Social Services
YACSA	Youth Affairs Council of South Australia
YWCA	Young Women's Christian Association

List of recommendations

Recommendation 1

2.346 The Committee recommends that the Australian Bureau of Statistics commission an independent review of the statistical definition of homelessness and its operation, having particular regard to the circumstances in which persons living in severely crowded dwellings and boarding houses should be categorised as homeless. The review should consider:

- national and international best practice;
- the need for greater inclusion of non-western and Indigenous Australian cultural practices and perspectives; and
- in relation to overcrowding, the need for the use of other measures in addition to or in place of the Canadian National Occupancy Standard.

Recommendation 2

2.357 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government commission an independent review of the Australian Bureau of Statistics' collection and use of Census of Population and Housing data to estimate the homeless population, having particular regard to the problem of overcounting and undercounting particular categories of homeless persons and demographic groups.

The review should involve stakeholder consultation and should be completed in time to inform the conduct of the 2026 Census.

Recommendation 3

2.363 The Committee recommends that the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare implement changes to the Specialist Homelessness Services Collection to ensure that data collected:

- more comprehensively captures unmet need for services and casual contacts with service providers;
- more clearly identifies clients' reasons for seeking assistance;
- provides for spatial analysis of demand for services;
- can be disaggregated by age and sex to support the development of targeted policies and responses; and
- is more inclusive of diverse groups and needs.

Recommendation 4

2.364 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government provide funding to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare to establish a national longitudinal housing and homelessness data set.

The Australian Government should also give consideration to providing funding for research projects to analyse the data set and identify evidence-based policy and service responses.

Recommendation 5

2.367 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government and state and territory governments, in consultation with community housing providers, improve the availability, quality and consistency of data on community housing and Indigenous community housing.

Recommendation 6

2.368 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government work with state and territory governments to ensure the regular publication of statistics on residential tenancy evictions, giving consideration to the need to establish a common framework for such data.

Recommendation 7

- 2.369 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government, including through the introduction of mandatory requirements on state and territory governments, improve data collection and reporting on housing stock and overcrowding to assist with monitoring and evaluation, planning and strategic investment at a regional and community level.

The Committee further recommends specific measures to improve data relating to housing outcomes for Indigenous Australians to inform all governments' efforts to meet the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap* target on housing.

Recommendation 8

- 2.371 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government and state and territory governments, in consultation with homelessness and community services, improve data collection and reporting on the COVID-19 vaccination of Australians experiencing homelessness, particularly rough sleepers.

Recommendation 9

- 2.382 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government, in consultation with state and territory governments, develop a needs-based funding methodology to be applied to future inter-governmental housing and homelessness funding agreements, to be completed no later than June 2022.

Recommendation 10

- 2.383 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government undertake an evaluation of Australian Government sponsored social and affordable housing projects, including those delivered by state and territory governments, to be completed no later than June 2022.

Recommendation 11

- 2.393 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government commission an independent review of Commonwealth Rent Assistance, which should consider the maximum rates and method of indexation of the payment and its interaction with other relevant payments.

Recommendation 12

2.397 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government waive or refinance at a concessional rate the historical housing-related debts of state and territory governments, in exchange for:

- an amount equal to the savings to each jurisdiction being reinvested into affordable housing, with 50 per cent of new housing stock to be leased to community housing providers; and
- agreement on appropriate planning and zoning reforms in each jurisdiction.

Recommendation 13

3.284 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government, in consultation with state and territory governments, review the national priority homelessness cohorts identified in the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement and determine whether new cohorts should be added and/or whether existing cohorts should be removed.

Recommendation 14

3.285 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government, in consultation with state and territory governments, consider strengthening the requirements on state and territory governments in relation to national and state-specific priority homelessness cohorts listed in the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement.

This should include considering requirements such as:

- formal consultation with representative groups from priority cohorts;
- dedicated funding for measures to address priority cohorts; and
- additional evaluation of and reporting on measures taken to address priority cohorts.

Recommendation 15

3.293 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government and state and territory governments provide funding for additional crisis, emergency and

transitional accommodation, and associated support services including pathways to long-term accommodation, for people at risk of homelessness. This should include dedicated funding for accommodation for victim-survivors of family, domestic and sexual violence.

In addition, the Committee reiterates Recommendation 75 of the report of its inquiry into family, domestic and sexual violence, that the Australian Government and state and territory governments consider funding emergency accommodation for perpetrators of such violence, to prevent victim-survivors from having to leave their homes.

Recommendation 16

3.297 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government work with state and territory governments to ensure the availability of an appropriate proportion of social housing and transitional, crisis and emergency accommodation which is accessible and appropriate for people with diverse needs, including but not limited to:

- older people;
- people living with disability;
- people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds; and
- Indigenous Australians.

Recommendation 17

3.298 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government work with state and territory governments to establish nationally consistent tenancy legislation for victim-survivors of family, domestic and sexual violence to terminate a tenancy when they need to leave a home, or alternatively maintain an existing tenancy when a perpetrator is removed from a home.

Recommendation 18

3.299 Recognising the association between substance abuse and homelessness, the Committee recommends that the Australian Government work with state and territory governments to implement further measures to reduce alcohol-related harms at a whole-of-population level.

In addition, the Committee reiterates Recommendation 60 of the report of its inquiry into family, domestic and sexual violence for a public health approach to preventing and managing drug and alcohol related harms experienced by families and children, involving all jurisdictions, including local governments.

Recommendation 19

- 3.300 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government lead the development of a national integrated approach to housing and homelessness services for Indigenous Australians, co-designed with Indigenous community-controlled organisations and grounded in the principle of self-determination.

Recommendation 20

- 3.301 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government work with state and territory governments to review public order offences and other offences that disproportionately affect people experiencing homelessness, particularly rough sleepers, and those in a cycle of homelessness, with a view to minimising enforcement-based responses to homelessness.

This should include consideration of sentencing practices and bail conditions for public order offences and the need for effective integration of legal, social, health and other agencies to create pathways out of the justice system.

Recommendation 21

- 3.302 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government work with state and territory governments to implement strategies to address the risk of exiting into homelessness from state institutions, including hospitals, mental health facilities, correctional institutions and out-of-home-care, including developing a nationally consistent approach to discharge planning and a national definition of 'no exit into homelessness'.

The Australian Government should also work with state and territory governments to better integrate housing and mental health support services.

Recommendation 22

3.303 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government work with state and territory governments to ensure that:

- adequate incentives are in place for social housing providers to accept tenants with high needs or who are at risk of repeat homelessness;
- adequate support is available for social housing tenants, particularly those with a history of episodic homelessness, to minimise re-entries into homelessness; and
- housing providers and support services are more accountable for the housing outcomes of the people they support.

Recommendation 23

3.304 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government and state and territory governments expand the circumstances in which asylum seekers, particularly those on bridging visas, have the right to work and are able to access social housing, transitional, crisis and emergency accommodation, safe-at-home programs, and housing and homelessness services.

Recommendation 24

3.305 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government together with state and territory governments increase investment in economic development and other measures to enhance employment opportunities in rural and regional areas. This should include the creation of new traineeships and apprenticeships in the mining, renewable energy, eco-tourism and technology sectors.

Recommendation 25

3.306 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government establish a comprehensive strategy to address the financial insecurity of older women. This should include consideration of:

- measures relating to superannuation and income support with a view to improving financial outcomes for women; and

- the need for new data collection and reporting measures, including new national data sets, to inform policies and strategies targeted at older women.

Recommendation 26

3.307 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government, in cooperation with state and territory governments, fund data collection and research to address gaps in evidence relating to the prevalence of homelessness and demand for support services among specific vulnerable groups, including but not limited to:

- older women;
- people living in regional, rural and remote areas;
- veterans; and
- LGBTIQ+ people.

Recommendation 27

4.234 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government work with state, territory and local governments and community organisations to develop a more integrated ‘place-based’ approach to homelessness prevention and early intervention. This should include:

- establishing a national strategic framework for prevention and early intervention, setting out targets, roles and responsibilities, data collection and reporting requirements, and evaluation;
- identifying the structural support and resources required to support ‘place-based’ programs; and
- funding for ‘place-based’ research and pilot programs.

Recognising the importance of stopping homelessness early in life, the Committee further recommends that there be a particular focus on prevention and early intervention of youth homelessness.

Recommendation 28

- 4.235 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government work with state and territory governments to strengthen training across the health and community sectors on prevention of and early intervention in homelessness, particularly for disadvantaged and vulnerable children and families.

This should include training on the impact of homelessness and family, domestic and sexual violence on the social and emotional wellbeing of children.

Recommendation 29

- 4.236 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government work with state and territory governments to ensure that data collection and reporting systems adequately capture the experiences and needs of disadvantaged and vulnerable children and families, in order to support the early identification, assessment, support and/or referral of those experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

Recommendation 30

- 4.244 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government, in making relevant funding agreements with state and territory governments and housing providers, incorporate the principles of 'Housing First', particularly for any priority groups identified in those agreements.

Recommendation 31

- 4.254 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government, in consultation with state, territory and local governments, seek to increase affordable housing supply when land is rezoned for residential development, through the introduction and harmonisation of inclusionary planning approaches across Australia.

Recommendation 32

- 4.255 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government, through the National Housing and Finance Investment Corporation, investigate opportunities for attracting greater private-sector investment in social and affordable housing, including from superannuation funds.

Recommendation 33

4.262 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government work with state, territory and local governments to:

- ensure the appropriate allocation of social and affordable housing stock to meet the needs of individuals and families at different life stages and accommodate different household family structures;
- in appropriate circumstances and locations, amend local government restrictions on secondary dwellings ('granny flats'); and
- consider new measures to encourage the use of secondary dwellings to free up primary dwellings for larger families, including grants to Indigenous community-controlled organisations to construct new secondary dwellings.

Recommendation 34

4.263 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government work with state and territory governments toward implementing consistent national legislation imposing a 'three strikes' policy for the eviction of social and affordable housing tenants who repeatedly breach their tenancy obligations.

Recommendation 35

4.276 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government, in consultation with state, territory and local governments, develop and implement a ten-year national strategy on homelessness. The scope of a national strategy should include, but not be limited to:

- creating new and strengthening existing arrangements for inter-governmental coordination and funding accountability of state and territory governments;
- formally recognising and strengthening the role of local government;
- identifying opportunities for greater involvement of community organisations and the private sector;

- encompassing existing arrangements under the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement and reflecting other relevant Australian Government policies and programs; and
- giving effect to other relevant recommendations made in this report.

1. Introduction

Referral and conduct of the inquiry

- 1.1 On 11 February 2020, the Committee adopted the inquiry into homelessness in Australia, following a referral from the Minister for Families and Social Services, Senator the Hon Anne Ruston and the (then) Assistant Minister for Community Housing, Homelessness and Community Services, the Hon Luke Howarth MP.
- 1.2 The terms of reference (provided in full in the front pages) included reference to the causes of and contributing factors to homelessness; opportunities for early intervention to prevent homelessness; support services for Australians experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness, including cohorts of people especially vulnerable to homelessness; and governance and funding arrangements.
- 1.3 After opening the inquiry for submissions in February 2020, with an original deadline of 9 April, the Committee suspended evidence gathering between 31 March and 12 May, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. When the inquiry resumed, the Committee extended the closing date for submissions to 12 June 2020 (later extended further to 31 July for those who requested more time). The Committee also invited additional evidence addressing the impact of COVID-19 on homelessness in Australia.
- 1.4 In total, the Committee received 201 submissions and 25 supplementary submissions to the inquiry, including 4 confidential submissions, from a range of government agencies, community groups and individuals. The submissions received are listed at Appendix A and published on the Committee's website.

- 1.5 The Committee held five public hearings, in July and August 2020. Due to the pandemic the public hearings were all conducted from Canberra, with witnesses (and most Committee members) participating via teleconference. Details of the public hearings held are at Appendix B.
- 1.6 On 7 October 2020, the Committee presented an interim report entitled *Shelter in the Storm*, which discussed the evidence the Committee had received about the impact of COVID-19 on homelessness in Australia. The interim report foreshadowed that broader issues would be discussed, and recommendations made, in this final report.
- 1.7 The Committee thanks all of those who contributed to this inquiry.

Previous inquiries and reports

- 1.8 The Committee's inquiry took note of previous reviews and inquiries into homelessness undertaken at the state and federal level in recent years.
- 1.9 A key document setting the context for recent national action on homelessness was the Australian Government's 2008 White Paper on homelessness, *The Road Home*.¹ The White Paper sought to set a strategic agenda for reducing homelessness in Australia, with the headline goals of halving overall homelessness by 2020, and offering accommodation to all rough sleepers who need it by 2020. The strategy was backed by commitments to increased funding through a National Affordable Housing Agreement and a series of National Partnership Agreements with the states and territories.
- 1.10 It was drawn to the Committee's attention that the 2020 goals of *The Road Home* were not achieved², but also that the incidence and nature of homelessness has changed significantly since the time of the White Paper.³ Proposals made to the Committee for a new national housing and/or homelessness strategy are discussed further in Chapter 4.
- 1.11 Since that time, several other parliamentary inquiries have examined homelessness and related issues. A predecessor to this Committee, the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family, Community, Housing and Youth, inquired into homelessness legislation and presented a

¹ Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, *The Road Home: a national approach to reducing homelessness*, December 2008.

² Per Capita, *Submission 68*, p. 3.

³ Victorian Council of Social Service, *Submission 153*, p. 8.

report, *Housing the Homeless*, in November 2009.⁴ Between 2013 and 2015 the Senate Economics Committee conducted an inquiry into affordable housing, presenting its final report with 40 recommendations in May 2015.⁵ Other committees' inquiries between 2017 and 2019 have examined new housing and homelessness legislation,⁶ or touched on the problems of homelessness and housing affordability when inquiring into related issues.⁷

- 1.12 In June 2019 the Legislative Council of the Victorian Parliament referred an inquiry into homelessness in Victoria to its Legal and Social Issues Committee.⁸ The Committee's inquiry was comprehensive, and its final report presented on 4 March 2021 contained 51 recommendations for addressing homelessness in Victoria.⁹
- 1.13 Certain government agencies report regularly on homelessness in Australia and related issues, and are cited as relevant in this report. These include annual reports of the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, and the Productivity Commission's reports on government services.

Defining and describing homelessness in Australia

- 1.14 As cited in the Committee's interim report, the Department of Social Services described the Government's definition of homelessness in its submission to the inquiry:

The [Australian Bureau of Statistics] definition of homelessness is based on core elements of 'home' in Anglo-American and European interpretations of

⁴ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family, Community, Housing and Youth, *Housing the Homeless: report on the inquiry into homelessness legislation*, November 2009.

⁵ Senate Economics References Committee, *Out of reach? The Australian housing affordability challenge*, May 2015.

⁶ Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee, *Social Services Legislation Amendment (Housing Affordability) Bill 2017 [Provisions]*, December 2017; Senate Economics Legislation Committee, *Treasury Laws Amendment (National Housing and Homelessness Agreement) Bill 2017 [Provisions]*, February 2018.

⁷ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Infrastructure, Transport and Cities, *Building Up & Moving Out: Inquiry into the Australian Government's role in the development of cities*, September 2018, paragraphs 8.18-8.73; House of Representatives Select Committee on Intergenerational Welfare Dependence, *Living on the Edge: Inquiry into Intergenerational Welfare Dependence*, February 2019, paragraphs 4.66-4.73.

⁸ See <<https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/lsc-lc/inquiry/976>>.

⁹ Parliament of Victoria, Legislative Council, Legal and Social Issues Committee, *Inquiry into homelessness in Victoria*, final report, March 2021.

‘home’. These elements include a sense of security, stability, privacy, safety and the ability to control the living space. Homelessness relates to a lack of one or more elements representing a ‘home’ as opposed to purely ‘roof-lessness’.¹⁰

- 1.15 The definition of homelessness, however, has changed in recent years and remains the subject of some debate. Issues raised during the inquiry in relation to how homelessness is defined and quantified in Australia are examined in detail in Chapter 2.
- 1.16 Nevertheless, it is without doubt that homelessness is a problem in Australia: one that causes great damage to individuals and families, to Australia’s society and economy, and one that intersects in complex ways with a range of other social ills. The prevalence of homelessness in Australia, its geographic distribution and trends over time are further explored in Chapter 2.
- 1.17 The Department of Social Services, recognising that ‘homelessness is an important issue affecting many Australians’,¹¹ observed that:

Homelessness is rarely the result of a single event, action or issue. Even a short period of homelessness can have a profound impact on the lifetime wellbeing of an individual. As factors leading to homelessness vary, people experience homelessness and are affected by homelessness in different ways. The homeless population is diverse because anyone can experience homelessness...¹²
- 1.18 Many participants in the inquiry also pointed out that the experience of homelessness has complex and serious flow-on effects for affected people’s broader rights and wellbeing, including their security, health and education.¹³ These issues are discussed further throughout this report.

Structure of this report

- 1.19 This report consists of four chapters.
- 1.20 Chapter 2 examines issues relating to the definition of homelessness, the prevalence of homelessness in Australia and proposed improvements to

¹⁰ Department of Social Services (multi-agency submission), *Submission 57*, p. 5.

¹¹ Department of Social Services (multi-agency submission), *Submission 57*, p. 7.

¹² Department of Social Services (multi-agency submission), *Submission 57*, p. 8.

¹³ See, for example, Australian Human Rights Commission, *Submission 22*, p. 1; St Vincent’s Health Australia, *Submission 133*, p. 11.

data analysis and collection. It also outlines the roles and responsibilities of the three levels of government and considers evidence received on the *National Housing and Homelessness Agreement*, funding arrangements, and other relevant policies and programs.

- 1.21 Chapter 3 examines the causes and risk factors related to homelessness and housing stress in Australia. It then discusses vulnerable groups who may be at increased risk of homelessness, or face unique challenges in relation to housing and homelessness that require targeted responses.
- 1.22 Chapter 4 examines evidence received on options for better addressing homelessness in Australia, focusing on four proposed solutions in particular: increased focus on early intervention and prevention; a 'Housing First' approach, provision of more social housing, and developing a national strategy.
- 1.23 In each chapter, evidence received by the Committee is presented and discussed, followed by a concluding section setting out the Committee's views and recommendations on the matters covered in the chapter.

2. Context of homelessness

- 2.1 This chapter begins with a discussion of definitions of homelessness used in the Australian context. The chapter then considers the prevalence of homelessness in Australia and evidence on possible improvements to data collection, reporting, and evaluation.
- 2.2 The chapter also outlines the roles and responsibilities of the three levels of government and considers evidence received on the *National Housing and Homelessness Agreement* and other relevant policies and programs.

Definitions of homelessness

- 2.3 As noted in Chapter 1, definitions of homelessness generally seek to take account of both physical housing—put simply, having a roof over one’s head—and broader cultural considerations such as the concept of a ‘home’. For example, the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) explained:

Homelessness is typically conceptualised as a situation in which people are not accessing adequate housing that enables them to make a home. This has necessarily required an understanding of the concept of home, which is often culturally determined. It embraces ideas not only of housing (both its adequacy and security of tenure) but also whether it facilitates good relationships (both with household members and those outside it).¹

- 2.4 This section outlines the two main definitions used to estimate the homeless population in Australia, and considers evidence received on the adequacy of these definitions, particularly with regard to persons living in severely overcrowded dwellings and boarding houses.

¹ Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, *Submission 139*, p. 12.

Definitions used in the Australian context

2.5 AHURI explained that, in Australia, two definitions of homelessness have dominated—the ‘cultural definition’ and a more recent definition adopted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), hereafter referred to as the ‘statistical definition’.² These two definitions are discussed below in turn.

2.6 In addition, AHURI noted that the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) defines a person *at risk* of homelessness as:

... a person who is at risk of losing their accommodation or are experiencing one or more factors or triggers that can contribute to homelessness. Risk factors include financial or housing affordability stress, inadequate or inappropriate dwelling conditions, previous accommodation ended, child abuse, family, sexual and domestic violence, and relationship or family breakdown (AIHW, 2020).³

2.7 AHURI explained that risk factors can be considered to raise the probability of homelessness occurring, but may not be necessary or sufficient for it to occur, and that other factors can ‘protect or buffer’ people from risks:

Some people are better able to avoid homelessness or exit earlier because of access to financial resources, psychological resources and physical and mental health, as well as relational support (Martin, 2014).⁴

2.8 Evidence on risk factors for homelessness is discussed in Chapter 3.

Cultural definition

2.9 AHURI explained that, prior to the adoption of the statistical definition for the 2011 Census, the ABS used the cultural definition of homelessness, which was based on what were considered to be common cultural expectations of housing needs in Australia:

This meant having, at a minimum, one room to sleep in, one room to live in, one’s own bathroom and kitchen and security of tenure (Chamberlain and MacKenzie 2008).⁵

² Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, *Submission 139*, p. 12.

³ Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, *Submission 139*, p. 13.

⁴ Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, *Submission 139*, p. 22.

⁵ Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, *Submission 139*, p. 12.

- 2.10 AHURI explained that three categories of homelessness were defined based on the cultural definition:
- 1 primary homeless (people without conventional accommodation, such as rough sleepers or those in improvised dwellings);
 - 2 secondary homeless (people who frequently move from one temporary shelter to another, such as those in crisis accommodation, youth refuges and couch surfers); and
 - 3 tertiary homeless (people staying in accommodation that falls below minimum community standards such as boarding housing and caravan parks).⁶
- 2.11 Tangentyere Council Aboriginal Corporation (TCAC) submitted that the fundamental contention underpinning the cultural definition is that homelessness is 'a relative concept that acquires meaning in relation to the housing conventions of a particular culture'.⁷
- 2.12 St Vincent's Health Australia suggested that the categories of primary, secondary and tertiary homelessness are 'fluid' and that 'people often cycle between them'.⁸
- 2.13 For the purpose of the Specialist Homelessness Services Collection (SHSC), the AIHW has adopted a definition of homelessness that aligns closely with primary and secondary homelessness, but which does not include tertiary homelessness.⁹ The SHSC is discussed in further detail later in this chapter.

Statistical definition

- 2.14 In its submission, the Australian Government outlined the statistical definition of homelessness currently used by the ABS:

According to the ABS, a person is considered homeless if their current living arrangement is in an inadequate dwelling, has no tenure or if their initial tenure is short and not extendable or does not allow the tenant to have control of and access to space for social relations.¹⁰

⁶ Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, *Submission 139*, p. 12.

⁷ Tangentyere Council Aboriginal Corporation, *Submission 165*, p. 3.

⁸ St Vincent's Health Australia, *Submission 133*, p. 3.

⁹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 'Homelessness services', <<https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports-data/health-welfare-services/homelessness-services/glossary>>.

¹⁰ Department of Social Services (multi-agency submission), *Submission 57*, p. 8.

2.15 An information paper issued by the ABS in 2012 provided further guidance on the three elements of the statistical definition:

- the adequacy of the dwelling refers to whether the structure of the dwelling renders it fit for human habitation, and whether the dwelling has access to basic facilities;
- the security of tenure in the dwelling refers to a person's legal right to occupy a dwelling, with stability and security of tenure such as owning or renting with a formal lease or similar right that could be enforced by the tenant (this also includes arrangements such as children living with their parents); and
- control of, and access to space for social relations refers to whether a person or household has living space; space to pursue social relations and maintain privacy; and exclusive access to kitchen facilities and a bathroom.¹¹

2.16 In applying the statistical definition, the ABS identifies the following six categories of homeless persons:

- 1 persons living in improvised dwellings, tents or sleeping out ('sleeping rough');
- 2 persons in supported accommodation for the homeless;
- 3 persons staying temporarily with other households ('couch surfers');
- 4 persons living in boarding houses;
- 5 persons in other temporary lodgings; and
- 6 persons living in 'severely' crowded dwellings.¹²

2.17 The Australian Government explained that the category of persons 'sleeping rough' includes any person in an improvised home, such as a dwelling made of tarp or cardboard, tent or sleeping out on the street, and who reported they were at home or had no usual address.¹³

2.18 Similarly, the Government explained that the category of persons in 'supported accommodation for the homeless' refers to people living in

¹¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 4992.0 – *Information Paper – A Statistical Definition of Homelessness*, 2012.

¹² Department of Social Services (multi-agency submission), *Submission 57*, p. 8.

¹³ Department of Social Services (multi-agency submission), *Submission 57*, p. 9.

transitional housing support that is time limited and not long term, such as crisis accommodation.¹⁴

2.19 The categories of persons living in severely crowded dwellings and persons living in boarding houses are discussed in further detail later in this section.

2.20 Further background on the statistical definition was provided in the ABS information paper:

Definitions of homelessness are culturally and historically contingent. They range from limited objective measures which conflate homelessness with rooflessness to more equivocal subjective definitions founded on culturally and historically determined ideas of 'home'. The ABS definition of homelessness is informed by an understanding of homelessness as 'home'lessness, not rooflessness. It emphasises the core elements of 'home' in Anglo American and European interpretations of the meaning of home... These elements include: a sense of security, stability, privacy, safety, and the ability to control living space. Homelessness is therefore a lack of one or more of the elements that represent 'home'.¹⁵

2.21 Mr Stephen Collett from the ABS explained to the Committee that the statistical definition was developed in consultation with the Homelessness Statistics Reference Group, which includes 'members from those agencies that are providing services to the homeless; and state governments, academics and a whole variety of people who work in the area'.¹⁶

2.22 As noted above, the ABS has used the statistical definition since the 2011 Census. Mr Collett said that having a consistent definition assisted the ABS to estimate how the prevalence of homelessness varies over time.¹⁷

Evidence on definitions

2.23 AHURI's submission to the inquiry outlined a number of critiques of both the cultural and statistical definitions, including that: they potentially understate the full extent of those at risk; they may not reflect people's lived experience of homelessness; and they are narrowly focused on housing

¹⁴ Department of Social Services (multi-agency submission), *Submission 57*, p. 9.

¹⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 4992.0 – *Information Paper – A Statistical Definition of Homelessness*, 2012.

¹⁶ Mr Stephen Collett, Program Manager, Indigenous and Social Information, Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 7 July 2020, pp. 27, 29.

¹⁷ Mr Stephen Collett, Program Manager, Indigenous and Social Information, Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 7 July 2020, p. 27.

rather than home and 'have not properly grappled with multi-dimensional experiences of homelessness'.¹⁸

- 2.24 Several of these points were raised by other submitters. For example, Kids Under Cover submitted:

A broader definition of homelessness is understood as not just a lack of an abode or a roof over one's head, but rather, it is multidimensional and involves physiological, emotional, territorial, ontological and spiritual deprivations...¹⁹

- 2.25 Addressing the distinction between shelter and secure housing, the St Vincent de Paul Society argued that this was 'often conflated, not made or not prioritised':

Housing is supposed to be secure and it is this that separates it from shelter. Though less secure, shelter has a lower barrier to entry which makes it a more viable option for some. While housing should be the ultimate target, 'shelter' is a lower order physiological need and thus a higher priority as it provides protection from the most significant risks associated with homelessness. Achieving broad provision of shelter should be the first step on the path to higher goals, such as universal housing and housing as a human right.²⁰

- 2.26 A further critique outlined in AHURI's submission was that the cultural and statistical definitions of homelessness are both culturally biased. That is:

... because these definitions reference dominant cultural ideas of home, this can make them more problematic for some cultural groups.²¹

- 2.27 As an example, AHURI referred to Indigenous understandings of homelessness, which it said:

... may not necessarily relate to a lack of accommodation and can include 'spiritual homelessness' (the state of being disconnected from one's homeland, separation from family or kinship networks or not being familiar with one's heritage) and 'public place dwelling' or 'itinerancy' (usually used to refer to Indigenous people from remote communities who are 'sleeping rough' in proximity to a major centre) (Memmott et al. 2003). Indigenous understandings of homelessness can also refer to an inability to access

¹⁸ Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, *Submission 139*, p. 13.

¹⁹ Kids Under Cover, *Submission 59*, p. 2.

²⁰ St Vincent de Paul Society, *Submission 142*, p. 6.

²¹ Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, *Submission 139*, p. 13.

appropriate housing that caters to an individual's particular social and cultural needs (Birdsall-Jones et al. 2011).²²

- 2.28 TCAC submitted that while contemporary definitions of homelessness are valuable, these 'may not adequately explain how the interface between different systems contributes to housing vulnerability and homelessness in Central Australia'.²³
- 2.29 While acknowledging some more recent efforts to include broader concepts of homelessness, AHURI said that 'new measures will need to be developed if more multi-dimensional aspects of homelessness are to give a fuller picture of homelessness'.²⁴
- 2.30 The City Futures Research Centre (CFRC) at the University of New South Wales explained that, while homeless is often conceptualised as being restricted to rough sleeping:
- ... it is internationally widely accepted that homelessness cannot be sensibly equated with rough sleeping alone, and that – as a manifestation of extreme housing need – it must be more broadly defined to include – at the very least – those living in shelters, hostels and other temporary housing situations (e.g. sofa surfing).²⁵
- 2.31 Further evidence focussed on the inclusion in definitions of homelessness of persons living in severely overcrowded dwellings and boarding houses, as outlined below.

Severe overcrowding

- 2.32 A key difference between the cultural and statistical definitions of homelessness is that only the latter includes persons in severely overcrowded dwellings.²⁶
- 2.33 Overcrowding (also referred to as 'crowding') occurs when a dwelling is not of an adequate size to meet the needs of the household. AHURI explained that overcrowding can be measured 'using density, occupancy standards and stress measures', noting that:

²² Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, *Submission 139*, p. 13.

²³ Tangentyere Council Aboriginal Corporation, *Submission 165*, pp. 3-4.

²⁴ Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, *Submission 139*, p. 13.

²⁵ City Futures Research Centre, *Submission 5.1*, pp. 5-6.

²⁶ Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, *Submission 139*, p. 12.

Official measures of overcrowding using occupancy standards utilise a set of normative or cultural standards around a household's use of a dwelling.²⁷

- 2.34 In its submission, the Australian Government explained that in the statistical definition, severe overcrowding is based on the Canadian National Occupancy Standard (CNOS).²⁸ The CNOS is outlined in Box 2.1.

Box 2.1 Canadian National Occupancy Standard

The CNOS is sensitive to both household size and composition in determining housing requirements. The standard assesses the bedroom requirements of a household by specifying that:

- there should be no more than two persons per bedroom;
- a household of one unattached individual may reasonably occupy a bed-sit (i.e. have no bedroom);
- couples and parents should have a separate bedroom;
- children less than five years of age, of different sexes, may reasonably share a room;
- children five years of age or over, of different sexes, should not share a bedroom;
- children less than 18 years of age and of the same sex may reasonably share a bedroom; and
- single household members aged 18 years or over should have a separate bedroom.²⁹

In Australia, the CNOS is used by government agencies such as the ABS, the AIHW, and the Productivity Commission to measure housing utilisation—that is, whether a dwelling is of an adequate size to meet the needs of the household, or is overcrowded or underutilised.

²⁷ Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, *Submission 139*, p. 32.

²⁸ Department of Social Services (multi-agency submission), *Submission 57*, p. 9. Other methods used to measure overcrowding internationally include the British Bedroom Standard and the New Zealand Equivalised Crowding Index (which are based on the number of bedrooms and demographic data, similar to the CNOS), a measure adopted by the European Statistical Office (which is based on the number of rooms and demographic data) and the American Crowding Index (which is based solely on the number of rooms).

²⁹ Department of Social Services (multi-agency submission), *Submission 57*, p. 28; Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Submission 81*, p. 7; Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, *Submission 139*, p. 32.

- 2.35 A dwelling that requires one, two or three additional bedrooms to meet the requirements of the CNOS is considered *overcrowded*, whereas a dwelling that requires four or more additional bedrooms is considered to be *severely overcrowded*. In the statistical definition, persons living in severely overcrowded dwellings are considered to be homeless.³⁰
- 2.36 Mr Collett outlined the ABS's rationale for including persons in severely overcrowded dwellings in the statistical definition:
- In consultation with the [Homelessness Statistics Reference Group], we feel that, if four or more bedrooms are required, then those health and safety requirements are not there—for example, the bathroom facilities aren't going to be adequate for the number of people that are living in the dwelling—and there's also no access to privacy.³¹
- 2.37 Mr Collett acknowledged that some members of the Homelessness Statistics Reference Group did not agree with the decision to include severe overcrowding, but said the decision was made 'on balance' after listening to the views of the sector. Mr Collett also advised that in 2011 when the statistical definition was developed the CNOS was an 'internationally regarded measure of occupancy rates'. He added that 'we try and keep our definitions as consistent as possible' in order to make data consistent and comparable over time.³²
- 2.38 However, the Committee heard that data about persons in severely overcrowded dwellings are not included in the SHSC, which is managed by the AIHW.³³
- 2.39 The Committee also heard that Australia was an exception among Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries in including severely overcrowded dwellings in its definition of homelessness. The Australian Government advised:

Most Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries include rough sleepers, people living in accommodation for the homeless and in emergency temporary accommodation when defining homelessness.

³⁰ Department of Social Services (multi-agency submission), *Submission 57*, pp. 9, 28.

³¹ Mr Stephen Collett, Program Manager, Indigenous and Social Information, Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 7 July 2020, p. 27.

³² Mr Stephen Collett, Program Manager, Indigenous and Social Information, Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 7 July 2020, p. 29.

³³ Dr Gabrielle Phillips, Head, Housing and Specialised Services Group, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 7 July 2020, p. 18.

However, Australia is the only country that includes severe crowding and boarding houses in estimating homelessness.³⁴

2.40 However, the ABS advised that New Zealand includes some instances of overcrowding in its estimates of the homeless population:

These are people who are staying in a severely overcrowded permanent private dwelling (ie. with a deficit of two or more bedrooms) who are not part of the 'host household' (ie. the owners or listed tenants).³⁵

2.41 In its submission, AHURI argued that it was important to consider overcrowding:

Overcrowding matters because it can create conflict in a household, undermine tenant safety, lead to property damage, and contribute to poor social, health and education outcomes.

... Overcrowding has a number of other problematic outcomes, such as overburdening kitchens and toilets, and property damage. This can have adverse impacts on health and tenure security (Habibis et al. 2016). Such health risks associated with overcrowding are heightened in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic...³⁶

2.42 Similarly, Mission Australia submitted:

It is important to recognise that poor housing conditions and severe overcrowding can contribute to escalating violence and increasing the vulnerability of women and children to abuse and violence from a range of potential perpetrators. Overcrowding can also present as an environmental stressor for people living in such households, including from issues such as a lack of privacy, which can have an impact on mental health, education achievement and communicable diseases.³⁷

2.43 A striking example of the health impact of overcrowding was given by Ms Christine Fitzgerald, appearing on behalf of the Northern Territory Government. Ms Fitzgerald explained that in the town of Maningrida, east of Darwin, the overcrowding rate is 77 per cent. Ms Fitzgerald went on to

³⁴ Department of Social Services (multi-agency submission), *Submission 57*, p. 10. See also: Unison Housing, *Submission 66*, p. 3.

³⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Submission 81.1*, pp. 1-2.

³⁶ Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, *Submission 139*, p. 33.

³⁷ Mission Australia, *Submission 137*, pp. 8-9.

discuss the high incidence of rheumatic heart disease in the town, which is known to be linked to environmental factors including crowding:

Just this week a study has been published by Josh Francis, a well-known paediatrician here at the Menzies School of Health Research, and other medical experts. They undertook a survey in 2018 in Maningrida of all five- to 20-year-olds in the population. ...In that screening they found 32 young people with rheumatic heart disease; 20 of those 32 had not previously been known. Five of those were incredibly severe cases and three of them had cardiac surgery immediately. That study found another 17 young people who were borderline [rheumatic heart disease], so they were developing it.³⁸

2.44 Ms Fitzgerald concluded:

That is the highest reported incidence in the world of rheumatic heart disease of any population that has been recorded. That's a shocking statistic for us to have in Australia, and it's a consequence of overcrowding.³⁹

2.45 In its submission, the Northern Territory Government provided further evidence on the 'strong and significant impact' of overcrowding on socio-economic outcomes, including developmental outcomes for children and the incidence of family, domestic and sexual violence.⁴⁰

2.46 The Community Housing Industry Association (CHIA) and the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO) among others also noted detrimental impacts associated with overcrowding.⁴¹

2.47 Submitters drew attention to differing views about the ABS's inclusion of severe overcrowding in the statistical definition of homelessness. The CFRC explained that this 'had been a focus for debate':

Residents enduring such conditions will be, in anyone's book, experiencing quality of life extremely degraded by absence of adequate housing. Nevertheless, there are legitimate questions about the logic of

³⁸ Ms Christine Fitzgerald, Executive Director, Strategy, Policy and Performance, Department of Local Government, Housing and Community Development, Northern Territory, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 30 July 2020, p. 47.

³⁹ Ms Christine Fitzgerald, Executive Director, Strategy, Policy and Performance, Department of Local Government, Housing and Community Development, Northern Territory, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 30 July 2020, p. 47.

⁴⁰ Northern Territory Department of Local Government, Housing and Community Development, *Submission 62*, pp. 12-14.

⁴¹ Community Housing Industry Association, *Submission 89*, pp. 12-13; National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation, *Submission 166*, pp. 6-7.

including overcrowding (even at these levels) as a manifestation of 'homelessness'.⁴²

2.48 The CFRC continued:

While in no way downplaying the seriousness of severe crowding as a form of extreme deprivation, Prof Chris Chamberlain, one of Australia's top homelessness experts (and a foremost advocate for homeless people), argues that this is questionable. The case here is that, for those in the census-identified 'severely crowded' cohort, the accommodation concerned is generally considered 'permanent housing', not a temporary bedspace – which could be reasonably classed as part of the homelessness [cohort].

... According to the above argument, the ABS inclusion of severely crowded households within the 'homeless' population might undermine the credibility of the overall official homelessness total, of which it is part.⁴³

2.49 The CFRC argued that resolving whether persons living in severely crowded dwellings should be counted as 'homeless' is difficult because of the limited information about the circumstances of those persons:

In the absence of such information, it is hard to know how people in these conditions experience serious overcrowding, and the extent to which they see themselves as adequately or permanently housed.⁴⁴

2.50 In a submission to the Victorian parliamentary inquiry into homelessness, Professors Chris Chamberlain and Guy Johnson from RMIT University outlined their concerns about the ABS's treatment of overcrowding:

According to the ABS, there were 24,825 homeless people in Victoria on Census night 2016, and people in severely overcrowded dwellings were the largest group in the population.

... All of those in overcrowded dwellings were at an address where they had lived, or intended to live, for 6 months or longer. They had permanent accommodation. ... Having worked in the homeless area for many years, we know that homeless people often move frequently from one form of temporary accommodation to another, others go to emergency

⁴² City Futures Research Centre, *Submission 5.1*, p. 11.

⁴³ City Futures Research Centre, *Submission 5.1*, p. 11.

⁴⁴ City Futures Research Centre, *Submission 5.1*, p. 11.

accommodation or boarding houses, and some people sleep rough. Homeless people do NOT live permanently in houses and flats.⁴⁵

2.51 Professors Chamberlain and Johnson concluded:

... the problem identified by the ABS is NOT homelessness. The problem identified by the ABS is overcrowding.⁴⁶

2.52 They also said that the ABS's decision to define people in households requiring four or more additional bedrooms—but not those requiring three bedrooms—as being homeless was arbitrary and without convincing rationale.⁴⁷

2.53 Other evidence addressed the extent to which cultural factors contribute to overcrowding, and how this may be better accounted for in the definition of homelessness. For example, AHURI argued that 'some caution should be exercised' when using the CNOS, as:

... CNOS measures presume a western cultural framework for understanding how a household uses a home which are at odds with other cultural perspectives including those from Indigenous and migrant communities. This is a matter of concern since it is precisely these communities that also have high measured rates of overcrowding.⁴⁸

2.54 Ms Fitzgerald from the Northern Territory Government told the Committee that the definition of homelessness and the issue of overcrowding should be looked at with a 'cultural lens' from the perspective of Indigenous and other culturally and linguistically diverse communities. In relation to overcrowding, Ms Fitzgerald said:

Aboriginal people would probably not see overcrowding in the same context that I would, as a non-Aboriginal person. I might be strict at a far earlier point than an Aboriginal family, who will accommodate more people in their house

⁴⁵ Professor Chris Chamberlain and Professor Guy Johnson, *Submission 178 to Victorian Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria*, pp. 4-5.

⁴⁶ Professor Chris Chamberlain and Professor Guy Johnson, *Submission 178 to Victorian Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria*, p. 5.

⁴⁷ Professor Chris Chamberlain and Professor Guy Johnson, *Submission 178 to Victorian Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria*, p. 4.

⁴⁸ Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, *Submission 139*, p. 32.

because that's family land. So the Canadian National Occupancy Standard is a slightly blunt measure, because it's age and relationship that determines it.⁴⁹

- 2.55 AHURI said that the current 'density measure' of overcrowding could be adapted or supplemented with 'subjective stress measures' that:

... take into account the values and rules of householders that if broken 'can generate stress and loss of control' (Memmott et al. 2012). Such measures of overcrowding might reveal that even those experiencing moderate levels of overcrowding are nevertheless under strain. Some forms of overcrowding (including that due to temporary mobility for cultural reasons) may not necessarily be perceived as problematic (Habibis et al. 2011).⁵⁰

- 2.56 AHURI referred to work underway through the Housing and Homelessness Data Working group to consider ways to better measure overcrowding, in which AHURI was taking a leading role.⁵¹

- 2.57 Mr Adrian Pisarski from National Shelter argued that it was 'dangerous to confuse cultural practice with overcrowding definitions':

You might have a desire to live together but you still can live in a severely overcrowded space. I think the thing we want to achieve is housing that is appropriate for people—and that will often mean more bedrooms are required for those people to live in in the way that they want. That's what overcrowding gets to; it's really the shortage of bedrooms.⁵²

- 2.58 In a supplementary submission, National Shelter highlighted the issue of severe overcrowding in the Canterbury-Bankstown area of Sydney, and said that the local council in that area had not noted cultural preferences as an explanation, but rather a lack of affordable housing.⁵³
- 2.59 National Shelter argued that the 'definitional bar' for severe overcrowding set by the ABS was already high, and noted that the ABS's operationalisation of the definition is intended to:

⁴⁹ Ms Christine Fitzgerald, Executive Director, Strategy, Policy and Performance, Department of Local Government, Housing and Community Development, Northern Territory, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 30 July 2020, pp. 46-47.

⁵⁰ Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, *Submission 139*, p. 32.

⁵¹ Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, *Submission 139*, p. 33.

⁵² Mr Adrian Pisarski, Executive Officer, National Shelter, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 8 July 2020, p. 19.

⁵³ National Shelter, *Submission 86.1*, pp. 1-2.

... rule out many traditional extended family households who may in fact, for cultural, economic or family support reasons elect to live in a dwelling a little small for its needs.⁵⁴

- 2.60 Several submitters further examined the issue of overcrowding with reference to Indigenous communities. For example, the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) submitted:

Care should be taken when investigating overcrowding as this concept is based on western assumptions of safe housing and family structures, omitting Aboriginal cultural kinship protocols in relation to raising children communally or caring for extended family members in the same household.⁵⁵

- 2.61 VACCA continued:

Particular attention should be paid to cases where 'overcrowding' is deemed an issue without focusing on alleviating other contributing structural factors and policy failures that contribute to the lack of safe and secure housing... such as affordability, unsafe and unmaintained public housing stock and inadequate facilities, as well as a lack of housing which accommodate families larger than western normative understandings of a nuclear family... Each of these structural problems has been shown to have a greater association with poor wellbeing outcomes for children than overcrowding.⁵⁶

- 2.62 Further evidence on homelessness in Indigenous and other culturally and linguistically diverse communities is discussed in Chapter 3.

- 2.63 CHIA submitted that research on overcrowding in Australia should be undertaken before any change is made to the official homelessness definition, but also stated that:

Irrespective of its inclusion within the official definition of homelessness, severe overcrowding should be a priority for governments to address.⁵⁷

Boarding houses

- 2.64 The inclusion of persons living in boarding houses in the statistical definition of homelessness was also discussed in evidence.

⁵⁴ National Shelter, *Submission 86.1*, pp. 2-3.

⁵⁵ Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency, *Submission 126*, p. 12.

⁵⁶ Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency, *Submission 126*, p. 12.

⁵⁷ Community Housing Industry Association, *Submission 89*, pp. 12-13. See also: Ms Wendy Hayhurst, Chief Executive Officer, Community Housing Industry Association, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 30 July 2020, p. 11.

2.65 The Australian Government explained that:

Boarding house residents are considered homeless if they do not have control of or access to space or privacy, or lack security of tenure. This includes vulnerable residents living in non-private dwellings that do not have exclusive living areas such as a private bathroom.

Halls of residence for students, dwellings for members of religious orders and institutions such as hospitals are not considered boarding houses for homeless purposes because:

- they may have chosen to live in these circumstances and have accommodation alternatives or
- they are required by law to live in these circumstances or
- they are in temporary living arrangements (such as student halls of residence) or
- it is essential for their broader health and wellbeing to be living in these situations.⁵⁸

2.66 The ABS advised that the Census does not collect sufficient information about individual boarding house residents to determine whether they are homeless:

Instead, the ABS determines whether people are homeless or not for each boarding house as a whole. Factors taken into account in making this determination are variables such as labour force status, student status, income, tenure type, need for assistance with core activities, religion and volunteering. This ensures that occupants of dwellings such as religious convents, student halls of residence or supported living arrangements for people with a disability are not incorrectly classified as homeless.⁵⁹

2.67 As with the inclusion of severe overcrowding, Mr Collett from the ABS said the inclusion of persons living in boarding houses in the statistical definition was an 'on-balance' decision made in consultation with stakeholders.⁶⁰

2.68 Boarding houses as a form of accommodation are also included in the SHSC maintained by the AIHW.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Department of Social Services (multi-agency submission), *Submission 57*, p. 9.

⁵⁹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Submission 81.1*, p. 5. See also: Department of Social Services (multi-agency submission), *Submission 57*, p. 27.

⁶⁰ Mr Stephen Collett, Program Manager, Indigenous and Social Information, Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 7 July 2020, p. 28.

- 2.69 As noted in the previous section, the Australian Government told the Committee that 'Australia is the only country that includes severe crowding and boarding houses in estimating homelessness'.⁶² However, the ABS advised that New Zealand, Canada, the United States of America, Korea and several European Union countries include boarding houses in their definition of homelessness.⁶³
- 2.70 The Committee received a range of evidence on the experiences of people living in boarding houses, which gave some insight into the extent to which these people should be considered to be homeless. A common theme in the evidence was that the quality of accommodation provided by boarding houses varies greatly. For example, Ms Marion Bennett from Mission Australia told the Committee:

I think we need to be careful when looking at the term 'boarding houses' in particular. There are good boarding houses and there are bad boarding houses. We work with people who are living in boarding houses who may not be experiencing good outcomes at all. Some of them are substandard and they don't provide the supportive environment that many people need. ... But in other cases they can be a really good housing option.⁶⁴

- 2.71 Ms Kate Incerti from the Inner South Rooming House Network expressed concern about the growth in privately operated rooming houses, which she said were increasingly common in outer suburban areas:

Some of them are registered ... But they also sometimes have unknown, unregistered places, so services can unwittingly refer ethically and fund people with state funds into the registered places, but then later on we find those owners shuffle people and stand over them and say, 'You have to move into these other places,' which are more hidden. So it's a really disreputable space at times...⁶⁵

⁶¹ Dr Gabrielle Phillips, Head, Housing and Specialised Services Group, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 7 July 2020, p. 18.

⁶² Department of Social Services (multi-agency submission), *Submission 57*, p. 10.

⁶³ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Submission 81.1*, p. 1.

⁶⁴ Ms Marion Bennett, Executive, Practice, Quality and Leadership, Mission Australia, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 8 July 2020, p. 13.

⁶⁵ Ms Kate Incerti, Co-Convener, Inner South Rooming House Network, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 8 August 2020, pp. 22, 28. See also: Mr Corey Allen CF APM, *Submission 56*, pp. 3-4.

- 2.72 The City of Melbourne said that many international students were living in ‘unregistered rooming house-type accommodation that is exploitative and overcrowded’:

People living in illegal rooming houses have limited and insecure tenure, limited access to social space, shared bedrooms, kitchens and bathrooms and often experience discriminatory tenancy practices and high rents.⁶⁶

- 2.73 The Committee had the benefit of hearing from Ms Maurya Bourandanis about her lived experience as a resident in seven rooming houses over a period of three years. She explained that in five of the rooming houses she had lived in she was the only female:

At ... two rooming houses I was told to stay in my room as much as possible, to only use the shared bathroom and if I wanted to use the kitchen to do so quickly and otherwise please stay in my room as some of these men don't like women. On many occasions I felt safer sleeping in the park than going back there.⁶⁷

- 2.74 Ms Bourandanis said her experience was characterised by a lack of control:

... I never felt like I had control. Every time I was in a rooming house, it was on a fortnightly basis, I felt like. I had no stability there. They could tell me to leave if they wanted to for some reason. I didn't have any security at all. It just felt like it was fortnight, fortnight, fortnight.⁶⁸

- 2.75 Ms Bourandanis told the Committee that her situation began to improve when she entered a rooming house which facilitated her access to support services.⁶⁹

- 2.76 Ms Incerti explained how the lack of control experienced by Ms Bourandanis related to the ABS's definition of homelessness:

... when Maurya described being told to stay in her room and not go to the communal areas and she had no control over who she was living with, no control over whether or not the bathroom had a lock on it or was properly maintained, and no control over whether someone locked the house doors and

⁶⁶ City of Melbourne, *Submission 169*, pp. 9-10.

⁶⁷ Ms Maurya Bourandanis, Community member and Adviser, Inner South Rooming House Network, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 7 August 2020, pp. 20, 23.

⁶⁸ Ms Maurya Bourandanis, Community member and Adviser, Inner South Rooming House Network, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 7 August 2020, p. 27.

⁶⁹ Ms Maurya Bourandanis, Community member and Adviser, Inner South Rooming House Network, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 7 August 2020, p. 21.

locked everybody in, these are the sorts of things that make that definition fit that space because, even if you do have a form of tenure and even though your initial tenure may be extendable, it is in a dwelling that's inadequate; it doesn't allow you to have control over the shared spaces; and it barely lets you have control over accessing your own room.⁷⁰

Homelessness data

2.77 This section considers the prevalence of homelessness in Australia and highlights trends in the data on homelessness discussed in evidence to the inquiry. It concludes with a discussion on suggested improvements to data collection and reporting.

Numbers, rates and trends

2.78 According to the ABS, there were 116,427 people classified as being homeless on the night of the 2016 Census, which was up from 102,439 people in 2011.⁷¹ This overall figure included:

- 51,088 people living in severely overcrowded dwellings;
- 21,235 people living in supported accommodation for the homeless;
- 17,725 people staying temporarily with other households;
- 17,503 people staying in boarding houses;
- 8,200 people sleeping rough; and
- 678 people staying in other temporary lodging.⁷²

2.79 The Committee notes that these figures will be re-examined at the next Census due in 2021.

2.80 The Unison Housing Research Lab at RMIT University stressed that increases in the homeless population should be understood in the context of changes in the population (emphasis in original):

From a policy perspective the critical measure is not the number of homeless people *per se*, or the percentage increase, but rather the **rate of homelessness**, because rates take into account population growth.⁷³

⁷⁰ Ms Kate Inceri, Co-Convener, Inner South Rooming House Network, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 8 August 2020, pp. 26-27.

⁷¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Submission 81*, p. 2.

⁷² Department of Social Services (multi-agency submission), *Submission 57*, pp. 4-5.

⁷³ Unison Housing Research Lab, *Submission 66*, p. 3.

2.81 The Australian Government stated in its submission that while the number of homeless people increased over the 2001 to 2016 period, the rate of homelessness per 10,000 people decreased. It explained that this reduction was more pronounced ‘if Australia’s definition of homelessness is more closely aligned with other countries’ (that is, if persons living in severely overcrowded dwellings and boarding houses are excluded):

From 2001 to 2016, including severe crowding and boarding houses, the estimated rate of homelessness per 10,000 people dropped slightly by 2.0 per cent, from 50.8 people to 49.8 people.

... Over this same period, excluding severe crowding and boarding houses, Australia’s estimated rate of homelessness per 10,000 drops by 5.1 per cent, from 21.6 people to 20.5 people.⁷⁴

2.82 The Australian Government noted that while the overall rate of homelessness has remained relatively stable, growth in the rate of homelessness varies across Australia, ‘reflecting the different social and economic circumstances’ of the states and territories.⁷⁵ Table 2.1 provides data on the numbers and rate of homelessness by state and territory.

Table 2.1 Number of homeless persons and rate of homeless persons per 10,000 of the population, by state and territory of usual residence

	2001 Census		2016 Census	
	Number of people	Rate per 10,000 population	Number of people	Rate per 10,000 population
NSW	23,041	36.4	37,715	50.4
Victoria	18,154	38.9	24,817	41.9
Queensland	19,316	54.8	21,671	46.1
South Australia	5,844	39.8	6,224	37.1
Western Australia	9,799	53.6	9,005	36.4

⁷⁴ Department of Social Services (multi-agency submission), *Submission 57*, pp. 10-11.

⁷⁵ Department of Social Services (multi-agency submission), *Submission 57*, pp. 11-13.

Tasmania	1,264	27.5	1,622	31.8
Northern Territory	16,948	904.4	13,717	599.4
ACT	943	30.4	1,596	40.2
National	95,314	50.4	116,427	49.8

Source: Department of Social Services (multi-agency submission), Submission 57, p. 13.

- 2.83 While the data in Table 2.1 show that the rate of homelessness in the Northern Territory has decreased more than in other states and territories, it remains disproportionately high. This is mostly due to the high level of severe overcrowding—the rate of severe overcrowding is 20 times higher in the Northern Territory than in New South Wales, the state with the second highest rate.⁷⁶
- 2.84 Trends highlighted in the Australian Government’s submission included that homelessness is increasing in major cities, both in absolute numbers and on a per capita basis, and that severe overcrowding has driven the growth in homelessness:
- Since 2001, the rate of people living in severe crowding increased by 22.5 per cent from 17.8 per 10,000 of the population to 21.8 per 10,000 in 2016.⁷⁷
- 2.85 Nationally, the majority (60.4 per cent) of persons living in severely overcrowded dwellings live in greater capital city areas, particularly in Sydney and Melbourne. However, in the Northern Territory the overwhelming majority live outside the capital city area.⁷⁸
- 2.86 The ABS also provided information on previous experience of homelessness based on the results of the General Social Survey (GSS) and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS):
- The 2014 GSS found that 2.5 million people aged 15 years and over had experienced homelessness at some time in their lives. About 1.4 million of these people had experienced at least one episode of homelessness in the last 10 years, of which 351,000 had experienced homelessness in the last 12 months.

⁷⁶ Department of Social Services (multi-agency submission), *Submission 57*, pp. 15.

⁷⁷ Department of Social Services (multi-agency submission), *Submission 57*, pp. 13-15.

⁷⁸ Department of Social Services (multi-agency submission), *Submission 57*, pp. 16-17.

... The NATSISS found that 29% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 years and over had experienced homelessness during their lifetime. People in non-remote areas were significantly more likely than those in remote areas to have experienced homelessness (32% compared with 18%).⁷⁹

- 2.87 Further insight into the prevalence of homelessness was provided by the AIHW based on the SHSC. The SHSC comprises data about people who were supported by specialist homelessness service (SHS) agencies because they were experiencing homelessness or were at risk of homelessness.⁸⁰
- 2.88 In 2018–19, around 290,300 clients sought assistance from SHS agencies, equating to 116.2 clients per 10,000 population.⁸¹ Around 112,000 clients were homeless when their support began:
- Of these, around 53,000 were male, and just under 59,000 were female. Around 43,000 were couch surfing (staying in a house, townhouse or flat without tenure), a similar amount in short-term accommodation and around 24,000 rough sleeping.⁸²
- 2.89 However, most SHS clients who received support during 2018-19 were at risk of homelessness, rather than homeless, when their support began, and the majority of these were assisted to maintain housing.⁸³
- 2.90 SHS agencies provided around 7 million nights of accommodation in 2018-19, with a median of 29 nights per client. Other services and assistance provided by SHS agencies included advice and information, advocacy and liaison services, and material aid and brokerage.⁸⁴
- 2.91 Many other submitters gave evidence on the prevalence of homelessness in Australia and trends in the available data.
- 2.92 AHURI submitted that both the number of homeless persons and the rate of homelessness increased significantly from 2006 to 2016, following the Global Financial Crisis. It said there has been ‘strong growth’ in the numbers

⁷⁹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Submission 81*, p. 3.

⁸⁰ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Submission 39*, p. 2.

⁸¹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Submission 39*, p. 7.

⁸² Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Submission 39*, p. 2.

⁸³ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Submission 39*, pp. 5-6.

⁸⁴ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Submission 39*, p. 7; Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Submission 39*, Appendix 2.

of persons living in severely overcrowded dwellings, temporary lodgings, supported accommodation, and boarding houses, and persons rough sleeping.⁸⁵

- 2.93 AHURI explained that for most people who experience homelessness it is a ‘fleeting experience ... managed through the assistance of family and friends’. However, for others—particularly those with less family support in childhood, shorter work histories and lower education—periods of homelessness can endure for months or years. It added:

There is evidence of path dependence, with those who are housed more likely to remain housed, while those who are homeless are more likely to remain homeless. The likelihood of exit from homelessness declines over time; the longer a person remains in homelessness the less likely they are to escape. Rough sleepers are especially at risk of repeat homelessness...⁸⁶

- 2.94 AHURI also argued that the number *at risk* of homelessness is rising. It said the level of homelessness ‘understates the degree to which many housed Australians might also face stresses that can put them at risk of homelessness’.⁸⁷

- 2.95 CHIA linked the increase in homelessness to what it said was a ‘much wider housing market problem’:

Unless this is tackled, then while we may devise better ways of assisting affected individuals, the fundamental causes of rising homelessness will remain unaddressed. Not only will the flow of newly homeless households continue to grow, but many of those assisted will once again find themselves in need of help.⁸⁸

- 2.96 Similarly, the Public Interest Advocacy Centre submitted:

Australia has the second highest rate of homelessness in the OECD, following only New Zealand, despite our record of uninterrupted strong economic growth over nearly three decades. This is partially explained by the broad definition of homelessness used in Australia compared to some OECD countries, but is also the consequence of a systemic policy failure.

⁸⁵ Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, *Submission 139*, pp. 14-15.

⁸⁶ Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, *Submission 139*, pp. 16-17.

⁸⁷ Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, *Submission 139*, p. 15.

⁸⁸ Community Housing Industry Association, *Submission 89*, p. 8.

In particular, our poor record on homelessness can be explained by two factors... first, a housing system that does not function for people on lower incomes, and second, an inadequate social security safety net.⁸⁹

2.97 Anglicare Australia drew the Committee's attention to its *Rental Affordability Snapshot*, which it said 'shows how close many renters on low incomes are to homelessness'.⁹⁰

2.98 Further evidence on the drivers of homelessness is discussed in Chapter 3.

2.99 As noted above, evidence to the inquiry highlighted the fact that severe overcrowding has driven the growth in homelessness. National Shelter submitted that severe overcrowding is 'one of the most common forms of insecure housing in Australia'.⁹¹

2.100 AHURI explained in further detail:

There has been a 62 per cent increase in the number of persons in severely overcrowded dwellings as part of the ABS measurements of homelessness between 2006 and 2016. Related to this is the high number of marginally housed persons—these people are in less severely crowded dwellings or marginal housing types like improvised dwellings or caravan parks—many people who occupy these often insecure tenures are at risk of homelessness. Persons living in other crowded dwellings has increased by 88 per cent from 2006 to 2016 (ABS, 2016).⁹²

2.101 National Shelter pointed out that the category of persons living in severely crowded dwellings was the largest homeless group in each of the last four Censuses.⁹³

2.102 Based on ABS data, AHURI explained that severe overcrowding mainly occurs in detached and rental dwellings and in families and multiple family households, and that people in overcrowded dwellings are mainly Indigenous, young, tertiary students and migrants.⁹⁴

⁸⁹ Public Interest Advocacy Centre, *Submission 115*, p. 10.

⁹⁰ Anglicare Australia, *Submission 173*, p. 5.

⁹¹ National Shelter, *Submission 86*, p. 3.

⁹² Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, *Submission 139*, p. 34. See also: City Futures Research Centre, *Submission 5.1*, p. 8.

⁹³ National Shelter, *Submission 86*, p. 3.

⁹⁴ Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, *Submission 139*, pp. 34, 36.

- 2.103 Evidence to the inquiry also discussed the overrepresentation of particular groups in the broader homeless population.
- 2.104 AHURI explained that homeless persons are disproportionately male, Indigenous, young (15 to 24 years old), and unemployed or not in the labour force.⁹⁵
- 2.105 The significant overrepresentation of Indigenous people was a particular focus in evidence to the inquiry. For example, the Central Australian Aboriginal Congress submitted:
- On Census night in 2016, 1 in 28 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were homeless (an estimated total of 23,437 across Australia), about ten times the rate for non-Indigenous people.⁹⁶
- 2.106 Similarly, in a joint submission, CatholicCare NT and the University of South Australia said:
- While Indigenous Australians are 3.3% of the Australian population, they are represented disproportionately across a breadth of social indicators. At the national level 20% of people experiencing homelessness are Aboriginal. In the Northern Territory that figure is 88%.⁹⁷
- 2.107 NT Shelter described the situation in the Northern Territory as ‘particularly dire, with 12 times the national rate of homelessness and a front line homelessness service response that is severely overstretched’:
- The effect of this is a disproportionate burden on Aboriginal persons which impedes progress on closing the gap on Indigenous disadvantage.⁹⁸
- 2.108 NT Shelter said that ‘[d]ecades of neglect of Aboriginal communities has resulted in too few houses being constructed to support a growing and ageing population’.⁹⁹
- 2.109 AHURI added that Indigenous people are disproportionately exposed to risk factors such as family and domestic violence, mental illness, drug

⁹⁵ Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, *Submission 139*, p. 17.

⁹⁶ Central Australian Aboriginal Congress, *Submission 84*, p. 8.

⁹⁷ CatholicCare NT and University of South Australia, *Submission 101*, pp. 2-3.

⁹⁸ NT Shelter, *Submission 121*, p. 1.

⁹⁹ NT Shelter, *Submission 121*, p. 14.

and alcohol issues, discharge into homelessness from institutions, unemployment, overcrowding, trauma and poverty.¹⁰⁰

- 2.110 Another trend highlighted in evidence was the growth in homelessness among older women. For example, the National Older Women's Housing and Homelessness Working Group explained that between the 2011 and 2016 Censuses, there was a 31 per cent increase in homelessness among older women. However, it also said the number of older women experiencing homelessness is likely to be under-reported:

...due to the hidden nature of their homelessness; that is, staying with friends or family, house-sitting, living in their car or remaining in at-risk situations.¹⁰¹

- 2.111 AHURI advised that older women are particularly at risk of homelessness due to their lower levels of savings and disadvantaged position in the labour market.¹⁰²

- 2.112 The national alliance of women's organisations, economic Security4Women, warned that the number of older women being homeless was likely to continue to increase:

For older women this is the first time that they are experiencing this and it was never a consideration for them—that this might be them. Contributing factors include not being financially independent, having a small amount of or no savings, the ending of a relationship due to death, divorce, escaping finally [*sic*] violence. Given the growing ageing population, the shortage of affordable housing and women's financial disadvantage, the number of older women is likely to increase further.¹⁰³

- 2.113 While acknowledging the significant percentage increase in homelessness among older Australians, the Unison Housing Research Lab, advised, drawing on figures in Victoria, that the rate of homelessness has increased the most among people aged 19 to 24 years and that young people are over-represented in the homeless population, while older people are not.¹⁰⁴

- 2.114 Family and domestic violence was raised in evidence as a risk factor mainly affecting women, along with children and young people. The AIHW

¹⁰⁰ Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, *Submission 139*, p. 28.

¹⁰¹ National Older Women's Housing and Homelessness Working Group, *Submission 108*, p. 2.

¹⁰² Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, *Submission 139*, p. 28.

¹⁰³ economic Security4Women, *Submission 41*, p. 3.

¹⁰⁴ Unison Housing Research Lab, *Submission 66*, pp. 3-4.

identified people experiencing family and domestic violence as ‘one of the largest cohorts’ of SHS clients:

In 2018–19, around 40% of all SHS clients (116,000 people) had experienced family and domestic violence, up from around 92,000 in 2014–15. The majority of these clients in 2018–19 were women (66,000 aged 18 years and over) and children (42,700 clients aged under 18 years) and most (63%) were at risk of homelessness rather than homeless (37%).¹⁰⁵

2.115 Domestic Violence Victoria told the Committee:

Family violence is the most common reason that women and children become homeless.¹⁰⁶

2.116 This was corroborated by the Salvation Army, among other submitters, who advised that family and domestic violence remains the primary factor in women and their children seeking its homelessness services.¹⁰⁷

2.117 Further evidence on risk factors and the experiences of vulnerable groups is discussed in Chapter 3.

2.118 Other submitters discussed geographic trends in the homeless population. For example, the Salvation Army explained that almost half of all rough sleepers are concentrated in capital cities—particularly Sydney and Melbourne.¹⁰⁸

2.119 Link Housing, one of the largest community housing providers in metropolitan Sydney, submitted:

Capital cities account for just under two-thirds of all homelessness nationally and it is rising most in those areas with a shortage of affordable private rental housing and higher median rents. This is most acute in Sydney, Hobart and Melbourne. There is a high correlation between overcrowding in capital cities with weak labour markets and poorer areas that have a higher than average concentration of males and areas that are more culturally and linguistically diverse.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Submission 39*, p. 6. See also: Homelessness Australia, *Submission 144*, pp. 9-14.

¹⁰⁶ Domestic Violence Victoria, *Submission 60*, p. 6.

¹⁰⁷ The Salvation Army Australia, *Submission 70*, p. 21.

¹⁰⁸ The Salvation Army Australia, *Submission 70*, p. 20.

¹⁰⁹ Link Housing, *Submission 93*, p. 2.

2.120 The City of Whittlesea (in outer Melbourne) said that a 'large portion' of the homeless population in the city is 'invisible', residing in 'inadequate housing such as overcrowded environments or in temporary arrangements with others'.¹¹⁰

2.121 AHURI noted that while most people who are homeless live in cities, the rates of homelessness are highest in remote areas. However, it also said that both numbers and rates of homelessness in major cities are increasing, which is linked to overcrowding in those areas. Overall, it said homelessness was becoming more geographically spread out:

This is mainly because the population is moving away from regional and remote areas (where rates are high) towards cities, and homeless people in cities are increasingly less likely to be in inner city areas and more likely to be in outer suburbs where cheaper accommodation might be found (Parkinson et al. 2019, Wood et al. 2015).¹¹¹

2.122 A number of submitters also discussed the increase in demand on SHS agencies. For example, Homelessness NSW explained:

SHSs have experienced an unprecedented increase in demand due to the increase in homelessness in NSW and inadequate funding to meet these needs.

... NSW has now reached the point where more people who need crisis accommodation do not receive it (21,552) than those who do (18,000). And even if supported by a homelessness service, two in three clients will still be without long term accommodation or housing.¹¹²

2.123 AHURI also explained that service usage has increased, which it said reflected the growth in homelessness and the risk of homelessness:

There has been an increase in service usage from 255,700 clients during 2014-15 to 290,300 clients in 2018-19. Over this period, the rate of usage has increased from 108.9 clients per 10,000 population to 116.2 clients per 10,000 population.¹¹³

¹¹⁰ City of Whittlesea, *Submission 65*, p. 2.

¹¹¹ Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, *Submission 139*, pp. 19-21.

¹¹² Homelessness NSW, *Submission 132*, p. 8.

¹¹³ Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, *Submission 139*, p. 15.

- 2.124 The Salvation Army, one of Australia's largest SHS providers, advised that demand for its services increased 4.2 per cent in 2018-19 from the year before.¹¹⁴

Impact of COVID-19

- 2.125 Evidence on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on homelessness was discussed in the Committee's interim report, *Shelter in the storm – COVID-19 and homelessness*, which was presented to the Parliament in October 2020.¹¹⁵

- 2.126 Since that time, other reports have considered the implications of the pandemic for housing and homelessness in Australia.¹¹⁶

- 2.127 In a report published in February 2021, the CFRC wrote:

The onset of the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic followed on from a period of rising homelessness and housing stress in Australia, especially in the pressured markets of Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane. However, despite the almost instant loss of over 800,000 jobs due to the March 2020 national lockdown, no measurable rise in new homelessness at once resulted. In Q3 2020 the number of people being provided with homelessness services across Australia remained slightly below that for Q1 2020, immediately prior (in large part) to the pandemic.¹¹⁷

- 2.128 The CFRC found that emergency accommodation programs to provide housing for rough sleepers and people in shelters had reduced street homelessness to 'residual levels' in some Australian cities. However,

¹¹⁴ The Salvation Army Australia, *Submission 70*, p. 8.

¹¹⁵ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs, *Shelter in the storm – COVID-19 and homelessness: Interim report of the inquiry into homelessness in Australia*, October 2020.

¹¹⁶ For example, see: City Futures Research Centre, *COVID-19: Rental housing and homelessness impacts – an initial analysis*, ACOSS/UNSW Poverty and Inequality Partnership Report No. 7, February 2021; Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, *Policy coordination and housing outcomes during COVID-19*, AHURI Final Report No. 343, November 2020; Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, *Marginal housing during COVID-19*, AHURI Final Report No. 348, December 2020; Launch Housing, *Australian Homelessness Monitor 2020*, October 2020.

¹¹⁷ City Futures Research Centre, *COVID-19: Rental housing and homelessness impacts – an initial analysis*, ACOSS/UNSW Poverty and Inequality Partnership Report No. 7, February 2021, p. 17.

these programs had had only modest success in transitioning people into longer-term tenancies.¹¹⁸

- 2.129 In addition, the CFRC noted that with temporary income and eviction-protection measures due to be phased out, it was 'highly likely' that homelessness would rise during 2021.¹¹⁹

Data collection and reporting

- 2.130 The main sources of data about homelessness in Australia include the Census conducted by the ABS and the SHSC managed by the AIHW, along with other surveys such as the GSS and the NATSISS. Other sources include counts of rough sleepers conducted by city councils and longitudinal studies of persons who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.¹²⁰
- 2.131 Under the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA), the Australian Government and state and territory governments are jointly responsible for 'collecting and sharing data, including a commitment to provide data for the development of a nationally consistent data set and a commitment to the continuous improvement of data'.¹²¹
- 2.132 The NHHA establishes a Housing and Homelessness Data Working Group, an advisory body of government officials and expert advisors, to pursue improvements in data collection and reporting through a Housing and Homelessness Data Improvement Plan.¹²²
- 2.133 While noting that it had not been formalised, Dr Gabrielle Phillips from the AIHW outlined the possible scope of the Data Improvement Plan:
- Some of the work that we're intending to do under that with the states and territories includes... continuing to work on consistent definitions between

¹¹⁸ City Futures Research Centre, *COVID-19: Rental housing and homelessness impacts – an initial analysis*, ACOSS/UNSW Poverty and Inequality Partnership Report No. 7, February 2021, pp. 17-18

¹¹⁹ City Futures Research Centre, *COVID-19: Rental housing and homelessness impacts – an initial analysis*, ACOSS/UNSW Poverty and Inequality Partnership Report No. 7, February 2021, p. 17.

¹²⁰ Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, *Submission 139*, p. 14. See also: City of Sydney, *Submission 31*, p. 45; Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Submission 39*; Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Submission 81*; City of Melbourne Management, *Submission 169*, p. 5.

¹²¹ Commonwealth of Australia, *National Housing and Homelessness Agreement*, p. 7.

¹²² Commonwealth of Australia, *National Housing and Homelessness Agreement*, pp. 18-22. See also: *National Housing and Homelessness Agreement: Schedule E – Data Improvement Plan*, <https://www.federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/content/housing_homelessness_agreement.aspx>.

the various collections. We're looking at improving the social housing data, particularly in the growing community housing sector. ... We're really interested in working on methodologies to understand how people interact with services over time. We're also very interested in looking at how we work through what the long-term outcomes are for people, particularly for those people that seem to cycle in and out of homelessness and being at risk, and understanding better the pathways of clients between the social support options that are there.¹²³

- 2.134 In addition, as noted above in the discussion of severe overcrowding, AHURI advised that the Housing and Homelessness Data Working Group is considering ways to improve the measurement of overcrowding.¹²⁴
- 2.135 The Committee received a range of evidence on limitations of current approaches to data collection and reporting, along with some suggestions for improvements, as outlined below.

Census of Population and Housing

- 2.136 The Census is a point-in-time survey conducted every five years, from which estimates of homelessness are derived. The last Census was in August 2016 and the next Census will be in August 2021. Detailed information about the Census and how it is used to calculate estimates of persons who are homeless or marginally housed is available on the ABS website.¹²⁵
- 2.137 In its submission to the inquiry, the Australian Government outlined some limitations of using the Census approach:

One of the key challenges is the ability to fully operationalise, with a limited number of Census questions, the full range of conceptual aspects that define homelessness. Individual responses are essentially proxy measures of the adequacy of current living arrangements. Census is also likely to underestimate key populations of interest such as youth, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons, or those displaced due to domestic and family violence.¹²⁶

¹²³ Dr Gabrielle Phillips, Head, Housing and Specialised Services Group, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 7 July 2020, p. 20.

¹²⁴ Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, *Submission 139*, p. 33.

¹²⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 'Census of Population and Housing: Estimating Homelessness', <<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/housing/census-population-and-housing-estimating-homelessness/latest-release>>.

¹²⁶ Department of Social Services (multi-agency submission), *Submission 57*, p. 27.

- 2.138 It also said that ‘emergent living arrangements’ may be difficult for the Census approach to detect, giving the example of residences which appear to be separate dwellings but are in fact boarding houses with shared facilities.¹²⁷
- 2.139 Numerous other submissions to the inquiry raised concerns about the undercounting of particular categories of homeless persons in the Census.
- 2.140 AHURI suggested that the Census may undercount the extent of overcrowding by excluding visitors. Further, it said:
- There is a need for better collection and management of data on the direction, volume and duration of Indigenous population movement, and of the motives and demographic composition of the individuals involved. In addition, there is a need to better capture temporary movement in homelessness measures in the Census.¹²⁸
- 2.141 The CFRC, citing Professor Chris Chamberlain from RMIT University, said:
- ... the ABS did not collect sufficient information in the 2016 census to enumerate people living in physically inadequate dwellings, nor to identify renters lacking security of tenure, nor those experiencing domestic violence.¹²⁹
- 2.142 In a submission to the Victorian parliamentary inquiry into homelessness, Professor Chamberlain and Professor Guy Johnson, also from RMIT, argued that the Census undercounts three categories: persons staying with other households; rough sleepers; and persons living in boarding houses. They estimated that in Victoria the undercount was at least 8,400 people.¹³⁰
- 2.143 In relation to rough sleepers, Professors Chamberlain and Johnson raised concerns with the ABS’s reliance on service providers to identify ‘hot spots’ and the use of street counts. They said it was ‘obvious’ that the Census leads to an underestimate, and suggested that in Victoria the number of rough sleepers could ‘easily have been double the figure identified’.¹³¹

¹²⁷ Department of Social Services (multi-agency submission), *Submission 57*, p. 27.

¹²⁸ Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, *Submission 139*, p. 11.

¹²⁹ City Futures Research Centre, *Submission 5.1*, p. 11.

¹³⁰ Professor Chris Chamberlain and Professor Guy Johnson, *Submission 178 to Victorian Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria*, pp. 5-10.

¹³¹ Professor Chris Chamberlain and Professor Guy Johnson, *Submission 178 to Victorian Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria*, pp. 7-9.

2.144 The CFRC suggested it was a 'practical reality that a street count methodology can never fully enumerate' rough sleepers. Further, it said:

... it is a critically important fact that the cohort sleeping rough on any given night is not a fixed group of people. Rather, it is a shifting population that usually includes a proportion of long-term chronic rough sleepers, alongside others lacking settled housing and therefore liable to cycle in and out of actual rooflessness. Point-in-time enumeration therefore understates the numbers experiencing this form of extreme deprivation over any time period.¹³²

2.145 Dr Simon Quilty, a specialist physician with experience working in remote areas of the Northern Territory, said there are 'clear holes' in the ABS's collection of data in towns such as Katherine:

... for instance in the last census, a critical staff member was ill and did not collect data on homeless people living rough in Katherine.¹³³

2.146 Yfoundations, the NSW peak body representing young people at risk of and experiencing homelessness, said that while obtaining accurate data is crucial, currently there are 'many limitations to the accuracy of homelessness data'. It expressed concern about the enumeration of couch surfers:

Unfortunately they may not be counted as homeless due to the confusion over the 'usual address' question in the Census. One way around this would be to add an option, which asks, "What is the relationship of this person to Person 1?" Adding the responses "Person staying temporarily due to housing crisis/instability". This would allow for a clearer picture of those potentially couch surfing.¹³⁴

2.147 Yfoundations also made a suggestion to improve the measurement of overcrowding:

Currently, only 6 people per household can complete the paper version of the Census form, and up to 10 people can complete the online form. To capture overcrowding data there should be no limit on the online form, so to better capture overcrowded accommodation.¹³⁵

2.148 The Youth Affairs Council of South Australia argued that the number of young people experiencing homelessness was higher than as reported in the

¹³² City Futures Research Centre, *Submission 5.1*, pp. 5-6.

¹³³ Dr Simon Quilty, *Submission 1*, p. 5.

¹³⁴ Yfoundations, *Submission 151*, p. 23.

¹³⁵ Yfoundations, *Submission 151*, p. 23.

Census, highlighting the ‘vast numbers of “invisible homelessness” not counted in the official statistics’.¹³⁶

- 2.149 The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing Authority submitted that many Indigenous people do not participate in the Census and are therefore not counted:

Whilst the participation rate has increased during recent Census periods due to additional resources provided by government for the process, the ‘gaps’ and levels of disadvantage would still be much greater than reported. There are several reasons for this including the fear and mistrust of government agencies and historical government policies that have impacted on their health and well-being and sustainability of culture, family and kinships.¹³⁷

- 2.150 Similarly, Dr Quilty said that Indigenous people will ‘run and hide’ from government officials, and suggested that the extremely high incidence of homelessness in the Katherine region was ‘almost certainly’ an underestimate.¹³⁸

- 2.151 TCAC gave evidence that its own population study had resulted in a significantly higher estimate of the population in the Alice Springs town camps than the ABS’s estimate. It suggested that the ‘use of local Aboriginal people to conduct this research meant that residents were prepared to share information’:

It is recognised by TCAC that the model of remote public housing and rent collection influences the preparedness for people to report additional household members to government agencies.¹³⁹

- 2.152 TCAC said it and the ABS were ‘planning to collaborate on strategies for the improvement of data collection’.¹⁴⁰ In a supplementary submission, it recommended that the Australian and the Northern Territory Governments work to strengthen population estimates in collaboration with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations and consider the impact of mobility on populations.¹⁴¹

¹³⁶ Youth Affairs Council of South Australia, *Submission 36*, p. 2.

¹³⁷ National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing Authority, *Submission 162*, p. 7.

¹³⁸ Dr Simon Quilty, *Submission 1*, p. 1.

¹³⁹ Tangentyere Council Aboriginal Corporation, *Submission 165*, p. 5.

¹⁴⁰ Tangentyere Council Aboriginal Corporation, *Submission 165*, p. 5.

¹⁴¹ Tangentyere Council Aboriginal Corporation, *Submission 165.1*, p. 20.

2.153 Compass Housing Services, a community housing provider, argued that, in contrast to the Census which is household-based, '[t]he nature of homelessness is to be partly invisible and is not usually household based'. It went on:

In reality, the true figure of homelessness cannot be attained, and all methods will result in a degree of under-estimation.¹⁴²

2.154 The Queensland Nurses and Midwives' Union raised concerns about undercounting of women who are escaping family and domestic violence, Indigenous people living in overcrowded households, rough sleepers, and youth homeless. It recommended a review of how the Census can best capture homelessness.¹⁴³

2.155 In its submission to the inquiry, the ABS listed 'key enhancements' planned for the next Census:

- To increase the use of administrative data from state and territory governments to better identify people in supported accommodation, boarding houses, and those brokered to stay in hotels and motels.
- To differentiate the tenure of supported accommodation, i.e., whether short-term (crisis) or medium/longer term.
- To improve the Census forms by adding more instructions to guide homeless couch surfers and those in overcrowded dwellings on how to participate and how to answer the 'usual address' question.
- To consider the inclusion of "Australian Defence Force service status" and "Usual address one year ago" questions on the shorter Census form used for counting rough sleepers (dependent on the outcome of interviewer testing). Family homelessness will also be new information collected from the shorter Census form.
- To engage earlier with the homelessness sector to promote early Census awareness and support, especially for recruitment of sector staff to assist with the homelessness enumeration.¹⁴⁴

Specialist Homelessness Services Collection

2.156 The SHSC is a collection of data about people who were supported by SHS agencies because they were experiencing homelessness or were at risk

¹⁴² Compass Housing Services, *Submission 32*, p. 10.

¹⁴³ Queensland Nurses and Midwives' Union, *Submission 82*, p. 7.

¹⁴⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Submission 81*, p. 4.

of homelessness. The AIHW collects data directly from SHS agencies and produces ‘a range of nationally consistent data products’ which are shared with SHS agencies and governments providing funding and support to these agencies. An overview of the SHSC is included in the AIHW’s submission to this inquiry.¹⁴⁵

- 2.157 The AIHW explained that the ‘person-centred natured’ of the SHSC means that it facilitates longitudinal analysis of SHS clients:

Clients of SHS may receive multiple support periods in a single financial year, or may receive more than one support period over a number of years. Analysing SHS client data over a longer time period provides much richer insights into patterns of service use among SHS clients.¹⁴⁶

- 2.158 As an example, the AIHW noted its *Older clients of specialist homelessness services* report, which analysed data about 86,000 clients aged 55 or older who received SHS services in the period from 2013-14 to 2017-18.¹⁴⁷

- 2.159 The AIHW advised that it is ‘planning for more regular reporting of the longitudinal data to improve the information available for policy development and service delivery design’.¹⁴⁸

- 2.160 Compass Housing Services described SHS client data as providing a ‘relatively robust method of updating census material’.¹⁴⁹

- 2.161 The Unison Housing Research Lab said that while SHS data is often used as a proxy measure of the prevalence of homelessness and its characteristics, ‘there are several compelling reasons to treat claims relying on SHS data with some caution’ (emphasis in original):

First, most of the people who access homelessness services are housed when they first present – indeed in Victoria nearly two thirds (62%) are. Second, SHS data captures only those that use homelessness services and many homeless people, possibly nearly half, do not (ABS, 2014). Third, homelessness agencies collect information on the main reasons people seek assistance and this

¹⁴⁵ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Submission 39*, pp. 9-11. See also: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, ‘Specialist Homelessness Services Collection (SHSC)’, <<https://www.aihw.gov.au/about-our-data/our-data-collections/specialist-homelessness-services-collection>>.

¹⁴⁶ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Submission 39*, p. 11.

¹⁴⁷ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Submission 39*, p. 11.

¹⁴⁸ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Submission 39*, p. 11.

¹⁴⁹ Compass Housing Services, *Submission 32*, p. 10.

information has been erroneously used to explain the causes of homelessness (FaHCSIA 2008). Cause **cannot** be inferred from SHS data because presenting reasons often mask underlying problems. Finally, while the number of people accessing homelessness services has consistently increased over the last 10 years, the increase is very strongly correlated with funding increases.¹⁵⁰

- 2.162 Similarly, the CFRC cautioned in the use of administrative data to ‘measure the scale and changing quantum of housing need’:

For example, an awareness that the capacity of advice and assistance services is increasingly stretched will likely discourage people with housing problems from seeking such help.¹⁵¹

- 2.163 It cited an estimate that administrative data may omit around 60 per cent of homeless people who do not seek help. Nevertheless, it said that this data could provide information about the circumstances that prompted requests for assistance, which could in turn inform policy responses.¹⁵²

- 2.164 In its submission the AIHW noted some limitations of the SHSC, including that it ‘does not include the needs of the estimated 253 requests for support per day throughout 2018–19 who could not be offered assistance for a range of reasons’. In addition, the AIHW said:

... there is limited data on the capacity of the SHS sector, for example, the number of short-term accommodation places or the staff capacity delivering support services. There is no regular national SHS workforce data collection nor information about availability measures. SHSC data are also limited to those people who receive support as an SHS funded client – there are [a] range of additional support services provided by the non-government sector that are provided beyond the SHS funded services.¹⁵³

- 2.165 The Northern Territory Government submitted that ‘the unassisted persons portion of the [SHSC] has the potential to provide key outcome data on the level of unmet need, including what types of required services cannot be provided’. However, it said it had received feedback from SHS providers that there was complexity and a lack of clarity in the reporting process.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁰ Unison Housing Research Lab, *Submission 66*, p. 4.

¹⁵¹ City Futures Research Centre, *Submission 5.1*, p. 6.

¹⁵² City Futures Research Centre, *Submission 5.1*, p. 6.

¹⁵³ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Submission 39*, p. 7.

¹⁵⁴ Northern Territory Government, *Submission 62*, p. 21.

2.166 The ACT Government also suggested that understanding the extent of unmet need was one of the challenges for the SHSC. It said that the evidence base for understanding demand for assistance had improved with the introduction of intake and referral services:

... it is these intake and referral services that offer the best hope for understanding service need and unmet need. A national evaluation of their contribution to ... improved evidence regarding homelessness and to outcomes for people who seek homelessness assistance would be highly valuable to inform future policy setting[s] for this sector.¹⁵⁵

2.167 The ACT Government also highlighted the issue of casual clients, who do not establish an ongoing support relationship with the homelessness agency and generally receive assistance for less than one hour on a given day. It said that while the collection of data about these clients ceased with the introduction of the SHSC in 2011:

... in responding to COVID19, casual client contacts have become an important source of information on emerging need for assistance.¹⁵⁶

2.168 It noted that a national casual client data collection for homelessness is not included under the NHHA, which reflects 'the concerns of a pre-COVID19 environment'.¹⁵⁷

2.169 Pride Foundation Australia submitted that the SHSC does not contain fields to record information about a client's LGBTIQI status:

This lack of appropriate data collection on LGBTIQ people accessing homelessness services has been repeatedly identified as a challenge in effectively addressing this issue, understanding prevalence and trends (especially among highly vulnerable subgroups and intersectional experiences), and providing inclusive services that are sufficiently targeted to identify and meet specific needs (McNair, Andrews et al. 2017, Andrews and McNair 2020).¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁵ ACT Government, *Submission 150*, pp. 14-15.

¹⁵⁶ ACT Government, *Submission 150*, pp. 15-16.

¹⁵⁷ ACT Government, *Submission 150*, p. 16.

¹⁵⁸ Pride Foundation Australia, *Submission 53*, p. 12.

- 2.170 It said that data collection that includes sexual orientation, gender identity, and intersex variations should be mandatory and linked with service funding agreements.¹⁵⁹
- 2.171 Bolton Clarke Homeless Persons Program highlighted the importance of holistic assessments of needs and the recognition of underlying disabilities and chronic health issues. It noted that acquired brain injury is not recognised in the SHSC.¹⁶⁰
- 2.172 The Salvation Army identified a number of areas for improvement with respect to the SHSC, including:
- easier access for SHS agencies to obtain client data (individual and aggregate) at the centre, state and national levels;
 - standardised use of reporting variables in reports and publications to avoid confusion;
 - changes to ensure that data collection is cohesive and more concise, and also more consistent over time; and
 - presentation of data or client counts to be based on one adult/head person in the household to better understand representation of certain demographic groups.¹⁶¹
- 2.173 The Mornington Peninsula Shire Council said that while data collection and publication is improving, there is 'room for substantial improvement to further assist local government planning' for housing and homelessness services. It called on the AIHW to publish more data, including SHSC data, at the local government level.¹⁶²
- 2.174 The CFRC stressed the importance of the SHSC for informing efforts to prevent homelessness from occurring:
- Given its fundamental role as a simple enumeration device, the census cannot help us here. Since the key challenge is to stem the flow of newly homeless people, the cohort on which to concentrate is not so much those homeless at a point in time, but those who are newly experiencing the problem. Therefore, the most important data source here is not the census, but the AIHW system

¹⁵⁹ Pride Foundation Australia, *Submission 53*, p. 12.

¹⁶⁰ Bolton Clarke Homeless Persons Program, *Submission 17*, pp. 11-12.

¹⁶¹ The Salvation Army Australia, *Submission 70*, pp. 18-19.

¹⁶² Mornington Peninsula Shire Council, *Submission 54*, pp. 10-11.

that records requests for assistance logged by homelessness service providers.¹⁶³

2.175 In this context, it suggested three improvements:

- enhancing the classification of clients' reasons for seeking assistance—particularly in relation to the 'apparently somewhat rubbery category of "housing crisis"';
- unique identification of clients to reduce double counting; and
- addition of a geographic indicator enabling spatial analysis of demand for services.¹⁶⁴

2.176 A coalition of organisations including Upstream Australia made a number of recommendations to improve data collected for SHS clients to 'more explicitly inform outcomes and outcomes improvement'.¹⁶⁵

Other homelessness and housing-related data

2.177 The Committee received other suggestions for improvements to the collection and reporting of homelessness data, as well as broader housing-related data.

2.178 Compass Housing Services suggested there may be a need for a review of current arrangements with respect to homelessness data, and proposed the establishment of an independent body with responsibility for developing and administering effective data protocols.¹⁶⁶

2.179 The Council of Single Mothers and their Children highlighted a lack of data linking homelessness with health and morbidity, and also called for research on the energy efficiency and climate suitability of affordable rental stock.¹⁶⁷

2.180 To support the development of a gendered homeless and housing policy, economic Security4Women recommended that collection of mainstream homelessness and housing data be disaggregated by sex.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶³ City Futures Research Centre, *Submission 5.1*, p. 12.

¹⁶⁴ City Futures Research Centre, *Submission 5.1*, p. 12. Spatial analysis would examine the geographic distribution of demand for services, and how that may change over time—for example, the locations or regions where demand may have risen, fallen, become more concentrated or more dispersed.

¹⁶⁵ Upstream Australia and 17 other organisations, *Submission 196*, p. 21.

¹⁶⁶ Compass Housing Services, *Submission 32*, p. 10.

¹⁶⁷ Council of Single Mothers and their Children, *Submission 72*, p. 17.

2.181 VACCA highlighted a lack of Indigenous sovereignty over data in the housing and homelessness sector. It said:

Self-determination underpins data sovereignty where Aboriginal people have a fundamental right to the collection, intellectual property and application of data regarding them.¹⁶⁹

2.182 Mission Australia suggested that some state and territory collected information is not consistent across the country. It also noted limited availability of information about people on waiting lists for social housing and people exiting from public housing.¹⁷⁰

2.183 Specifically in relation to housing data, the ABS and AIHW advised that they collate a range of information about housing utilisation, housing affordability, social housing, and home purchase and rent assistance programs.¹⁷¹

2.184 The AIHW identified ‘a number of long standing issues’ affecting the quality of community housing and Indigenous community housing data collections, which it said ‘make it difficult to understand the profile and comparative performance of the community housing sector’. The AIHW suggested improvements to:

- the alignment of terminology, concepts, definitions and counting rules across community housing reporting requirements;
- the efficiency of collection, collation and reporting of community housing data; and
- data sharing arrangements and coordination across reporting systems.¹⁷²

2.185 CHIA argued there is ‘considerable scope’ for improvements in housing data. It said there is an absence of data on housing needs across Australia and suggested that Australia should work towards a publication similar to the annual UK Housing Review. It also said the COVID-19 pandemic had highlighted the limited availability of data on tenant evictions.¹⁷³

¹⁶⁸ economic Security4Women, *Submission 41*, p. 3.

¹⁶⁹ Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency, *Submission 126*, p. 13.

¹⁷⁰ Mission Australia, *Submission 147*, pp. 41-42.

¹⁷¹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Submission 39*, cover letter; Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Submission 81*, pp. 5-8.

¹⁷² Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Submission 39*, p. 12.

¹⁷³ Community Housing Industry Association, *Submission 89*, p. 20.

2.186 The CFRC also highlighted the need for better data on tenant evictions:

The basis for such statistics would be the case records held by the tenancy tribunals that govern tenancy repossession cases across Australia.¹⁷⁴

2.187 It said that state and territory governments should ensure these statistics are published routinely and, ideally, in accordance with a common framework administered by the AIHW.¹⁷⁵

2.188 A number of submissions addressed the issue of data linkage. The AIHW explained that data linkage can be ‘used to explore service use patterns and pathways, both targeted and broader outcomes for priority populations, and broader social impact and investment prioritisation’, and provided some examples of linked data in its submission.¹⁷⁶

2.189 While noting the establishment of enduring national data sets in other sectors, the AIHW advised that there is currently no linked longitudinal data set in the housing and homelessness sector:

Given the intersections between housing and health, the asset could include the data domains including income support payments, health and homelessness services use and social housing. Such an asset would provide valuable insights into the intersection between health and homelessness, and the pathways through housing-related support services.¹⁷⁷

2.190 The Department of Paediatrics at the University of Melbourne also identified an opportunity to link national administrative health and homelessness data. That such data has not been linked and analysed, it said, hindered ‘system-wide capacity to develop evidenced-based approaches to prevent homelessness and its profound effects’.¹⁷⁸

2.191 To support a response to youth homelessness, including investment in early intervention and rapid rehousing, Upstream Australia recommended among other measures a research and development project that would link:

... school data, data on risk of homelessness, SHS homelessness data, social housing data and data on the private rental market to map the geographical

¹⁷⁴ City Futures Research Centre, *Submission 5.1*, p. 9.

¹⁷⁵ City Futures Research Centre, *Submission 5.1*, p. 9.

¹⁷⁶ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Submission 39*, p. 13.

¹⁷⁷ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Submission 39*, p. 13.

¹⁷⁸ Melbourne Medical School, Department of Paediatrics, The University of Melbourne, *Submission 156*, pp. 2-3.

patterns that would inform a place-based reorientation of youth policy and programs, especially youth homelessness.¹⁷⁹

2.192 The City of Hobart submitted:

Better access to and sharing of information, data and statistics would be beneficial at the local government level, to allow greater intervention and informed policy to help alleviate housing stress in local communities.¹⁸⁰

2.193 Prevention and early intervention are discussed in further detail in Chapter 4.

Governance and funding

2.194 This section gives an overview of the roles and responsibilities of the three levels of government in relation to homelessness, as well as the role of social housing and the specialist homelessness services sector. The section then reviews evidence on the NHHA and other funding and governance arrangements, and concludes with a consideration of other relevant Australian Government initiatives.

Overview of government responsibilities

2.195 State and territory governments have primary responsibility for the provision of housing and homelessness services. This includes providing public housing and increasing levels of community housing in their jurisdictions.¹⁸¹

2.196 However, a strong theme in evidence to the inquiry was that responsibility for policies that impact upon housing (and therefore homelessness) is in reality spread across all three levels of government. This was explained in a submission from the Northern Territory Government:

In a broad sense, the Australian Government has leverage over the demand side and how affordable the housing market is as they control policy levers related to programs, subsidies and incentives for investors, renters and prospective home owners... These levers also include determining the extent to which welfare payments are adjusted to reflect changes in the cost of living (including housing affordability) ... States, territories and local governments

¹⁷⁹ Upstream Australia and 17 other organisations, *Submission 196*, p. 18.

¹⁸⁰ City of Hobart, *Submission 44*, p. 19.

¹⁸¹ Department of Social Services (multi-agency submission), *Submission 57*, p. 6.

have levers related to the supply of housing, including land release, planning policy and social and affordable housing provision.¹⁸²

2.197 An overview of the housing policy levers controlled by the different levels of government, based on a brief published on AHURI's website¹⁸³, is provided in Table 2.2.

Table 2.2 Housing policy responsibilities of the three levels of government

Australian Government	State and territory governments	Local government
Housing demand (including tax incentives and migration policy).	Funding public housing and transferring housing to community housing providers.	Zoning laws.
Home ownership.	Home ownership.	Minor infrastructure.
Social housing investment.	Major infrastructure funding.	Rates.
Welfare support.	Land release.	
Major infrastructure funding.	Taxes and duties.	

Source: Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute

National Housing and Homelessness Agreement

2.198 Recognising its shared responsibility in the area of housing and homelessness, the Australian Government supports states and territories to improve housing and homelessness outcomes, primarily through the NHHA, an inter-governmental agreement which commenced on 1 July 2018.¹⁸⁴

2.199 Other roles for the Australian Government include encouraging investment in social housing provided by community housing providers through the

¹⁸² Northern Territory Government, *Submission 62*, p. 23.

¹⁸³ Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, 'Understanding the housing policy levers of Commonwealth, state and territory, and local government', <<https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/ahuri-briefs/understanding-the-housing-policy-levers-of-commonwealth,-state-and-territory,-and-local-government>>.

¹⁸⁴ Department of Social Services (multi-agency submission), *Submission 57*, p. 6.

National Housing Finance and Investment Corporation (NHFIC), the provision of Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA), and support for Indigenous housing. These are discussed later in this chapter.

2.200 The NHHA acknowledges that the Australian Government and state and territory governments:

... have a mutual interest in improving housing outcomes across the housing spectrum, including outcomes for Australians who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, and need to work together to achieve those outcomes.¹⁸⁵

2.201 The NHHA also acknowledges broader factors outside the scope of the Agreement that impact on the housing market:

... including Commonwealth and State tax settings, financial sector regulation, immigration, income support and rental subsidies.¹⁸⁶

2.202 Roles and responsibilities of the Australian Government and state and territory governments as set out in the NHHA are listed in Table 2.3.

Table 2.3 Roles and responsibilities set out in the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement

Australian Government	State and territory governments	Shared responsibilities
NHHA provides funding to states and monitors performance.	Publishing and implementing a homelessness strategy to address priority cohorts.	Housing, homelessness and housing affordability policy.
Income support and Commonwealth Rent Assistance for low-income people.	Funding homelessness services to support local needs.	Identifying and sharing best practices and policy for housing, homelessness and housing affordability.
Providing Government own-purpose housing and homelessness related programs and services.	Collecting data from homelessness service providers. Providing an annual expenditure breakdown,	Collecting and sharing data. Setting joint priorities for evaluation and research.

¹⁸⁵ Commonwealth of Australia, *National Housing and Homelessness Agreement*, p. 2.

¹⁸⁶ Commonwealth of Australia, *National Housing and Homelessness Agreement*, p. 2.

Publishing data.	disaggregated by priority homelessness cohorts. Social housing and homelessness services, administration and delivery to support local needs.
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Source: Department of Social Services (multi-agency submission), Submission 57, p. 7.

- 2.203 Under the NHHA, the Australian Government provides an ongoing contribution of approximately \$1.6 billion per year to state and territory governments, including around \$125 million to be set aside for homelessness services, which is required to be matched by states and territories. The balance of the Australian Government contribution (referred to in the Agreement as ‘general funding’) can be allocated to either housing or homelessness services.¹⁸⁷ Evidence on funding arrangements is discussed later in this chapter.
- 2.204 The Australian Government submitted that the NHHA improves transparency and accountability, as state and territory governments are required to have publicly available housing strategies, have homelessness strategies that address priority cohorts, and (as noted earlier in this chapter) contribute to improved data collection and reporting to improve comparability.¹⁸⁸
- 2.205 The national priority homelessness cohorts identified under the NHHA (which the Australian Government noted are not mutually exclusive) are:
- women and children affected by family and domestic violence;
 - children and young people;
 - Indigenous Australians;
 - people experiencing repeat homelessness;
 - people exiting institutions and care into homelessness; and
 - older people.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁷ Department of Social Services (multi-agency submission), *Submission 57*, p. 6; Commonwealth of Australia, *National Housing and Homelessness Agreement*, pp. 10-12.

¹⁸⁸ Department of Social Services (multi-agency submission), *Submission 57*, p. 6.

¹⁸⁹ Department of Social Services (multi-agency submission), *Submission 57*, p. 7.

- 2.206 The NHHA also provides that state and territory governments may identify other priority homelessness cohorts.¹⁹⁰
- 2.207 Evidence about vulnerable groups, including those groups identified under the NHHA, is discussed in detail in Chapter 3.
- 2.208 The NHHA also sets out three homelessness priority policy reform areas, which ‘should be incorporated into [state and territory] homelessness strategies’ where appropriate to each state and territory’s needs:
- a. Achieving better outcomes for people, setting out how the desired outcomes for individuals will be measured (may include a focus on priority groups, economic and social participation);
 - b. Early intervention and prevention, including through mainstream services, setting out actions being taken through homelessness services and mainstream services (may include a focus on particular client groups or services); and
 - c. Commitment to service program and design, that is evidence and research-based, that shows what evidence and research was used to design responses to homelessness and how responses/strategies will be evaluated.¹⁹¹
- 2.209 The Committee received submissions from most state and territory governments outlining those governments’ initiatives in relation to housing and homelessness.¹⁹²

Monitoring and evaluation

- 2.210 The NHHA requires that state and territory governments provide assurances each year to the Australian Government that they have met requirements under the Agreement in relation to outputs and matched funding.¹⁹³

¹⁹⁰ Department of Social Services (multi-agency submission), *Submission 57*, p. 7.

¹⁹¹ Department of Social Services (multi-agency submission), *Submission 57*, p. 7; Commonwealth of Australia, *National Housing and Homelessness Agreement*, p. 17.

¹⁹² Northern Territory Government, *Submission 62*; ACT Government, *Submission 150*; Government of Western Australia, *Submission 178*; Tasmanian Government, *Submission 179*; Queensland Government, *Submission 197*; Victorian Government, *Submission 200*.

¹⁹³ Commonwealth of Australia, *National Housing and Homelessness Agreement*, p. 9 (sections 36-39). The annual assurances provided by each state and territory are published online: see https://www.federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/content/housing_homelessness_agreement.aspx.

- 2.211 States and territories are also required to report on the reforms and initiatives agreed with the Australian Government under the NHHA, and the Australian Government is required to provide an independent public report on the outcomes that the Agreement contributes to.¹⁹⁴
- 2.212 While the Committee received some evidence on the evaluation of individual homelessness programs¹⁹⁵, limited evidence was received on more general or systematic approaches to monitoring and evaluation.
- 2.213 In relation to governments' collection of data on specialist homelessness services, the City of Sydney argued that SHS data 'does not adequately measure outcomes':
- Given many specialist homelessness services are funded based on how many people they service, data tends to focus on instances of interactions with specialist homelessness services, rather than the long term outcomes for individuals.¹⁹⁶
- 2.214 Similarly, Upstream Australia submitted that SHS client data is 'fragmented, about contract accountability, more outputs than outcomes focused, and not about practice and improved outcomes'.¹⁹⁷
- 2.215 In the context of calling for longer-term funding cycles, Compass Housing Services said these needed to be accompanied by 'effective monitoring and evaluation, preferably designed to fully measure outcomes rather than outputs'.¹⁹⁸
- 2.216 The Council of Single Mothers and their Children proposed a national monitoring commission to promote instances of best practice and provide resources and training. It also called for a better system for reviewing and reporting on the services available in each jurisdiction.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁴ Commonwealth of Australia, *National Housing and Homelessness Agreement*, p. 10.

¹⁹⁵ For example, see: Ruah Community Services & St Bart's, *Submission 13*, pp. 10-13; Compass Housing Services, *Submission 32*, p. 8; Mission Australia, *Submission 137*, pp. 17-18; Shelter WA and WA Alliance to End Homelessness, *Submission 145*, pp. 25-26.

¹⁹⁶ City of Sydney, *Submission 31*, pp. 45-46.

¹⁹⁷ Upstream Australia and 17 other organisations, *Submission 196*, p. 21.

¹⁹⁸ Compass Housing Services, *Submission 32*, p. 11.

¹⁹⁹ Council of Single Mothers and their Children, *Submission 72*, p. 13.

- 2.217 VACCA emphasised the importance of Indigenous-led evaluation and monitoring of any indicators or targets relating to Indigenous Australians.²⁰⁰
- 2.218 While not confined specifically to housing and homelessness, in its submission to the 2020-21 Federal Budget which was provided to the Committee, the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) recommended the establishment of an independent body to oversee the evaluation and monitoring of policies, programs and initiatives.²⁰¹

Role of local government

- 2.219 While not party to the Agreement, local governments' role is recognised in the NHHA—in particular, in relation to building approval processes, local planning and development approval processes, and rates and charges that influence housing affordability.²⁰²
- 2.220 The Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) explained that councils undertake a diverse range of activities to support people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, including identifying excess land suitable for social housing; developing partnerships with community housing providers; and advocating for and co-ordinating with local community service providers.²⁰³
- 2.221 The Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) submitted that local government is 'increasingly turning its attention to the issue of homelessness':

A growing number of councils have invested significant resourcing into addressing homelessness in direct and indirect ways. Service responses range from direct funding to local homelessness providers, providing land on which to develop housing, data collection to understand the scale of the issue and strategic advocacy campaigns all the way through to enforcement and compliance-based interventions.²⁰⁴

- 2.222 The Committee received submissions from city councils across Australia further highlighting the role of local government in responding to

²⁰⁰ Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency, *Submission 126*, pp. 13, 16, 33.

²⁰¹ Australian Council of Social Service, *Submission 105: Attachment 3*, p. 32.

²⁰² Commonwealth of Australia, *National Housing and Homelessness Agreement*, p. 8.

²⁰³ Australian Local Government Association, *Submission 67*, p. 2. See also: Shelter WA and WA Alliance to End Homelessness, *Submission 145*, pp. 28-29.

²⁰⁴ Municipal Association of Victoria, *Submission 159*, p. 16.

homelessness, in areas including coordination, data collection and reporting, and assisting rough sleepers.²⁰⁵

- 2.223 For example, the City of Sydney submitted that while housing and homelessness ‘have not been a traditional domain of local government’, in responding to community expectations it was ‘taking direct action in areas under our own control’:

... such as responding to the effects of homelessness on public spaces, working with a wide range of partners to demonstrate innovative solutions and advocating for action from other levels of government.²⁰⁶

- 2.224 However, ALGA lamented that there is ‘no longer a national dialogue between the three levels of government on housing’. It said that the NHHA and associated bilateral agreements were determined by the Australian Government and state and territory governments ‘without direct engagement of local government’.²⁰⁷

- 2.225 Similarly, MAV argued that the ‘patchwork of interventions’ being delivered by local government ‘comes at a significant, often unbudgeted cost’. It called for ‘a more timely and coordinated approach across all levels of government’.²⁰⁸

Social housing and specialist homelessness services

- 2.226 The main services to assist people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness are:

- social housing, comprising public housing and community housing; and
- specialist homelessness services.

- 2.227 As noted above, the provision of social housing and specialist homelessness services is primarily the responsibility of state and territory governments. Other relevant services include private rental assistance programs and

²⁰⁵ City of Darwin, *Submission 18*; City of Sydney, *Submission 31*; City of Hobart, *Submission 44*; Mornington Peninsula Shire Council, *Submission 54*; City of Whittlesea, *Submission 65*; City of Adelaide, *Submission 79*; Council of Capital City Lord Mayors, *Submission 83*; City of Boroondara, *Submission 146*; Municipal Association of Victoria, *Submission 159*; City of Port Phillip, *Submission 167*; City of Melbourne Management, *Submission 169*.

²⁰⁶ City of Sydney, *Submission 31*, p. 7.

²⁰⁷ Australian Local Government Association, *Submission 67*, p. 3.

²⁰⁸ Municipal Association of Victoria, *Submission 159*, p. 18.

private rental brokerage services, which are also generally provided by state and territory governments.²⁰⁹

Social housing

2.228 ‘Social housing’ is an umbrella term used to refer to long-term rental accommodation where rents are subsidised (and sometimes set to be a proportion of household income). The two main forms of social housing are:

- **public housing:** housing provided and managed by state and territory governments, which can include dwellings owned by government or leased from the private sector, and generally accessed by people on low incomes and/or those with special needs; and
- **community housing:** housing managed by community-based organisations (known as community housing providers, or CHPs), which may include dwellings leased from government, and generally provided to low-to-moderate income and/or special needs households.²¹⁰

2.229 Social housing also includes state owned and managed Indigenous housing and Indigenous community housing.²¹¹

2.230 CHPs’ rent setting and allocation policies are determined with regard to the policies of state and territory housing authorities.²¹²

2.231 CHPs typically receive some form of government assistance, such as direct funding for the provision of land and property, but may be entirely self-funded. CHPs can also access a range of tax concessions and benefits which may lower their operating, construction and development costs.

2.232 One additional difference between public and community housing is that tenants in community housing are eligible to apply for Commonwealth Rent Assistance, which in most jurisdictions can be included in calculations of tenants’ rents, thereby increasing the rental revenue of CHPs.²¹³

2.233 The Victorian Public Tenants’ Association explained that there are significant differences between public and community housing for tenants:

²⁰⁹ Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, *Submission 139*, pp. 41-42.

²¹⁰ Productivity Commission, *Report on Government Services 2021 – Part G: Housing and Homelessness*. See also: Victorian Public Tenants’ Association, *Submission 21*, pp. 2-3.

²¹¹ Productivity Commission, *Report on Government Services 2021 – Part G: Housing and Homelessness*.

²¹² For example, see: Victorian Public Tenants’ Association, *Submission 21*, pp. 13-15.

²¹³ Community Housing Peaks Policy Network, *The vital subsidy: The importance of Commonwealth Rent Assistance to community housing providers*, May 2014.

... which directly impact on the day to day lives of residents, including the amount of rent that can be charged in each form of tenure, how complaints are dealt with, who is housed and the level of rights and protections for residents.²¹⁴

2.234 AHURI explained that social housing is ‘a key source of affordable and secure housing that can benefit people who are homeless or at risk’. However, while the total number of social housing dwellings has grown over the last decade, there has been a significant shift from public housing to community housing, and the overall number of dwellings has not kept pace with population growth and demand.²¹⁵

2.235 On this point, Per Capita submitted:

As both state and federal governments have withdrawn from their responsibility to fund public housing, the sector has shifted away from the post-war ‘safety net model’ wherein the government provided affordable housing to an ‘ambulance service model’ focused on providing emergency housing in response to the homelessness crisis.²¹⁶

2.236 Further evidence in relation to social housing is discussed in Chapter 4.

Specialist homelessness services

2.237 Specialist homelessness services are non-government organisations that deliver services—funded partly or fully by government—to support people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. This includes agencies specialising in delivering services to specific target groups (such as young people or people experiencing family and domestic violence).²¹⁷

2.238 As noted earlier in this chapter, the AIHW collects detailed data on the diverse range of services provided by SHSs agencies through the SHSC.²¹⁸ According to the AIHW, these services include:

... accommodation provision, assistance to sustain housing, domestic/family violence services, mental health services, family/relationship assistance,

²¹⁴ Victorian Public Tenants’ Association, *Submission 21*, p. 3.

²¹⁵ Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, *Submission 139*, p. 43.

²¹⁶ Per Capita, *Submission 68*, p. 15.

²¹⁷ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, ‘Homelessness services’, <<https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports-data/health-welfare-services/homelessness-services/overview>>.

²¹⁸ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Submission 39*, p. 7; Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Submission 39*, Appendix 2.

disability services, drug/alcohol counselling, legal/financial services, immigration/cultural services, other specialist services and general assistance and support.²¹⁹

2.239 SHS agencies also have an important role in referring clients to other support services.²²⁰

2.240 Link Housing submitted that SHS agencies ‘play a key role in providing the range of preventative, crisis and post crisis support for those households experiencing and at risk of homelessness’. However, it also noted the significant number of people reported by the AIHW to be turned away from SHS agencies each day:

There are two key issues; these figures suggest that there are insufficient SHS services to meet demand and second is that the intervention does not usually represent a long-term solution for more than half of the people who use the services.²²¹

2.241 It said that current funding arrangements for SHS agencies ‘contribute to a difficult operating environment’:

This could be addressed by providing a much longer term funding structure for SHS services so they can more effectively plan and deal with peaks in service demand.²²²

2.242 The Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS) also highlighted the issue of funding uncertainty for organisations in the sector:

Managing short-term funding allocations, time-limited project grants and last-minute funding limits their ability to deliver quality services and retain skilled staff.

... No organisation can operate to its full potential with a series of funding cliffs always looming on the horizon.²²³

2.243 A number of submitters characterised the housing and homelessness sector as being ‘crisis driven’. For example, the City of Sydney submitted:

²¹⁹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Specialist homelessness services annual report*, December 2020.

²²⁰ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Submission 39*, p. 6.

²²¹ Link Housing, *Submission 93*, p. 4.

²²² Link Housing, *Submission 93*, p. 4.

²²³ Victorian Council of Social Service, *Submission 153*, pp. 10-12.

Housing and homelessness services in Australia are increasingly crisis driven, with an overreliance on temporary and crisis accommodation because of a lack of suitable social, affordable and supported accommodation models.²²⁴

2.244 Similarly, Bolton Clarke Homeless Persons Program submitted:

Access to the housing service system and funding models are mostly geared to crisis responses. People often cycle in and out of the crisis system due to a lack of viable and sustainable options.²²⁵

2.245 Homelessness NSW said the 2019-20 bushfire seasons and the COVID-19 pandemic had ‘exposed a housing and homelessness system that is severely hampered in its ability to respond to crisis when it is itself constantly in crisis’.²²⁶

2.246 The Public Interest Advocacy Centre suggested that services for people experiencing homelessness (including both housing and homelessness services and the social security system) are not sufficiently responsive to individual needs and circumstances. Further, it said:

... clients tend to be blamed for not using the system properly, even though such issues often arise as a result of system-side issues that create barriers to access. As a result, some people are deterred from accessing the system at all, and fall into primary homelessness and severe financial hardship. Support costs are then shifted to other systems, including justice and health systems.²²⁷

2.247 Homelessness Australia said that despite the challenges facing the SHS sector, these services ‘do prevent and end homelessness for many people and provide critical support to individuals and households in need’.²²⁸

Evidence on governance and funding arrangements

2.248 The Committee received a range of evidence on the current governance and funding arrangements with respect to homelessness, including evidence reflecting on the design and implementation of the NHHA.

2.249 In addition to the evidence below, a recurring theme was the need for a national strategy, which would address the interconnectedness of policies

²²⁴ City of Sydney, *Submission 31*, p. 3.

²²⁵ Bolton Clarke Homeless Persons Program, *Submission 17*, p. 12.

²²⁶ Homelessness NSW, *Submission 132*, p. 19.

²²⁷ Public Interest Advocacy Centre, *Submission 115*, p. 24.

²²⁸ Homelessness Australia, *Submission 144*, p. 14.

and programs on homelessness and housing, and the respective roles of the three levels of government. This evidence is discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

- 2.250 Homelessness Australia argued that while the establishment of the NHHA was seen as ‘a first step in increased attention to the matter of homelessness’, after accounting for population growth and inflation, federal funding for housing and homelessness services had in fact decreased.²²⁹
- 2.251 Similarly, VCOSS said the NHHA provided ‘much-needed federal coordination of homelessness service funding’ but noted that Australian Government funding for these services had fallen in real terms.²³⁰
- 2.252 ACOSS among others urged the Australian Government to examine the adequacy and security of its funding arrangements for homelessness services:
- Constrained resources are already placing undue pressure on services struggling to meet existing demand for services and forced to regularly turn away people in desperate situations.²³¹
- 2.253 Some submitters expressed particular concern about the method used to allocate funding under the NHHA and the resulting impact on funding for housing and homelessness services.
- 2.254 The NHHA specifies that ‘general’ funding is allocated to states and territories in accordance with each state and territory’s share of total population, whereas ‘homelessness’ funding is allocated in accordance with each state and territory’s share of total homelessness based on estimates made at the 2006 Census.²³²
- 2.255 The NHHA also specifies that the Australian Government’s contribution to both general and homelessness funding will be indexed annually according to the ABS’ index of wage inflation.²³³

²²⁹ Homelessness Australia, *Submission 144*, pp. 16-17.

²³⁰ Victorian Council of Social Service, *Submission 153*, p. 11. See also: Homelessness Australia, *Submission 144*, p. 14.

²³¹ Australian Council of Social Service, *Submission 105*, p. 2. See also: Mission Australia, *Submission 137*, p. 42; Victorian Council of Social Service, *Submission 153*, p. 11.

²³² Commonwealth of Australia, *National Housing and Homelessness Agreement*, p. 10.

²³³ Commonwealth of Australia, *National Housing and Homelessness Agreement*, p. 10.

2.256 The CFRC explained that homelessness funding under the NHHA ‘underwrites only a small (and diminishing) proportion of state/territory homelessness services expenditure’:

Having risen by 27% in real terms in only four years, such outlays are set to top \$1billion in 2019-2035. Notably, the average annual real terms increase in state/territory spending has been running at 7% while the Commonwealth’s pledged NHHA contributions going forward increase by only the predicted rate of inflation – i.e. zero in real terms.²³⁴

2.257 The CFRC went on:

Especially since aspects of homelessness services could be classed as amounting to ‘social security’ (constitutionally, a Commonwealth responsibility), this seems highly problematic.²³⁵

2.258 The ACT Government also noted that expenditure on homelessness services by states and territories has increased significantly more than the indexed amount (in the case of the ACT Government, expenditure increased by 16 per cent from 2015-16 to 2018-19):

Over time the scope of what State and Territories are expected to do has increased, however funding has not increased in order to meet these new expectations.²³⁶

2.259 Similarly, the Victorian Government submitted:

... funding under the NHHA is only sufficient to support maintenance of baseline social housing and homelessness services and is not enough to support meaningful change to the incidence of homelessness, increased social housing supply, wrap-around support to sustain social housing tenancies or an increase in housing affordability.²³⁷

2.260 It argued that the indexation method used ‘does not reflect the real rising cost of providing services or delivering housing’, and also questioned the use of data from the 2006 Census as a basis for distributing funds:

This data is 14 years out of date, and the results of two Censuses have been released since this time. The continued use of this data has resulted in funds

²³⁴ City Futures Research Centre, *Submission 5.1*, pp. 12-13.

²³⁵ City Futures Research Centre, *Submission 5*, p. 13.

²³⁶ ACT Government, *Submission 150*, p. 11.

²³⁷ Victorian Government, *Submission 200*, p. 18.

not being directed based on current need. It is inappropriate to continue using this data when more recent data is available.²³⁸

- 2.261 A number of submitters drew particular attention to the relative amount of funding allocated under the NHHA to the Northern Territory. The Northern Territory Government argued that the approach to calculating homelessness funding under the NHHA ‘fails to take into account current need and demand for services’:

The NT accounts for 11.79% of national homelessness yet receives only 4.63% of the homelessness funding allocated through NHHA...

... according to both the 2006 and 2016 Censuses, the NT is ranked fourth in the country according to the percentage of the population estimated to be homeless and yet is ranked sixth in terms of the amount of homelessness funding received via the NHHA.²³⁹

- 2.262 It also said that the allocation of general funding under the NHHA does not account for the higher than average costs required to provide services in the Northern Territory:

The NT’s large land mass, distributed population and large share of populations with high and complex needs requires additional resources.²⁴⁰

- 2.263 Ms Karen Walsh from the Northern Territory Government suggested that a ‘much fairer approach’ would be needs based and would consider ‘the entrenched levels [of] homelessness, the levels of poverty and ... the geography of the NT, with those criteria being layered into a funding formula for the future’.²⁴¹

- 2.264 NT Shelter also called for a ‘re-set funding allocation model’ for the NHHA based on need instead of population size:

The next iteration of the NHHA must deliver a model where distribution of Commonwealth funding is driven by the relative needs of each state and

²³⁸ Victorian Government, *Submission 200*, p. 18.

²³⁹ Northern Territory Government, *Submission 62*, pp. 21-22.

²⁴⁰ Northern Territory Government, *Submission 62*, p. 23. See also: Ms Christine Fitzgerald, Executive Director, Strategy, Policy and Performance, Department of Local Government, Housing and Community Development, Northern Territory, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 30 July 2020, p. 48.

²⁴¹ Ms Karen Walsh, Acting Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Department of Local Government, Housing and Community Development, Northern Territory, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 30 July 2020, p. 48.

territory rather than their population size. Discussions with the states on an alternative distribution formula need to begin now.²⁴²

2.265 Further, it said:

Until a replacement model is negotiated, the Australian government should provide interim additional funding in the form of a supplementary payment that recognizes the sheer level of demonstrated unmet demand and acute housing and service shortfalls in the Territory.²⁴³

2.266 The City of Darwin's submission said that the current level of funding allocated to the Northern Territory 'does not and cannot in the future address what would be seen in other parts of the world as a humanitarian crisis'.²⁴⁴

2.267 Dr Duncan Rouch argued that the NHHA is an improvement on previous agreements as it 'targets the entire housing spectrum from crisis accommodation to home ownership'. However, Dr Rouch also noted that national policies which affect housing cost and demand are outside the scope of the NHHA, and therefore limit its scope to address what he characterised as 'Australia's housing problem'.²⁴⁵

2.268 VACCA noted that an intended outcome of the NHHA is improved housing for Indigenous Australians, but questioned whether this would be achieved. It called for the establishment of specific Indigenous targets in the Victorian Government's bilateral agreement under the NHHA, which it said would allow for a portion of funding to be directed solely to improving Indigenous housing outcomes.²⁴⁶

2.269 Per Capita recommended that Australian Government funding committed through the NHHA be 'linked with performance outcomes relating to community engagement and co-design; for example, engaging older people in the design and development of social housing'.²⁴⁷

²⁴² NT Shelter, *Submission 121*, pp. 3, 20. See also: National Shelter, *Submission 86*, pp. 3-4; Shelter WA and WA Alliance to End Homelessness, *Submission 145*, p. 28.

²⁴³ NT Shelter, *Submission 121*, p. 20.

²⁴⁴ City of Darwin, *Submission 18*, pp. 3-4.

²⁴⁵ Dr Duncan Rouch, *Submission 37: Attachment 1*, pp. 12-13.

²⁴⁶ Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency, *Submission 126*, p. 16.

²⁴⁷ Per Capita, *Submission 68*, p. 25.

Historical housing related debts

- 2.270 Some submitters referred to the historical housing-related debts owed by state and territory governments to the Australian Government.
- 2.271 The Council of Capital City Lord Mayors (CCCLM) explained that from 1945 to the late 1980s, the Australian Government made fixed-interest loans to states and territories for the construction of new public housing and the provision of low-interest loans to home builders. The loans were to be repaid over a term of 53 years, and were in addition to other housing-related loans made over this period.²⁴⁸
- 2.272 Drawing on research by the Parliamentary Library, the CCCLM said that as at 30 June 2018, states and territories owed over \$2 billion to the Australian Government for housing-related loans. A breakdown of this total figure is provided in Table 2.4.²⁴⁹

Table 2.4 Outstanding state and territory housing-related debts as at 30 June 2018 (\$ million)

NSW	VIC	QLD	WA	SA	TAS	ACT	NT	Total
806	–	266	324	176	149	123	145	2,018

Source: Council of Capital City Lord Mayors, Submission 83, p. 11.

- 2.273 The same Parliamentary Library research found that over the period of the NHHA, ‘for every dollar the Tasmanian Government receives in NHHA funding it pays back around half in housing-related debt’.²⁵⁰
- 2.274 The CCCLM said it had been argued that outstanding housing-related debts are ‘are detracting from jurisdictions ... investing in social housing and reducing waiting lists’. It noted that in 2019, the Australian Government waived Tasmania’s outstanding housing-related debt, with the Tasmanian Government required to ‘redirect all of their scheduled repayments to programs that increase access to social housing, reduce homelessness,

²⁴⁸ Council of Capital City Lord Mayors, *Submission 83*, p. 11.

²⁴⁹ Council of Capital City Lord Mayors, *Submission 83*, p. 11.

²⁵⁰ Parliamentary Library, ‘State and territory housing debts’, July 2019, <https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/FlagPost/2019/July/State_and_territory_housing_debts>.

and improve housing supply across Tasmania'.²⁵¹ At the time, Tasmania's debt stood at around \$150 million.²⁵²

2.275 The Parliamentary Library noted that South Australia also had some of its housing-related debt forgiven in 2012-13.²⁵³

2.276 The CCCLM called for a review of state and territory housing-related debts on the basis that savings will be used for social housing.²⁵⁴ The Lord Mayor of Sydney, Clover Moore, argued that the Australian Government should waive the debts:

In New South Wales, this would free up over \$800 million to reinvest in social housing and supported accommodation programs.²⁵⁵

2.277 The ACT Government said it had sought discussions with the Australian Government regarding redirecting its debt repayments to housing and homelessness services, and that it understood from media reports that other states and territories had done likewise. It submitted:

Servicing these historic debts diverts resources that could otherwise be invested in new or expanded housing or homelessness services.²⁵⁶

2.278 The Tasmanian Government said the waiving of its housing-related debt had enabled it to enhance its housing and homelessness efforts:

The Tasmanian Government will save \$230.2 million in total interest and principal repayments to 2041-42 (end of loan term) and will redirect these funds to programmes that increase access to social housing, reduce homelessness, and improve housing supply across Tasmania. The first of these funds have been allocated towards additional social housing and increased targets for the Rapid Rehousing and Private Rental Incentives programs.²⁵⁷

²⁵¹ Council of Capital City Lord Mayors, *Submission 83*, p. 11.

²⁵² Tasmanian Government, *Submission 179*, p. 3.

²⁵³ Parliamentary Library, 'State and territory housing debts', July 2019, <https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/FlagPost/2019/July/State_and_territory_housing_debts>.

²⁵⁴ Council of Capital City Lord Mayors, *Submission 83*, p. 11.

²⁵⁵ Mayor Clover Moore, Lord Mayor of Sydney, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 29 July 2020, p. 10.

²⁵⁶ ACT Government, *Submission 150*, pp. 10-11.

²⁵⁷ Tasmanian Government, *Submission 179*, p. 3.

Social, Community and Disability Services Industry Equal Remuneration Order 2012

- 2.279 A number of submitters referred to funding provided by the Australian Government to meet costs incurred as a result of the 2012 decision of the Full Bench of Fair Work Australia to increase wages in the social services sector. The wage increases are set out in the Social, Community and Disability Services (SACS) Industry Equal Remuneration Order 2012 (ERO).²⁵⁸
- 2.280 Following the decision, the Australian Government committed to providing supplemental funding to organisations that deliver in-scope Australian Government programs, as well as to organisations that deliver in-scope programs through Commonwealth-state agreements, to assist them to meet the costs of complying with the ERO.²⁵⁹ This includes supplemental funding of \$145.1 million paid to states and territories under the NHHA.²⁶⁰
- 2.281 ERO supplementation payments under the NHHA are scheduled to cease in June 2021.²⁶¹ However, payments to some organisations funded directly by the Australian Government were extended for three years.²⁶²
- 2.282 A consistent message in evidence to the inquiry was that ERO supplementation payments should continue or be incorporated into other, ongoing funding agreements.
- 2.283 ACOSS argued that the cessation of the ERO supplementation requires urgent action:
- The Commonwealth Government must move quickly to give certainty to the sector that adequate funds will be available to meet increased demand and that it will fund ERO supplementation ongoing, ideally by consolidating this cost into service funding agreements.²⁶³

²⁵⁸ Fair Work Commission [2012] FWAFB 1000; Fair Work Commission, *Social, Community and Disability Services Industry Equal Remuneration Order 2012*.

²⁵⁹ Department of Social Services, 'Fair pay for social and community services workers', <<https://www.dss.gov.au/communities-and-vulnerable-people/fair-pay-for-social-and-community-services-workers>>.

²⁶⁰ Commonwealth of Australia, *National Housing and Homelessness Agreement*, pp. 10-11.

²⁶¹ Commonwealth of Australia, *National Housing and Homelessness Agreement*, p. 10.

²⁶² Commonwealth of Australia, Budget Paper No. 2, *Budget Measures 2020–21*, p. 157.

²⁶³ Australian Council of Social Service, *Submission 105*, p. 2.

2.284 VCOSS said the sector is ‘deeply concerned’ about the impacts of the cessation of the ERO supplementation:

This will affect homelessness, families and children, domestic violence and other community services.

... Community service organisations simply cannot absorb cuts of this magnitude. It will inevitably mean reductions in services to vulnerable people in the community and job losses for workers in the industry.²⁶⁴

2.285 Mallee Family Care—a not-for-profit agency managing over sixty government-funded programs supporting community members in regional, rural and remote areas in Victoria and South-West New South Wales—outlined the impact of the cessation of the ERO supplementation on its organisation. It said that without the continuation of the payments, or an equivalent rise in program funding, it will lose around \$583,000 in the 2021-22 financial year. It said the organisation will ‘struggle to absorb this cost’ and this ‘will mean hard decisions about the future of our programs’.²⁶⁵

2.286 The Victorian Government outlined the impact across Victoria more broadly:

An end to Commonwealth SACS ERO funding would result in a funding cut to approximately 260 organisations that deliver critical homelessness, family violence and tenancy support services in Victoria. ... For some smaller organisations, a removal of this critical funding may mean they may no longer be able to operate. It is estimated that a Commonwealth withdrawal of funding would result in 6,700 fewer Victorian households being assisted each year to address and prevent homelessness and family violence related housing crisis and would lead to an increase in rough sleeping among women and children escaping family violence.²⁶⁶

2.287 The Victorian Government, along with a number of other state and territory governments and non-government organisations, advocated for the continuation of the ERO supplementation.²⁶⁷

²⁶⁴ Victorian Council of Social Service, *Submission 153*, p. 12.

²⁶⁵ Mallee Family Care, *Submission 180*, pp. 20-22.

²⁶⁶ Victorian Government, *Submission 200*, p. 19.

²⁶⁷ Victorian Government, *Submission 200*, p. 19. See also: Northern Territory Government, *Submission 62*, p. 23; Mission Australia, *Submission 137*, pp. 2, 42-43; Shelter WA and WA Alliance to End Homelessness, *Submission 145*, p. 28; Southern Youth and Family Services, *Submission 148*, pp. 38-39; ACT Government, *Submission 150*, pp. 11-12.

Other Australian Government initiatives

2.288 This section considers evidence received on three Australian Government initiatives relevant to homelessness, which are separate from the NHHA:

- the National Housing Finance and Investment Corporation;
- Commonwealth Rent Assistance; and
- investment in remote housing.

2.289 The Committee notes that other Australian Government programs were outlined in the Government's submission, including the delivery of youth homelessness prevention services and funding for accommodation for victim-survivors of family and domestic violence.²⁶⁸

National Housing Finance and Investment Corporation

2.290 In recognition of the need for greater private and institutional investment to expand the community housing sector, in 2018 the Australian Government established NHFIC under the *National Housing Finance and Investment Corporation Act 2018* (NHFIC Act) to 'improve housing outcomes for Australians'.²⁶⁹

2.291 NHFIC aims to achieve its purpose by providing loans to registered community housing providers (CHPs), finance for infrastructure projects, and grants for capacity building services to assist CHPs. NHFIC also administers the First Home Loan Deposit Scheme and undertakes research on housing demand, supply and affordability.²⁷⁰

2.292 NHFIC is subject to the directions of the Assistant Treasurer and Minister for Housing outlined in the National Housing Finance and Investment Corporation Investment Mandate Direction 2018.²⁷¹

Affordable Housing Bond Aggregator

2.293 Most evidence in relation to NHFIC focused on the Affordable Housing Bond Aggregator (AHBA), which was established to provide loans to registered CHPs which can be used to acquire or construct new housing

²⁶⁸ Department of Social Services (multi-agency submission), *Submission 57*, pp. 4, 18-26.

²⁶⁹ *National Housing Finance and Investment Corporation Act 2018*, s. 3.

²⁷⁰ National Housing Finance and Investment Corporation, *Corporate Plan 2020–21*, pp. 5-6.

²⁷¹ *National Housing Finance and Investment Corporation Act 2018*, ss. 12-13.

stock, maintain existing stock, meet capital or corporate requirements, or refinance existing debt.²⁷²

2.294 NHFIC funds loans from the AHBA by issuing its own bonds into the wholesale capital market, guaranteed by the Australian Government. It is also provided with a \$1 billion line of credit facility by the Australian Government which it can use to advance loans to CHPs prior to issuing bonds.²⁷³

2.295 NHFIC's investment mandate explains that the AHBA allows:

... money to be raised on a larger scale and on different terms to those that would be possible for the individual providers; the savings will be passed on to the providers in the form of lower interest loans and reduced refinancing risks, enabling them to improve housing outcomes for their clients.²⁷⁴

2.296 In June 2020, NHFIC announced that it had finalised its third bond issuance of \$562 million. These funds were passed to 10 CHPs in the form of 12-year interest-only loans at a fixed rate of 2.06 per cent. This brought the total amount issued over three bond issuances to nearly \$1.2 billion.²⁷⁵

2.297 Mr Nathan Dal Bon, the Chief Executive Officer of NHFIC, explained how those funds had been used by CHPs:

... if you trace through what we've funded in terms of new properties, we've supported the funding of 2,000 new dwellings and we've supported the refinancing of a further 6,300 dwellings. We estimate that this has delivered interest savings to the CHPs that we've financed of around \$190 million over the term of those loans.²⁷⁶

²⁷² *National Housing Finance and Investment Corporation Act 2018*, ss. 12-13.

²⁷³ National Housing Finance and Investment Corporation, *Corporate Plan 2020–21*, p. 5.

²⁷⁴ National Housing Finance and Investment Corporation Investment Mandate Direction 2018, pt. 3.

²⁷⁵ Mr Nathan Dal Bon, Chief Executive Officer, National Housing Finance and Investment Corporation, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 29 July 2020, p. 18-19. See also: National Housing Finance and Investment Corporation, 'NHFIC finalises largest social bond from an Australian issuer', *Media release*, June 2020.

²⁷⁶ Mr Nathan Dal Bon, Chief Executive Officer, National Housing Finance and Investment Corporation, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 29 July 2020, p. 18.

- 2.298 NHFIC's investment mandate initially limited its total guaranteed liabilities to \$2 billion. However, in the 2020-21 Budget, the Australian Government announced it would increase this limit to \$3 billion.²⁷⁷
- 2.299 Evidence from some CHPs and others on the operation of the AHBA is discussed in further detail in Chapter 4.

National Housing Infrastructure Facility

- 2.300 NHFIC also operates the \$1 billion National Housing Infrastructure Facility (NHIF), which offers concessional loans, grants and equity funding to support housing-enabling infrastructure, including new or upgraded infrastructure for services such as power, water and transport and site remediation works.²⁷⁸
- 2.301 Recent examples of funding agreements under the NHIF include an \$18 million agreement with the CHP HousingFirst for infrastructure works to support 316 homes across four projects in Melbourne, and a \$100 million agreement with the New South Wales Land and Housing Corporation for infrastructure works to support 781 homes at sites across Sydney.²⁷⁹
- 2.302 Mr Dal Bon told the Committee that funding housing infrastructure could 'help unlock projects that are close to being viable'.²⁸⁰

Findings of Auditor-General Report No. 28 2020–21

- 2.303 In January 2021, the Auditor-General presented an audit report to the Parliament on the administration of NHFIC. In the report, the Auditor-General concluded that:

While NHFIC has established administrative arrangements for five programs which align to the NHFIC Act and the Investment Mandate, its

²⁷⁷ Commonwealth of Australia, Budget Paper No. 2, *Budget Measures 2020–21*, pp. 161-162.

²⁷⁸ National Housing Finance and Investment Corporation, *Corporate Plan 2020–21*, p. 5.

²⁷⁹ National Housing Finance and Investment Corporation, 'New infrastructure loan to support 316 social and affordable homes in Victoria', *Media release*, March 2021; National Housing Finance and Investment Corporation, 'NHFIC infrastructure funding to deliver 781 new social and affordable homes', *Media release*, August 2020.

²⁸⁰ Mr Nathan Dal Bon, Chief Executive Officer, National Housing Finance and Investment Corporation, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 29 July 2020, p. 17.

implementation and reporting does not clearly demonstrate that it is achieving its purpose to 'improve housing outcomes'.²⁸¹

2.304 The Auditor-General said that NHFIC's administration should be improved in relation to:

... management of its Services Agreement (SA) with Export Finance Australia (EFA); risk management and compliance management; and measuring and presenting its achievements in delivering 'improved housing outcomes'.²⁸²

2.305 In relation to the latter, the Auditor-General said:

NHFIC's loan, investment and grant assessment guidelines require specific consideration and assessment of the additionality for projects at the transaction level. However, the level of additionality is not consistently measured or presented in submissions for NHFIC Board approval.²⁸³

2.306 The Auditor-General made five recommendations, which were agreed by NHFIC.²⁸⁴

2.307 In the 2020-21 Budget, the Australian Government announced it would undertake an independent review of NHFIC to establish whether it is meeting its objectives of improving housing outcomes for Australians. A review of the operation of the NHFIC Act is also required under section 57 of the Act.²⁸⁵

Commonwealth Rent Assistance

2.308 The Australian Government provides CRA to eligible individuals and families renting in the private rental market or living in community housing.

²⁸¹ Australian National Audit Office, *Auditor-General Report No.28 2020–21, Administration of the National Housing Finance and Investment Corporation*, p. 8.

²⁸² Australian National Audit Office, *Auditor-General Report No.28 2020–21, Administration of the National Housing Finance Investment Corporation*, p. 8.

²⁸³ Australian National Audit Office, *Auditor-General Report No.28 2020–21, Administration of the National Housing Finance and Investment Corporation*, p. 9.

²⁸⁴ Australian National Audit Office, *Auditor-General Report No.28 2020–21, Administration of the National Housing Finance and Investment Corporation*, pp. 10, 76-77.

²⁸⁵ Commonwealth of Australia, Budget Paper No. 2, *Budget Measures 2020–21*, p. 162. See also: Australian Government, 'Review of the National Housing Finance and Investment Corporation Act 2018', <<https://treasury.gov.au/review/national-housing-finance-and-investment-corporation-act-review>>.

The Government estimated that \$4.6 billion in CRA would be provided to around 1.3 million individuals and families in 2019-20.²⁸⁶

- 2.309 A person is eligible for CRA if they pay rent and also receive certain income support, family assistance and veterans' payments. However, a person leasing from a state or territory housing authority is not eligible.²⁸⁷
- 2.310 CRA is paid at 75 cents for every dollar above a minimum rental threshold, up to a maximum amount which depends on a recipient's circumstances. The maximum amounts for CRA are indexed according to the Consumer Price Index (CPI) in March and September each year.²⁸⁸
- 2.311 In a 2019 research paper on vulnerable private renters, the Productivity Commission stated that CRA is 'the clearest path to improving affordability'. It explained that 'CRA materially improves rental affordability' for those who receive it:

Government reporting has shown that, in 2018, 68 per cent of households receiving CRA would have been in rental stress without it, but that number drops to 40 per cent when CRA is provided. The drop in rental stress is greater still among eligible households who included an Age Pension or Disability Support Pension recipient.²⁸⁹

- 2.312 The Productivity Commission also assessed that CRA is well targeted to households with lower levels of wealth:

Among working-age households, over 92 per cent and 71 per cent of CRA payments were made to low-wealth and low-income households, respectively in 2018...²⁹⁰

²⁸⁶ Department of Social Services (multi-agency submission), *Submission 57*, p. 8.

²⁸⁷ Department of Social Services (multi-agency submission), *Submission 57*, p. 8; Services Australia, 'Rent Assistance', <<https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/individuals/services/centrelink/rent-assistance>>.

²⁸⁸ Department of Social Services (multi-agency submission), *Submission 57*, p. 8; Services Australia, 'Rent Assistance', <<https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/individuals/services/centrelink/rent-assistance>>.

²⁸⁹ Productivity Commission, *Vulnerable Private Renters: Evidence and Options*, Productivity Commission Research Paper, September 2019, pp. 13-15.

²⁹⁰ Productivity Commission, *Vulnerable Private Renters: Evidence and Options*, Productivity Commission Research Paper, September 2019, p. 13.

2.313 However, the Productivity Commission found that the maximum payment amount of CRA has not kept up with the rise in rents, which has outpaced CPI:

As a result, the average share of rents covered by CRA has fallen. Further, the share of CRA recipients who received the maximum payment has steadily increased...²⁹¹

2.314 The latter point was reiterated in evidence to the inquiry. For example, the Grattan Institute submitted that while CRA ‘materially reduces housing stress among low-income Australians’, it has not kept up with rising housing costs:

The maximum Rent Assistance payment is indexed in line with CPI, but rents have been growing faster than CPI over the long term. Between June 2003 and June 2019, CPI increased by about 46 per cent, while average (quality-adjusted) rents increased by about 65 per cent... The actual rents paid by Australians, including improvements in the quality or quantity of housing, rose even faster.²⁹²

2.315 Mr Brendan Coates from the Grattan Institute told the Committee:

The best way to help low- to moderate-income earners who are not at severe risk of homelessness is through the provision of income support, like rent assistance.²⁹³

2.316 In its submission, the Grattan Institute recommended a 40 per cent increase to the maximum amount of CRA, which it estimated would cost around \$1.3 billion per year:

Rent Assistance would then provide the same level of assistance to low-income earners as it did 15 years ago, taking into account the rising cost of their rent. In future, Rent Assistance should be indexed to changes in rents typically paid by people receiving income support, so that its value is maintained...²⁹⁴

²⁹¹ Productivity Commission, *Vulnerable Private Renters: Evidence and Options*, Productivity Commission Research Paper, September 2019, p. 15.

²⁹² Grattan Institute, *Submission 127*, pp. 7-8.

²⁹³ Mr Brendan Coates, Household Finances Program Director, Grattan Institute, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 7 July 2020, p. 55.

²⁹⁴ Grattan Institute, *Submission 127*, p. 13.

- 2.317 It argued that such an increase ‘is unlikely to substantially increase rents’.²⁹⁵
- 2.318 Similarly, cohealth, a community health service, called for an immediate 30 per cent increase in the rate of CRA, in line with a recommendation from ACOSS. It said that CRA ‘has failed to keep pace with steep increases in rents’.²⁹⁶
- 2.319 Ms Jacqueline Phillips from ACOSS said the organisation was advocating for ‘a very significant increase to [CRA] of 50 per cent, to better reflect the average rents that are paid by households on the lowest incomes’.²⁹⁷
- 2.320 The City of Sydney said that because CRA is paid at an even rate across the country, recipients in areas with higher rents such as Sydney are further disadvantaged.²⁹⁸
- 2.321 The Northern Territory Council of Social Service recommended that CRA be ‘responsive to local housing market conditions’.²⁹⁹
- 2.322 AHURI explained that even with CRA, private rental remains expensive, particularly for young people. It said that 57 per cent of young people are still in housing stress despite receiving CRA.³⁰⁰
- 2.323 A number of other submitters argued for aspects of CRA to be reviewed.³⁰¹

Indigenous and remote housing

- 2.324 The Australian Government also provides funding to states and territories for housing in remote and Indigenous communities, including:
- \$550 million over five years to deliver the equivalent of 1,950 new bedrooms in remote *Northern Territory communities under the National Partnership Agreement for Remote Housing Northern Territory (NPA)* until 2023;

²⁹⁵ Grattan Institute, *Submission 127*, pp. 13-14.

²⁹⁶ cohealth, *Submission 9*, p. 24.

²⁹⁷ Ms Jacqueline Phillips, Director of Policy and Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Australian Council of Social Service, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 7 July 2020, p. 39.

²⁹⁸ City of Sydney, *Submission 31*, p. 26.

²⁹⁹ Northern Territory Council of Social Service, *Submission 136*, p. 3.

³⁰⁰ Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, *Submission 139*, p. 41.

³⁰¹ For example, see: National Shelter, *Submission 86*, p. 6; Public Interest Advocacy Centre, *Submission 115*, p. 5; St Vincent’s Health Australia, *Submission 133*, p. 18; ACT Government, *Submission 150*, p. 10.

- funding contributions to Western Australia (\$121 million) and South Australia (\$37.5 million), to assist with their transition to full responsibility for housing; and
- \$105 million for remote Indigenous housing in Queensland.³⁰²

2.325 The Committee received some evidence on the Australian Government's investments in Indigenous and remote housing, particularly the NPA.

2.326 For example, TCAC questioned the target for the number of houses to be constructed under the NPA and called for greater transparency with respect to the proposed expenditure.³⁰³

2.327 TCAC also suggested that the housing stock across the NPA footprint does not perform well against the relevant housing codes and standards, including the National Indigenous Housing Guide (NIHG) and the National Construction Code (NCC). It noted that the NPA makes no commitments to work towards the NCC or to improve the amenity of the broader built environment, and recommended that the Australian and Northern Territory governments determine triggers for the assessment of compliance with the NCC as part of the NPA.³⁰⁴

2.328 Central Australian Aboriginal Congress explained that investments in remote housing were offset by population growth and policies contributing to a decline in public housing stock, and a reduction in the role of Indigenous Community Housing Organisations. It went on:

High levels of government investment in culturally appropriate, well-maintained remote housing is critical to addressing the very high rates of Aboriginal homelessness in the Northern Territory. Such investment must be increased and sustained over the long term (beyond the 2018-2023 period of the current [NPA]); guided by genuine Aboriginal community input; and must take account of future population increases.³⁰⁵

³⁰² Department of Social Services (multi-agency submission), *Submission 57*, pp. 19-20.

³⁰³ Tangentyere Council Aboriginal Corporation, *Submission 165*, p. 17.

³⁰⁴ Tangentyere Council Aboriginal Corporation, *Submission 165*, p. 17. See also: Mr Michael Klerck, Social Policy Manager, Tangentyere Council Aboriginal Corporation, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 30 July 2020, pp. 36-37.

³⁰⁵ Central Australian Aboriginal Congress, *Submission 84*, pp. 11-12.

- 2.329 Similarly, the Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory alliance argued that investment in remote housing must plan for the projected increase in the Indigenous population in the Northern Territory.³⁰⁶
- 2.330 NACCHO recommended an expansion of the funding and timeframe of the NPA to match the former *National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing* (NPARIH), a ten-year agreement which expired in 2018.³⁰⁷
- 2.331 Mr Pisarski from National Shelter suggested that while the funding under the NPA was welcome, it did not meet the level of need. Mr Pisarski agreed that a similar approach was required as under the former NPARIH.³⁰⁸
- 2.332 Further evidence on the experiences of remote and Indigenous communities is discussed in Chapter 3.

Committee comment

Definition of homelessness

- 2.333 The Committee accepts that defining homelessness is challenging and will necessarily reflect a cultural understanding of what constitutes a house and a home. The Committee nevertheless agrees that homelessness should not be confined to those who are rough sleeping but should extend more broadly to include those in some insecure arrangements and in circumstances where living conditions are substandard.
- 2.334 Much of the evidence in relation to definitional issues concerned the inclusion in the ABS's statistical definition of persons in severely overcrowded dwellings and boarding houses.
- 2.335 The Committee acknowledges the evidence received about the seriousness of overcrowding and the impact it can have on the quality of life of people living in such conditions, including on their security and safety, privacy, health, mental health, and educational attainment.
- 2.336 The Committee is particularly concerned by the extreme extent of overcrowding in some Indigenous communities.

³⁰⁶ Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory, *Submission 170*, p. 20.

³⁰⁷ National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations, *Submission 166*, p. 4.

³⁰⁸ Mr Adrian Pisarski, Executive Officer, National Shelter, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 8 July 2020, pp. 15-16.

- 2.337 Similarly, in relation to boarding houses, while there are some that provide a supportive environment for tenants, the Committee heard compelling evidence about how other boarding houses deprive tenants of security, privacy and control over their lives.
- 2.338 The Committee, however, recognises that there is a legitimate debate about the scope of the ABS's definition. While the evidence was not entirely clear, it appears that Australia is, if not alone in this regard, one of a very small number of countries that count people living in overcrowded conditions and boarding houses among the homeless population.
- 2.339 The Committee also acknowledges some concern about the objective definition of severe overcrowding with reference to the CNOS, which the Committee considers is too prescriptive and potentially a blunt instrument for determining homelessness. For example, multiple siblings sharing a bedroom, or people voluntarily sharing larger open-plan dwellings, could be classed as severely overcrowded under the CNOS criteria.
- 2.340 The Committee considers that the definition of overcrowding could incorporate more detailed elements to more rigorously assess where overcrowding genuinely amounts to homelessness, and be more inclusive of non-western and Indigenous Australian cultural practices and perspectives.
- 2.341 Similarly, the Committee is concerned that the criteria used to classify boarding houses within the definition of homelessness may be too blunt. The Committee notes that all boarding houses are not the same, nor are the people who live in them, and that the ABS acknowledged its inability to consider the circumstances of individual residents when ruling such dwellings in or out of its count.
- 2.342 People living in boarding houses and overcrowded accommodation make up a significant proportion of the estimated homeless population. Those in severely overcrowded dwellings or boarding houses represented 59 per cent of the people reported as homeless by the ABS in the 2016 Census. Severe overcrowding in particular has driven the growth in homelessness in Australia over recent years.
- 2.343 The Committee considers it vital that the ABS's definition—and, in particular, how it accounts for overcrowding and boarding houses—is consistent with best practice in Australia and internationally and, as much as possible, reflects the experiences and perspectives of people living in such conditions.

- 2.344 The Committee therefore recommends that the ABS commission a review of the statistical definition of homelessness to ensure a more nuanced approach to the specific circumstances in which people in such conditions should be included in the official definition and the headline figure of Australia's homeless population.
- 2.345 In making this recommendation, it is not the Committee's intention that persons living in overcrowded conditions and boarding houses should cease to be reported on in official statistics. Moreover, the Committee stresses that, regardless of the outcome of such a review for definitional purposes, governments will need to continue to address the serious issues of overcrowded and substandard accommodation—just as, for example, victims of family, domestic and sexual violence living in unsafe or insecure conditions must remain a priority for housing and related services, regardless of their inclusion within any definition of homelessness.

Recommendation 1

2.346 The Committee recommends that the Australian Bureau of Statistics commission an independent review of the statistical definition of homelessness and its operation, having particular regard to the circumstances in which persons living in severely crowded dwellings and boarding houses should be categorised as homeless. The review should consider:

- national and international best practice;
- the need for greater inclusion of non-western and Indigenous Australian cultural practices and perspectives; and
- in relation to overcrowding, the need for the use of other measures in addition to or in place of the Canadian National Occupancy Standard.

Data collection and reporting

- 2.347 A clear theme in evidence to the inquiry was the 'invisible' nature of many forms of homelessness and how this has resulted in an undercounting of the homeless population in official statistics, particularly the Census.
- 2.348 The Committee notes that evidence given to this inquiry accords with the finding of the Victorian inquiry that:

It is difficult to provide an accurate figure for the number of people experiencing homelessness in Victoria and it is likely the figures captured in the Census and other sources are an underestimate.³⁰⁹

- 2.349 The extent of undercounting suggested in evidence to the inquiry is concerning to the Committee, particularly given that the Census is one of the primary sources of information about the homeless population. The reliance on the Census is apparent from the many submissions to this inquiry which draw on Census data.
- 2.350 While the broad extent of homelessness in Australia is clear, it is critical that governments and service providers have an accurate understanding of the prevalence of homelessness and the makeup of the homeless population. It is particularly important that those most at need are counted in order to ensure that appropriate policy and service responses are in place.
- 2.351 The Committee acknowledges the work that the ABS has done and continues to do to ensure its estimates of the homeless population are accurate. This includes, importantly, engagement with the homelessness services sector.
- 2.352 The Committee also welcomes the change to the next Census to include Australian Defence Force service status, which should give greater insight into the nature and extent of homelessness affecting veterans. (Homelessness among veterans is discussed further in Chapter 3.)
- 2.353 However, given what appears to the Committee to be broad concern among stakeholders about undercounting, and given that the current approach used by the ABS to enumerate the homeless population has been in place since 2011, the Committee considers it is timely for there to be an independent review of how Census data is collected and used to determine estimates of the homeless population.
- 2.354 The Committee is concerned to see that any such review consider the extent of inaccuracy by overcounting and undercounting of particular categories of homeless persons, including but not limited to rough sleepers, persons staying with other households, persons living in boarding houses, and persons living in severely overcrowded dwellings.
- 2.355 The review should also consider the extent of undercounting of people in particular demographic groups and circumstances, including but not limited

³⁰⁹ Victorian Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee, *Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria – Final report*, March 2021, p. 35.

to Indigenous people, young people, and people escaping family and domestic violence.

- 2.356 The review should be informed by experts, representatives of the homelessness sector, and organisations representing at-risk population groups. In this regard, the Committee considers in particular that the involvement of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations and other Indigenous organisations is critical.

Recommendation 2

- 2.357 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government commission an independent review of the Australian Bureau of Statistics' collection and use of Census of Population and Housing data to estimate the homeless population, having particular regard to the problem of overcounting and undercounting particular categories of homeless persons and demographic groups.**

The review should involve stakeholder consultation and should be completed in time to inform the conduct of the 2026 Census.

- 2.358 Beyond the Census, the Committee recognises that administrative data, and particularly the SHSC, has a particularly important role in understanding the prevalence and nature of homelessness and informing policy and service responses.
- 2.359 Evidence to the inquiry has highlighted a number of areas for improvement, relating to data collection, access and reporting and needs assessments. The Committee encourages the Australian Government to consider these suggestions in consultation with the AIHW and SHS agencies.
- 2.360 The Committee is also concerned that the SHSC is currently failing to adequately capture unmet need for homelessness services and that it does not record casual contacts with service providers.
- 2.361 In the Committee's view, more comprehensive administrative data—particularly about those people who are most at risk—is critical to informing efforts to prevent homelessness from occurring and to better assist those recently made homeless.
- 2.362 In this regard, the Committee also recommends the development of a national longitudinal data set for housing and homelessness, which it expects will assist in better understanding pathways through services and

the needs and outcomes of clients, in turn leading to more evidence-based policy and service responses.

Recommendation 3

2.363 The Committee recommends that the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare implement changes to the Specialist Homelessness Services Collection to ensure that data collected:

- **more comprehensively captures unmet need for services and casual contacts with service providers;**
- **more clearly identifies clients' reasons for seeking assistance;**
- **provides for spatial analysis of demand for services;**
- **can be disaggregated by age and sex to support the development of targeted policies and responses; and**
- **is more inclusive of diverse groups and needs.**

Recommendation 4

2.364 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government provide funding to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare to establish a national longitudinal housing and homelessness data set.

The Australian Government should also give consideration to providing funding for research projects to analyse the data set and identify evidence-based policy and service responses.

- 2.365** The Committee also accepts the arguments made in evidence of the need for better data on both the community housing sector and tenancy evictions. Resolving issues with the quality and consistency of community housing data is particularly important given the increasing use of this type of housing, as discussed in Chapter 4.
- 2.366** The Committee considers there is a need for better data on housing stock and overcrowding, particularly as it relates to Indigenous communities.

Recommendation 5

- 2.367 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government and state and territory governments, in consultation with community housing providers, improve the availability, quality and consistency of data on community housing and Indigenous community housing.

Recommendation 6

- 2.368 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government work with state and territory governments to ensure the regular publication of statistics on residential tenancy evictions, giving consideration to the need to establish a common framework for such data.

Recommendation 7

- 2.369 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government, including through the introduction of mandatory requirements on state and territory governments, improve data collection and reporting on housing stock and overcrowding to assist with monitoring and evaluation, planning and strategic investment at a regional and community level.

The Committee further recommends specific measures to improve data relating to housing outcomes for Indigenous Australians to inform all governments' efforts to meet the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap* target on housing.

- 2.370 The Committee notes the significant impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on homelessness in Australia, as documented in the interim report of this inquiry. Given the vital importance of vaccination as a protection against COVID-19, the Committee considers that there is a need for governments to work together to monitor the participation of those experiencing homelessness in Australia's COVID-19 vaccination program.

Recommendation 8

- 2.371 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government and state and territory governments, in consultation with homelessness and community services, improve data collection and reporting on the COVID-19 vaccination of Australians experiencing homelessness, particularly rough sleepers.

Governance and funding arrangements

2.372 While the provision of social housing and homelessness services is primarily a responsibility of states and territories, it is clear that the Australian Government continues to have a significant role in improving housing outcomes for Australians. This includes working with the states and territories through the NHHA, the provision of CRA, investment in Indigenous and remote housing, and support for community housing through NHFIC.

2.373 The Committee also recognises that the Australian Government has implemented measures intended to address the broader issue of housing affordability, particularly for first home buyers. These include:

- the *HomeBuilder* program, which provides grants to assist owner-occupiers including first home buyers to build a new home or substantially renovate an existing home;
- the *First Home Loan Deposit Scheme*, which provides guarantees to first home buyers to assist them to build or purchase a first home with a 5 per cent deposit without paying lenders mortgage insurance; and
- the *First Home Super Saver Scheme*, which enables first home buyers to save for their first home inside their superannuation fund, thereby receiving concessional tax treatment.

2.374 The 2021-22 Budget included new measures including the *Family Home Guarantee*, which will assist single parents with dependants to purchase a house with a deposit of as little as two per cent.³¹⁰

2.375 The Committee also acknowledges the Australian Government's permanent increase of \$50 per fortnight from 1 April 2021 to payments including JobSeeker and Youth Allowance.³¹¹

2.376 In relation to the NHHA, the Committee notes concerns raised about the baseline amount of funding for housing and homelessness services, the indexation of the Australian Government's financial contribution under the Agreement, and the methods and data used to determine funding allocations to the states and territories.

³¹⁰ Commonwealth of Australia, Budget Paper No. 2, *Budget Measures 2021–22*, pp. 187-188.

³¹¹ Prime Minister, Minister for Families and Social Services, Minister for Employment Skills Small and Family Business, 'Morrison Government Commits Record \$9B to Social Security Safety Net', *Media release*, 23 February 2021.

- 2.377 The Committee notes that the 2021-22 Budget included a further \$124.7 million over two years to be provided to states and territories under the NHHA to ‘assist them to bolster public housing stocks, or to meet wage requirements under the 2011 Fair Work Australia decision on social and community services wages, where that requirement has not already been met’.³¹²
- 2.378 While the Committee welcomes this additional funding, it remains particularly concerned by the evidence that the allocation of funding under the NHHA is not sufficiently based on need, nor does it reflect the actual costs of providing services in different jurisdictions. This impact of these arrangements on the Northern Territory was clear, but other jurisdictions such as Queensland and Western Australia with large rural and remote populations or high-needs groups may also be disadvantaged.
- 2.379 The Committee considers that these issues should be addressed where possible in future funding arrangements under the NHHA or any successor to the Agreement beyond 2023.
- 2.380 Acknowledging that the development of a needs-based funding methodology will be a complex exercise and should involve extensive consultation—not least with the states and territories—the Committee recommends that the Australian Government commence this work as a priority to ensure that it can inform these future funding arrangements.
- 2.381 The Committee is also concerned about a lack of transparency around how state and territory governments use funds received from the Australian Government for social and affordable housing. The Committee considers that there should be an evaluation of Australian Government sponsored housing projects to better understand the work undertaken and the outcomes achieved.

Recommendation 9

- 2.382 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government, in consultation with state and territory governments, develop a needs-based funding methodology to be applied to future inter-governmental housing and homelessness funding agreements, to be completed no later than June 2022.**

³¹² Commonwealth of Australia, Budget Paper No. 2, *Budget Measures 2021–22*, p. 183.

Recommendation 10

- 2.383 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government undertake an evaluation of Australian Government sponsored social and affordable housing projects, including those delivered by state and territory governments, to be completed no later than June 2022.**
- 2.384 Further to these recommendations, the Committee notes that a review of the NHHA will be completed by the Productivity Commission no later than June 2022, with terms of reference to be developed by the Australian Government in consultation with the states and territories. The Committee encourages the Australian Government to ensure that the issues raised in this inquiry with respect to the NHHA are given full consideration as part of the Productivity Commission's review.
- 2.385 The Committee anticipates that the outcomes from each of these processes will enable future iterations of the NHHA or any equivalent agreements to be better targeted at improving outcomes across the housing spectrum, including for those people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.
- 2.386 In that respect, the Committee also notes the view expressed in discussions about the NHHA, that its scope should be expanded to include the full range of Australian Government policies that affect housing cost and demand, and therefore homelessness. This is closely related to the view expressed by many contributors to the inquiry that Australia has need of a national housing and homelessness strategy, which is discussed in Chapter 4. The Committee considers that the future role and scope of NHHA should be considered in the development of the national strategy outlined in Recommendation 35 of this report.
- 2.387 In the interim, the Committee also encourages the Australian Government to consider the need for any supplemental funding to be made available to individual states or territories to address urgent or acute needs not currently provided for under the NHHA.
- 2.388 Further comments regarding future inter-governmental agreements—particularly with regard to improving coordination across the three levels of government—are also included in Chapter 4 in the context of calls for a national strategy.
- 2.389 The Committee's views on NHFIC are also outlined in Chapter 4 in the context of the evidence received on the need for greater investment in social housing.

- 2.390 In relation to the CRA, the Committee notes the findings of the Productivity Commission and others that the payment is well targeted and reduces the incidence of housing stress in Australia. However, the Committee also acknowledges that the payment has not kept pace with rising rental costs.
- 2.391 The Committee notes the significant cost to the Australian Government of providing CRA—\$4.6 billion in 2019-20—and the potential for any changes to the payment to lead to broader effects on the housing market.
- 2.392 Given these considerations, while not making any recommendation to change CRA, the Committee recommends that the Australian Government conduct a separate, independent review of the payment, which would include consideration of the rate of the payment, its indexation, and its interaction with other forms of housing and homelessness assistance.

Recommendation 11

- 2.393 **The Committee recommends that the Australian Government commission an independent review of Commonwealth Rent Assistance, which should consider the maximum rates and method of indexation of the payment and its interaction with other relevant payments.**
- 2.394 Lastly, in relation to the historical housing-related debts owed by states and territories to the Australian Government, the Committee's view is that these should be waived, as was the case for Tasmania in 2019, or at the very least refinanced at a modern-day equivalent concessional rate. There is little point in the Australian Government providing funds to the states and territories through the NHHA on the one hand, and on the other hand taking a portion of these funds back as a result of historical debts.
- 2.395 The waiving or refinancing of these debts should occur at the earliest opportunity to ensure that any future inter-governmental funding agreements can start from a blank slate.
- 2.396 However, the Committee stresses that this should be conditional on the states and territories taking further measures to increase the supply of social and affordable housing in their jurisdictions, and require transparency from the states and territories regarding how they spend the savings realised in that regard. The Committee also proposes that the states and territories should be required to undertake the necessary planning and zoning reforms to facilitate increased supply of social and affordable housing—evidence on this is discussed in Chapter 4.

Recommendation 12

2.397 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government waive or refinance at a concessional rate the historical housing-related debts of state and territory governments, in exchange for:

- **an amount equal to the savings to each jurisdiction being reinvested into affordable housing, with 50 per cent of new housing stock to be leased to community housing providers; and**
- **agreement on appropriate planning and zoning reforms in each jurisdiction.**

3. Causes, risks and vulnerable groups

- 3.1 There is no single cause of homelessness. Instead there are a diverse range of causes and risk factors which impact people in different ways, and individual and social circumstances that make some groups of Australians particularly vulnerable to the risk of homelessness. Understanding these causes and risks, and addressing vulnerabilities within the community, are important elements in addressing the problem of homelessness in Australia.
- 3.2 This chapter briefly outlines the wide array of causes and risk factors linked to homelessness before focusing on two significant causes identified in evidence to the inquiry: limited means, and a lack of affordable and social housing. The chapter then discusses the experiences and perspectives of various groups identified as vulnerable to homelessness in the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA) and in evidence received by the Committee.
- 3.3 Some broader measures proposed to respond to homelessness, taking into account these causes and vulnerabilities, are further discussed in Chapter 4.

Causes of homelessness

- 3.4 Participants in the inquiry identified both current and historical causes of homelessness as well as ongoing structural issues which can contribute to homelessness.
- 3.5 The Department of Social Services advised that:
 - Several factors can contribute to a person experiencing homelessness, including long-term unemployment, mental health issues, substance abuse, family and relationship breakdown and shortages of affordable housing. In

addition, natural disasters and unprecedented events, such as the global coronavirus pandemic can also contribute. As a result, treatments to address homelessness will differ depending on the form of homelessness.¹

- 3.6 In its submission the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) catalogued risk factors associated with homelessness. AHURI stated that family violence, housing crisis and financial reasons were the three most significant factors associated with housing stress and poverty.²
- 3.7 AHURI's submission listed a number of structural and societal risk factors associated with housing stress and homelessness. These included:
 - Housing markets: areas with rising rates of homelessness feature shortages of affordable private rental housing. In this respect, AHURI noted that the impact of housing markets varies and interacts in complex ways with individual factors and behaviours, such as alcohol or drug abuse.³
 - Weak labour markets: more people experiencing homelessness are located in areas with weaker labour markets.
 - Uneven distribution of homelessness services: unavailable or inaccessible homelessness services contribute to homelessness. AHURI noted that the Northern Territory, New South Wales and Queensland had a lack of homelessness services relative to demand.
 - Poverty: not only is poverty a pathway to homelessness in adults, but also a common experience for people after they have been homeless, which can undermine their capacity to re-enter and sustain housing.⁴
- 3.8 AHURI also listed individual risk factors. These were defined as events or behaviour associated with a higher risk of entering homelessness or facing difficulties in exiting from homelessness.⁵
- 3.9 These individual risk factors included:
 - Gender and age: men, older people (over 45) and young people (15-24) were listed as demographic groups at elevated risk of entry into homelessness.

¹ Department of Social Services (multi-agency submission), *Submission 57*, p. 5.

² Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, *Submission 139*, p. 25.

³ Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, *Submission 139*, p. 26.

⁴ Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, *Submission 139*, pp. 25-27.

⁵ Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, *Submission 139*, p. 28.

- Cultural risk factors: Indigenous peoples and those from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds were included as two cohorts at increased risk of homelessness.
- Human capital risk factors: unemployment and not being in the labour force, casual and fixed-term contract employment and low educational attainment were all human capital risk factors.
- Relationship risk factors: family and domestic violence was identified by AHURI as a significant risk factor and the main reason women presented for assistance at homelessness agencies. Sexual, physical and emotional abuse was also another important factor. Losing a partner through relationship breakdown or death was another relationship risk factor.
- Health related risk factors: AHURI noted a wide range of health related risk factors that could influence entry into homelessness. These included mental ill-health, disability, traumatic stress, traumatic brain injury and problematic drug and/or alcohol use.
- Exiting institutions risk factors: people transitioning between or to and from institutions are points of risk where gaps in the service system can mean people are discharged into homelessness. Particularly high risk groups include ex-prisoners, people leaving care (hospital, rehabilitation, foster care, etc.) and veterans from the military.
- Previous or intergenerational homelessness risk factors: some groups may have high levels of persistent homelessness. These include people with previous experience of homelessness, people with experience of child homelessness and those in families with intergenerational homelessness.⁶

3.10 AHURI emphasised that the causes and risks of homelessness are multifaceted and interrelated:

Risk of homelessness might be associated with the prevalence of the factor in the wider community (e.g. prevalence of domestic and family violence), or risks associated with an individual experiencing homelessness (e.g. drug and alcohol use). Some people will face multiple risks, and some of the risks in one area (e.g. discrimination due to Indigenous status) can often coincide with other risks (poverty).⁷

⁶ Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, *Submission 139*, pp. 28-31.

⁷ Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, *Submission 139*, p. 22.

3.11 AHURI's submission also noted that alongside risk factors, there are protective factors that can reduce the risk of homelessness, such as financial resources and relational support, which people draw upon when required.⁸

3.12 National Shelter also listed a number of causes of homelessness in Australia in its submission:

There are many contributing factors to [the] rise in homelessness across Australia... including but not limited to: domestic and family violence, alcohol and drug use, mental health issues, release from correctional facilities, juvenile justice, education and other systemic failure.⁹

3.13 However, it noted that:

While these factors are acknowledged as the sources of supply to homelessness, the major problem is how we respond to the issue of homelessness itself, beyond simply addressing each factor individually.¹⁰

3.14 Others, such as South Port Community Housing Group, highlighted the complexity of homelessness:

The causes of homelessness are multifaceted and complex. The factors leading to someone being homeless is often a combination of both market failure and individual circumstance. No one, however, chooses to be homeless.¹¹

Poverty and limited income

3.15 Consistent with AHURI's assessment, many submitters identified poverty and limited income as significant contributors towards homelessness.¹²

3.16 The Salvation Army Australia submitted that poverty is the 'underlying cause' of homelessness:

The circumstances of poverty that can lead a person to become homeless include having little money, debt, a lack of education, poor mental and

⁸ Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, *Submission 139*, p. 22.

⁹ National Shelter, *Submission 86*, p. 2.

¹⁰ National Shelter, *Submission 86*, p. 2.

¹¹ South Port Community Housing Group, *Submission 88*, p. 8. See also: Jesuit Social Services, *Submission 8*, p. 3.

¹² See, for example: Mercy Foundation, *Submission 35*, p. 4; Launch Housing, *Submission 47*, p. 1; Council of Single Mothers and their Children Inc, *Submission 72*, p. 7; National Council of Women Australia, *Submission 76*, p. 2.

physical health, disability, reliance on public housing, living in sub-standard accommodation and social exclusion.¹³

- 3.17 Per Capita also cited poverty as a key factor driving family homelessness, particularly poverty within single parent families.¹⁴ Per Capita argued that:

Any plan, therefore, to prevent and reduce homelessness must include a strong focus on the prevention and reduction of poverty, given that income adequacy is a key determinant in ensuring access to appropriate housing.¹⁵

- 3.18 Per Capita highlighted that the majority of housing evictions are driven by rental arrears, and many of these are evictions from public housing:

Tens of thousands of eviction applications are made by landlords every year, and the vast majority of these are not for damage, nuisance, or use for illegal purpose, but for simple rental arrears... Many of those evicted are people who will find it hardest to find homes again. Public housing authorities are two to four times more likely to try and evict their tenants than private landlords. Given that public housing tenants are likely to have high or complex needs and/or be permanently outside the workforce, evictions from social housing (whether public or community) are highly likely to be evictions into homelessness.¹⁶

- 3.19 The Victorian Public Tenants Association drew the Committee's attention to a 2019 survey it undertook examining the financial pressures on people who live in social housing. The survey identified that rent was by far the biggest weekly expense for most respondents, accounting for 72.7 per cent of their spending.¹⁷

Social Security

- 3.20 A number of witnesses focused on the relationship between social security and homelessness.
- 3.21 Mission Australia, for example, said that social security payments have been 'far too low and increased the risk of homelessness'.¹⁸ While noting increased payments in response to COVID-19, Mission Australia stated:

¹³ The Salvation Army Australia, *Submission 70*, p. 9.

¹⁴ Per Capita, *Submission 68*, p. 26.

¹⁵ Per Capita, *Submission 68*, p. 4.

¹⁶ Per Capita, *Submission 68*, p. 7.

¹⁷ Victorian Public Tenants Association, *Submission 21*, pp. 9-10.

¹⁸ Mission Australia, *Submission 137*, p. 4.

Without access to adequate social security payments, people will continue to experience housing stress and increased risk of homelessness.¹⁹

3.22 The Public Interest Advocacy Centre (PIAC) also raised concerns about the adequacy of social security payments:

The JobSeeker payment (previously Newstart), which forms the core of our social security system together with related allowances, has not increased in real terms in 25 years. Leaving aside recent temporary increases as part of COVID-19 policy response, the JobSeeker payment level places its recipients well below the poverty line. ...there is virtually no housing at all that is affordable for people on Newstart in any metropolitan area of Australia, within reach of employment opportunities and services.²⁰

3.23 Sacred Heart Mission submitted:

Climbing out of poverty is extremely difficult, in part due to historically punishing levels of income support in Australia that cannot sustain basic living standards. Poverty and deep disadvantage are severe risk factors for homelessness, and the traumas associated with these experiences. We expect an increased demand for homelessness services responses in the wake of COVID-19, especially if the JobSeeker Payment is reduced or eligibility is cut.²¹

3.24 As noted in Chapter 2, in April 2021 the Australian Government permanently increased a range of social security payments including JobSeeker and Youth Allowance by \$50 per fortnight.

3.25 It is important to recognise that those receiving JobSeeker and Youth Allowance among others also receive other forms of financial assistance from the Australian Government through such measures as Commonwealth Rent Assistance and the Health Care Card, which entitles them to free or discounted health care and significantly subsidised pharmaceuticals.²²

Lack of affordable and social housing

3.26 Many participants in the inquiry drew the Committee's attention to a deficit of affordable and social housing as a significant cause of homelessness in Australia.

¹⁹ Mission Australia, *Submission 137*, p. 4.

²⁰ Public Interest Advocacy Centre, *Submission 115*, p. 12.

²¹ Sacred Heart Mission, *Submission 42*, p. 4.

²² Department of Social Services, 'Benefits & Payments', <<https://www.dss.gov.au/about-the-department/benefits-payments>>.

- 3.27 The Northern Sydney Housing & Homelessness Collaboration stated that:
Fundamental to the prevention of homelessness is an available and growing supply of social housing and affordable housing for people in need.²³
- 3.28 Housing All Australians stated that homelessness was increasing in areas where there was a shortage of affordable private rental housing and higher median rents. The increase is most significant in capital city areas including Sydney, Melbourne, Perth and Hobart.²⁴
- 3.29 Per Capita agreed, observing that rising housing and rental prices driven in part by policies such as negative gearing, capital gains tax and by an increase in short-term letting have made finding affordable housing more difficult.²⁵
- 3.30 It argued that more expensive housing particularly affects Australians on middle and lower incomes, those on income support, older Australians (particularly older women), younger people and people already experiencing homelessness, at risk of homelessness or living in social housing.²⁶
- 3.31 PIAC noted high rent costs in its submission:
Private rent is unaffordable, insecure, and some face discrimination as an additional barrier to access. ... Some households are able to deal with this by compromising on amenity and quality of their housing, at the cost of exacerbating tertiary homelessness, or being pushed out to the geographical and social fringes and excluded from opportunities. Others 'fall through the cracks' and become homeless.²⁷
- 3.32 The Northern Sydney Housing & Homelessness Collaboration drew the Committee's attention to the historical factors that are increasing housing pressure:
Over the last 30 years the proportion of Australians who own their own home has declined. House prices have risen sharply while wages have remained stagnant. The ratio of average disposable household income to median house price has increased from just over 4 in 1991 to just over 7 in 2015. As a result, a

²³ Northern Sydney Housing & Homelessness Collaboration, *Submission 112*, p. 3.

²⁴ Housing All Australians, *Submission 7*, p. 3.

²⁵ Per Capita, *Submission 68*, p. 10.

²⁶ Per Capita, *Submission 68*, p. 10.

²⁷ Public Interest Advocacy Centre, *Submission 115*, p. 10.

growing number of households are now renting through the private market. At the same time, the total stock of social housing has declined from over 6 percent of the total stock of housing in 1996 to around 4 percent in 2016.

As a result of these structural drivers, there is a major shortage of housing that is affordable to those on lower incomes. This has contributed to the steady increase in homelessness of 30 percent between 2006 to 2016. Both the reduction in social housing and lack of affordable housing is a fundamental issue that needs to be tackled in order to successfully prevent homelessness.²⁸

3.33 The submission also highlighted the current social housing and affordable dwelling shortfall:

Estimates suggest there is a current shortfall of almost 440,000 social housing dwellings, which is projected to grow to 730,000 over the next 20 years. Similar estimates highlight a current shortage of 215,000 affordable housing dwellings, increasing to almost 300,000 over the next two decades.²⁹

3.34 The Grattan Institute advised that Australia has a current lack of social housing with extensive wait lists:

Social housing in Australia is currently rationed: more than 400 000 households are eligible for, but cannot access, social housing. Over 150 000 are on waiting lists.³⁰

3.35 National Shelter observed:

The shortage of social housing and its reduction relative to all housing has been occurring since 1991. Social housing as a proportion of all housing has declined from 6-7% in 1991 to 4.2% at the 2016 census and will have fallen further due to a lack of investment by all governments. The fall in social housing mirrors the rise in homelessness.³¹

3.36 Dr Michael Fotheringham, Chief Executive of AHURI, explained that:

There have been new public housing dwellings built, but their development has not kept pace with the broader housing market. So the share of the housing market that is public and social housing has declined and is significantly lower than in most countries that we would compare ourselves

²⁸ Northern Sydney Housing & Homelessness Collaboration, *Submission 112*, pp. 3-4

²⁹ Northern Sydney Housing & Homelessness Collaboration, *Submission 112*, p. 4.

³⁰ The Grattan Institute, *Submission 127*, p. 12.

³¹ National Shelter, *Submission 86*, p. 4. See also: Link Housing, *Submission 93*, p. 3.

to. For example, the UK would have roughly five times the proportion of social and public housing.

If we want to house the homeless, they need to be housed in dwellings. They need somewhere to be housed.³²

3.37 The City of Whittlesea highlighted a lack of crisis and transitional housing:

Underinvestment across all levels of government has resulted in a lack of crisis and transitional housing for people entering the homelessness service system. Short term housing is being used long term by people who cannot access long term affordable housing due to lack of provision, creating a housing bottleneck which prevents people experiencing homelessness from securing appropriate housing.³³

3.38 The impact of housing shortages is heightened in relation to certain areas and groups. The Central Australian Aboriginal Congress pointed to a housing stock deficiency as a primary cause of homelessness in the Northern Territory:

The primary cause of homelessness in the Northern Territory is the lack of remote and public housing stock to meet the population needs. At the current slow rate of improvement it would take more than seventy years to build the required houses to address Aboriginal homelessness in the Northern Territory.³⁴

3.39 Women's Safety Services of Central Australia (WoSSCA) provided stark information on housing availability in Alice Springs:

The current Alice Springs housing wait list times, as of Feb 4th, 2020 are 4-6 year[s] for a 1, 2- or 3-bedroom house. These times are increased to 6-8 years in the Tenant Creek region 500km north of Alice Springs.³⁵

3.40 YWCA Australia highlighted a gendered analysis of affordable housing in Australia:

A gendered analysis tells us that Australia's affordable housing stock needs to be significantly expanded and diversified to meet the needs of all women,

³² Dr Michael Fotheringham, Chief Executive, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 7 July 2020, p. 35.

³³ City of Whittlesea, *Submission 65*, p. 2.

³⁴ Central Australian Aboriginal Congress, *Submission 84*, p. 3.

³⁵ Women's Safety Services of Central Australia, *Submission 51*, p. 3.

particularly young women, low income women, women with disability, women with caring responsibilities and women over 55.³⁶

- 3.41 The Department of Social Services advised that state and territory governments are responsible for public and social housing, and that the Commonwealth Government was providing funding through the NHHA to improve housing outcomes.³⁷ The NHHA and funding issues are discussed in Chapter 2, while proposed policy responses including the provision of more social housing are examined in Chapter 4.

Vulnerable groups

- 3.42 The terms of reference for the inquiry, and evidence given to it, included a focus on certain vulnerable groups: cohorts of people who may be at greater risk of homelessness and housing stress than the general population, or groups who may face unique housing challenges requiring targeted solutions.
- 3.43 The NHHA identifies six ‘priority cohorts’ for homelessness:
- women and children affected by family and domestic violence;
 - children and young people;
 - Indigenous Australians;
 - people experiencing repeat homelessness;
 - people exiting institutions and care into homelessness; and
 - older people.³⁸
- 3.44 The NHHA also provides that states and territories may identify other priority cohorts in their bilateral arrangements with the Commonwealth.³⁹
- 3.45 A submission from 18 organisations working on youth homelessness observed that ‘there is no guidance on what “priority” means in practical terms’ in the NHHA,⁴⁰ adding that the articulation of priority cohorts does not lead to any guidance ‘on what a strategic approach might look like’ in responding to their needs.⁴¹

³⁶ YWCA Australia, *Submission 48*, p. 8.

³⁷ Department of Social Services (multi-agency submission), *Submission 57*, p. 25.

³⁸ Department of Social Services (multi-agency submission), *Submission 57*, p. 7.

³⁹ Department of Social Services (multi-agency submission), *Submission 57*, p. 7.

⁴⁰ Upstream Australia and 17 other organisations, *Submission 196*, p. 20.

⁴¹ Upstream Australia and 17 other organisations, *Submission 196*, p. 50.

3.46 Evidence received by the Committee also highlighted additional groups to those specified in the NHHA as being particularly vulnerable to homelessness:

- older women;
- people living with disability;
- people living with mental illness;
- veterans;
- LGBTQI+ people;
- migrants, those on temporary visas and people seeking asylum;
- rough sleepers; and
- people living in rural and remote areas.

3.47 It was frequently observed that many people may be members of two or more of these groups and that can lead to additional intersectional challenges.

Women and children affected by family and domestic violence

3.48 Family and domestic violence was highlighted strongly in evidence to the inquiry, as both a cause of homelessness, and as creating a particularly vulnerable group of people at risk of or experiencing homelessness. Family and domestic violence was identified by numerous organisations as the most common driver of housing instability and homelessness amongst women and children, and the dominant reason women and children sought housing services assistance.⁴²

3.49 The Australian Women Against Violence Alliance (AWAVA) submitted that:

Domestic and sexual violence is the leading cause of homelessness and housing instability in Australia, and is consistently one of the most common reasons clients seek assistance from specialist homelessness services.⁴³

3.50 Dr Gabrielle Phillips, Head of the Housing and Specialised Services Group at the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), highlighted how pervasive family and domestic violence was among clients of specialist homelessness service (SHS) agencies:

⁴² See, for example: Homelessness NSW, *Submission 132*, p. 12; Emerging Minds, *Submission 30*, p. 5; Equality Rights Alliance, *Submission 40*, p. 5; The Salvation Army Australia, *Submission 70*, p. 21; Domestic Violence Victoria, *Submission 60*, p. 6; Australian Women Against Violence Alliance, *Submission 97*, pp. 2-3.

⁴³ Australian Women Against Violence Alliance, *Submission 97*, p. 3.

In the 2018-19 collection, over 116,000 SHS clients had experienced family and domestic violence, which equated to about 40 per cent of all clients. Women made up around 90 per cent of all adult clients experiencing family and domestic violence. We are seeing an increase on average of about 3.9 per cent each year since the collection began in 2011-12. However, in very recent times, we have seen a slight decrease.⁴⁴

- 3.51 Domestic Violence Victoria stated that family violence ‘is the most common reason that women and children become homeless’, advising that almost half of people accessing specialist homelessness services in Victoria in 2017-18 listed family violence as their primary reason for seeking support. The vast majority of these were female.⁴⁵
- 3.52 Others, including the Tasmanian Government⁴⁶ and the City of Whittlesea, also pointed out the significance of family violence as a cause of homelessness in their jurisdictions. The City of Whittlesea submitted that ‘[t]he homelessness rates would be reduced significantly, if we could end violence against women’.⁴⁷
- 3.53 AHURI explained that for women escaping family or domestic violence, ‘homelessness often starts with short periods away from home before a more permanent break. The presence of children is a complicating factor in the decision to either stay in the family home, or leave, risking homelessness.’⁴⁸
- 3.54 In its submission, the Council of Single Mothers and their Children referred to testimony from the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence⁴⁹, which explained the importance of accommodation for women and children escaping domestic and family violence:

The first pillar of recovery is housing. Safe and affordable housing is central to stabilising a victim’s life. Without the certainty of knowing where they will live, a victim cannot plan for the future: if they are not returning home, they need to know where their children will go to school, how they themselves will get to work, or even where they might seek work. With stable accommodation

⁴⁴ Dr Gabrielle Phillips, Head, Housing and Specialised Services Group, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 7 July 2020, p. 19.

⁴⁵ Domestic Violence Victoria, *Submission 60*, p. 6.

⁴⁶ Tasmanian Government, *Submission 179*, p. 9.

⁴⁷ City of Whittlesea, *Submission 65*, p. 2.

⁴⁸ Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, *Submission 139*, p. 46.

⁴⁹ State of Victoria, *Royal Commission into Family Violence: Summary and recommendations*, Parl. Paper No. 132 (2014–16).

they can turn their mind to rebuilding their own and their children's lives and (re)connecting with the community.⁵⁰

3.55 Domestic Violence Victoria highlighted structural drivers linked to homelessness resulting from family and domestic violence:

Homelessness among victim-survivors occurs as a direct result of experiencing family violence – for example, having to leave the home to be safe from a perpetrator's use of violence. However it is also underpinned by structural drivers such as gender-based economic inequality and a systemic lack of affordable housing that prevent victim-survivors from being able to find an affordable, safe place to live where they can recover from the violence they have experienced.⁵¹

3.56 The National Council of Women Australia focused on women's economic inequality:

Homelessness caused by domestic and family violence is closely tied to a victim's financial independence. In Australia, women are usually economically worse off than men.⁵²

3.57 Women's Legal Service Queensland stated that 'poverty and housing affordability are significant barriers to women leaving domestic violence'. Lacking affordable housing options, women may choose to delay separation from their partner, even if this poses risks of further violence to themselves or children.⁵³

3.58 Women's Legal Service Queensland submitted that many women fleeing family violence, despite facing significant financial hardship, were not eligible for social housing and could not afford private rental, especially if they are financially dependent on their partner and have caring responsibilities for children. Home ownership is one ground for ineligibility, despite a woman's inability to access equity in that home.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Council of Single Mothers and their Children, *Submission 72*, pp. 14-15.

⁵¹ Domestic Violence Victoria, *Submission 60*, p. 6.

⁵² National Council of Women Australia, *Submission 76*, p. 3. See also: Per Capita, *Submission 68*, p. 26.

⁵³ Women's Legal Service Queensland, *Submission 87*, p. 3. See also: Women's Legal Service Queensland, *Submission 87*, p. 3; Australian Women Against Domestic Violence Alliance, *Submission 97*, p. 2.

⁵⁴ Women's Legal Service Queensland, *Submission 87*, pp. 3-4. See also: Australian Women Against Violence Alliance, *Submission 97*, p. 2.

- 3.59 Women's Legal Service Queensland also noted that due to hurried departure, many survivors of family or domestic violence may be unable to take furniture and other possessions with them. Lack of financial ability to establish a new home may in turn lead to 'failed tenancies'.⁵⁵
- 3.60 The Council of Single Mothers and their Children added that although emergency relief money may be available for emergency accommodation, this may mean that women and their children are 'sitting in motels without kitchen facilities for months at a time'. This may leave women feeling shame and unable to feed their children well; housed in unsafe or unlockable accommodation near male occupants; or living in sub-standard or mouldy places that impair their health.⁵⁶
- 3.61 AWAVA discussed some further issues that women separating from a violent partner might experience with regards to housing:

Where women post separation are moving into private rentals, as AHURI reports, they may be facing discrimination from landlords or be 'unable to effectively compete with childless, working couples in tight markets where landlords can choose from a large number of prospective tenants.' They may also have a poor renting record due to behaviours and property damage by their violent ex-partners or other family members inflicting violence.

Other compounding factors that disadvantage women include the intersection with child protection, where a lack of housing may be the ground for child removal as well as Family Court orders mandating the places where women must reside. AHURI reports that 'Family Court decisions can trap some women in unaffordable housing markets in order to enable their violent ex-partner to continue to have access to children.'⁵⁷

- 3.62 Mr Benjamin Cronshaw outlined how a threat of homelessness may keep some victim-survivors within abusive relationships:

Family violence can... present women and their children with a Catch-22. They either endure an abusive relationship, or attempt to leave and potentially face homelessness or retributive violence. Some women may have no secure accommodation to go to, leaving themselves homeless and vulnerable to further abuse and hardship.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Women's Legal Service Queensland, *Submission 87*, pp. 3-4.

⁵⁶ Council of Single Mothers and their Children, *Submission 72*, p. 14.

⁵⁷ Australian Women Against Violence Alliance, *Submission 97*, p. 2.

⁵⁸ Mr Benjamin Cronshaw, *Submission 3*, p. 2.

3.63 The link between family and domestic violence and homelessness in remote and Indigenous communities was highlighted to the Committee.

3.64 The Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) submitted that:

Family violence is one of the main reasons for homelessness within Aboriginal communities. Aboriginal children, women and families are disproportionately over-represented in rates of family violence, with Aboriginal women 15 times more likely to access homelessness and crisis housing than non-Aboriginal women.⁵⁹

3.65 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (NATSILS) stated that a lack of crisis accommodation and accessible housing ‘traps our women in a revolving door between crisis accommodation and homelessness, which in turn forces them to return to unsafe homes.’⁶⁰

3.66 The Committee was told that in Central Australia, domestic, family and sexual violence is a major driver of homelessness.⁶¹ WoSSCA explained how women and children fleeing domestic violence in remote communities seek support services in Alice Springs. As transport costs for a woman with three children can be around \$400, once there, the family may have to remain homeless there for weeks before they can afford to return.⁶²

3.67 According to the Central Australian Aboriginal Family Legal Unit (CAAFLU):

The Alice Springs Women’s Shelter has 30 beds to provide short-term emergency accommodation for women and children escaping domestic violence. This can be for a few days or weeks. It was estimated that over 2,000 women and children are turned away each year.⁶³

3.68 AWAVA pointed out that while family, domestic and sexual violence is a key contributor to homelessness, the inverse can also be true:

Homelessness also increases risk of gender-based violence in particular sexual violence. In addition, when intertwined with poverty and lack of social

⁵⁹ Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency, *Submission 126*, p. 17.

⁶⁰ National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services, *Submission 189*, p. 28. See also: Mission Australia, *Submission 137*, p. 15.

⁶¹ Women’s Safety Services of Central Australia, *Submission 51*, p. 3; Central Australian Aboriginal Congress, *Submission 84*, p. 14.

⁶² Women’s Safety Services of Central Australia, *Submission 51*, p. 4.

⁶³ Central Australian Aboriginal Family Legal Unit, *Submission 52*, p. 3.

security support, many women are forced to engage in survival sex to obtain any accommodation, 'pay the rent' or to obtain general 'protection'.⁶⁴

3.69 Domestic Violence Victoria raised the issue of homelessness and housing stress among perpetrators of family violence:

The [Victorian] Royal Commission identified housing for perpetrators of family violence as a significant gap in the system that undermines victim-survivors' safety. If a perpetrator is removed from the family home and becomes homeless as a result, it makes them more likely to try to return home or harass victim-survivors to take them back. It is also harder to engage perpetrators in services when they are homeless. It is much safer for victim-survivors to have perpetrators monitored and engaged in programs than being displaced into dangerous rooming houses or sleeping in their cars. It is also common for perpetrators who are excluded from the home to stay with relatives, most frequently elderly parents. This can place other family members at risk of other forms of family violence, such as elder abuse.⁶⁵

3.70 The Salvation Army Australia stated that housing for survivors of domestic violence is critical and that shortages of crisis accommodation for women facing family violence and at risk of homelessness must be addressed.⁶⁶

3.71 On this topic the Committee was also cognisant of evidence provided to its recent inquiry into family, domestic and sexual violence, in which many participants also emphasised the links between family violence and homelessness, and the importance of appropriate short- and long-term housing solutions for victim-survivors.⁶⁷

Children and young people

3.72 The Committee received extensive evidence on homelessness amongst children and young people.

3.73 Per Capita spoke of complex problems that homeless mothers and their dependent children can face, stating that 'Homeless children are more likely

⁶⁴ Australian Women Against Violence Alliance, *Submission 97*, p. 2. See also: Council of Single Mothers and their Children, *Submission 72*, p. 8.

⁶⁵ Domestic Violence Victoria, *Submission 60*, pp. 6-8.

⁶⁶ The Salvation Army Australia, *Submission 70*, p. 26.

⁶⁷ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs, *Inquiry into family, domestic and sexual violence*, March 2021, pp. 309-312.

to experience hunger, developmental issues, and poor physical and mental health outcomes'.⁶⁸

- 3.74 The Council of Single Mothers and their Children pointed out the toll on children from homelessness or insecure housing forces them to change schools, leave personal possessions, friends and significant family members.⁶⁹
- 3.75 Brisbane Youth Service noted the prevalence of adolescents and young adults within this cohort, submitting that 'in 2018-2019, young people aged 15-24 presenting alone and homeless constituted over half (51%) of young people seeking assistance from homelessness agencies in Australia'. It added that this may be an underestimation due to inaccurate calculations of couch surfing and over-crowding.⁷⁰
- 3.76 Brisbane Youth Service elaborated on drivers of youth homelessness, which include:
- Mental health, drug and alcohol, gender and sexuality, cultural isolation, transitioning and language barriers of youth entering Australia, domestic and family violence, parental mental health and drug and alcohol use and family breakdown. Young people who are exiting care, or youth justice systems and who are transitioning to independence are particularly vulnerable to homelessness.⁷¹
- 3.77 Mission Australia drew attention to a lack of housing options for youth, advising that 'young people account for only 2.9% of principal tenants in social and public housing in Australia and young people are less likely to qualify for priority access'.⁷² SYC pointed out factors that discriminate against young people in the rental market and perpetuate youth homelessness, including lack of stable income, lack of prior rental references, and lack of credit rating history.⁷³
- 3.78 On the detrimental impacts of child and youth homelessness, Melbourne City Mission submitted that:

⁶⁸ Per Capita, *Submission 68*, p. 27.

⁶⁹ Council of Single Mothers and their Children, *Submission 72*, p. 3.

⁷⁰ Brisbane Youth Service, *Submission 118*, p. 6.

⁷¹ Brisbane Youth Service, *Submission 118*, pp. 4-5. See also: Melbourne City Mission, *Submission 91*, p. 4.

⁷² Mission Australia, *Submission 137*, p. 21.

⁷³ SYC, *Submission 80*, p. 4.

Young people who become homeless at an early age are forced into situations where they are required to take on a range of adult responsibilities, without having been given the time and support to develop the knowledge and skills required.⁷⁴

3.79 According to Brisbane Youth Services, homeless young people face increased risks of:

- exposure to violence, abuse and domestic and family violence;
- intersection with the law and justice systems;
- disengagement from school, education and training;
- difficult access to employment;
- stress, depression, anxiety disorders and suicide; and
- substance use.⁷⁵

3.80 Homeless young people also face a disproportionate range of health issues compared to the general population, with higher risks for infectious diseases (such as influenza, hepatitis, and sexually transmitted diseases), diabetes, asthma and pneumonia.⁷⁶

3.81 Several submitters emphasised that children living in families that are homeless or at risk of homelessness are also at an increased risk of mental health difficulties.⁷⁷ Emerging Minds stated that:

Housing stress impacts housing stability and parenting capacity which has an impact on children's social and emotional wellbeing and development. Frequent moves impact on social connection (educational and community) which impacts on the support network of the family and can have cascading impacts on children's mental health as they grow and develop.⁷⁸

3.82 The Youth Affairs Council of South Australia (YACSA), a peak body representing youth-focused organisations in South Australia, advised that:

The *Costs of Youth Homelessness in Australia* project report found that over half (53%) of the homeless young people surveyed described being diagnosed with at least one mental health condition. In addition, the incidence of self-injury and suicidality in homeless young people is not only higher than the rest of the population but is also higher than any other group of disadvantaged

⁷⁴ Melbourne City Mission, *Submission 91*, p. 4.

⁷⁵ Brisbane Youth Service, *Submission 118*, p. 5.

⁷⁶ Youth Affairs Council of South Australia, *Submission 36*, pp. 3-4.

⁷⁷ Emerging Minds, *Submission 30*, p. 2; Mission Australia, *Submission 137*, p. 18.

⁷⁸ Emerging Minds, *Submission 30*, p. 6.

young people. Alarmingly, 20% of homeless young women and 12% of homeless young men had attempted suicide in the six months prior to the survey and over half (55%) of those young people had not received any counselling or professional support.⁷⁹

3.83 Hope Street Family and Youth Services commented on the flow-on economic effects of homelessness among young people, advising that the estimated costs of youth homelessness in additional health and justice services are \$18,000 per youth annually, or \$747 million per year excluding ‘lifetime impact’ on education and employment.⁸⁰

3.84 SYC drew attention to the connection between youth homelessness and unemployment, advising that the unemployment rate for young homeless people was 84 per cent, and that:

There is often a cyclical relationship between youth homelessness and unemployment. Losing their job may place the young person at risk of homelessness and their homelessness then makes it more difficult for the young person to find work and maintain work routines.⁸¹

3.85 Emerging Minds expressed concern about the limited visibility of children in homelessness data, particularly in situations of overcrowding.⁸²

Data collection which does not adequately capture the experience of children in homeless families means the services delivered are less likely to consider the needs of children as individuals when providing services to families or to take into account to their context when providing services directly to children.⁸³

3.86 Hope Street Youth and Family Services stressed the need for specialist ‘youth-specific responses’ and services to be provided not only in central city areas but in urban and rural communities, to maintain social connections and mitigate negative impacts of relocation.⁸⁴

⁷⁹ Youth Affairs Council of South Australia, *Submission 36*, p. 3.

⁸⁰ Hope Street Youth and Family Services, *Submission 74*, p. 5.

⁸¹ SYC, *Submission 80*, pp. 3-4.

⁸² Emerging Minds, *Submission 30*, p. 2.

⁸³ Emerging Minds, *Submission 30*, p. 6.

⁸⁴ Hope Street Youth and Family Services, *Submission 74*, p. 5.

Indigenous Australians

- 3.87 The 2016 Census revealed that ‘despite representing less than 3% of the total Australian population, Indigenous Australians account for 20% of the homeless population (down from 26% in 2011)’.⁸⁵
- 3.88 The high prevalence of homelessness among Indigenous Australians was a concern raised in much evidence to the Committee. VACCA, for example, submitted that Victoria has the highest and fastest rising rates of Aboriginal people accessing homeless services in Australia, at 17 per cent, commenting that ‘[t]his scale of homelessness would not be accepted in the mainstream’.⁸⁶
- 3.89 Contributors to the inquiry explained the particular understandings and circumstances of homelessness as experienced in Indigenous communities.
- 3.90 Chapter 2 discussed the issue of severe overcrowding as a form of homelessness, and noted that this was particularly prevalent in Indigenous families and communities. AHURI explained that
- Aboriginal households tend to be larger and more complex, often including a number of family sub-groups, but all of whom are inter-related by descent. Household sizes of six to 12 people are common, and much larger multi-generational ones of up to 20 members can be regularly encountered.⁸⁷
- 3.91 Housing for the Aged Action Group (HAAG) submitted that ‘Indigenous Australians are six more times likely to live in overcrowded conditions [than] non-indigenous Australians’.⁸⁸
- 3.92 Some of the risks associated with severely overcrowded housing raised with the committee included communicable disease, poorer early childhood development, and stress to mental health and social and emotional wellbeing.⁸⁹

⁸⁵ Exodus Foundation, *Submission 27*, p. 5.

⁸⁶ Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency, *Submission 126*, p. 7.

⁸⁷ Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, *Service integrated housing for Australians in later life*, AHURI Final Report No. 141, January 2010, quoted in SEARMS Aboriginal Corporation, *Submission 85*, p. 12. See also: National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation, *Submission 166*, pp. 6-7; Q Shelter, *Submission 164*, pp. 7-8.

⁸⁸ Housing for the Aged Action Group, *Submission 138*, p. 15. See also: Central Australian Aboriginal Congress, *Submission 84*, p. 11.

⁸⁹ Central Australian Aboriginal Congress, *Submission 84*, pp. 16-17.

- 3.93 VACCA submitted that ‘one in five Aboriginal people live in social housing compared to one in 50 of the mainstream community’, noting the low rate of home ownership among Indigenous Australians:

Since 1971, homeownership has significantly decreased for people aged 25-35 and the Aboriginal community is disproportionately impacted by this as their median age is much younger compared to that of the mainstream community.

The latest census data estimates that 38 per cent of Aboriginal households own their own home compared to 69 per cent for the mainstream population.⁹⁰

- 3.94 VACCA submitted that ‘Aboriginal households face additional challenges such as systemic discrimination when attempting to enter the private rental market’.⁹¹

- 3.95 The correlation of poverty with Indigenous homelessness was raised by the Central Australian Aboriginal Congress:

Aboriginal people are disproportionately dependent on citizenship entitlements such as the Newstart Allowance, the Parenting Payment and the Youth Allowance. These are inadequate to meet the needs of families and their children, especially in remote areas where the cost of living is much higher, especially for food.⁹²

- 3.96 On employment, HAAG submitted that:

The 2016 census indicated that the employment rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders is 46%. In comparison, the employment rate for non-Indigenous is around 72%.⁹³

- 3.97 Dominant concepts of permanency and mobility in housing were queried by the Mental Health Association of Central Australia:

Indigenous people are highly mobile due to a range of social, cultural, economic and seasonal factors which drive their mobility. They often attribute residency to a region rather than a specific place or structure. The notion that a

⁹⁰ Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency, *Submission 126*, p. 9.

⁹¹ Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency, *Submission 126*, pp. 9-10, 29.

⁹² Central Australian Aboriginal Congress, *Submission 84*, p. 14.

⁹³ Housing for the Aged Action Group, *Submission 135*, p. 15.

successful tenancy is one that is permanent is not necessarily relevant to many of our clients in central Australia.⁹⁴

3.98 Further, the concepts of 'home' and 'spiritual homelessness' were addressed by the Central Australian Aboriginal Congress:

For tens of thousands of years, the concept of 'home' for Aboriginal people – of where a person is from and their relationship to Country – literally, their 'homeland' – has been central to our wellbeing...

However, for many Aboriginal people and families colonisation has led to 'spiritual homelessness', a state of disconnection from homeland, family, kin, and culture which has profound effects on the health and wellbeing of individuals, families and communities.⁹⁵

3.99 On the other hand, the Central Australian Aboriginal Congress also spoke of the 'protective effect' of Aboriginal culture:

Aboriginal culture is founded on sharing through extended networks of family and kin. Many Aboriginal people without a home of their own will therefore be able to stay in other dwellings within those family networks.⁹⁶

3.100 In responding to homelessness among Indigenous Australians, VACCA submitted that 'Aboriginal population projections show that a further 27,000 households will require housing by 2036 with an average annual household population growth rate of 4 per cent'.⁹⁷

3.101 Many contributors emphasised the need for culturally appropriate housing policies and programs. The City of Sydney, for example, observed that:

There is currently no federal program specifically supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples experiencing or at risk of homelessness. Services for homeless Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are overwhelmingly 'mainstreamed'...

Culturally appropriate crisis and early intervention services must recognise issues that disproportionately affect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

⁹⁴ Mental Health Association of Central Australia, *Submission 92*, pp. 1-2. See also: SEARMS Aboriginal Corporation, *Submission 85*, p. 11; Central Australian Aboriginal Congress, *Submission 84*, p. 19.

⁹⁵ Central Australian Aboriginal Congress, *Submission 84*, p. 7. See also: Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency, *Submission 126*, pp. 7-8.

⁹⁶ Central Australian Aboriginal Congress, *Submission 84*, p. 11.

⁹⁷ Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency, *Submission 126*, p. 11.

people, including domestic violence, health care, mental health and alcohol and substance use.⁹⁸

3.102 Homelessness NSW similarly submitted that despite a substantially higher rate of Aboriginal people accessing homelessness services than other Australians, few culturally specific organisations were sufficiently funded.⁹⁹

3.103 The Mental Health Association of Central Australia stated that rather than explaining Indigenous homelessness in terms of ‘culturally inappropriate housing’, the housing system as a whole:

... needs to be understood in the context of how the services and opportunities that a house can afford are realised and managed. For example, in central Australia we expect transience and movement of tenancies within the housing system. A successful tenancy is one that supports recovery and stability and is not measured by the length of stay in a building.¹⁰⁰

3.104 Chapter 4 discusses further evidence received about Indigenous community housing and the role of community-controlled organisations.

People experiencing repeat homelessness

3.105 As recognised in the NHHA, the cyclical and even intergenerational nature of some homelessness was raised as an important matter for consideration during the inquiry.

3.106 Unison Housing Research Lab, a partnership between the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) and Unison Housing, stressed that homelessness can often be cyclical. The Lab noted the problem of ‘tenancy breakdown’ and people cycling between social housing and homelessness:

The flow of people out of social housing and into homelessness is a serious issue simply because high turnover has significant social and economic costs. For households and individuals, the costs of tenancy breakdown can include poor health and well-being, as well as poor educational and employment outcomes, more so if they subsequently experience chronic residential instability or homelessness.¹⁰¹

3.107 On reasons for leaving social housing tenancies, it submitted that:

⁹⁸ City of Sydney, *Submission 31*, p. 40.

⁹⁹ Homelessness NSW, *Submission 132*, p. 14.

¹⁰⁰ Mental Health Association of Central Australia, *Submission 92*, p. 2.

¹⁰¹ Unison Housing Research Lab, *Submission 66*, p. 7.

Residents left their housing for both positive reasons (pull factors) and negative reasons (push factors). Most exits (59 per cent) were due to negative reasons, such as rent arrears or conflict with neighbours. However, reasons for leaving vary according to the duration of the tenancy, with positive exits increasing with longer tenures.¹⁰²

3.108 Mission Australia added that social housing tenants who have been evicted face a precarious position as ‘these individuals often have no access to secure housing or a history of tenancy in the private rental market to support their private rental applications’, emphasising the importance of tenancy support programs.¹⁰³

3.109 Unison Housing Research Lab argued that a focus on the repeat homelessness in allocation of social housing is key:

Reducing the number of formerly homeless people re-entering homelessness is the area where direct government intervention has the greatest capacity to deliver strong results. Our view is that, coupled with structural reform in the housing market, a policy focus on reducing to zero re-entries into homelessness by targeting formerly homeless households in social housing makes sense. It makes sense because the target population is easy to identify. It makes sense because the economic and social benefits are substantial. And, it makes sense because the impact of any intervention designed to reduce re-entries would be relatively easy to measure, and hence contribute to a more accountable sector.¹⁰⁴

3.110 It stated that ‘housing homeless people is often a costly and complex process yet relatively little is spent ensuring they maintain their housing’. It urged that ‘flows’ of people in and out of homelessness be viewed through a ‘systems’ perspective to capture ‘behaviours of systems over time’ rather than ‘snapshots’ of individuals.¹⁰⁵

3.111 The Committee was told that for more than a decade programs have existed to address the flows of high risk tenancies, such as Green Light¹⁰⁶ and Tenancy Plus¹⁰⁷, but that:

¹⁰² Unison Housing Research Lab, *Submission 66*, p. 8.

¹⁰³ Mission Australia, *Submission 137*, p. 27.

¹⁰⁴ Unison Housing Research Lab, *Submission 66*, p. 8.

¹⁰⁵ Unison Housing Research Lab, *Submission 66*, p. 6.

¹⁰⁶ Sacred Heart Mission, ‘GreenLight Supportive Housing Program’, <www.sacredheartmission.org/seek-help/housing-support/greenlight-supportive-housing>.

They are insufficiently scaled to reduce the flow in any meaningful way. Further, they are poorly integrated with social housing providers and often only work with specific, narrowly defined subpopulations.¹⁰⁸

3.112 Further measures were proposed to support formerly homeless people to maintain social housing tenancies, including:

- better coordination between support providers and landlords to identify and target signs of tenancy breakdown;
- encouraging a housing focused culture in support agencies, including clinical and health agencies; and
- incentivising social housing providers to work with high risk tenancies.¹⁰⁹

3.113 The City of Sydney identified the importance of social support and geographic considerations:

Most people who are homeless in Sydney are from Inner Sydney and the greater Sydney metropolitan area and spend an average of more than five years on the streets. Once housed, people who have experienced chronic or repeat homelessness can struggle to adapt to living in an apartment, and meeting the obligations and expectations of landlords and neighbours.

The City is also aware of numerous people who have experienced chronic homelessness, that have been housed in social housing, often in locations far away from where they have been living. Without connection to their social networks, some have returned to sleeping rough because of social isolation and loneliness.

Social support needs and connection to community should be considered as key factors that assist people sustain tenancies.¹¹⁰

People exiting institutions and other care arrangements

3.114 The risk of homelessness can be high for people exiting institutional and care settings such as prisons, detention centres, health facilities or youth out-of-home care:

¹⁰⁷ HousingVic, 'Tenancy Plus support program', <www.housing.vic.gov.au/tenancy-plus-support-program>.

¹⁰⁸ Unison Housing Research Lab, *Submission 66*, p. 8.

¹⁰⁹ Unison Housing Research Lab, *Submission 66*, pp. 8-9.

¹¹⁰ City of Sydney, *Submission 31*, p. 37.

It is still common practice for people experiencing homelessness to be discharged from mental health facilities, public hospitals and the justice system into homelessness. There is a lack of suitable housing options, waitlists for crisis accommodation and complexity of issues such as substance use.¹¹¹

3.115 NATSILS stated that ‘homelessness is more common among those with a history of contact with the criminal legal system, it lasts for longer, and is more likely to reoccur than for other homeless people’.¹¹²

3.116 Statistics were presented by the Community Restorative Centre (CRC) on people exiting correctional centres in NSW:

- Over the last 12 months close to 20,000 people were released from NSW Correctional Centres.
- 41% of this population will re-offend within a year.
- AIHW data notes that more than 50% of people leaving prison in Australia expect to be homeless.
- More than 70% of people locked up in NSW prisons have been there before.
- NSW Health data shows us that 9.6% of people in prison were in primary homelessness six months prior to incarceration and 24.6% of people in prison either have no fixed address or had moved twice or more in the six months prior to incarceration.
- Imprisonment increases the likelihood of homelessness.
- It is a conservative estimate to observe that there are at least 4000 people released each year from prison in NSW each year with nowhere stable to live.
- At last count, in the community sector in NSW there were only 38 specialist beds across the sector for people leaving prison. Most of these are short term (less than 12 weeks) crisis beds.¹¹³

3.117 The City of Sydney submitted that 28 per cent of Sydney’s homeless population have been in prison:

There are proven links between homelessness, offending and reoffending. People who find suitable, supported and stable housing are more likely to stay out of prison, particularly those with complex needs.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ Bolton Clarke Homeless Persons Program, *Submission 17*, p. 6.

¹¹² National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service, *Submission 198*, p. 31.

¹¹³ Community Restorative Centre, *Submission 114*, p. 8. See also: Civil Liberties Australia, *Submission 23.1*, p. 1.

- 3.118 Flat Out advised that prisoner exits into homelessness in Victoria have increased by 188 per cent over the last five years:

The limited housing that is available often replicates the punitive and coercive dynamics that have already impacted criminalised women, either or both as a result of imprisonment, and of family violence.¹¹⁵

- 3.119 CRC told the Committee that many accommodation service organisations will not accept people released from custody, which presents serious challenges for people who wish to change their lives:

Thousands of people leave NSW prisons each year with no support services engaged to work with them, no information about how to survive on the outside, no money, no identification, no clothing, no family or friends, and nowhere at all to live.¹¹⁶

- 3.120 Civil Liberties Australia (CLA) quoted a personal perspective:

A bloke's suddenly let out of jail, no money, nowhere to go. He had no idea what to do. He had no home, no clothing, no accommodation, no family support ... What do they do? They commit a crime and go back to jail because at least they get four walls and a roof and a meal.¹¹⁷

- 3.121 CLA also submitted that the major but 'questionable' housing option for people exiting prison appeared to be boarding houses.¹¹⁸

- 3.122 NATSILS submitted that Indigenous Australians are more likely to become homeless upon release from prison:

The social exclusion and isolation faced by our people in prison also leads to a loss of connectedness to country and culture. Many of our people require repatriation back into their communities for successful reintegration, with those unable to return to their communities being at greater risk of homelessness, and consequently at greater risk of reoffending.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁴ City of Sydney, *Submission 31*, p. 16.

¹¹⁵ Flat Out, *Submission 103*, p. 8.

¹¹⁶ Community Restorative Centre, *Submission 114*, pp. 6-7.

¹¹⁷ Civil Liberties Australia, *Submission 23.1*, p. 2.

¹¹⁸ Civil Liberties Australia, *Submission 23.1*, p. 2.

¹¹⁹ National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service, *Submission 189*, pp. 31-32.

- 3.123 The National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO) observed that Indigenous women are particularly affected by the cycle of homelessness and imprisonment:

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are the least likely of any group within the corrections system to be able to find appropriate accommodation on release—particularly if they have dependent children. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women released from prison find it difficult to find stable accommodation and often remain homeless or return to prison after nine months.¹²⁰

- 3.124 In relation to exit from healthcare facilities, Bolton Clarke Homeless Persons Program (Bolton Clarke) submitted that there are limited options for respite or ‘step-down’ facilities for discharged patients. Although Supported Residential Services and other services may be used, there can be difficulties if service staff lack the skills needed to address complex health and social issues. There is no legislation prescribing appropriate skills levels for homelessness services, unlike aged care.¹²¹

- 3.125 For youth exiting out-of-home care, particularly for youth with low school attainment and employment levels, Mission Australia submitted that:

Care leavers often struggle with finding housing due to lack of family supports or supportive social networks, limited financial resources and high rates of mental illness and/or issues related to past trauma.¹²²

- 3.126 According to Anglicare Australia, ‘63% of homeless youth [come] from the out-of-home care system’.¹²³

- 3.127 Responses were proposed to the Committee in respect of each of these groups. In relation to released prisoners, Bolton Clarke stated that there is a need for discharge plans that can conduct early identification of homelessness, provide access to housing and link with community support organisations.¹²⁴

- 3.128 For those leaving health care facilities, Bolton Clarke recommended that:

¹²⁰ National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation, *Submission 166*, p. 8.

¹²¹ Bolton Clarke Homeless Persons Program, *Submission 17*, p. 6.

¹²² Mission Australia, *Submission 137*, pp. 28-29.

¹²³ Anglicare Australia, *Submission 173*, p. 10.

¹²⁴ Bolton Clarke Homeless Persons Program, *Submission 17*, p. 7. See also: City of Sydney, *Submission 31*, p. 38.

Step down units, sometimes known as ‘medical respite’, are an evidence-based strategy for better outcomes for people experiencing homelessness and reducing readmission to acute hospital beds.¹²⁵

3.129 AHURI submitted that increased care for youth leaving out-of-home care is needed until 21 years of age.¹²⁶

People aged 55 or older

3.130 Numerous submissions referred to people over 55 as the fastest growing cohort experiencing homelessness.¹²⁷

3.131 HAAG submitted that from 2006 to 2016, there was a 55 per cent increase in homeless people over 55 years old and predicts that this will ‘more than double from 2010 to 2050’.¹²⁸

3.132 HAAG identified four major drivers for increasing aged homelessness:

- ageing population;
- decreasing levels of home ownership and increasing retiree mortgage debt;
- 50% reduction in public housing expenditure since 1990;
- a rapid increase in the numbers of older people living in insecure and expensive private rental market that is ill equipped for ageing in place.¹²⁹

3.133 AHURI linked homelessness among older people to the breakdown of intergenerational family housing due to rental stress, overcrowding, carer stress or elder abuse, noting that conversely, family ties acted as a protective factor.¹³⁰

3.134 Per Capita submitted that ‘older people experience home as a social relationship’ and that homelessness can be described as a ‘distinctive form of social exclusion’ with far-reaching health and wellbeing impacts.¹³¹

¹²⁵ Bolton Clarke Homeless Persons Program, *Submission 17*, p. 6.

¹²⁶ Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, *Submission 139*, p. 7.

¹²⁷ See, for example: Housing for the Aged Action Group, *Submission 138*, p. 5; Unison Housing Research Lab, *Submission 66*, pp. 3-4.

¹²⁸ Housing for the Aged Action Group, *Submission 138*, p. 5.

¹²⁹ Housing for the Aged Action Group, *Submission 138*, pp. 3-4.

¹³⁰ Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, *Submission 139*, p. 4.

¹³¹ Per Capita, *Submission 68*, pp. 24-25.

3.135 HammondCare also commented on the additional needs of aged homeless people, many of whom face significant health care challenges caused by exploitative relationships, chronic abuse, institutionalisation, long-term substance abuse, loneliness and a general lack of social supports.¹³²

3.136 Wintringham, a provider of care and accommodation to older persons who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, submitted that:

Many clients arrive at Wintringham in very poor health, undernourished and frequently frightened or so 'battle hardened' that they are difficult to communicate with. In addition, it is quite common for our clients to have no contact with family members and no support system to advocate or care for them.¹³³

3.137 Per Capita cited the shift away from home ownership amongst retirees as a key driver of increased homelessness among older Australians:

Although an assumption of zero housing costs in retirement continues to underpin our retirement income system, only 73.4% of older Australians own their own homes fully. With average mortgage debt a staggering 600 per cent higher than 30 years ago, this trend is likely to continue.¹³⁴

3.138 HAAG submitted that two consequences flow from the assumption of retiree home ownership. First, the aged pension does not adequately cover ongoing mortgage or rent costs. Second, the aged care system presumes that services will be provided in secure housing.¹³⁵

3.139 Without their own homes, submitters pointed out that there are limited affordable housing options for the aged cohort:

Australia's mainstream 'aged housing' market is fragmented, with the main model of retirement villages expensive to both enter and to exit. Affordable options such as independent living units have strict eligibility criteria: unless you are over 60 and receiving the full age pension you are unlikely to be housed.¹³⁶

3.140 Wintringham submitted that more than 96 per cent of its clients survive on Centrelink incomes. The majority receive the age pension, followed by

¹³² HammondCare, *Submission 71*, p. 4.

¹³³ Wintringham, *Submission 100*, p. 13.

¹³⁴ Per Capita, *Submission 68*, p. 23.

¹³⁵ Housing for the Aged Action Group, *Submission 138*, p. 4.

¹³⁶ Per Capita, *Submission 68*, p. 24.

clients on disability support. Less than one per cent of their clients are employed:

With this reliance upon statutory incomes, we see that many people who are living alone, especially older women, are pushed out of the rental market solely due to their low income. Homelessness services such as ours are inundated with people who live on a pension, and can no longer afford their rent.¹³⁷

- 3.141 HammondCare submitted that it is ‘simply not viable’ for many providers to offer accommodation for the aged homeless. Falling occupancy rates, rising care costs, and insufficient funding has placed severe financial stress on the residential aged care sector:

In this fiscal environment where the viability of providing mainstream residential aged care services is being challenged, providing homeless-specific residential aged care – for a resident group that have complex personal histories, health care needs and that require correspondingly high levels of support – is out of the question for many providers.¹³⁸

- 3.142 Where social housing is available, it may not be fit for purpose for ageing residents:

Despite some dedicated ‘over-50s’ blocks, the built environment of social housing – often older stock of low-quality standards – usually lacks the universal design standards of age-friendly housing, as defined by the World Health Organisation (WHO).¹³⁹

- 3.143 HammondCare submitted that accessing assistance can be challenging for aged homeless people:

The interface between the homeless and aged care sector is characterised by fragmentation and access issues, and both sectors are severely under-resourced, leaving many older people with inadequate levels of support.¹⁴⁰

- 3.144 Further, Wintringham said that ‘the majority of community-based aged care services are predicated on the assumption that the care recipient has secure and appropriate housing’:

¹³⁷ Wintringham, *Submission 100*, p. 10.

¹³⁸ HammondCare, *Submission 71*, p. 6.

¹³⁹ Per Capita, *Submission 68*, p. 24.

¹⁴⁰ HammondCare, *Submission 41*, p. 4.

The only program that specifically acknowledges that older people may be living in sub-standard housing is the Assistance with Care and Housing (ACH) sub-program in the Commonwealth Home Support Program (CHSP), which provides entry level aged support services to older Australians...CHSP providers are funded for specific service types and – depending on what their funding makeup is- have very limited flexibility to respond to client need if the older person unexpectedly finds themselves experiencing homelessness.¹⁴¹

- 3.145 Per Capita noted that the Government's 2013 *Living Longer Living Better* reforms¹⁴² gave priority residential aged care access to older homeless people and increased funding for their complex needs and outreach services.

The Aged Care and Housing (ACH) sub-program has also been expanded, with a homelessness supplement provided to residential aged care providers to help them meet the costs incurred in providing specialised services. A focus on housing circumstances now forms part of the aged care assessment process, whereas in the recent past, housing and ageing portfolios have operated separately.¹⁴³

- 3.146 Moreover, the Australian Government has acknowledged the 'premature ageing' of homeless people in order to provide access to Commonwealth-funded aged care services for homeless people over 50 (rather than 65). Wintringham endorsed the recognition of premature aging in this way: 'it makes a key difference to service provision if we 'label' a client aged and homeless, rather than homeless and aged'.¹⁴⁴

- 3.147 Nevertheless, the Committee was told that access through the My Aged Care System can be difficult to navigate without a support worker:

In general, Specialist Homelessness Support Workers are not familiar with the Aged Care system and therefore do not refer to it. Consequently, this results in people who are eligible for the Aged Care Services not receiving the services they need and are entitled to.¹⁴⁵

- 3.148 Bolton Clarke observed similarly that mainstream aged care service providers had little understanding of issues facing elderly homeless people:

¹⁴¹ Wintringham *Submission 100*, p. 5.

¹⁴² *Aged Care (Living Longer Living Better) Act 2013* (Cth).

¹⁴³ Per Capita, *Submission 68*, pp. 24-25.

¹⁴⁴ Wintringham, *Submission 100*, p. 13.

¹⁴⁵ Wintringham, *Submission 100*, p. 13. See also: Bolton Clark Homeless Persons Program, *Submission 17*, p. 7.

People living with homelessness are often distrustful of ‘faceless’ government services and paperwork. Most services are not able to provide assertive outreach or deliver services to environments where people are living such as rooming houses due to concerns about safety for workers.¹⁴⁶

- 3.149 Per Capita submitted that early detection and intervention mechanisms are vital to support the homeless aged and the elderly at risk of homelessness, particularly older women.¹⁴⁷
- 3.150 Wintringham also advocated for ‘holistic, wrap-around, and sustainable support’ models and strategies based on collaboration between housing, aged care, mental health and other services such as brokerage funding.¹⁴⁸

Older women

- 3.151 Within the group of older Australians facing homelessness or the risk of homelessness, several groups highlighted the situation of single older women.¹⁴⁹
- 3.152 The National Older Women’s Housing and Homelessness Working Group (NOWHHWG) stated that between the Censuses in 2011 and 2016, homelessness among older women rose by 31 per cent with poverty attributed as the key driver for this group.¹⁵⁰
- 3.153 The 2016 Census reported a 75 per cent increase in older women sleeping in their cars, which was observed by HAAG staff.

Safe emergency housing for older women is particularly rare, and many women tell us they prefer to live in their car (if they have one) or under a street lamp than in a rooming house or cheap motel which can be more dangerous.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁶ Bolton Clarke Homeless Persons Program, *Submission 17*, pp. 7-8.

¹⁴⁷ Per Capita, *Submission 68*, p. 25.

¹⁴⁸ Wintringham, *Submission 100*, p. 14.

¹⁴⁹ National Council of Women Australia, *Submission 76*, p. 3; Housing for the Aged Action Group *Submission 138*, p. 5; Australian Human Rights Commission, *Submission 22*, p. 2.

¹⁵⁰ National Older Women’s Housing and Homelessness Working Group, *Submission 108*, p. 2. See also: Housing for the Aged Action Group, *Submission 138*, p. 5.

¹⁵¹ Housing for the Aged Action Group, *Submission 138*, p. 5.

3.154 An increase was also reported by YWCA, which stated that ‘65% of YWCA tenants are over 50, with many being first time users of the welfare system’.¹⁵²

3.155 The true scale of homelessness amongst older women may however be hidden as many women may be reluctant to access services due to stigma, stoicism or shame. HAAG stated that:

We know many women aren’t accessing services and will often couch surf and manage overcrowding, poor living conditions (such as living in a shed or garage) or live under the threat of violence from a partner/ family member for many years before seeking service support.¹⁵³

3.156 NOWHHWG submitted that older women experience homelessness differently to men:

Most [women] will not self-identify as homeless, instead describing their situation in terms of ‘housing crisis’. Homeless women generally move from place to place, often in a downward trajectory in terms of mental and physical health as their situation becomes untenable... Most older women who are homeless have not been homeless before and are therefore unlikely to approach traditional homelessness services for support.¹⁵⁴

3.157 Anglicare Australia submitted:

The precarious nature of their economic circumstances means that older women can find themselves suddenly, and very unexpectedly, without a home, and without the coping strategies that people who have grown up through hardship might develop.¹⁵⁵

3.158 Homelessness risk factors for older women included being single and renting, situations of family and domestic violence, loss of a partner, and crisis situations such as job loss, illness or eviction. Risk can be compounded by economic disadvantage from lifelong lower wages and superannuation.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵² YWCA Australia, *Submission 48*, p. 11.

¹⁵³ Housing for the Aged Action Group, *Submission 138*, p. 5. See also: National Older Women’s Housing and Homelessness Working Group, *Submission 108*, p. 2.

¹⁵⁴ National Older Women’s Housing and Homelessness Working Group, *Submission 108*, pp. 2-3.

¹⁵⁵ Anglicare Australia, *Submission 173*, p. 11.

¹⁵⁶ Australian Human Rights Commission, *Submission 22*, p. 2.

- 3.159 Lower financial accumulation by women over their lifetimes was cited by submitters as a key causal factor leading to homelessness when these women reach retirement age. The reasons for this included lower rates of pay in casual or part-time work; less time in the workforce due to children or caring roles; (previous) employment discrimination against married or pregnant women; mortgage access discrimination; and less access to additional income earning opportunities for older women.¹⁵⁷
- 3.160 On superannuation, the Australian Human Rights Commission submitted that:
- The average superannuation balance of women at retirement is \$157,050, while the average superannuation holdings of men at retirement are \$270,000. Approximately 48% of women aged 45 to 64 have less than \$40,000 in superannuation—or none at all.¹⁵⁸
- 3.161 NOWHHWG submitted that during the COVID-19 emergency, women were disproportionately economically affected, and that allowing early access to super is likely to have ‘future ramifications for homelessness amongst older women’.¹⁵⁹
- 3.162 Older women face particular challenges in accessing housing. Anglicare Australia’s 2020 Rental Affordability Snapshot illustrated the current lack of private rental housing for single older women, with less than 800 of the 69,000 properties available for rent on the survey weekend affordable for a single person on the aged pension, even with the Coronavirus Supplement.¹⁶⁰ Others advised that in the decade prior to the 2016 Census, the number of older women forced to rent increased by 97 per cent.¹⁶¹
- 3.163 NOWHHWG submitted that ‘older women will often not get access to priority social housing as they are usually homeless due to low incomes, not because of having complex needs’.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁷ National Older Women’s Housing and Homelessness Working Group, *Submission 108*, p. 3; National Council of Women Australia, *Submission 76*, p. 3-4; YWCA Australia, *Submission 48*, p. 11.

¹⁵⁸ Australian Human Rights Commission, *Submission 22*, p. 2.

¹⁵⁹ National Older Women’s Housing and Homelessness Working Group, *Submission 108*, p. 4.

¹⁶⁰ National Older Women’s Housing and Homelessness Working Group, *Submission 108*, p. 4.

¹⁶¹ National Older Women’s Housing and Homelessness Working Group, *Submission 108*, p. 2. See also: Mercy Foundation, *Submission 35*, p. 4.

¹⁶² National Older Women’s Housing and Homelessness Working Group, *Submission 108*, p. 4.

- 3.164 The submission added that older women's basic need for housing cannot be overstated as housing is 'an important social determinant of health':

Women's health needs generally increase as they age and are exacerbated for those women who are living in precarious housing, at risk of homelessness or who experience homelessness.¹⁶³

- 3.165 McAuley Community Services for Women questioned whether traditional homelessness services, which target people with complex needs, are well suited to the needs of older women at risk of homelessness:

It could be that relatively modest investment in support for this cohort, who may still be working but are only a few pay-packets away from being unable to maintain their housing – will divert older women from requiring homelessness support.¹⁶⁴

- 3.166 The Committee was told about research indicating that older women are particularly interested in accessing large scale (between 25-30 units) cooperative housing or 'cohousing', in which each woman has independent accommodation around communal areas and shared responsibility for day-to-day community operations.

This is important because it shows that what older people really want from housing is not only affordability and secure tenure; older women have a preference to belong to a small and socially connected community in their final years of adulthood.¹⁶⁵

- 3.167 Per Capita research showed that 'even older women who own their homes outright would consider moving into cohousing, but cohousing models have received very limited attention or support in Australia'.¹⁶⁶

People living with disability

- 3.168 People living with a disability are at a greater risk of housing stress and homelessness and face additional barriers to accessing support and housing services.

¹⁶³ National Older Women's Housing and Homelessness Working Group, *Submission 108*, p. 4.

¹⁶⁴ McAuley Community Services for Women, *Submission 46*, p. 16.

¹⁶⁵ Per Capita, *Submission 68*, p. 24.

¹⁶⁶ Per Capita, *Submission 68*, p. 24.

- 3.169 PIAC submitted that risks included ‘generally lower income, limited opportunities to secure a full time, well paid job, and low levels of appropriate, affordable stock in the private rental market’.¹⁶⁷
- 3.170 The Committee heard that carers of people with disabilities are also at greater risk of homelessness due to income stress, as caring duties reduce ability to work or study:

It can lead to [carers] losing current work and limiting other employment opportunities. As such, household income decreases and people can be forced into vulnerable situations, particularly if they are renting or already experiencing low socioeconomic status. This coupled with stress and pressure to pay bills and maintain quality of life can have devastating consequences for people and increase their risk of homelessness.¹⁶⁸

- 3.171 Bolton Clarke noted that many homeless people may be living with a disability which, if undiagnosed, presents barriers to accessing support from the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). NDIS service access requires a formal diagnosis of mental health, physical or cognitive disabilities. Despite having obvious functional challenges, there may be difficulties providing the required evidence:

There can be long waiting lists for neuro-psychology assessments and difficulty accessing mental health services. The cost of private neuro-psychology assessment service is prohibitive and access to bulk billing psychiatry limited. Cognitive challenges may make it difficult to collect the ‘evidence’, such as getting to appointments and having insight into needs. Fragmentation of medical history, transience and unstable housing contribute to the difficulty.¹⁶⁹

- 3.172 Dementia Australia noted that while data was limited, evidence of poor health outcomes indicated that homeless people with dementia had higher rates of cognitive impairments than the general population:

This poses challenges for the healthcare and social services workforce to meet the demands of identifying and providing appropriate care and support for homeless persons living with dementia and those who care for them.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁷ Public Interest Advocacy Centre, *Submission 115*, p. 29.

¹⁶⁸ Dementia Australia, *Submission 19*, p. 4.

¹⁶⁹ Bolton Clarke Homeless Person Program, *Submission 17*, p. 8.

¹⁷⁰ Dementia Australia, *Submission 19*, p. 4.

3.173 Dementia Australia also noted that dementia symptoms can be confused with mental illness symptoms and that dementia does not preclude other mental health illnesses, or vice versa. This poses challenges for homeless sector workers who report that:

While their training focuses to some degree on mental health, they lack adequate knowledge on the early signs and symptoms of dementia, making it difficult to recognise the disease or distinguish between dementia and mental health symptoms or other neurocognitive issues (such as acquired brain injuries).¹⁷¹

3.174 Submissions were also received from minority cohorts with disabilities to highlight the particular difficulties they faced.

3.175 The Pride Foundation Australia stated that LGBTIQ+¹⁷² people with disability were likely to face additional challenges including:

- higher risks of family violence and violence from carers and others;
- discrimination when accessing services;
- restrictions on freedom of sexual expression;
- increased sense of social marginality, isolation, and higher risks of psychological distress and mental health risks; and
- difficulties connecting with LGBTI and disability communities.¹⁷³

3.176 For asylum seekers with a disability, the Jesuit Refugee Service Australia submitted that:

There is currently not a comprehensive set of data on people seeking asylum with disability. People seeking asylum with disability are currently not eligible for the NDIS. Even if they have access to Medicare and SRSS, this does not cover costs of all therapeutic needs. Experiences of housing, particularly house sharing arrangements and access to employment are increasingly difficult and compounded for people seeking asylum with disability as they exhaust their savings and funds to manage their health.¹⁷⁴

3.177 Domestic Violence Victoria highlighted that domestic violence survivors with disabilities face difficulty finding safe long-term housing options that fit their unique needs, particularly if they also have children:

¹⁷¹ Dementia Australia, *Submission 19*, p. 7.

¹⁷² Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer (LGBTIQ+).

¹⁷³ Pride Foundation Australia, *Submission 53*, pp. 7-9.

¹⁷⁴ Jesuit Refugee Service Australia, *Submission 120*, p. 16.

Without long-term housing options, many victim-survivors with disabilities and their children are forced to stay in violent relationships.¹⁷⁵

- 3.178 Domestic Violence Victoria pointed to the Disability Family Violence Crisis Response Initiative, which provides funds for support workers, equipment, transport and temporary crisis accommodation to enable people with disabilities to escape a violent relationship:

This initiative fills an important gap in services for victim-survivors with a disability because the funds can be distributed quickly and flexibly at short notice to facilitate a victim-survivor's escape. Other schemes such as the NDIS are unsuited to a crisis response because NDIS packages can be slow to negotiate and difficult to change to meet rapidly changing needs.¹⁷⁶

- 3.179 Mission Australia highlighted the importance of building accessible social and affordable housing for people with disability:

In addition to increasing the accessible housing stock, the government must also ensure that appropriate measures are in place so that people with disability are provided with supports to be active and participating members of the community.¹⁷⁷

- 3.180 Canberra Community Law submitted that many of its clients with disabilities faced barriers in accessing suitable housing due to:

- lack of specific modifications to existing public housing;
- failure to transfer clients to disability-compliant public housing despite evidence of specific needs; and
- long delays in modifying properties or transferring tenants once approvals were given.¹⁷⁸

- 3.181 PIAC argued that the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) could reduce homelessness amongst people with disability through reform of its specialist disability accommodation (SDA) policy, which provides accommodation funding for people with significant functional impairment or very high support needs.¹⁷⁹

- 3.182 Other recommendations to address homelessness and disability included:

¹⁷⁵ Domestic Violence Victoria, *Submission 60*, p. 12.

¹⁷⁶ Domestic Violence Victoria, *Submission 60*, p. 13.

¹⁷⁷ Mission Australia, *Submission 137*, p. 34.

¹⁷⁸ Canberra Community Law, *Submission 135*, p. 9.

¹⁷⁹ Public Interest Advocacy Centre, *Submission 115*, p. 30.

- supporting people with disability to participate in the community;
- designing rapid response transitional housing for complex disability;
- building the capacity of homelessness services to identify and assess the needs of people with disability;
- establishing and evaluating innovating housing and support which addresses failure points in current housing and service systems; and
- creating a vision of what success might look like in the future.¹⁸⁰

People living with mental illness

3.183 The Committee received extensive evidence regarding the relationship between mental health issues and homelessness.

3.184 Submitters noted that mental health was correlated with homelessness and that Australians with undiagnosed or untreated mental illness were more likely to experience homelessness than the general population. The Mental Health Association of Central Australia, for example, submitted that there is a 'strong association between mental health and homelessness'.¹⁸¹

3.185 Dr Olav Nielssen advised that many rough sleepers in urban areas may have a mental illness:

About a third of the rough sleepers in Sydney and other large cities have severe mental illness, mainly schizophrenia. Moreover, people with severe mental illness are more likely to be chronically homeless and to sleep in the open for long periods.¹⁸²

3.186 Sacred Heart Mission (SHM) reported a 36 per cent increase in its clients with mental health concerns in 2018, and a further 51 per cent with unclear mental health status.¹⁸³

3.187 The Committee heard that the relationship between brain injury or mental illness and homelessness may be 'bidirectional', with one increasing the risk of the other.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸⁰ Haven; Home, Safe, *Submission 130*, pp. 6-7; Bolton Clarke Homeless Person Program, *Submission 17*, p. 8.

¹⁸¹ Mental Health Association of Central Australia, *Submission 92*, p. 1.

¹⁸² Dr Olav Nielssen, *Submission 6*, p. 1.

¹⁸³ Sacred Heart Mission, *Submission 42*, p.13

¹⁸⁴ Bolton Clarke Homeless Persons Program, *Submission 17*, p. 4; National Mental Health Commission, *Submission 172*, p. 6; SANE Australia, *Submission 14*, p. 1.

- 3.188 Bolton Clarke submitted that many homeless people with undiagnosed mental health conditions ‘fly under the radar’:

It is extremely difficult to access mental health services unless the person is in an acute crisis and even then, due to concurrent substance use, often the person falls between the service gaps. Often a police response is recommended which can have a negative and traumatising effect. It usually takes repeated and assertive attempts to engage the person with mental health services.¹⁸⁵

- 3.189 The B Miles Women’s Foundation similarly said that people with significant mental health problems ‘fall between the gaps’, resulting in rough sleeping:

[Non-government organisations] are...under resourced and ill equipped to manage people in acute stages of mental illness. These people often find themselves being assessed as not unwell enough to meet the criteria for an admission to hospital, yet too unwell to meet the criteria for admission to an NGO.¹⁸⁶

- 3.190 SHM stated that early identification and treatment of mental health issues for homeless people is crucial:

People we see at SHM are often not treated by the mental health system until they are visually unwell, at serious risk of self-harm, or harm to others. From there, the road of recovery is often long, and complex given their exposure to trauma and experience of social exclusion.¹⁸⁷

- 3.191 Bolton Clarke stressed that it was vital for homelessness outreach programs to be assertive and have embedded access to mental health expertise:

Assertive outreach programs need timely access to mental health expertise and recognition that although some people are not in a crisis, they are not making a ‘choice’ about homelessness but are in fact disengaged, functionally impacted and experiencing psychological distress as a result of undiagnosed mental health issues and trauma. Without appropriate, assertive mental health care they are unable to shift from entrenched homelessness.¹⁸⁸

- 3.192 South Port Community Housing Group expressed concern over the systemic fragmentation of support for mental illness:

¹⁸⁵ Bolton Clarke Homeless Persons Program, *Submission 17*, pp. 6-8.

¹⁸⁶ B Miles Women’s Foundation, *Submission 116*, p. 3.

¹⁸⁷ Sacred Heart Mission, *Submission 42*, p. 13. See also: South Port Community Housing Group, *Submission 88*, p. 5.

¹⁸⁸ Bolton Clarke Homeless Persons Program, *Submission 17*, p. 6.

This has been particularly so after the mental health system was deinstitutionalised in the 1990s with the expectation that patients would be accommodated in social housing with adequate supports attached. While we recognise the criticality of housing to helping people address and manage mental illness, we often see support services withdraw[n] after a person is housed.¹⁸⁹

3.193 Melbourne City Mission highlighted that homeless youth can find it difficult to access both mainstream mental health services (which cater for mild and moderate illness) and intensive clinical mental health support. Reasons include:

- lack of formal documentation and formal diagnoses;
- no fixed address and difficulty with appointment-based models of care;
- being considered 'lost to follow up' when uncontactable by phone;
- exclusion from short-term recovery of 'step down' residential clinical mental health services, as these require a fixed address to return to;
- low trust in mental health services based on previous experiences; and
- lack of family carer to help them to navigate complex systems.¹⁹⁰

3.194 As for housing services, the National Mental Health Commission highlighted the importance of housing as a priority for the mentally ill because:

- Generally for people with lived experience of mental illness, getting and keeping their own home is harder to achieve compared to the general community.
- For the most vulnerable and unwell, cycles of homelessness, unstable housing and mental ill health can become their typical life experience.¹⁹¹

3.195 The B Miles Women's Foundation agreed that well-resourced long term accommodation is needed for those with significant mental illness.¹⁹²

3.196 The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists stated that integrating and tailoring both mental health and homelessness services to meet specific needs of people experiencing mental illness would improve outcomes. It also recommended that:

¹⁸⁹ South Port Community Housing Group, *Submission 88*, p. 8.

¹⁹⁰ Melbourne City Mission, *Submission 91*, p. 8.

¹⁹¹ National Mental Health Commission, *Submission 172*, p. 2.

¹⁹² B Miles Women's Foundation, *Submission 116*, p. 3.

Greater efforts be made to ensure that people with mental health conditions have access to purpose-built accommodation if they are at risk of homelessness.¹⁹³

3.197 Dr Olav Nielssen proposed a housing model suitable for severely mentally ill people who lack stable tenancy or family support, comprising:

Clusters of purpose built units within a secure perimeter and day staff to direct care and rehabilitative programs. The best example of the model in Australia is the Haven foundation founded by Allan Fels in Melbourne (havenfoundation.org.au). However, a large scale version can be found in Italy, where the radical closure of the large psychiatric hospitals, seen at the time as an example of Italian chaos, has in fact led to the construction of around 30,000 community based places in small clusters. The Italian example has been in effect the adoption of the recommendations of the Richmond Report. A more systematic version in Europe, based on the quality of construction and the integration of mental health care into the service, has been the Y Foundation in Finland (ysaatio.fi), the only European Country to reduce homelessness among the mentally ill.¹⁹⁴

3.198 SANE Australia recommended that:

- The Federal Government work with all States and Territories to immediately increase social housing stock.
- A greater focus on the design and configuration of services for people who need a medium-term intensive housing response that combines accommodation and support.
- Dedicated funding to provide targeted outreach support where tenancies are at risk.
- Homelessness and housing program commissioners allocate funding on evidence-based models, including but not limited to Housing First.
- A federal housing policy is established to drive housing and homelessness service improvements across the health sector. This policy should articulate the importance of service collaboration and integration between all health-based services, and provide flexible responses for people experiencing homelessness, or risks to tenure.¹⁹⁵

3.199 Other recommendations received in submissions included:

¹⁹³ Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists, *Submission 110*, p. 6.

¹⁹⁴ Dr Olav Nielssen, *Submission 6*, p. 2.

¹⁹⁵ SANE Australia, *Submission 14*, p. 2.

- integrating mental health, housing and homelessness services;
- tailoring support programs for people with complex mental health issues to maintain stable housing, including access to the private rental market;
- providing more social housing availability and mental health triaging, as per the Housing First model;
- actively monitoring and reducing the social and public housing waitlist for people with mental health issues; and
- increasing the number of supported housing placements for people affected by complex mental health issues.¹⁹⁶

Veterans

3.200 The Committee heard evidence regarding the number and experiences of Australian military veterans who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

3.201 Contributors to the inquiry stressed that while there was insufficient data on veteran homelessness, what is known is that veterans are at greater risk of homelessness than the general population and that they may face additional barriers when accessing relevant services.

3.202 Possible responses to veteran homelessness focused on providing specialist services specifically working for veterans and assisting the transition from military to civilian life.

3.203 Ms Liz Cosson, Secretary of the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA), pointed to the 'top issues for attention' regarding veteran homelessness:

They often delay seeking support. When they first leave the military service, they want to think that they can continue to find their way outside of the military, and therefore they think they'll be right and they'll just continue on, and then they'll get to a crisis point when they do reach out. Sometimes they have complex medical issues, if they have been medically discharged. Some may have some mental health issues and don't want to share accommodation with someone else; they would rather be alone. When they transition out of the military, sometimes they're in an area where there's potentially a lack of housing affordability, whereas during service they may have been living in soldiers' quarters or may have been in receipt of rental assistance, and then they find it a little bit of a struggle.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁶ SANE Australia, *Submission 14*, pp. 2-3; Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists, *Submission 110*, p. 6.

¹⁹⁷ Ms Liz Cosson, Secretary, Department of Veterans' Affairs, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 29 July 2020, p. 35.

- 3.204 Ms Livia Carusi, General Manager, Homelessness, The Salvation Army Australia stated that there was no one reason why a veteran might become homeless and that the issue was often complex:

It's certainly around housing affordability. For some veterans it's how the current veterans support system operates and perhaps doesn't work as well as it can for people in terms of access to support and other essential services that they may need. Of course there is their experience of trauma, their experience of perhaps family and social network breakdown and some of the challenges more broadly about coming back into community and trying to fit back in from a world that they have come from which is very different.¹⁹⁸

- 3.205 Queensland Shelter submitted research evidence undertaken by the AHIW for DVA which found that:

Between July 2011 and June 2017, 1.1% of the contemporary ex-serving Australian Defence Force (ADF) population used homelessness services. Veterans that were more likely to be SHS clients were women, young people, or had less ADF experience. The main reasons for seeking SHS assistance included accommodation, financial and interpersonal reasons.¹⁹⁹

- 3.206 Ms Cosson from DVA acknowledged that existing information on homeless veterans and their families is insufficient:

To be honest, I don't feel that we have an accurate number on homelessness for veterans or their families, so we are very keen to have that. With the census in 2021, where we now have that question, 'Have you served in the Australian Defence Force?' we may get closer to actually starting to understand where our veterans are and how many veterans we have in Australia.²⁰⁰

- 3.207 The Community Housing Industry Association (CHIA) told the Committee that veterans' needs were not being met by homelessness service organisations:

The research into veterans' homelessness found that only 39 per cent of recently transitioned ADF members who reported experiencing homelessness had sought assistance from mainstream homelessness service organisations, citing a number of barriers to access. Those who had sought help reported high rates of dissatisfaction with the help received. Positive outcomes from the

¹⁹⁸ Ms Livia Carusi, General Manager, Homelessness, The Salvation Army Australia, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 8 July 2020, p. 29

¹⁹⁹ Queensland Shelter, *Submission 164*, pp. 11-12

²⁰⁰ Ms Liz Cosson, Secretary, Department of Veterans' Affairs, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 29 July 2020, p. 34.

few specialist housing and support services that exist suggest that an increase in targeted provision is needed.²⁰¹

- 3.208 CHIA recommended in its submission that the Australian Government provide funds to support Housing First accommodation options for veterans facing housing stress or who have become homeless.²⁰²
- 3.209 CHIA pointed to the RSL Victoria Veteran's accommodation project in the City of Yarra. This project was designed to meet a need for accommodation for young veterans by delivering short to medium-term accommodation to veterans experiencing personal issues. Support was tailored, based on circumstances and included accommodation assistance, bill payment, home maintenance, medical expenses, transport and socialising.²⁰³
- 3.210 Since commencing in 2015, the project has supported 20 veterans, mostly ex-army servicemen aged between 31 and 50 and with diagnosed mental health or addiction issues. CHIA believed the project had successfully met the needs of these veterans.²⁰⁴
- 3.211 Ms Cosson from DVA summarised the Department's approach to veteran homelessness:

In summary, DVA's approach has been to gain a better understanding of the scale and profile of homelessness amongst veterans to address the risk factors associated with homelessness; to work with Defence to ensure optimal support for veterans during transition; and to work across government, states and territories, and with the homelessness sector to improve outcomes for veterans and their families.²⁰⁵

LGBTIQ+ people

- 3.212 The Committee received evidence on the challenges LGBTIQ+ people may face with regards to housing pressure or homelessness.
- 3.213 Bolton Clarke summarised factors that may increase the risk of homelessness for LGBTIQ+ people:

²⁰¹ Community Housing Industry Association, *Submission 19*, p. 18.

²⁰² Community Housing Industry Association, *Submission 89*, p. 18.

²⁰³ Community Housing Industry Association, *Submission 89*, p. 18.

²⁰⁴ Community Housing Industry Association, *Submission 89*, p. 18.

²⁰⁵ Ms Liz Cosson, Secretary, Department of Veterans' Affairs, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 29 July 2020, p. 33.

They are twice as likely as heterosexuals to experience homelessness. They often experience homelessness at a younger age due to family rejection. Crisis and short-term accommodation can be unsafe and traumatic. LGBTIQ people experiencing homelessness frequently experience discrimination, harassment, misgendering and violence when accessing services, shared accommodation and rooming houses. As a result, they may be less likely to seek out a service leading to rough sleeping or other unsafe alternatives.²⁰⁶

3.214 The Pride Foundation Australia stated that LGBTIQ+ people are 'more likely to be living with a disability, living with mental illness, be older, or have experienced repeated homelessness. The intersectionality of multiple vulnerabilities and marginalised identities is well known to increase vulnerability and risk.'²⁰⁷

3.215 The Foundation noted statistics from the Australian Bureau of Statistics' General Social Survey that indicated LGBTIQ+ people are over-represented amongst the homeless population:

It showed that bisexual respondents were much more likely to have at least 5 repeated experiences of homelessness (McNair, Andrews et al. 2017). Lesbian/gay respondents were twice as likely to stay in crisis accommodation or sleep rough, and bisexual people were at least 3 times more likely than heterosexual respondents.²⁰⁸

3.216 However, the Foundation raised concerns that there was no LGBTIQ+ field in the national database for homelessness services, despite being repeatedly identified as necessary for understanding prevalence and trends, particularly amongst intersectional subgroups. It continued:

Although some services have made changes to their databases, there are still many services that do not collect data, and training is needed to ensure that – when appropriate fields are available to report information – staff are comfortable and competent asking questions in a way that is sensitive, respectful, and reassuring of confidentiality.²⁰⁹

3.217 A joint submission from The Victorian Gay & Lesbian Rights Lobby, Transgender Victoria, the Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby of New South

²⁰⁶ Bolton Clarke Homeless Persons Program, *Submission 17*, p. 9. See also: Housing for the Aged Action Group LGBTI Community reference group, *Submission 111*, p. 3.

²⁰⁷ Pride Foundation Australia, *Submission 53*, p. 7.

²⁰⁸ Pride Foundation Australia, *Submission 53*, p. 3.

²⁰⁹ Pride Foundation Australia, *Submission 53*, p. 12.

Wales and Intersex Human Rights Australia stressed the paucity of research on the causes, rates and experiences of LGBTIQ+ homelessness, including amongst intersectional subgroups of multi-faith, multi-cultural, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people living with a disability, aged people, refugees and people seeking asylum:

Research into the rates and causes of LGBTIQ homelessness is critical to enable appropriate strategies to be put into place to begin to address its root causes, and to better support LGBTIQ people experiencing it.²¹⁰

- 3.218 In terms of measures to address homelessness in LGBTIQ+ communities, the Pride Foundation Australia advised that people with experience of homelessness reported that they needed the legitimacy of their LGBTIQ+ identity to be acknowledged by services and to be recognised. Many wanted affirmation and visibility.²¹¹
- 3.219 The Foundation pointed to three possible opportunities for early intervention and prevention of LGBTIQ+ homelessness:
- ‘family of origin interventions’, which focus on the person’s family with education and counselling services;
 - ‘school based interventions’, which address discrimination, bullying and harassment at schools; and
 - ‘peer support’, where a peer support worker can work with a LGBTIQ+ person to provide strong client advocacy and specific support.²¹²
- 3.220 Homelessness NSW provided the Committee with a series of recommendations focused on addressing homelessness among LGBTIQ+ Australians:
- funding LGBTIQ+ education and training to address the lack of knowledge, discrimination about LGBTIQ+ people and increase inclusivity within community and homelessness services;
 - funding targeted assistance to LGBTIQ+ people at risk of or facing homelessness; and
 - including LGBTIQ+ people as vulnerable sub-groups that require specific attention in Australian housing and homelessness policies.²¹³

²¹⁰ Victorian Gay & Lesbian Rights Lobby and three other organisations, *Submission 201*, p. 5. See also: Forcibly Displaced People Network, *Submission 63*, pp. 3-5.

²¹¹ Pride Foundation, *Submission 53*, p. 6.

²¹² The Pride Foundation Australia, *Submission 53*, pp. 4-5. See also: Housing for the Aged Action Group LGBTI Community Reference Group, *Submission 111*, pp. 5-6.

Migrants, temporary visa holders and people seeking asylum

- 3.221 The Committee received evidence from submitters discussing the risks of homelessness faced by migrants, temporary visa holders and people seeking asylum.
- 3.222 PIAC noted that newly arrived migrants must wait for 208 weeks before being eligible for social security payments, which causes financial hardship and risk of homelessness.²¹⁴
- 3.223 Homelessness NSW listed factors which increased homelessness risks for people on temporary visas in that state:
- NSW Housing policy, which excludes temporary visa holders from housing and rental assistance;
 - NSW and Commonwealth health policy, which excludes people without Medicare and temporary visa holders from accessing public hospitals except in limited circumstances;
 - Commonwealth policy which excludes temporary visa holders from Centrelink benefits, and restricts or prohibits work permits;
 - limited specific funding for crisis accommodation to assist people on temporary visas;
 - complex intersecting legal issues relating to domestic violence, immigration, family, and child protection law;
 - lack of culturally safe and free interpreting services;
 - limited social networks and support; and
 - lack of understanding of their rights.²¹⁵
- 3.224 Women's Legal Service Queensland referred to the predicament of non-resident and New Zealand women who 'fall between contradicting federal legislative systems and are unable to leave Australia with their children or access social housing and Centrelink payments in order to stay in Australia', effectively forcing them into homelessness or into leaving Australia without their children.²¹⁶

²¹³ Homelessness NSW, *Submission 132*, p. 3. See also: The Pride Foundation Australia, *Submission 53*, p. 10; Forcibly Displaced People Network, *Submission 63*, p. 9.

²¹⁴ Public Interest Advocacy Centre, *Submission 115*, p. 15.

²¹⁵ Homelessness NSW, *Submission 132*, p. 16. See also: Jesuit Refugee Services Australia, *Submission 120*, pp. 6-7.

²¹⁶ Women's Legal Service Queensland, *Submission 87*, p. 6.

3.225 Bolton Clarke highlighted challenges faced by New Zealand citizens in Australia on Special Category Visas who are homeless:

They are not eligible for permanent visas due to income requirements and they have no safety net. As a result, they are unable to pay rent, purchase food or medicines. They are ineligible for many charitable services as they do not have a Centrelink card. They are reliant on volunteers to provide food and sometimes temporary housing as they are ineligible for social housing.²¹⁷

3.226 AWAVA stated that crisis and long-term housing was the service most needed, and not able to be provided, to women on temporary visas experiencing family violence.²¹⁸

3.227 To help support migrants, people on temporary visas and people seeking asylum, Homelessness NSW recommended that the Australian Government:

- Immediately allow all temporary visa holders the same access to Centrelink entitlements as permanent residents in Australia, including the JobSeeker subsidy.
- Redress gaps in the specialist homelessness system to adequately fund targeted support for culturally and linguistically diverse communities.
- Fund social and affordable housing with culturally appropriate support.²¹⁹

3.228 PIAC highlighted asylum seekers as a particularly vulnerable group, submitting that ‘people seeking asylum are particularly and increasingly at risk of homelessness, yet they are not mentioned in the terms of reference of the inquiry as a group of people with particular risk of homelessness’.²²⁰

3.229 The Australian Community Safety & Research Organisation (ACRO) pointed to the bridging visa system as a direct cause of homelessness for some asylum seekers:

The current practice adopted by the Federal government in responding to women and children who are fleeing violence and trauma in another country through the application of a protection visa is both unworkable and inhumane. The current approach requires such people to subsist on a bridging visa for an indeterminate period without access to adequate levels of income

²¹⁷ Bolton Clarke Homeless Persons Program, *Submission 17*, p. 3. See also: Reverend Bill Crews Exodus Foundation, *Submission 27*, p. 2.

²¹⁸ Australian Women Against Violence Alliance, *Submission 97*, p. 4.

²¹⁹ Homelessness New South Wales, *Submission 132*, p. 16.

²²⁰ Public Interest Advocacy Centre, *Submission 115*, p. 14.

support. The direct result of this approach is to create homelessness for them.²²¹

3.230 ACRO argued that ‘all access to services and support should be based on assessed need not a visa status’.²²²

3.231 PIAC advised that financial pressures on people seeking asylum increased as a result of a 60 per cent funding reduction to Status Resolution Support Services (SRSS) since 2018:

Status Resolution Support Services (SRSS) is a safety net for the most vulnerable people seeking asylum, allowing them to access basic income support for food and rent, medication, and torture and trauma counselling. This payment is designed to support people while they await assessment of their protection claims, as they tend not to be eligible for mainstream services.

As documented in the Cutting the Safety Net report by the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre (ASRC), these cuts have greatly increased demand for housing support, and many families cut off from SRSS are now either at risk of, or experiencing homelessness. ASRC reports providing 64,643 nights of accommodation in 2018 following the cuts, up 265% from 17,682 nights in 2016.²²³

3.232 Jesuit Refugee Services Australia (JRS) also noted the impact of SRSS reductions on people seeking asylum:

Since 2018, only carers of children under 6, people over the age of 70, those experiencing a significant medical and/or mental health issue, or facing significant crisis are eligible for SRSS. The risk of homelessness, homelessness itself or the loss of work does not meet [the Department of Home Affairs'] criteria for significant crisis. With an estimated 1600 people in NSW currently receiving SRSS, most people seeking asylum, roughly 95% of the estimated 40,000 people in NSW, are not eligible and therefore have no income support when they are not in work.²²⁴

3.233 JRS argued that there were two opportunities for early intervention to prevent homelessness for people seeking asylum. First, give people seeking asylum the right to work upon submission of a protection application and while waiting for a review or when a claim has been rejected but the person

²²¹ Australian Community Safety & Research Organisation Incorporated, *Submission 78*, p. 1.

²²² Australian Community Safety & Research Organisation Incorporated, *Submission 78*, p. 1.

²²³ Public Interest Advocacy Centre, *Submission 115*, p. 14.

²²⁴ Jesuit Refugee Services Australia, *Submission 120*, p. 7.

cannot be removed from Australia. Second, provide practical support to seek housing when a protection claim is initially lodged.²²⁵

Rough sleepers

3.234 The 2016 Census estimated that of the 116,427 people in Australia experiencing homelessness, 8,200 were classified as ‘rough sleepers’,²²⁶ making up approximately seven per cent of the homeless.

3.235 In its submission Per Capita elaborated on this group:

They are not accommodated in any kind of established dwelling but instead live in improvised dwellings, tents, or on the street. These 8,200 people are at the ‘pointy end’ of homelessness and are likely to face dangerous and/or traumatising circumstances on a regular basis, putting them at high risk for mental health and substance misuse issues.²²⁷

3.236 Per Capita submitted the view that:

The scale of rough sleeping in Australia is both ‘preventable and solvable’ and... all 8,200 individuals could be housed relatively quickly if there were political will and funding.²²⁸

3.237 Rough sleepers have different experiences and needs to people in temporary or supported accommodation. They are at greater risk of physical or verbal abuse, are more likely to interact with law enforcement and often have unmet physical or mental health needs.

3.238 The End Street Sleeping Collaboration’s submission noted a 2019 survey of people experiencing homelessness in the City of Sydney. The results of the survey gave some insight into the circumstances and experiences of rough sleepers, and are set out in Table 3.1.

²²⁵ Jesuit Refugee Services Australia, *Submission 120*, p. 10.

²²⁶ Department of Social Services (multi-agency submission), *Submission 57*, pp. 56-57

²²⁷ Per Capita, *Submission 68*, p. 20.

²²⁸ Per Capita, *Submission 68*, p. 20.

Table 3.1 End Street Sleeping Collaboration November 2019 Survey Results

Income	History	Health
35% Newstart	48% report past trauma or abuse	27% brain injury
32% Disability Support Pension	23% report out of home care as a child	22% learning/Intellectual disability
10% Government payment (other)	28% report being in prison or watch house in the past 6 months	63% problematic substance use
5% working	53% report experiencing physical harm or verbal abuse while homeless	75% mental health diagnosis
6% begging		52% problematic substance use and mental health diagnosis
3% no income		
9% other/not recorded		

Source: End Street Sleeping Collaboration, Submission 11, p. 5.

3.239 The Committee heard evidence on proposed policies to support rough sleepers. A number of participants in the inquiry advised that the ‘Housing First’ model of responding to homelessness was particularly effective in assisting rough sleepers. The End Street Sleeping Collaboration, for example, expressed the view that:

A variety of housing types and models of support must be available to support people in different circumstances. Taking a ‘Housing First’ approach is among the most critical of these.²²⁹

3.240 Housing First is discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

3.241 Other responses raised specifically in relation to rough sleepers included changing police approaches to homelessness, and changing legislation and law enforcement to remove the ‘criminalisation of homelessness’.

²²⁹ End Street Sleeping Collaboration, *Submission 11*, p. 5.

3.242 In a personal submission, Mr Corey Allen CF APM stated that police services in Australia have had negative relationships with people experiencing homelessness and the organisations that support them in the past. However, the role and expectations of first responders are now changing, and their role needs to be better articulated:

Competing interests and traditional expectations of police make any investment in efforts to tackle homelessness unappealing and tokenistic at best. Until the role of police in this space is articulated in terms of harm reduction, community benefit and community expectations there will be continued resistance to serious investment from agencies. This creates boutique, short lived and disingenuous efforts to portray police as active in these spaces. Police responses and strategies should include proactive partnership response to vulnerable persons as part of core business. The same may be said of the role of police in mental health and domestic violence, factors that contribute to homelessness.²³⁰

3.243 Mr Allen proposed steps to address homelessness including partnered outreach to the long term homeless, using medical/welfare oriented tools to identify needs, improving information sharing between services, and referral pathways for emergency services.²³¹

3.244 Mr Allen also raised two practices he considered as possibly harmful. First, the provision of food and interpersonal services which, while well intentioned, could sustain and normalise unsafe and unhealthy rough sleeping. Secondly, poorly administered boarding houses could increase the risk of residents experiencing abuse and of being unable to access wrap around services, which could increase reliance on emergency services.²³²

3.245 Another harmful phenomenon discussed by CLA was what it termed the 'criminalisation of homelessness', meaning 'the use of policing and the criminal justice system as central features of our response to homelessness'.²³³

3.246 CLA argued that the homeless are disproportionately more likely to be charged with minor criminal offences through 'enforcement-based approaches'. These included:

²³⁰ Mr Corey M Allen CF APM, *Submission 56*, p. 1.

²³¹ Mr Corey M Allen CF APM, *Submission 56*, p. 2.

²³² Mr Corey M Allen CF APM, *Submission 56*, pp. 3-4.

²³³ Civil Liberties Australia, *Submission 23*, pp. 1-3.

- Express laws: for example, laws that prohibit sleeping in public places and begging – these laws directly prohibit the activities of people experiencing homelessness;
- Neutral laws with a disproportionate impact: for example, laws prohibiting drinking in public or public urination that impact disproportionately on people experiencing homelessness because they have relatively little choice except to carry out their private activities in public;
- Neutral laws enforced differently: for example, laws that prohibit jaywalking, public drunkenness and public transport offences and general ‘stop and search’ powers that are enforced differently because of the increased visibility of people experiencing homelessness as well as the attitudes of law enforcement officers towards people experiencing homelessness;
- Targeted collaborative enforcement: for example, arrest or move-on powers that are enforced in collaboration with homelessness support agencies to promote engagement with services;
- Crackdowns or blitzes: these are intensive, targeted enforcement of existing laws prohibiting, for example, begging or sleeping in public places, for short periods as part of a direction by government or law enforcement officers;
- Tickets, fines, court orders and sentences: use of these instruments, as well as community corrections orders and ‘anti-social behaviour orders’, to deter or modify the movement and activities of people experiencing homelessness.²³⁴

3.247 CLA argued that enforcement-based approaches negatively impact the wellbeing and safety of rough sleepers, who may be excluded from safe spaces, be deterred from seeking help, or have their relationships with existing services strained.²³⁵

3.248 CLA recommended that all states and territories review legislation that targets or disproportionately affects rough sleepers. It also argued that Australian jurisdictions should establish specialist homelessness courts, similar to those operated in other countries such as New Zealand.²³⁶

Rural and remote areas

3.249 While capital cities provide a hub for large numbers of homeless people, the Committee received a range of evidence to the inquiry from those in

²³⁴ Civil Liberties Australia, *Submission 23*, p. 2.

²³⁵ Civil Liberties Australia, *Submission 23*, p. 3.

²³⁶ Civil Liberties Australia, *Submission 23*, pp. 4-5.

Australia's rural, regional and remote areas, highlighting their experiences of and perspectives on homelessness in their places.

- 3.250 Blue Sky Community Services submitted that the lack of affordable, safe and stable housing, financial difficulties, domestic and family violence, health and mental health issues were major factors pushing young people into homelessness along the New South Wales Mid North Coast.²³⁷
- 3.251 Young People Ahead Youth & Community Services Incorporated was another regional not-for-profit that cited family and domestic violence and over-crowded living conditions as significant causes of homelessness among people in Mt Isa.²³⁸
- 3.252 Based in the regional centre of Young, the Young Crisis Accommodation Centre Incorporated recommended urgent actions at national and state levels:
1. A National Housing Strategy: More low-cost properties mean more choices, making it cheaper and easier to find a home. 500,000 new social and affordable rental homes are needed nationally to meet the current demand for affordable housing.
 2. Immediate relief for Australians in chronic rental stress: we need to keep JobSeeker at current funding levels.
 3. A plan to end homelessness by 2030: With real effort we can halve homelessness in five years - and end it in 10.
 4. A better deal for renters: Get rid of 'no grounds' evictions and unfair rent rises so that millions of Australian renters have the security they need to create homes, build lives, and raise families.²³⁹
- 3.253 The Tamworth based Tamworth Family Support Services and Youth Homeless Services made similar recommendations in its submission to the inquiry.²⁴⁰
- 3.254 Young People Ahead stated that mixed tenancy arrangements could be a possible way to support homeless people and youth in the Mt Isa region:

²³⁷ Blue Sky Community Services, *Submission 15*, p. 2.

²³⁸ Young People Ahead Youth & Community Services Incorporated, *Submission 20*, p. 1.

²³⁹ Young Crisis Accommodation Centre Incorporated, *Submission 24*, p. 2.

²⁴⁰ Tamworth Family Support Services and Youth Homeless Services, *Submission 28*, p. 2.

As a means of innovative practice that could be explored is the provision of a mixed tenancy arrangement, termed in most European countries as Intergenerational Living program, which involves young people and the Elderly suitably matched to support one another and address critical issues that Australia is encountering, such as Youth Homelessness, High Youth Unemployment and a rising Ageing Population who require support and connection to thrive.²⁴¹

3.255 More generally, the National Rural Women's Coalition advised that the rate of women's homelessness in the regions was growing, with women's economic insecurity colliding with 'a significant decrease in rental affordability and limited access to property and services in rural, regional and remote Australian communities'.²⁴²

3.256 The Coalition expressed concern that there was insufficient data on homelessness in rural, regional and remote areas:

Data collection to date has been limited and general in nature, setting up significant data gaps, which lead to insufficient analysis of the issue and therefore inferior outcomes for rural, regional and remote women.

It is our assessment that what is being expressed anecdotally and on the ground in rural, regional and remote communities is not being adequately captured by mainstream research. Rural women's homelessness is often hidden from view due to circumstances such as couch surfing, living with friends, living in cars and caravans and in women's refuges.²⁴³

3.257 The Coalition recommended Government funding for a comprehensive survey and targeted, place-based research with a gender-specific focus on homelessness issues facing rural women which could form the basis of a gender-responsive and strategy to support safe, secure housing and decrease homelessness for rural women.²⁴⁴

3.258 Blue Sky Community Services highlighted the importance of employment opportunities in preventing and addressing youth homelessness in rural and regional areas. It recommended creating more opportunities for vocational

²⁴¹ Young People Ahead Youth & Community Services Incorporated, *Submission 20*, p. 2.

²⁴² National Rural Women's Coalition, *Submission 175*, p. 3.

²⁴³ National Rural Women's Coalition, *Submission 175*, p. 2.

²⁴⁴ National Rural Women's Coalition, *Submission 175*, p. 2.

training as part of school curricula and better access to traineeships and apprenticeships in growing sectors in regional areas.²⁴⁵

Northern Territory

3.259 The Committee heard that rural and remote parts of Northern Territory have the highest rates of homelessness and the lowest levels of services in the nation and deserve more attention.²⁴⁶

3.260 A joint submission from Catholic Care NT and the University of South Australia noted that:

Program deliverables that may have relevance within either urban or regional settings elsewhere in Australia, are often not appropriate in remote communities in the Northern Territory and the way they intersect with regional and urban settings. Homelessness in the Northern Territory stands at 13 times the national average. In Katherine the figure is 31 times the national figure.²⁴⁷

3.261 In its submission, the Northern Territory Mental Health Coalition pointed to the particular challenges of services delivery in the Northern Territory:

- Remoteness, which adds time and cost to deliver services, especially where these need to be co-designed with local communities for tailoring to individual needs.
- Thirty per cent of the population are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people; 77 per cent of the Aboriginal population lives in remote or very remote areas of the NT.
- The economy is relatively small, and the NT Government has very few streams of own-source revenue. The Territory Government remains in considerable debt and is predicting operating deficits for the duration of the budget out years.
- Commonwealth arrangements that allocate funding based on jurisdictional populations rather than need inevitably result in under investment in services in the NT where the population is small but the relative disadvantage is high.
- There is historical underinvestment in mental health services and social/affordable housing compared to need, across the government, private and community sectors. This underinvestment is especially evident in

²⁴⁵ Blue Sky Community Services, *Submission 15*, p. 4.

²⁴⁶ Dr Simon Quilty, *Submission 1*, p. 1.

²⁴⁷ Catholic Care NT and University of South Australia, *Submission 101*, p. 2.

regional and remote areas of the NT. There are currently very limited, or no housing supports and supported accommodation for people with mental illness outside Darwin. For example, people seeking help from the Katherine hospital out of hours or on the weekend will be sent to Darwin (300km away) because there are no local facilities available. Their recovery is inevitably less successful when they are away from their family and country.²⁴⁸

3.262 The City of Darwin's submission to the inquiry noted that 'although homelessness and high levels of people displaced into "rough sleeping" are national issues, there are specific challenges with regard to the disproportionately high levels of homelessness experienced in the Northern Territory'.²⁴⁹

3.263 The City's submission highlighted that the Northern Territory has significant issues with housing for Australians at risk of homelessness:

It is widely recognised there are significant deficits in the provision of housing in both communities and urban centres, as well as chronic overcrowding in existing dwellings, including in 'town camps'. There is also a huge gap in the provision of short to medium term accommodation in urban and regional centres in the NT, including Darwin, for visitors who access major centres for a range of health and social reasons. The overall shortage of accommodation, including long term housing and accommodation places for those who need it in the short to medium term, (or in times of crisis) puts huge pressure on existing housing across the NT. It also pushes people into a cycle of sleeping rough and puts an inordinate amount of pressure within human service organisations and/or the community sector tasked with addressing homelessness and the complex social issues that go hand-in-hand with it. A lack of safe accommodation greatly increases the vulnerability experienced by individuals and families and creates further deficits in the interrelated areas of health, social and emotional wellbeing, employment outcomes and education.²⁵⁰

3.264 As noted above, WoSSCA highlighted the role of family, domestic and sexual violence in homelessness in Central Australia, intersecting with a 'critical lack of housing availability' and high prevalence of overcrowded dwellings. WoSSCA stated that a range of housing models were needed to

²⁴⁸ Northern Territory Mental Health Coalition, *Submission 102*, p. 3.

²⁴⁹ City of Darwin, *Submission 18*, p. 1.

²⁵⁰ City of Darwin, *Submission 18*, p. 1.

meet the demand for early intervention of homelessness, crisis based accommodation and needs based housing in Central Australia.²⁵¹

- 3.265 As discussed in Chapter 2, submitters from the Territory raised concerns regarding the model and proportion of funding from the Federal Government to the Northern Territory under the NHHA, especially in light of the Territory's high level of homelessness and particular needs.

Other factors and vulnerabilities

- 3.266 The Committee also heard evidence regarding other factors interacting with homelessness, or groups at particular risk of homelessness. These included alcohol or drug dependency, and people facing legal issues or interacting with the justice system.

- 3.267 The University of Melbourne Justice Health Unit submitted that:

The prevalence of alcohol and other drug dependence among people who experience homelessness is between 2 – 4 and 3 – 9 times higher than the prevalence in the general population, respectively.²⁵²

- 3.268 Danila Dilba Health Services noted a link between substance abuse and homelessness, although cautioned that the matter is not fully understood:

While the causes of homelessness are complex, the role of substance abuse can not be ignored. There is a strong positive association between homelessness and substance abuse but a lack of evidence of causation in an extensive study in Victoria but there is a positive causal relationship between risky alcohol use and homelessness.²⁵³

- 3.269 The Committee received evidence from SHM noting that people may be denied access to mental health services or assessment if they are not drug-free despite alcohol and drug use being a cause and consequence of mental illness and trauma.²⁵⁴

- 3.270 The Central Australian Aboriginal Congress stated that there was a link between substance abuse, family violence and homelessness:

²⁵¹ Women's Safety Services of Central Australia, *Submission 51*, pp. 2, 4.

²⁵² Justice Health Unit, University of Melbourne, *Submission 12*, p. 2.

²⁵³ Danila Dilba Health Services, *Submission 160*, p. 5.

²⁵⁴ Sacred Heart Mission, *Submission 42*, p. 13.

Harmful alcohol consumption, especially binge drinking, is strongly correlated to increased levels of family violence, with women often the victims. Alcohol and drug use can, of course, also lead directly to homelessness. Addressing high levels of harmful alcohol use is therefore a key way to prevent homelessness.²⁵⁵

- 3.271 It pointed to evidence of ‘very significant reductions in alcohol-related harm across the Northern Territory’ as a result of reforms introduced in that jurisdiction in 2019, including a minimum unit price for alcohol, and recommended the adoption of similar policies across Australia.²⁵⁶
- 3.272 Kids Under Cover cautioned, however, that the attribution of homelessness to drug and alcohol addiction by many Australians was a misperception, recognising that while drug and alcohol abuse may be associated with homelessness, it is not an isolated cause.²⁵⁷
- 3.273 Justice Connect stated that ‘legal issues cause and compound homelessness, often making it impossible for people to move into stable housing’.²⁵⁸
- 3.274 Justice Connect submitted that specialist homelessness legal services are a key component of multi-disciplinary services for reducing entrenched homelessness and improving access to justice:

These targeted services are able to identify the common barriers faced by this highly marginalised cohort and implement innovative solutions to better ensure access to justice. This assists identification of core issues and the facilitation of a more informed delivery of legal services to achieve positive outcomes.

The interlinked and complex vulnerabilities often experienced by homeless or at risk Australians generally increases the intensity of legal help required. Early access to specialised legal help is vital for people with complex needs, and crucial to resolving legal issues before they escalate to crisis point.²⁵⁹

- 3.275 LawRight’s submission stated:

²⁵⁵ Central Australian Aboriginal Congress, *Submission 84*, pp. 14-15.

²⁵⁶ Central Australian Aboriginal Congress, *Submission 84*, pp. 15-16. See also: Danila Dilba Health Services, *Submission 160*, p. 5.

²⁵⁷ Kids Under Cover, *Submission 59*, p. 2.

²⁵⁸ Justice Connect, *Submission 119*, p. 3.

²⁵⁹ Justice Connect, *Submission 119*, p. 26.

Laws, policies and practices disproportionately affect people experiencing or at risk of homelessness, and entrench their disadvantage and inequality before the law. An experience of homelessness will almost inevitably be accompanied by significant legal issues that are impossible to resolve without assistance.²⁶⁰

3.276 Australian Specialist Homelessness Legal Services added:

...people experiencing homelessness often present specific challenges to engagement, such as limited literacy and other communication barriers, unstable accommodation, unfamiliarity with legal processes and a distrust of the justice system.²⁶¹

3.277 Justice Connect recommended that ‘wrap-around, specialised legal services should be seen as an important part of achieving long-term housing outcomes for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness across Australia’. The submission recommended:

a. Investing in early-intervention, client-centred and co-located legal services that can proactively resolve legal issues to minimise barriers to housing security;

b. Supporting the integration of legal, social work, health and other community-support professionals to help people experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity in successfully accessing, navigating and exiting the justice system.²⁶²

Committee comment

3.278 Evidence set out in this chapter highlights the diverse range of causes and risk factors that contribute to homelessness, and the different ways in which homelessness manifests in different groups in the Australian community.

3.279 While acknowledging that each case of homelessness is unique, the Committee is concerned to see that all governments’ responses to homelessness, where possible, work in systematic ways to recognise common causes and effects and include strategies to address these.

3.280 The Committee notes that the NHHA includes six national priority homelessness cohorts, and allows states and territories to designate

²⁶⁰ LawRight, *Submission 50*, p. 2. See also: Australian Specialist Homelessness Legal Services, *Submission 49*, p. 1.

²⁶¹ Australian Specialist Homelessness Legal Services, *Submission 49*, p. 2.

²⁶² Justice Connect, *Submission 119*, p. 29.

additional priority homelessness cohorts in their bilateral agreements with the Australian Government.

- 3.281 However, the Committee is concerned that the process of designating priority cohorts under the NHHA is not clear. Moreover, while recognising that the states and territories are required to report annually the amounts of Commonwealth and state/territory funds spent on each cohort, the Committee considers that there is insufficient transparency and accountability about what is actually done for each of these cohorts and how effective those responses are.
- 3.282 The Committee notes that for some of the cohorts identified under the NHHA—such as victim-survivors of family and domestic violence and Indigenous people—homelessness appears to be a persistent and in some cases worsening problem. On the other hand, the Committee also received evidence about particular groups not identified under the NHHA—such as people living with mental illness—for whom specialised programs and services appear to be particularly important.
- 3.283 Given this, the Committee considers that the Australian Government should work with state and territory governments to ensure the NHHA adequately captures the full range of at-risk groups, and that there are clear requirements on governments to address these groups and account for their responses.

Recommendation 13

- 3.284 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government, in consultation with state and territory governments, review the national priority homelessness cohorts identified in the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement and determine whether new cohorts should be added and/or whether existing cohorts should be removed.**

Recommendation 14

- 3.285 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government, in consultation with state and territory governments, consider strengthening the requirements on state and territory governments in relation to national and state-specific priority homelessness cohorts listed in the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement.**

This should include considering requirements such as:

- **formal consultation with representative groups from priority cohorts;**
- **dedicated funding for measures to address priority cohorts; and**
- **additional evaluation of and reporting on measures taken to address priority cohorts.**

- 3.286 In addition, the Committee acknowledges the evidence it received indicating that there is an acute shortage of emergency and crisis accommodation, which necessarily impacts on those most at risk of homelessness, including several of the groups discussed in this chapter.
- 3.287 The Committee accepts that crisis and emergency accommodation is not a solution in and of itself to the problem of homelessness. Nevertheless, these forms of accommodation can play an important role in assisting people until a crisis has passed, thereby avoiding more protracted and entrenched cases of homelessness.
- 3.288 In this context, the Committee recognises the particular risk faced by victim-survivors of family, domestic and sexual violence and the importance of appropriate, dedicated accommodation to assist victim-survivors who cannot safely remain at home. At the same time, the Committee stresses that where it is safe to do so, it is perpetrators who should be removed from the family home, providing stability to victim-survivors and children. Perpetrators in those instances may need to be temporarily housed.
- 3.289 These issues were the subject of recommendations in the Committee's report on its inquiry into family, domestic and sexual violence.
- 3.290 As foreshadowed in that report, the Committee considers that there is a role for the Australian Government, along with state and territory governments, in providing additional funding for crisis and emergency accommodation.
- 3.291 The Committee considers that this funding should provide accommodation for people at risk of homelessness generally, and particularly the vulnerable groups identified in this report. However, recognising the clear link between family violence and homelessness, the Committee recommends dedicated funding for accommodation for victim-survivors, and perpetrators who are removed from the family home.
- 3.292 In this regard, the Committee welcomes the announcement in the 2012-22 Budget of additional funding to expand the *Safe Places* program, which provides new or expanded emergency accommodation for women

and children experiencing family and domestic violence.²⁶³ The Committee nevertheless considers that there is always more work to be done.

Recommendation 15

3.293 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government and state and territory governments provide funding for additional crisis, emergency and transitional accommodation, and associated support services including pathways to long-term accommodation, for people at risk of homelessness. This should include dedicated funding for accommodation for victim-survivors of family, domestic and sexual violence.

In addition, the Committee reiterates Recommendation 75 of the report of its inquiry into family, domestic and sexual violence, that the Australian Government and state and territory governments consider funding emergency accommodation for perpetrators of such violence, to prevent victim-survivors from having to leave their homes.

3.294 While responsibility for the provision and the detail of homelessness programs and services rests with the states and territories, it is a fact that the Australian Government makes a significant financial contribution to these programs and services through the NHHA.

3.295 The Committee therefore encourages the Australian Government to work with the states and territories to ensure that the collective response to homelessness is properly targeted at those who are most at risk, and supports people with particular needs and vulnerabilities.

3.296 To this end, while the Committee encourages all governments to consider the broad range of evidence and suggestions made to this inquiry in relation to various vulnerable groups, the Committee has identified the following specific recommendations which it endorses and encourages the Australian Government to pursue through relevant agreements with state, territory and local governments.

Recommendation 16

3.297 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government work with state and territory governments to ensure the availability of an

²⁶³ Commonwealth of Australia, Budget Paper No. 2, *Budget Measures 2021–22*, pp. 83–84.

appropriate proportion of social housing and transitional, crisis and emergency accommodation which is accessible and appropriate for people with diverse needs, including but not limited to:

- older people;
- people living with disability;
- people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds; and
- Indigenous Australians.

Recommendation 17

3.298 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government work with state and territory governments to establish nationally consistent tenancy legislation for victim-survivors of family, domestic and sexual violence to terminate a tenancy when they need to leave a home, or alternatively maintain an existing tenancy when a perpetrator is removed from a home.

Recommendation 18

3.299 Recognising the association between substance abuse and homelessness, the Committee recommends that the Australian Government work with state and territory governments to implement further measures to reduce alcohol-related harms at a whole-of-population level.

In addition, the Committee reiterates Recommendation 60 of the report of its inquiry into family, domestic and sexual violence for a public health approach to preventing and managing drug and alcohol related harms experienced by families and children, involving all jurisdictions, including local governments.

Recommendation 19

3.300 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government lead the development of a national integrated approach to housing and homelessness services for Indigenous Australians, co-designed with Indigenous community-controlled organisations and grounded in the principle of self-determination.

Recommendation 20

- 3.301** The Committee recommends that the Australian Government work with state and territory governments to review public order offences and other offences that disproportionately affect people experiencing homelessness, particularly rough sleepers, and those in a cycle of homelessness, with a view to minimising enforcement-based responses to homelessness.

This should include consideration of sentencing practices and bail conditions for public order offences and the need for effective integration of legal, social, health and other agencies to create pathways out of the justice system.

Recommendation 21

- 3.302** The Committee recommends that the Australian Government work with state and territory governments to implement strategies to address the risk of exiting into homelessness from state institutions, including hospitals, mental health facilities, correctional institutions and out-of-home-care, including developing a nationally consistent approach to discharge planning and a national definition of 'no exit into homelessness'.

The Australian Government should also work with state and territory governments to better integrate housing and mental health support services.

Recommendation 22

- 3.303** The Committee recommends that the Australian Government work with state and territory governments to ensure that:
- adequate incentives are in place for social housing providers to accept tenants with high needs or who are at risk of repeat homelessness;
 - adequate support is available for social housing tenants, particularly those with a history of episodic homelessness, to minimise re-entries into homelessness; and
 - housing providers and support services are more accountable for the housing outcomes of the people they support.

Recommendation 23

- 3.304 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government and state and territory governments expand the circumstances in which asylum seekers, particularly those on bridging visas, have the right to work and are able to access social housing, transitional, crisis and emergency accommodation, safe-at-home programs, and housing and homelessness services.

Recommendation 24

- 3.305 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government together with state and territory governments increase investment in economic development and other measures to enhance employment opportunities in rural and regional areas. This should include the creation of new traineeships and apprenticeships in the mining, renewable energy, eco-tourism and technology sectors.

Recommendation 25

- 3.306 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government establish a comprehensive strategy to address the financial insecurity of older women. This should include consideration of:
- measures relating to superannuation and income support with a view to improving financial outcomes for women; and
 - the need for new data collection and reporting measures, including new national data sets, to inform policies and strategies targeted at older women.

Recommendation 26

- 3.307 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government, in cooperation with state and territory governments, fund data collection and research to address gaps in evidence relating to the prevalence of homelessness and demand for support services among specific vulnerable groups, including but not limited to:
- older women;
 - people living in regional, rural and remote areas;

- **veterans; and**
- **LGBTIQ+ people.**

4. Addressing homelessness

- 4.1 In evidence to the inquiry, the Committee heard a range of suggestions for how governments at all levels could more effectively address the issue of homelessness in Australia.
- 4.2 Many submitters told the Committee about what they considered to be national and international best practice, with a common theme being that homelessness could not be addressed in isolation, but that policies, programs and support services should be designed and implemented holistically and in response to wider economic, social and health-related issues.
- 4.3 Drawing on this evidence, this chapter considers four suggested areas for improvement or reform, with a focus on those areas that relate to the Australian Government's roles and responsibilities or that would involve the Government taking on a stronger coordination role, supporting the efforts of state and territory governments. These are:
- increased focus on prevention and early intervention;
 - adoption of a 'Housing First' approach;
 - enhanced provision of social housing; and
 - development of a national strategy for housing and/or homelessness.
- 4.4 The Committee notes that, in addition to this evidence, changes in funding arrangements are discussed in Chapter 2 and suggestions relating to particular groups of homeless people are discussed in Chapter 3.

Prevention and early intervention

- 4.5 A range of submissions discussed interventions designed to prevent homelessness before it occurs or to take remedial action at the early stages before problems become critical or chronic. A common theme was that

broader social, health and educational problems that can lead to homelessness should be addressed before at-risk groups find themselves without suitable accommodation.

- 4.6 Evidence before the Committee indicated that terminology used by practitioners in the sector is not always precise or consistent. Regarding a definition of early intervention and prevention, and the distinction between the two terms, the National Mental Health Commission (NMHC) explained that:

Despite early intervention and prevention being key concepts in homelessness policy and service delivery ... policy and program literatures offers no consistent definition. While the terms are frequently used together, or interchangeably, they are not the same thing. Prevention strategies operate at the structural level and occur before a person has become homeless. Whereas early intervention strategies are targeted at individuals who have recently become homeless and aim to ensure that short periods of homelessness do not become chronic.¹

- 4.7 Haven; Home, Safe (HHS), a community housing provider, explained that prevention strategies aim to:

- Address the underlying political, economic and social causes that place people at risk of homelessness (e.g. increasing the supply of affordable housing, improving labour markets)
- Identify people who are most at risk of homelessness and build up their protective factors and decrease their risk factors
- Focus on people who are at risk but not actually homeless (e.g. sustain tenancies)
- Use broad population wide strategies that target the general population and at-risk groups; these interventions are not solely in the domain of Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS), but include mainstream services, such as housing, health, education, employment and family welfare services.²

- 4.8 HHS outlined a broad range of prevention measures. These included increases in affordable housing; reforms to tax and welfare settings; support for at-risk groups; and measures to address disadvantage in areas such as literacy, education, employment skills and financial capacity.³

¹ National Mental Health Commission, *Submission 172*, p. 3.

² Haven; Home, Safe, *Submission 130*, p. 16.

³ Haven; Home, Safe, *Submission 130*, p. 16.

- 4.9 On the other hand, in relation to early intervention, HHS submitted that these efforts should:

... aim to ensure that short periods of homelessness do not become chronic; to stop someone from becoming so entrenched in homelessness that it becomes almost impossible for them to leave and [be] targeted at those in the early stages of homelessness. This includes working across sectors and mainstream institutions to stem the flow of individuals from mental health care, disability, state institutions, child protection and corrections into homelessness.⁴

- 4.10 HHS gave examples of intervention strategies at the early stages of homelessness, including support for entry-point services to make rapid assessments of clients, rental advice and assistance, emergency housing, case management, and support for rough sleepers.⁵

- 4.11 NMHC argued for prevention and early intervention strategies as a way to move beyond crisis responses:

Prevention and early intervention strategies aim to re-orientate the service system away from crisis management and include offering post-crisis support where necessary. ... The national and international evidence base has firmly established that the longer someone is homeless, the more difficult it is to assist them to stabilise their life. The responses and resources required are therefore substantively different for someone who is homeless compared to someone at risk of homelessness.⁶

- 4.12 Several submitters made the point that long term preventative measures are not only more effective than crisis responses in dealing with the problem of homelessness, they also use public resources more efficiently.

- 4.13 The Salvation Army highlighted the social and financial costs of not dealing with homelessness before it becomes entrenched:

The cost of homelessness... is enormous and only increases the longer the individual remains homeless. Studies have consistently indicated that programs that effectively reduce homelessness can achieve ... savings from reduced public health and criminal justice costs that far outweigh their expense.⁷

⁴ Haven; Home, Safe, *Submission 130*, p. 16.

⁵ Haven; Home, Safe, *Submission 130*, pp. 16-17.

⁶ National Mental Health Commission, *Submission 172*, p. 3. See also: Upstream Australia and 17 other organisations, *Submission 196*, p. 18.

⁷ Salvation Army Australia, *Submission 70*, p. 13.

- 4.14 The Salvation Army also stressed the effectiveness and efficiency of tackling health and education problems that may lead to homelessness:

Whether it is maintaining the tenancy of someone in existing housing, providing rapid rehousing to people as they become homeless, preventing someone from falling into chronic homelessness, or investing early in protective factors such as health and education for young people, early intervention initiatives represent the most effective and cost-efficient approach to addressing homelessness.⁸

- 4.15 The Victorian Public Tenants' Association argued that people receive assistance only when they 'hit crisis point' and can sometimes fall into gaps between support services, thus generating more complicated future problems. It added:

By failing to ensure a continuum of housing assistance measures are available to address the full continuum of need, we are merely deferring the problem to a time when it is more urgent, more expensive to address and more complicated.⁹

- 4.16 Recognising the strong link between family and domestic violence and homelessness (as discussed in Chapter 3), some submitters argued for more early intervention and support measures to assist victim-survivors, including children who witness violence.¹⁰

- 4.17 Other submissions focused on young people and the importance of measures to stop them from falling into homelessness, while also making wider points about the role of prevention and early intervention in homelessness generally, and the importance of integrated and non-siloed responses from different areas and levels of government.

- 4.18 Social Futures, a provider of housing support services based in Northern New South Wales, explained:

Studies show that for people experiencing ongoing housing instability, the first episode of homelessness occurred when they were young. That is why early intervention services are so important.¹¹

⁸ Salvation Army Australia, *Submission 70*, p. 14.

⁹ Victorian Public Tenants' Association, *Submission 21*, p. 7.

¹⁰ For example, see: Domestic Violence Victoria, *Submission 60*, pp. 2-3; Women's Legal Service Queensland, *Submission 87*, pp. 2-3; Brisbane Youth Service, *Submission 118*, p. 9.

¹¹ Social Futures, *Submission 141*, pp. 13-14.

- 4.19 Bolton Clarke Homeless Persons Program, a service provider specialising in health care for the homeless, said that attention must be paid to dealing with long-term factors that can lead to homelessness, starting in early childhood:

Prevention of homelessness for individuals begins in early childhood and needs to address the extreme social exclusion that results in homelessness. Risk factors such as substance use, low income, a lack of suitable housing and poor health overlap in socially excluded populations. Addressing the multiple and complex needs of socially excluded population[s] is needed rather than focusing on single risk factors.¹²

- 4.20 Upstream Australia, part of a coalition of organisations working on youth homelessness, argued that:

Youth homelessness, and homelessness more generally, is a life experience not a characteristic of individuals ... Adolescents tend to become homeless due to family issues; young people leaving care are particularly vulnerable; young adults (mainly women with children) tend to become homeless due to domestic violence. In general, young people do not become homeless due to a housing problem, but if their homelessness cannot be averted, they definitely do have a housing problem.¹³

- 4.21 In calling for more investment in early intervention, SYC, a not-for-profit organisation that assists people with housing, education and employment, highlighted what it saw as the disjointed and disconnected nature of services systems. It said that:

The homelessness system has for far too long been used as the safety net for the thousands of people who fall through the gaps caused by disjointed servicing, restrictive eligibility criteria and a deep disconnection between bureaucratic systems. A transformation of the perception and usage of the homelessness system by those that refer into it - hospitals, corrections, youth justice, disability, child protection - is a mandatory precursor to reducing and ultimately ending homelessness, in all its forms.¹⁴

- 4.22 The Committee received some evidence on examples of prevention and early intervention programs and services operating in Australia. For example, the Australian Government explained it was investing up to \$118

¹² Bolton Clarke Homeless Persons Program, *Submission 17*, p. 5.

¹³ Upstream Australia and 17 other organisations, *Submission 196*, p. 8.

¹⁴ SYC, *Submission 80*, pp. 2, 7-9.

million over five years through the Reconnect program to support young people who are homeless or at risk:

Reconnect is a community-based program that aims to prevent homelessness through early intervention, working to improve their relationship with their family and their school attendance and increase their participation within their local community.

In 2018–19, Reconnect services supported around 7,900 young people nationally with 81 per cent of clients reporting an overall positive improvement in their circumstances.¹⁵

- 4.23 A number of organisations involved in delivering the Reconnect program, along with others, made a range of observations on the program.¹⁶
- 4.24 Mission Australia said an evaluation across its seven Reconnect sites found improvements ‘in clients’ wellbeing, sense of control and support, housing permanency, family cohesion and financial condition of the family’. It also found that:

Reconnect services fill a significant gap in existing regional service systems, including a central role in supporting schools to connect young people to other services in the community.¹⁷
- 4.25 Community Connections stressed the importance of homelessness practitioners in the Reconnect program continuing to work with people in other sectors (such as the education sector) to build their capacity to identify and respond to people at risk of homelessness.¹⁸
- 4.26 However, Southern Youth and Family Services, a community organisation based in New South Wales, said there had been a ‘systematic running down’ of the Reconnect program due to inadequate indexation and the application of an efficiency dividend. It said this had led to cuts to service provision, which had, in turn, affected the quality and quantity of the interventions provided under the program.¹⁹

¹⁵ Department of Social Services (multi-agency submission), *Submission 57*, p. 24.

¹⁶ For example, see: Jesuit Social Services, *Submission 8*, pp. 8-9; Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, *Submission 139*, p. 48; Social Futures, *Submission 141*, p. 14; Southern Youth and Family Services, *Submission 148*, pp. 18-19.

¹⁷ Mission Australia, *Submission 137*, pp. 17-18.

¹⁸ Community Connections, *Submission 176*, p. 3.

¹⁹ Southern Youth and Family Services, *Submission 148*, p. 18.

- 4.27 Melbourne City Mission said that while early intervention programs such as Reconnect were a positive step, their effectiveness was limited by the absence of ‘a strategic and coherent framework’:

The Commonwealth Government should consider building on the investment in Reconnect, to provide a joined-up approach to youth homelessness prevention and early intervention that clearly lays out a vision, targets, responsibilities across different ministerial portfolios, departments and levels of government, as well as system wide measurement against targets.²⁰

- 4.28 Similarly, the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) submitted that while there are good examples of early intervention programs—including Reconnect—these could be improved. In particular, it said that programs ‘do not presently effectively encourage the local cooperation with community structures like schools or other services necessary to reduce the numbers entering homelessness’.²¹

- 4.29 AHURI said that ‘place based’ approaches involving networked community-level service systems had been identified as the most effective means of addressing homelessness for young people:

... early intervention approaches that are based around an eco-system of networked coordinated and cooperating services in a community (interacting with other institutions like schools) are most effective in reducing youth homelessness. However most of [the] present early intervention programs are run at a state or federal level and ‘siloeed’, with many of the organisations competing for funding, undermining willingness to cooperate...²²

- 4.30 The coalition of organisations working with Upstream Australia outlined a proposal for ‘a more integrated system’ based on the ‘community of schools and services’ (COSS) model of early intervention, which was initially piloted in Geelong and subsequently trialled at other sites in Australia and overseas. The organisations explained:

The architecture of the COSS Model includes close working collaborations between the secondary schools in a community with the community agencies, such as the lead agency(ies) that provides the youth and family work. It requires a staged development and intensive backbone support in the initial

²⁰ Melbourne City Mission, *Submission 91*, pp. 5-6.

²¹ Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, *Submission 139*, pp. 7, 47-48.

²² Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, *Submission 139*, p. 40.

years. Data plays a crucial role in monitoring outcomes in near real-time (or reaching that point is a key objective to be achieved).²³

- 4.31 The organisations went on to describe the promising outcomes from the implementation of the model in Geelong:

Over three years, the implementation of the model has reduced adolescent homelessness in the City of Greater Geelong by 40 per cent and early school leaving by 20 per cent in the three most disadvantaged schools in Geelong...²⁴

- 4.32 Upstream Australia explained how the COSS model was an example of the 'collective impact' approach, where 'a community's support resources work collaboratively to a common vision and practice framework using the same data measurement tools'. It suggested that while the Australian Government would not necessarily provide direct funding for support services under the COSS model, there was a broader policy question about how the Government 'could act to lead, drive, or facilitate' a shift to a collective impact approach to service delivery.²⁵
- 4.33 Upstream Australia also questioned the appropriateness of the Australian Government funding programs such as Reconnect on an ongoing basis, and recommended that the program be transferred to the states and territories 'on the basis of a commitment to expand place-based early intervention as part of the state/territory's homelessness strategy or plan'.²⁶
- 4.34 Other submitters recommended increased funding for early intervention programs, including Reconnect or programs based on the COSS model.²⁷
- 4.35 As discussed in Chapter 2, submitters also emphasised the importance of using and linking data to inform approaches to prevention and early intervention. Emerging Minds, a non-profit organisation focused on the mental health of children and young people, encouraged data collection 'that enables the experiences and needs of children and their families to be

²³ Upstream Australia and 17 other organisations, *Submission 196*, pp. 30-31.

²⁴ Upstream Australia and 17 other organisations, *Submission 196*, pp. 30.

²⁵ Upstream Australia and 17 other organisations, *Submission 196*, pp. 16-18, 31, 67.

²⁶ Upstream Australia and 17 other organisations, *Submission 196*, p. 19.

²⁷ For example, see: Social Futures, *Submission 141*, p. 4; Southern Youth and Family Services, *Submission 148*, pp. 19-20; Yfoundations, *Submission 151*, p. 6; Mallee Family Care, *Submission 180*, p. 3.

identified, so that it can inform policy planning and service delivery' for prevention and early intervention.²⁸

Adopting a 'Housing First' approach

- 4.36 A wide range of submitters put the view that international best practice in overcoming homelessness was increasingly moving in the direction of a 'Housing First' approach.
- 4.37 The principle of Housing First is that housing should be made available to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness as an immediate priority, rather than requiring people to overcome challenges such as mental illness or substance abuse, as a precondition for the provision of housing. At the same time 'wrap around' services should be made available to deal with associated issues that may interact with and compound problems of homelessness.²⁹
- 4.38 This section discusses the conceptual basis of Housing First, features of the approach, examples of its operation in Australia and factors that may have constrained its broader adoption and implementation.
- 4.39 According to Ruah Community Services & St Bart's (Ruah and St Bart's), the Housing First approach emerged out of an increasing awareness of the limitations of existing methods to provide for the broader needs of particular groups of homeless people:

Housing First was developed as a model for supporting people experiencing chronic homelessness who had complex needs, particularly around mental health. Before Housing First, people were expected to build their capacity and housing readiness through a pathway of crisis and transitional housing. People with mental health and substance-use issues were excluded from crisis and transitional homelessness and housing services and expected to work toward being 'housing ready' while living on the streets.

This approach fails to recognise that for people who are homeless the primary concern in their life will be housing, thus setting people up to fail. Once people are in stable homes, with wrap-around supports, there is capacity to address underlying mental health and/or substance-use issues.³⁰

²⁸ Emerging Minds, *Submission 30*, pp. 4, 9-10.

²⁹ For example, see: Compass Housing Services, *Submission 32*, p. 7.

³⁰ Ruah Community Services & St Bart's, *Submission 13*, p. 6.

- 4.40 Ruah and St Bart's explained that the approach 'begins with immediate access to long-term housing without the need to meet housing readiness criteria'.³¹
- 4.41 Many submitters contrasted Housing First with what they described as the 'stepped', 'ladder' or 'staircase' approach, under which homeless people dealing with issues such as mental illness or substance abuse were expected to go through the steps of dealing with those problems before they could be eligible for assistance with housing.³²
- 4.42 In the view of Compass Housing Services, Housing First turns the conventional approach 'on its head':
- Conventionally, homelessness services worked from the premise that an individual's problems should be resolved prior to allocation of accommodation. This effectively means 'treatment in place' maintaining someone in a homeless situation while addressing mental health or addiction issues. The assumption was that a tenancy would not be sustained while a person had behaviours that were not socially acceptable. Housing First turns that assumption on its head and asserts that the first support required to resolve chronic homelessness is to provide stable accommodation.³³
- 4.43 However, Ms Louise Gilding from the ACT Government told the Committee that while the Housing First approach seeks to remove barriers to homeless people receiving assistance, it does not mean no evictions from social housing:

The elephant in the room is that Housing First doesn't mean no evictions. ... We still need people to be good neighbours, we need people to pay the rent and we need people to look after their properties. That's what we're aiming for, and we aim to give the support to people for that. Sometimes there are complex case needs; sometimes there are recalcitrant behaviours and there is defiance. It's challenging work. Yes, you're right—there are expectations, and there need to be expectations, around those living skills, but it's about not putting those barriers in place in the first instance, so that the support then can flow.³⁴

³¹ Ruah Community Services & St Bart's, *Submission 13*, p. 6.

³² For example, see: Northern Sydney Housing and Homelessness Collaboration, *Submission 112*, p. 7; Public Interest Advocacy Centre, *Submission 115*, p. 27; Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, *Submission 139*, p. 6; ACT Government, *Submission 150*, p. 3.

³³ Compass Housing Services, *Submission 32*, p. 7.

³⁴ Ms Louise Gilding, Executive Group Manager, Housing ACT, Australian Capital Territory, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 7 August 2020, p. 4.

4.44 AHURI set out its view of the principles that underpin the Housing First approach, which included:

- Rapid rehousing into permanent housing
- Consumer choice and control
- Separation of housing and support services
- Recognition that recovery is ongoing
- Community re-integration into housing that is not differentiated from other housing...³⁵

4.45 The Mercy Foundation said the principles of Housing First are:

- Housing is provided as quickly as possible for people experiencing chronic homelessness
- People do not have to be assessed as 'housing ready'. There are no pre-requisites for people to access housing.
- Housing First provides people with permanent housing and access to services needed to help them sustain their tenancy. Most people will just need permanent housing to end their homelessness; some may need a period of transitional support as they move back in housing, and a small number of people have high or complex needs and may require permanent support. An individual's engagement with these services is not required for them to maintain their housing.³⁶

4.46 The Committee heard that, from its beginnings as a response to the intersection of homelessness and mental illness and substance abuse, Housing First has now been applied to the wider problems of homelessness as they intersect with other issues affecting vulnerable groups.

4.47 For example, Flat Out, an organisation supporting women who have had contact with the criminal justice or prison systems, submitted:

For criminalised women, and other people facing complex challenges and who are targeted by the criminal justice system, the 'Housing First' approach is the gold standard. ... It has demonstrated repeatedly that once housed, people are better able to move on with their lives (such as finding safety from violent relationships, beating drug and alcohol addiction, being re-united with children who had been placed in out-of-home care, and finding employment).³⁷

³⁵ Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, *Submission 139*, p. 6.

³⁶ Mercy Foundation, *Submission 35*, p. 6.

³⁷ Flat Out, *Submission 103*, pp. 13-14.

4.48 The development of Housing First into a comprehensive approach was described by AHURI, which submitted that:

... the term Housing First has come to denote a philosophy or paradigm that has been influential in informing other programs or even broad homelessness strategies.³⁸

4.49 In keeping with the understanding of Housing First as a broad philosophy or paradigm, the Committee was given a number of different accounts of the principles behind the approach and the details of its application.

4.50 In its strategy on homelessness, *All Paths Lead to a Home*, the Western Australian Government outlined what it saw as the various dimensions of Housing First, which it said 'can be distinguished in terms of a philosophy, a systems approach and as a program model':

- As a philosophy, Housing First can be a guiding principle for an organisation or community that prioritises getting people into permanent housing with supports to follow...
- Housing First can be considered embedded within a systems approach when the foundational philosophy and core principles of Housing First are applied across integrated systems of service delivery...
- Housing First can be considered more specifically as a program when it is operationalised as a service delivery model or set of activities provided by an agency or government body.³⁹

4.51 The Western Australian Government said that 'while the core principles guide its application, Housing First can be delivered in different models for different contexts. ... It can take many forms and is applied in new ways across different contexts'.⁴⁰

4.52 Ruah and St Bart's endorsed the view that Housing First is primarily a systems approach directed at a holistic and integrated effort to overcome the sets of problems affecting those most vulnerable to homelessness. The organisations said the Housing First terminology was becoming increasingly adopted internationally, but stressed the importance of the full application of the core principles of the model, which it said could be described as a 'Housing Led' approach.⁴¹

³⁸ Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, *Submission 139*, p. 6.

³⁹ Government of Western Australia, *Submission 178: Attachment 1*, p. 31.

⁴⁰ Government of Western Australia, *Submission 178: Attachment 1*, p. 31.

⁴¹ Ruah Community Services & St Bart's, *Submission 13*, p. 7.

- 4.53 In their submission, Ruah and St Bart's outlined how a Housing Led approach could be applied to the spectrum of groups experiencing or at risk of homelessness, ranging from the chronic homeless to those newly homeless. Each of these cohorts require different responses, as shown in Figure 4.1.⁴²

Figure 4.1 Model of a 'Housing Led' systemic approach



Source: Ruah Community Services & St Bart's, Submission 13, p. 8

- 4.54 The Unison Housing Research Lab at RMIT University concurred with the view that Housing First is best understood as a systems approach, which means viewing a problem "as a whole rather than its individual component parts" and "taking into account behaviour of systems over time rather than static 'snapshots'".⁴³
- 4.55 It argued that approaches to homelessness should not, on one extreme, just focus on the individuals experiencing homelessness or, on the other extreme, view the problem entirely at the aggregate level, but should analyse the systemic factors that generate homelessness:

Focusing on ... finding out many details about individuals, at particular points in time ... can encourage the perception that homelessness is attributable only

⁴² Ruah Community Services & St Bart's, Submission 13, pp. 7-8.

⁴³ Unison Housing Research Lab, Submission 66, p. 6. Quotes from Atun, R. (2012). 'Health systems, systems thinking and innovation', *Health policy and planning*, 27, iv4-iv8.

to individual characteristics. At the other extreme, aggregate statistics (such as total numbers in Australia) can disguise the fact that homelessness is not equally distributed, and that there are significant variations between, for example, different age groups and different geographical locations.⁴⁴

- 4.56 It added that a systems approach highlights the fact that homelessness is fluid, with different people flowing into and out of homelessness under the influence of a range of different push and pull factors. Therefore, ‘reducing the number of homeless people requires thinking not only about the prevalence at a point in time... but also movement into and out of homelessness over time.’⁴⁵
- 4.57 Some submitters noted the importance to the Housing First model of the provision of a broad range of ‘wrap-around’ services—in the words of the St Vincent de Paul Society, the approach is a “‘housing first”, but not a “housing only” approach to preventing and addressing homelessness’.⁴⁶
- 4.58 At the same time, the Northern Sydney Housing and Homelessness Collaboration, a group of not-for-profit community housing providers and homelessness services, emphasised that the model involved ‘the provision of secure, affordable housing with flexible, wrap-around supports’ and that:
- The level of support must be flexible in order to respond to the changing needs of clients over time and housing tenure must be permanent in that it is not tied to engagement with support.⁴⁷
- 4.59 Similarly, the Australian Government explained that in the Housing First approach, engagement with wrap around services is not required for people to maintain accommodation.⁴⁸
- 4.60 The City of Adelaide, describing its programs to deal with homelessness, stated:
- A ‘housing first’ model proposes safe and permanent housing as the first priority for people experiencing homelessness. Once housed, support can be

⁴⁴ Unison Housing Research Lab, *Submission 66*, p. 6.

⁴⁵ Unison Housing Research Lab, *Submission 66*, p. 6.

⁴⁶ St Vincent de Paul Society, *Submission 142*, p. 1.

⁴⁷ Northern Sydney Housing and Homelessness Collaboration, *Submission 112*, p. 7.

⁴⁸ Department of Social Services, *Submission 57.3*, p. 18.

wrapped around the individual to address other complex needs such as drug and alcohol use or mental health.⁴⁹

- 4.61 Both international and Australian examples were offered to the Committee in support of the success of Housing First approaches.
- 4.62 Ruah and St Bart's told the Committee that Housing First is being 'adopted internationally and has been the subject of several evaluated programs that have built a strong evidence base around the model'.⁵⁰
- 4.63 In the case of Finland, a world leader in the field, Ruah and St Bart's reported that the strategy had reduced the number of rough sleepers from 3,000 in 2010 to 1,000 in 2019. This had been achieved through investment in housing infrastructure, social work supports for the homeless, investment in preventative services and expert consultations with people experiencing homelessness when developing services.⁵¹
- 4.64 Mission Australia added that Finland had been the first country in Europe to achieve a decrease in the number of people experiencing homelessness.⁵²
- 4.65 The City Futures Research Centre noted that Housing First approaches to homelessness in Finland, Denmark and Norway had been particularly successful in the context of rough sleepers.⁵³
- 4.66 The Mercy Foundation told the Committee that:
- A study of 225 people in the USA compared the outcomes of those using traditional housing services and those using a Housing First program known as Pathways to Housing. The research found that 88% of those in the Housing First program retained their housing for two years compared to 47% in the other programs. Housing First programs in Australia show similar rates of success.⁵⁴
- 4.67 An example of a Housing First strategy implemented by several organisations is known as Common Ground. Common Ground was developed in New York in the 1990s and, in the last decade or so, the model

⁴⁹ City of Adelaide, *Submission 79*, p. 4.

⁵⁰ Ruah Community Services & St Bart's, *Submission 13*, p. 6

⁵¹ Ruah Community Services & St Bart's, *Submission 13*, p. 14.

⁵² Mission Australia, *Submission 137*, p. 41.

⁵³ City Futures Research Centre, *Submission 5.1*, p. 10.

⁵⁴ Mercy Foundation, *Submission 35*, p. 6.

has been applied in a number of Australian cities: first Adelaide, then Hobart, Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane.⁵⁵

- 4.68 Compass Housing Services explained that Common Ground is ‘not a homelessness service offering crisis services or transitional housing’, but is both a ‘safe place to live permanently and the support to help [people experiencing homelessness] achieve stability in their lives’. It is a ‘mixed tenancy’ model that not only provides housing for ‘the most vulnerable chronically homeless people in the community’, but also offers support to those ‘who may not have a history of homelessness, but who need affordable housing’:

The Common Ground model can be applied to any population group which requires the combination of permanent affordable housing, connected with support services that are appropriate to the chosen population.⁵⁶

- 4.69 The Committee was also told about the Adelaide Zero Project as a further example of an initiative based on the principles of Housing First. Adelaide Zero was launched in 2017, and involves a consortium of 40 organisations, including service delivery agencies, social housing providers, state and local government, universities and private sector organisations.⁵⁷
- 4.70 Adelaide Zero is based on the Functional Zero model, which has been successfully adopted in several communities in the United States:

Simply put, Functional Zero happens when a community's average housing placement rate is more than the number of people sleeping rough. Housing placements are any outcome where someone is securely housed, for example long-term lease in public housing, community housing or private rental, [or] home ownership. In order to reach Functional Zero, the number of housing placements made per month must be more than the number of people sleeping rough in a city for a minimum of three consecutive months.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Compass Housing Services, *Submission 32*, p. 8.

⁵⁶ Compass Housing Services, *Submission 32*, p. 8.

⁵⁷ Adelaide Zero Project, *Submission 99*, p. 1. See also: Adelaide Zero Project, *Ending street homelessness in the inner city: Adelaide Zero Project Impact Report*, March 2021, <<https://www.dunstan.org.au/adelaide-zero-project>>.

⁵⁸ Adelaide Zero Project, *Submission 99*, p. 4.

- 4.71 The Functional Zero model recognises that people will still fall into homelessness, but works to ensure that people's experience of sleeping rough is 'rare, brief, and non-recurring'.⁵⁹
- 4.72 An important aspect of the Functional Zero model is 'knowing the names and needs of every person experiencing homelessness in real-time' through a 'By-Name List'. This enables service providers to monitor the number of people in the system and match housing and support to people's individual needs.⁶⁰
- 4.73 The Northern Sydney Housing and Homelessness Collaboration gave examples of Housing First approaches in New South Wales. For example:
- Bridge Housing and Neami National partnered on the Platform 70 initiative in 2011 to house and support rough sleepers in inner Sydney. The program was particularly successful with an 85 percent success rate in sustaining housing tenancies and housed 105 rough sleepers. It is an evidence-based example of a person centred program with housing and support partners working closely to bring about a range of positive outcomes for the clients.⁶¹
- 4.74 In a supplementary submission, the Australian Government provided a list of other Housing First approaches in Australia and overseas.⁶²
- 4.75 However, the Committee heard that the adoption of Housing First in Australia had been constrained due to a shortage of housing in which people vulnerable to homelessness can be accommodated.
- 4.76 AHURI observed that while Housing First principles and methods had been applied in Australia for some time:
- ... many homelessness programs still follow a stepped housing model, with people notionally moving through crisis, transitional and then longterm housing even though housing pathways are often not linear with many people cycling in and out of crisis accommodation ... The key reason for a delay in accessing long term housing has more often been due to shortages of

⁵⁹ Adelaide Zero Project, *Ending street homelessness in the inner city: Adelaide Zero Project Impact Report*, March 2021, p. 10.

⁶⁰ Adelaide Zero Project, *Submission 99*, p. 4. See also: Adelaide Zero Project, *Ending street homelessness in the inner city: Adelaide Zero Project Impact Report*, March 2021, pp. 15-18.

⁶¹ Northern Sydney Housing and Homelessness Collaboration, *Submission 112*, pp. 7-8.

⁶² Department of Social Services, *Submission 57.3*, pp. 18-20.

affordable housing and the lack of long term viable housing pathways, rather than programmatic reasons.⁶³

- 4.77 HHS submitted that ‘approaches like Housing First – successful overseas, are hampered here in Australia as stock is not available to implement the program’.⁶⁴
- 4.78 This was echoed by the Victorian parliamentary inquiry into homelessness, which found that ‘Victoria’s Housing First programs are significantly handicapped by a lack of affordable long-term accommodation to house participants’.⁶⁵
- 4.79 The Northern Sydney Housing and Homelessness Collaboration said that insufficient funding had made it difficult for providers to make the transition from traditional systems and embrace Housing First approaches:
- While there have been a number of highly successful individual Housing First initiatives and pilot programs in Australia, our homelessness system is still predominantly crisis-driven with stepped housing. The absence of a capital funding stream to deliver additional social housing in combination with the fragmented and short-term funding cycles for support services have prevented the expansion of Housing First models.⁶⁶
- 4.80 The Public Interest Advocacy Centre said the development of Housing First approaches in Australia was constrained by:
- a. the lack of appropriate social housing stock to move people experiencing homelessness into,
 - b. the split responsibilities between State and Federal levels of government, and
 - c. the lack of wrap around services to support people housed in maintaining tenancies and address any other underlying issues they may have.⁶⁷
- 4.81 National Shelter argued that the adoption of Housing First methods required reform of existing systems:

⁶³ Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, *Submission 139*, p. 6.

⁶⁴ Haven; Home, Safe, *Submission 130*, p. 5.

⁶⁵ Victorian Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee, *Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria – Final report*, March 2021, p. 260.

⁶⁶ Northern Sydney Housing and Homelessness Collaboration, *Submission 112*, p. 7.

⁶⁷ Public Interest Advocacy Centre, *Submission 115*, p. 28.

Focussing on the required housing needed to address homelessness also requires reform of the specialist homelessness service system to tailor support needs around the household and housing requirements rather than the prevalence in the current system of forcing people experiencing homelessness to fit specialist homelessness services.⁶⁸

4.82 While submitters argued that shortfalls in investment had limited the adoption of Housing First approaches, some also suggested that Housing First was cost effective and could reduce the total government expenditure on homelessness and related problems.

4.83 For example, Mercy Foundation submitted that:

An evaluation of the Brisbane Common Ground model in 2016 reveals that governments can save in excess of \$13,000 per person each year, by providing secure, long term housing and access to relevant support services. The savings are primarily in health (less mental health episodes, less visits to the emergency department, fewer hospital admissions). There are also saving[s] to criminal justice and homelessness services.⁶⁹

4.84 In a similar vein, LawRight, an independent legal centre, reported that:

Prioritising housing as a foundational response to homelessness not only improves social, financial and health outcomes, it has also been found to reduce costs associated with supporting homeless populations.⁷⁰

4.85 The Public Interest Advocacy Centre also argued that the Housing First model 'reduces costs borne by government due to reduced strain on the justice system, hospitals, and psychiatric care services'.⁷¹

4.86 Homelessness Australia said that while Housing First trial programs in some cities had achieved 'extraordinary results', Australian governments had not prioritised the expansion of these programs to support more people across the country.⁷²

⁶⁸ National Shelter, *Submission 86*, p. 5.

⁶⁹ Mercy Foundation, *Submission 35*, pp. 6-7.

⁷⁰ LawRight, *Submission 50*, p. 7.

⁷¹ Public Interest Advocacy Centre, *Submission 115*, p. 28.

⁷² Homelessness Australia, *Submission 144*, pp. 27-28.

Enhancing social housing

- 4.87 The Committee received evidence about the important role of social housing in helping to address homelessness. As outlined in this section, a strong theme in evidence to the inquiry was the need to increase investment in social housing.
- 4.88 As noted in Chapter 2, the term ‘social housing’ is conventionally used to refer to both public housing (provided and managed by state and territory governments) and community housing (managed by community-based organisations).
- 4.89 The term ‘affordable housing’ is sometimes used in association with social housing (for example, some submitters wrote about ‘social and affordable housing’). However, affordable housing can mean either social housing or, more generally, housing available on the private market which is affordable to lower income earners. Evidence about a lack of affordable housing as a cause of homelessness is discussed in Chapter 3.
- 4.90 This section begins with a general discussion of evidence on the need to increase investment in social housing, noting concerns about the failure of the supply of social housing to keep pace with demand. The section then considers more specific evidence relating to the distinct roles of public and community housing.

Need for increased investment in social housing

- 4.91 AHURI submitted that social housing is a ‘key source of affordable and secure housing that can benefit people who are homeless or at risk’. It explained that as at June 2018, there were 434,502 social housing dwellings across Australia, comprising 73 per cent public housing and 20 per cent community housing, with the remainder being Indigenous community and state owned and managed Indigenous housing.⁷³
- 4.92 AHURI explained that people who are assessed to be homeless or at risk of homelessness are given a high priority on the waiting list for social housing.⁷⁴

⁷³ Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, *Submission 139*, p. 43. See also: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Submission 39*, pp. 7-8.

⁷⁴ Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, *Submission 139*, p. 43.

4.93 However, as noted above, the Committee heard that growth in the stock of social housing has not kept pace with population growth and increasing demand, which has resulted in the waiting list for social housing increasing.⁷⁵

4.94 For example, AHURI advised that:

The total number of social housing dwellings has grown over time—from 401,576 dwellings in 2010 to 434,502 dwellings in 2018... but this growth has not been sufficient to enable social housing to keep pace with population growth and demand.⁷⁶

4.95 Similarly, the City Futures Research Centre (CFRC) submitted that:

Australia's stock of social housing has remained virtually static in nominal terms for almost 25 years – a period when population (and therefore need) has continued to increase. The number of social rental units has therefore fallen from 6.2 per 100 dwellings in 1991 to 4.2 in 2018. Consequently, over the past quarter century, what was already an internationally modest level of provision has effectively contracted by one third.⁷⁷

4.96 The Committee heard that while there had been some growth in community housing, there had been a significant decline in public housing. This trend is discussed in further detail below.

4.97 Another contributing factor discussed in evidence was the low turnover of tenancies in social housing. According to the Grattan Institute, 'tenants generally take a long time to leave social housing: most have stayed for more than five years' and few enter the private rental market:

As a consequence, there is little 'flow' of social housing available for people whose lives take a big turn for the worse, and many people who are in greatest need are not assisted. The result is that fewer Australians are living in social housing than in the past, and every year proportionally fewer social housing units become available for new tenants.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ For example, see: Compass Housing Services, *Submission 32*, pp. 4-5; Sacred Heart Mission, *Submission 42*, p. 9; Canberra Community Law, *Submission 135*, pp. 4-5; Everybody's Home, *Submission 140*, p. 9.

⁷⁶ Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, *Submission 139*, p. 43. See also: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Submission 39*, pp. 7-8.

⁷⁷ City Futures Research Centre, *Submission 5*, p. 5.

⁷⁸ Grattan Institute, *Submission 127*, p. 9.

- 4.98 The CFRC also noted the ‘declining mobility’ of existing tenants as a factor contributing to the effective contraction of social housing supply.⁷⁹
- 4.99 The Everybody’s Home campaign (discussed further below) said there was a ‘backlog’ of 430,000 social housing dwellings in Australia. It outlined the numbers of people on waiting lists for various forms of social housing:

... latest available figures demonstrate the considerable waiting list for social housing with the wait list nationally of 140,600 applicants on the waiting list for public housing and 8,800 households ... wait-listed for state-owned-and-managed Indigenous housing... Another 38,300 applicants were waiting for mainstream community housing... These figures exclude people temporarily suspended from waiting lists ... who need social housing but are ineligible and others not on waiting lists but still in need, such as rough sleepers and very low-income households in housing stress.⁸⁰

- 4.100 The Community Housing Industry Association (CHIA) argued that planned investments in social housing will not make up for past shortfalls but will continue the downward trend:

No reliable figures exist on the additional new social and affordable homes currently planned but even on optimistic assumptions it is highly unlikely to exceed 10% of what is required. ...the prospective net increase in social and affordable homes over the next five years is likely to be barely above zero. Unless there is a change of course by Australian governments, social and affordable housing provision per capita will continue to contract, just as it has for the past 25 years.⁸¹

- 4.101 CHIA also quoted an audit conducted in 2019 by Infrastructure Australia that found:

...‘the social housing system suffers from a lack of funding, an ageing housing stock with high maintenance needs, increased demand due to housing affordability issues, insufficient funding to increase the supply of dwellings in the system, and tenants with increasingly diverse needs’.⁸²

- 4.102 As discussed earlier in this chapter, the Committee heard evidence that the adoption of Housing First in Australia had been constrained due to the limited availability of social housing.

⁷⁹ City Futures Research Centre, *Submission 5*, p. 5.

⁸⁰ Everybody’s Home, *Submission 140*, p. 9.

⁸¹ Community Housing Industry Association, *Submission 89*, p. 9.

⁸² Community Housing Industry Association, *Submission 89*, p. 9.

- 4.103 Against this background, a large number of submitters called for substantial increases in government funding for social housing.⁸³
- 4.104 One prominent example was the Everybody's Home campaign, which submitted that it involves 400 organisations and more than 27,000 individual supporters. The campaign is calling for government investment to 'meet Australia's identified shortfall of 500,000 social and affordable homes by 2036'. It proposes new capital investment in 300,000 new social housing properties and tax incentives or subsidies to leverage private sector investment in a further 200,000 affordable rental properties.⁸⁴
- 4.105 A number of other submitters expressed support for the campaign, including Homelessness NSW, St Vincent's Health Australia, Jesuit Social Services, and Wintringham, an organisation supporting older homeless people.⁸⁵
- 4.106 Noting that most submissions to the inquiry were received in the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated economic contraction, a range of submitters suggested that investment in social housing would not only serve as a foundation for addressing homelessness, but would be an effective form of economic stimulus.
- 4.107 Anglicare Australia argued:
- Ending our affordable housing shortfall would be the most powerful way to tackle the homelessness crisis and boost regional economies. ... Social housing projects can get off the ground much more quickly than road or rail infrastructure – and it brings greater long-term benefits.⁸⁶
- 4.108 The St Vincent de Paul Society said the economic and social benefits of investment in social housing were 'far-reaching' and that:
- ... a significant investment in the building and maintenance of social, community and transitional housing and supported accommodation would not only improve housing options for the homeless, it would create jobs, kick-

⁸³ For example, see: Australian Council of Social Service, *Submission 105*, p. 3; Wayside Chapel, *Submission 107*, p. 2; B Miles Women's Foundation, *Submission 116*, p. 4; Wentworth Community Housing, *Submission 122*, p. 8; St Vincent de Paul Society, *Submission 142*, p. 9.

⁸⁴ Everybody's Home, *Submission 140*, pp. 2, 9-10.

⁸⁵ Jesuit Social Services, *Submission 8*, p. 5; Wintringham, *Submission 100*, p. 12; Homelessness NSW, *Submission 132*, p. 10; St Vincent's Health Australia, *Submission 133*, p. 17.

⁸⁶ Anglicare Australia, *Submission 173*, pp. 14-15.

start the economy and provide long-term benefits to the community as a whole.⁸⁷

4.109 National Shelter submitted that:

Directing public investment towards the construction of social and affordable housing during a period of economic decline has been widely recognised as an effective means of both stimulating the economy and creating meaningful social and systemic change.⁸⁸

4.110 Compass Housing Services took a similar position, arguing ‘there is no escaping the fact that a shortage of affordable and social housing is the primary determinant of homelessness in Australia’. It recommended the Australian Government support a ‘major program of building social and affordable housing’ in partnership with private sector and community housing providers, suggesting that this would ‘provide important economic stimulus’ following the COVID-19 pandemic.⁸⁹

4.111 The Grattan Institute also supported investment in new social housing, and said that this would be ‘a quick and affordable way to stimulate the economy in the wake of COVID-19’. However, it argued that new social housing stock should be reserved for those most in need:

Social housing is particularly effective stimulus, but does come at a cost. Once more units are constructed, they should be reserved for those most in need, and at significant risk of becoming homeless for the long term.⁹⁰

4.112 The Grattan Institute went on to argue that public financing is the most cost-effective way to finance construction of new social housing, and noted that the actual cost to government of providing more social housing is less than the up-front cost due to the ongoing rental returns.⁹¹

4.113 Other submitters expressed support for the Social Housing Acceleration and Renovation Program (SHARP) proposal, launched in 2020 by CHIA,

⁸⁷ St Vincent de Paul Society, *Submission 142*, p. 3.

⁸⁸ National Shelter, *Submission 86*, p. 2.

⁸⁹ Compass Housing Services, *Submission 32*, pp. 4-5.

⁹⁰ Grattan Institute, *Submission 127*, pp. 2, 10-11.

⁹¹ Grattan Institute, *Submission 127*, pp. 10, 12.

Homelessness Australia, National Shelter and the Everybody's Home campaign, partly in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.⁹²

- 4.114 The SHARP proposal calls for the Australian Government, with contributions from state and territory governments, to invest in:

... at least 30,000 additional social housing units and renovation to high environmental standards of many thousands more existing properties. The program should aim for 75% of new homes to be completed within three years.⁹³

- 4.115 The Council of Capital City Lord Mayors recommended that the Australian Government invest \$200 million over four years in a 'Capital City Housing First Fund' for the construction of 2,000 tailored units for people sleeping rough and/or at risk of primary homelessness.⁹⁴

Public housing

- 4.116 As noted above, the Committee heard that there had been a significant and long-term decline in the amount of public housing in Australia relative to population.
- 4.117 AHURI submitted that 'public housing as a proportion of all housing has declined significantly, falling from 5.2 per cent in 1996 to 4.1 per cent in 2011'.⁹⁵
- 4.118 The Victorian Public Tenants' Association (VPTA) presented data about the decline in public housing over the last two decades, which is reproduced in Table 4.1.⁹⁶

⁹² For example, see: Launch Housing, *Submission 47*, p. 3; National Shelter, *Submission 86*, p. 6; Community Housing Industry Association, *Submission 89*, p. 2; Centre for Social Impact, *Submission 131*, p. 6; PowerHousing Australia, *Submission 134*, p. 8; Mission Australia, *Submission 137*, p. 12; Everybody's Home, *Submission 140*, p. 10; Southern Youth and Family Services, *Submission 148*, p. 6.

⁹³ Community Housing Industry Association, *Social Housing Acceleration and Renovation Program (SHARP)*, <<https://www.communityhousing.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/SHARP-Program.pdf?x59559>>.

⁹⁴ Council of Capital City Lord Mayors, *Submission 83*, pp. 21-22.

⁹⁵ Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, *Submission 139*, p. 43.

⁹⁶ Victorian Public Tenants' Association, *Submission 21*, p. 5.

Table 4.1 Numbers of public housing dwellings, by state and territory

	2001	2019
New South Wales	128,215	100,623
Victoria	65,310	64,428
Queensland	50,666	51,817
South Australia	51,760	32,472
Western Australia	32,645	32,905
Tasmania	13,178	7,037
Northern Territory	6,038	4,954
ACT	11,510	10,955
National	359,322	305,191

Source: Victorian Public Tenants' Association, Submission 21, p. 5.

4.119 In addition to declining public housing stock, some submitters suggested that a decline in investment had caused a deterioration in the standard of current public housing, resulting in poor living conditions for tenants.⁹⁷

4.120 Sacred Heart Mission submitted that:

Much of the existing public housing stock is poorly maintained and in disrepair, poorly ventilated and insulated, often unsafe and no longer fit for purpose.

... Not all areas are unsafe; some residents of public and community housing mention the positive sense of communities that are formed in their neighbourhoods. However, for others they can be extremely unsafe places to live...⁹⁸

4.121 It went on:

We consider that public housing is a form of social infrastructure that should be viewed as essential in the same way that public transport, roads, schools,

⁹⁷ For example, see: Per Capita, *Submission 68*, p. 15.

⁹⁸ Sacred Heart Mission, *Submission 42*, p. 29.

hospitals and other forms of infrastructure are considered essential and worthy of long-term and considered investment.⁹⁹

- 4.122 The Exodus Foundation, a charity in Sydney's Inner West which assists homeless and vulnerable people, noted that in 2020, one in five government-owned homes failed to meet minimum standards, including standards relating to facilities for washing, showering, food storage and sewage removal. It noted these statistics are significantly worse for those in Indigenous housing and those with a disability.¹⁰⁰
- 4.123 While many submitters advocated for increased provision of social housing generally, in the context of reduced availability of public housing, some submitters stressed the particular role that public housing has for more vulnerable populations.
- 4.124 The VPTA argued that while 'public and community housing must continue to exist and grow side by side':
- We firmly believe that public housing is the most equitable, affordable and appropriate form of tenure for the most vulnerable Australians, including those who are experiencing or are at risk of experiencing homelessness.¹⁰¹
- 4.125 It quoted research from RMIT University which found that 'public housing is the most protective factor against homelessness, and that community housing did not have the same preventative effect'. This finding was attributed in part to the security of tenure afforded by public housing relative to community housing, which it was suggested was more dependent on rental revenue and therefore less tolerant of rental arrears.¹⁰²
- 4.126 The VPTA concluded that public housing must be the 'central pillar' in any homelessness response and that the 'single most important thing that Governments can do to address the issue of homelessness and marginalised housing in Australia, is to build more public housing'.¹⁰³
- 4.127 Similarly, Homelessness Australia made the case that 'rigorous research has shown that there is no single intervention more effective in ending

⁹⁹ Sacred Heart Mission, *Submission 42*, p. 29.

¹⁰⁰ Exodus Foundation, *Submission 27*, pp. 5-6.

¹⁰¹ Victorian Public Tenants' Association, *Submission 21*, p. 3.

¹⁰² Victorian Public Tenants' Association, *Submission 21*, pp. 11-13.

¹⁰³ Victorian Public Tenants' Association, *Submission 21*, pp. 11-13.

homelessness and preventing its re-occurrence than providing public housing'.¹⁰⁴

- 4.128 Per Capita said that community housing is 'an important component of a robust housing sector', but cautioned that growth in community housing at the expense of public housing was problematic. It outlined what it saw as the benefits of public housing over both community housing and the private rental market, and said:

Evidence both internationally and locally shows that providing good quality public housing in appropriate locations is the most effective way to keep people out of homelessness. Data from the University of Melbourne's Journeys Home study - the only longitudinal study in the world that tracks currently homeless populations alongside at-risk and vulnerable populations - shows that public housing is by far the strongest preventative factor against homelessness, finding that '...the magnitude of its effect was many times greater than anything else.'¹⁰⁵

Community housing

- 4.129 As noted above, to the extent there has been growth in the overall number of social housing dwellings, this was due to an increase in community housing. The AIHW explained:

The number of community housing dwellings more than doubled over a decade, from 39,800 in 2008–09, to 87,800 in 2017–18, partly due to the transfer of ownership or management of public housing dwellings to community organisations.¹⁰⁶

- 4.130 CHIA—a peak body representing non-profit community housing providers (CHPs)—advised that its more than 170 members managed a portfolio of more than 100,000 homes.¹⁰⁷
- 4.131 A number of submitters emphasised the strengths of the community housing sector. For example, Southern Homelessness Services Network (SHSN)—a network of specialist homelessness services in the southern region of Melbourne—submitted that:

¹⁰⁴ Homelessness Australia, *Submission 144*, pp. 15-16.

¹⁰⁵ Per Capita, *Submission 68*, pp. 16-19.

¹⁰⁶ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Submission 39*, p. 7.

¹⁰⁷ Community Housing Industry Association, *Submission 89*, p. 1. See also: Ms Rebecca Pinkstone, Chief Operations Officer, Bridge Housing Limited, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 30 July 2020, p. 10.

The community housing sector builds high quality housing that meets the needs of a range of groups for which the private market cannot respond. Community housing providers often have very strong relationships with local support agencies...¹⁰⁸

4.132 Link Housing said the benefits of CHPs managing social housing included:

... greater flexibility to respond to residents' needs, strong capacity to build effective partnerships with support organisations in order to benefit residents, a propensity to be innovative and ease in implementation of innovation and minimal 'red tape'.¹⁰⁹

4.133 HHS explained that CHPs can:

... mediate and gain better value between the developer and Council and ensure greater investment in models that cater for diverse local growing communities and are designed and developed to meet critical community need...¹¹⁰

4.134 Ms Wendy Hayhurst from CHIA told the Committee that:

AHURI conducted research that looked at the cost-effectiveness of both the public and community housing sector. It looked both at their costs but also ... the outcomes from that expenditure. It showed us in a very good light. We are generally well-liked by our tenants. Whilst we have higher staff ratios to properties, we're still not spending any more on services. So I think there's evidence out there to show that community housing providers will spend government investment extremely wisely. We are also regulated, so we're much more transparent [than the public housing sector]...¹¹¹

4.135 However, Compass Housing Services told the Committee that policy settings 'have not favoured the growth of the community sector and its ability to contribute new housing stock has been limited'.¹¹²

4.136 CHIA expressed concern about the perception that community housing is transitional rather than a long-term solution to the housing problems facing many people. It said CHPs:

¹⁰⁸ Southern Homelessness Services Network, *Submission 190*, p. 25.

¹⁰⁹ Link Housing, *Submission 93*, p. 1.

¹¹⁰ Haven; Home, Safe, *Submission 130*, pp. 15-16.

¹¹¹ Ms Wendy Hayhurst, Chief Executive Officer, Community Housing Industry Association, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 30 July 2020, pp. 15-16.

¹¹² Compass Housing Services, *Submission 32*, p. 4.

... frequently find themselves required to balance an expectation (from governments) that tenants in social housing are on some form of 'pathway' to market housing with the reality that sustainable move-on options do not exist in sufficient numbers and / or that household incomes and circumstances make long term social housing the best and most appropriate option.¹¹³

4.137 It said that in assessing the performance of landlords, 'tenancy sustainment' was equally as important an indicator as 'move on' rates.¹¹⁴

4.138 CHIA also argued that there was a need for support to improve the capacity of CHPs to provide additional services for tenants with special needs:

... there is currently insufficient income or subsidy to enable [CHPs] to focus on all the needs of tenants with complex and challenging issues. What is spent is essentially a transfer payment from disadvantaged tenants to those who are even more disadvantaged. Spending funds on support also means there is less money that can be spent delivering new homes for people.¹¹⁵

4.139 Similarly, SHSN said that funding for community housing is 'not sustainable for housing people on very low incomes and requires subsidies to ensure it can house larger numbers of people on the lowest incomes'.¹¹⁶

4.140 More generally, AHURI submitted that current arrangements do not always encourage affordable housing where the need is greatest:

AHURI research has shown that not for profit affordable housing growth is driven by opportunity rather than need – that is, new dwellings are provided where it proves viable, rather than where there is greatest demand for housing. It is dependent upon provision of subsidy, and at present affordable housing providers have to source that subsidy from varying sources (e.g. from land grants, market sales or operating subsidies). This fragmentation of subsidy mechanisms adds costs and complexity to the development process. A more coherent and long term policy framework would overcome this by providing public subsidy to reflect need across a continuum of need.¹¹⁷

4.141 The Committee heard a range of evidence about efforts to increase the supply of community housing.

¹¹³ Community Housing Industry Association, *Submission 89*, p. 14.

¹¹⁴ Community Housing Industry Association, *Submission 89*, p. 14.

¹¹⁵ Community Housing Industry Association, *Submission 89*, pp. 15-17.

¹¹⁶ Southern Homelessness Services Network, *Submission 190*, p. 25.

¹¹⁷ Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, *Submission 139*, p. 43.

- 4.142 The Committee was told of ‘head leasing’ programs, where a CHP leases a certain number of privately-owned properties, which are then sub-let to tenants. AHURI advised that head leasing offers advantages for landlords, can provide tenants a high degree of stability, and is especially useful for certain client groups, such as families who may need larger housing or housing located near schools.¹¹⁸
- 4.143 As an example, the Tasmanian Government explained that it provides owners with a financial incentive to make their property available via a head lease to a registered CHP for a two-year period. At the end of the lease, owners can offer tenants a direct lease agreement. The Tasmanian Government also makes use of head leasing for rapid rehousing for people in need of traditional accommodation.¹¹⁹
- 4.144 PowerHousing Australia said that head leasing was one option for a rapid response to assist people experiencing homelessness. However, it also classified head leasing as a ‘short-term’ solution.¹²⁰
- 4.145 Similarly, Sacred Heart Mission argued that while head leasing was an effective solution for providing immediate access to housing, and a useful interim measure while other approaches are undertaken to increase supply of permanent social housing, it was not a long-term solution.¹²¹
- 4.146 Another approach discussed in evidence to the inquiry was the practice by some state and territory governments of transferring management of public housing to CHPs. For example, the Tasmanian Government explained that its *Better Housing Futures* program, launched in 2013, involved transferring the management of 4,000 government-owned properties to four CHPs for an initial period of 10 years. A further 2,000 properties were subsequently added to the program and it was extended to 2040.¹²²

¹¹⁸ Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, *Submission 139*, p. 42.

¹¹⁹ Tasmanian Government, *Submission 179*, pp. 6, 8.

¹²⁰ PowerHousing Australia, *Submission 134*, p. 7.

¹²¹ Sacred Heart Mission, *Submission 42*, pp. 29-30.

¹²² Tasmanian Government, *Submission 179*, p. 8; Mr Peter White, Deputy Secretary, Housing, Disability and Community Services, Department of Communities Tasmania, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 7 August 2020, p. 17.

- 4.147 Mr Peter White from the Department of Communities Tasmania characterised the arrangement as being ‘effectively’ a head lease.¹²³
- 4.148 Mr White told the Committee that the program was financially advantageous because tenants became eligible for Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA), which was not the case when the housing was managed as public housing. Mr White explained that CRA payments went directly to the CHPs, which ‘allowed for increased investment in maintenance and upgrading and tenancy services and community support services’.¹²⁴
- 4.149 Mr White said the program initially focused on areas with a high concentration of social housing, and that the program had delivered positive outcomes for tenants:
- We’ve had really, really positive feedback from tenants in those communities. ... They’ve seen a suite of services and improvements over the last six or seven years in those areas. Across Tasmania last year ... those [CHPs] received approximately \$11 million in Commonwealth rent assistance. All those moneys, under our agreements, are required to be invested back in to making a difference within the communities themselves.¹²⁵
- 4.150 When asked more generally about the transfer of public housing to the community housing sector, Mr White also noted that CHPs receive GST concessions and are potentially able to attract philanthropic donations or access other forms of equity.¹²⁶
- 4.151 Mr White told the Committee that Tasmania’s experience had demonstrated that—with appropriate protections in place for vulnerable clients—it would be possible for states and territories to transfer responsibility for tenancy management and property management to CHPs:

¹²³ Mr Peter White, Deputy Secretary, Housing, Disability and Community Services, Department of Communities Tasmania, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 7 August 2020, p. 17.

¹²⁴ Mr Peter White, Deputy Secretary, Housing, Disability and Community Services, Department of Communities Tasmania, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 7 August 2020, p. 17.

¹²⁵ Mr Peter White, Deputy Secretary, Housing, Disability and Community Services, Department of Communities Tasmania, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 7 August 2020, pp. 18-19.

¹²⁶ Mr Peter White, Deputy Secretary, Housing, Disability and Community Services, Department of Communities Tasmania, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 7 August 2020, p. 18.

... what we have shown in Tasmania is that the community housing sector can do the tenancy and property management function very well. I could see that model being expanded across social housing across the board.¹²⁷

4.152 However, Mr White told the Committee there was still a role for public housing, particularly for clients with 'very specific and complex needs':

... public housing does a great job; we manage 8,000 homes at the moment as tenancy managers. But my point is that there's additional resources that come in for the community housing sector that the public providers don't have access to, which is resulting in improved amenity of the stock ... and the ability to put more programs on the ground for tenants. So I don't think it's a matter of saying one's better than the other but I would say that we've shown that working with the community housing sector has been positive, and they've shown a willingness to provide good quality accommodation and services for the most vulnerable people in Tasmania.¹²⁸

4.153 The Committee also heard about approaches to raise funds from the private sector for affordable housing, including community housing.

4.154 For example, the Homes for Homes model, which is an initiative of the Big Issue, involves raising funds via tax-deductible donations linked to property transactions:

Funds are raised via individuals and property developers agreeing to register properties with Homes for Homes, enabling a tax-deductible donation of 0.1% of the sale price to be donated to Homes for Homes. Participation is recognised through a caveat registered on the property title... The donation flows seamlessly through the settlement disbursement process. Donations are pooled and funding is granted to housing providers to increase supply of social and affordable housing.¹²⁹

4.155 Homes for Homes advised that the model had so far provided almost \$1 million in grants to CHPs and had the potential to raise over \$1 billion over the next 30 years if adopted by 5 per cent of the property market. It said

¹²⁷ Mr Peter White, Deputy Secretary, Housing, Disability and Community Services, Department of Communities Tasmania, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 7 August 2020, p. 18.

¹²⁸ Mr Peter White, Deputy Secretary, Housing, Disability and Community Services, Department of Communities Tasmania, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 7 August 2020, p. 19.

¹²⁹ Homes for Homes, *Submission 55*, p. 3. See also: Mr Gavin Jackman, Adviser, Homes for Homes, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 8 July 2020, pp. 42-44.

the Australian Government could accelerate the adoption of the model through funding agreements with states and territories.¹³⁰

- 4.156 While not specifically targeted to community housing, another example was the Permanent Rental Affordability Development Solution (PRADS) model, proposed by the private-sector not-for-profit organisation Housing All Australians (HAA). According to HAA:

The purpose of creating the PRADS model is to maximise the involvement of the private sector in delivering affordable rental housing, by acknowledging and mitigating the risks normally considered part of the development process. Over the medium term, this should result in the delivery of affordable housing becoming part of a [developer's] normal business.¹³¹

- 4.157 The PRADS model works via an agreement between a developer and the relevant local government, under which the local government accelerates or amends the development approval process, with the saving to the developer passed on through the provision of an agreed number of dwellings at an agreed percentage below market rent.¹³²

- 4.158 Mr Robert Pradolin from HAA explained the arrangement to the Committee in the following terms:

...where a developer says, 'Local government, you've got the levers to actually add huge value in terms of planning. You've got the levers to actually accelerate time and save money. If we work together collaboratively and you save some of that money or give me extra value, I will share some of that value with you and lock in affordable housing at a below-market rent for life that is at no cost to either federal, state or local government'.¹³³

- 4.159 In its submission, HAA said that the principles of the PRADS model had been applied in a development in Victoria.¹³⁴

- 4.160 However, Mr Pradolin explained that the model 'needs to be done at scale' and stressed the importance of attracting superannuation funds to invest in

¹³⁰ Homes for Homes, *Submission 55*, pp. 7-8.

¹³¹ Housing All Australians, *Submission 7.1*, p. 17.

¹³² Housing All Australians, *Submission 7*, pp. 6-7.

¹³³ Mr Robert Pradolin, Founder and Director, Housing All Australians Ltd, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 8 July 2020, pp. 34-35.

¹³⁴ Housing All Australians, *Submission 7*, p. 7.

affordable housing.¹³⁵ HAA recommended that the Australian Government work with HAA to ‘explore the scalability of the model’.¹³⁶

- 4.161 SYC, a not-for-profit housing provider, said that PRADS was ‘a creative and innovative proposal’.¹³⁷
- 4.162 The Victorian parliamentary inquiry into homelessness also considered the PRADS model, recommending that the Victorian Government further investigate the use of the model ‘to ascertain whether it is a practical and appropriate mechanism for increasing provision of affordable housing in Victoria’.¹³⁸
- 4.163 Speaking more generally, the Grattan Institute cautioned that there are limits to the extent to which private sector financing can meet a shortfall of government investment in social housing:

No amount of innovative financing can paper over the need for extra funding to boost the supply of social housing. Social housing provides heavily discounted rents to tenants, to assist them with their housing costs. And therefore government funding will be required to make up the shortfall between what tenants can afford to pay and the cost of acquiring land, building social housing, and maintaining it over the life of the asset.¹³⁹

Affordable Housing Bond Aggregator

- 4.164 In its submission to the inquiry, the Australian Government said it ‘recognises that greater private and institutional investment is needed to expand the community housing sector’. In 2018, the Government established the National Housing Finance and Investment Corporation (NHFIC) to operate the Affordable Housing Bond Aggregator (AHBA).¹⁴⁰
- 4.165 As outlined in Chapter 2, the AHBA provides loans to registered CHPs which can be used to acquire or construct new housing stock, maintain

¹³⁵ Mr Robert Pradolin, Founder and Director, Housing All Australians Ltd, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 8 July 2020, p. 33-36.

¹³⁶ Housing All Australians, *Submission 7*, p. 8.

¹³⁷ SYC, *Submission 80*, p. 7.

¹³⁸ Victorian Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee, *Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria – Final report*, March 2021, p. 321.

¹³⁹ Grattan Institute, *Submission 127*, p. 12.

¹⁴⁰ Department of Social Services (multi-agency submission), *Submission 57*, p. 25.

existing stock, meet capital or corporate requirements, or refinance existing debt.

4.166 Several CHPs spoke positively about the AHBA, but the Committee also heard that additional funding would be required to address the shortfall in social housing.

4.167 Compass Housing Services said that NHFIC has ‘gone some way to increasing the capacity of the community sector to increase supply’.¹⁴¹

4.168 HHS told the Committee that it had refinanced existing debt at a cheaper rate through a 10-year loan from the AHBA:

This has reduced refinancing risk for HHS and lowered costs, enabling us greater capacity to invest and develop. ... The scheme has been [a] very important initiative ... in supporting Community housing providers to engage in the development of social housing.¹⁴²

4.169 Ms Trudi Ray from HHS told the Committee that her organisation had saved approximately \$10 million over the term of the loan.¹⁴³

4.170 However, while positive about its own experience with the AHBA, HHS said that the initiative is ‘not generating enough new housing stock to close the existing gap in supply for those in urgent need of community housing across the states and territories, let alone to address the projected increasing gaps in future years’.¹⁴⁴

4.171 Launch Housing told the Committee:

The establishment of [NHFIC] is an important reform that should increase affordable housing. On its own, however, it will not provide a sufficient subsidy to increase the level of social housing and affordable housing at the very low end of the market.¹⁴⁵

4.172 Mission Australia submitted that:

[NHFIC] ... will make a useful contribution in making concessional funding available for Community Housing Providers. However, without significant funding to bridge the gap between cost and operations, this initiative is

¹⁴¹ Compass Housing Services, *Submission 32*, p. 4.

¹⁴² Haven; Home, Safe, *Submission 130*, p. 13.

¹⁴³ Ms Trudi Ray, Chief Operations Officer, Loddon Mallee Housing Services Trading as Haven; Home, Safe, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 29 July 2020, p. 51.

¹⁴⁴ Haven; Home, Safe, *Submission 130*, p. 13.

¹⁴⁵ Launch Housing, *Submission 47*, p. 4.

insufficient to generate sufficient investment in social and affordable housing to address the current critical shortfall.¹⁴⁶

- 4.173 Similarly, AHURI said that while NHFIC offers a new source of financing to support an increase in the supply of social housing, this increase in supply would be ‘dependent on ongoing subsidy’:

AHURI research has shown that the most efficient way to achieve this is through capital grants subsidies with housing being supplied according to community needs (Randolph et al. 2018). The depth of subsidy should reflect the higher risks and costs associated with accommodating homeless or at risk persons.¹⁴⁷

Indigenous community housing

- 4.174 Evidence on the experiences of Indigenous communities with homelessness is discussed in Chapter 3.

- 4.175 Further to this, the Committee received evidence on Indigenous community housing, which highlighted a common view that community-controlled organisations were best placed to manage housing to meet the needs of Indigenous communities.¹⁴⁸

- 4.176 For example, the Central Australian Aboriginal Congress submitted that:

Aboriginal community-controlled housing services, by understanding local cultural needs and knowing the local Aboriginal community are much more able to provide effective and appropriate housing and homelessness services.¹⁴⁹

- 4.177 The submission added:

Each community has its own specific history, ways of living, relationships to land, and social relations, so the design and placement of housing requires close collaboration and consultation with each place.¹⁵⁰

- 4.178 Tangentyere Council Aboriginal Corporation (TCAC) said it and other Indigenous organisations had advocated for the transfer of public housing to

¹⁴⁶ Mission Australia, *Submission 137*, p. 43.

¹⁴⁷ Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, *Submission 139*, p. 8.

¹⁴⁸ For example, see: National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing Authority, *Submission 162*, p. 11; Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory, *Submission 170*, p. 22.

¹⁴⁹ Central Australian Aboriginal Congress, *Submission 84*, p. 4.

¹⁵⁰ Central Australian Aboriginal Congress, *Submission 84*, p. 18.

community housing under the control of Aboriginal Community Controlled Housing Organisations. It explained it had entered into an agreement with the Northern Territory Government to oversee such a transfer on the Alice Springs Town Camps:

A model that is placed based [*sic*]; community controlled; culturally appropriate and delivered by a consortium underpinned [by] professionally accredited and skilled partners will deliver a community housing model that can deliver the best outcomes...¹⁵¹

4.179 Similarly, the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency submitted:

... that to achieve self-determination in a housing and homelessness framework there needs to be a transfer of social housing stock to Aboriginal organisations so that we can address the needs of our communities. Particularly in providing crisis accommodation for individuals affected by family violence and young people leaving out of home care.¹⁵²

Planning and zoning reform

4.180 In considering factors that impact the supply of social and affordable housing, a number of submitters highlighted the importance of planning and zoning policies. As noted in Chapter 2, while state governments set policies to guide planning decisions, local governments are responsible for developing and implementing land use plans at the local level.¹⁵³

4.181 For example, Shelter Tas, the peak body for housing and homelessness services in Tasmania, said that the planning system ‘needs to be modernised to recognise the importance of social housing and treat it as an urgent priority’.¹⁵⁴

4.182 A key concept discussed in evidence was ‘mandatory inclusionary zoning’ (MIZ), which is when planning rules require that residential developments include a certain number or proportion of affordable houses. This is an alternative to an incentive model, where affordable housing is encouraged

¹⁵¹ Tangentyere Council Aboriginal Corporation, *Submission 165*, pp. 15-16.

¹⁵² Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency, *Submission 126*, p. 14.

¹⁵³ In the Northern Territory and the ACT, land use planning is conducted at the territory level.

¹⁵⁴ Shelter Tas, *Submission 38*, pp. 10-11.

by reducing costs for developers (for example, by relaxing development controls or expediting approval processes).¹⁵⁵

- 4.183 The Constellation Project—a network founded by Australian Red Cross, the Centre for Social Impact, Mission Australia and PwC Australia collaborating on solutions to end homelessness—explained that:

In delivering on MIZ obligations, a developer may include affordable housing units within their project or elsewhere. Otherwise, an equivalent levy may be paid towards such housing, with the funds being passed as grant aid to an affordable housing provider (probably a not-for-profit CHP).

The MIZ proportion required in a development may vary according to local circumstances – but it should be a significant, not token, proportion.¹⁵⁶

- 4.184 It explained that some cities have implemented MIZ quotas of up to 50 per cent, but also said such quotas should be considered in light of factors such as the definition of ‘affordable housing’ used.¹⁵⁷

- 4.185 Ms Jacqui Jones from the Constellation Project told the Committee that she considered the United Kingdom to have a ‘very, very mature’ implementation of MIZ which ‘has created significant amounts of social and affordable housing’. Ms Jones said that while MIZ was occurring in some jurisdictions in Australia, it was not comprehensive or consistent.¹⁵⁸

- 4.186 Professor Kristy Muir from the Constellation Project and the Centre for Social Impact highlighted the example of South Australia:

In South Australia, we know that they were quite successful over a 10-year period, with a particular focus between 2005 and 2015. They added almost 5½ thousand affordable homes, which was about 17 per cent of the total housing supply in that state. It shows you that you can quite quickly get your proportions and numbers up if you do it in an appropriate way.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁵ Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, ‘Understanding inclusionary zoning’, <<https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/ahuri-briefs/Understanding-inclusionary-zoning>>.

¹⁵⁶ Constellation Project, *Submission 43.1: Attachment 1*, p. 4.

¹⁵⁷ Constellation Project, *Submission 43.1: Attachment 1*, p. 4.

¹⁵⁸ Ms Jacqui Jones, Executive Director, Constellation Project, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 8 July 2020, p. 40. See also: Constellation Project, *Submission 43.1: Attachment 1*, p. 6; Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, *Supporting affordable housing supply: inclusionary planning in new and renewing communities*, AHURI Final Report No. 297, April 2018.

¹⁵⁹ Professor Kristy Muir, Governance Group Member, Constellation Project; Chief Executive Officer, Centre for Social Impact, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 8 July 2020, p. 40.

- 4.187 The Constellation Project estimated that, over the period from 2020 to 2036, MIZ could potentially provide between 32,000 and 160,000 additional social and affordable rental houses in Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne. It said that while MIZ 'is not a substitute for public investment in social and affordable housing', it is 'one of the tools that governments should be using'.¹⁶⁰
- 4.188 The Constellation Project outlined a proposal for implementing MIZ in Australia, recommending as a baseline that 10 per cent of housing space developed on privately owned land in metropolitan areas be designated in perpetuity as social or affordable rental housing under CHP management.¹⁶¹
- 4.189 Other submitters also expressed their support for MIZ, suggesting a range of quotas for private and public land ranging from 10 to 30 per cent.¹⁶²
- 4.190 For example, the Mercy Foundation recommended setting quotes for affordable housing of 15 per cent of dwellings built on private land and 30 per cent of dwellings built on formerly public land:
- These targets will eventually lead to an increased supply of affordable dwellings for vulnerable cohorts as well as key workers and minimum wage workers. Inclusionary Zoning policies create additional affordable and social housing stock across the metropolitan area, rather than concentrating development in particular suburbs.¹⁶³
- 4.191 While noting that implementation of MIZ was a matter for state, territory and local governments, the Constellation Project said that the Australian Government 'must play its part' by helping to establish a nationally consistent approach to MIZ.¹⁶⁴
- 4.192 The Australian Government noted in its submission that under the NHHA, state and territory governments are required to incorporate 'planning and zoning reform and initiatives' in their housing strategies where appropriate

¹⁶⁰ Constellation Project, *Submission 43.1: Attachment 1*, p. 5.

¹⁶¹ Constellation Project, *Submission 43.1: Attachment 1*, pp. 7-8.

¹⁶² For example, see: Dr Duncan Rouch, *Submission 37*, p. 3; Positive Life NSW, *Submission 58*, pp. 10-11; Per Capita, *Submission 68*, p. 30; Barwon South West Homelessness Network, *Submission 155*, p. 4.

¹⁶³ Mercy Foundation, *Submission 35*, p. 5.

¹⁶⁴ Constellation Project, *Submission 43.1: Attachment 1*, p. 8.

to the needs of those jurisdictions. This includes consideration of inclusionary zoning and land release strategies.¹⁶⁵

- 4.193 However, Q Shelter said that the NHHA ‘could be more explicit in its requirements for state/territory governments to mandate the introduction of inclusionary zoning through the state planning systems’.¹⁶⁶
- 4.194 The City of Port Phillip in Melbourne recommended that the Australian Government reach agreement with the states on consistent approaches to both MIZ and ‘value sharing’ mechanisms to deliver more social and affordable housing.¹⁶⁷

Developing a national strategy

- 4.195 Proposals to develop a national strategy on housing and/or homelessness featured in a number of submissions. Generally, these proposals sought to address problems that were seen to exist regarding two inter-related issues:
- the interconnectedness of policies and programs on homelessness and housing; and
 - the respective roles of the three levels of government, particularly since the states and territories are primarily responsible for homelessness and housing while the Australian Government has authority over other relevant issues such as welfare.
- 4.196 As outlined in this section, the focus, objectives and details of the proposals for a national strategy varied considerably. Most submitters called for Australian Government leadership, some focused primarily on the issue of homelessness, and others addressed broader issues such as the housing market and housing affordability, taxation settings, and welfare.
- 4.197 The Committee notes that the evidence considered in this section builds on evidence about the existing roles and responsibilities of the different levels of government and the *National Housing and Homelessness Agreement* (NHHA), which is set out in Chapter 2. Under the NHHA, each of the states and territories are required to publish and implement a homelessness strategy for their jurisdiction.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁵ Department of Social Services (multi-agency submission), *Submission 57*, p. 25; Commonwealth of Australia, *National Housing and Homelessness Agreement*, p. 16 (Schedule A).

¹⁶⁶ Q Shelter, *Submission 164*, p. 20.

¹⁶⁷ City of Port Phillip, *Submission 167*, pp. 11-12.

¹⁶⁸ Department of Social Services (multi-agency submission), *Submission 57*, p. 6.

4.198 Some submissions also referred to the Australian Government's 2008 White Paper on homelessness, *The Road Home*, as an example of a previous national strategy.¹⁶⁹

4.199 In making the case for a national strategy, Ms Jenny Smith from Homelessness Australia told the Committee that:

Only a national strategy can take a bird's eye view of broader Commonwealth government services and change policies that are creating homelessness. Only the Commonwealth can bring together state, federal and even local government agencies to address and prevent homelessness.¹⁷⁰

4.200 Ms Katherine McKernan, also from Homelessness Australia, added:

We need to have that universal view across the country that incorporates not just the housing and support elements of ending and preventing homelessness, but also all of the other policy and programs that are in place that can prevent homelessness. It could be through preventing people leaving the health system into homelessness, leaving corrections into homelessness or leaving out-of-home care into homelessness. It could also look at the settings in the welfare space and how that can help assist people in ending homelessness, and also preventing homelessness.¹⁷¹

4.201 Homelessness Australia in its submission stressed that responsibility for the broad factors that impact on homelessness is shared among the different levels of government, and therefore argued for a 'coordinated approach' led by the Australian Government. It said a national strategy should incorporate prevention; support for universal services to meet the needs of people who are homeless or at risk; a national framework for the homelessness service system; and targets relating to rough sleeping and homelessness more generally.¹⁷²

4.202 National Shelter recommended that the Australian Government lead the development of a 10-20 year housing strategy incorporating a separate plan to address homelessness. It said the strategy should include increased

¹⁶⁹ See: Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, *The Road Home: a national approach to reducing homelessness*, December 2008.

¹⁷⁰ Ms Jenny Smith, Chair, Homelessness Australia, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 8 July 2020, p. 2.

¹⁷¹ Ms Katherine McKernan, Deputy Chair, Homelessness Australia, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 8 July 2020, p. 3.

¹⁷² Homelessness Australia, *Submission 144*, p. 15.

financial support for social housing.¹⁷³ In calling for a national strategy, Mr Adrian Pisarski from National Shelter said:

I know the committee ... have been discussing who is principally responsible for dealing with homelessness and housing. Our contention is that we are all responsible—every level of government in Australia as well as the private and community sectors—and nobody is doing enough.¹⁷⁴

4.203 Similarly, Ms Trudi Ray from HHS said a national strategy was important because homelessness is a ‘national issue’:

I think having a national plan creates certainty; it creates some momentum that we are actually all in this together and that housing is a fundamental right for everybody, and it's on the national agenda.¹⁷⁵

4.204 Link Housing also emphasised the importance of leadership by the Australian Government. It said a national housing strategy would:

... bring relevant stakeholders together to set an agreed way forward to reduce homelessness, to deliver social and affordable housing, to make private rental housing a longer-term, more secure [form] of housing, and identify new strategies to support people on low incomes [to] rent from the private rental market.¹⁷⁶

4.205 It said a national strategy should be supported by a suitable funding agreement and include a review of Commonwealth Rent Assistance.¹⁷⁷

4.206 The Salvation Army submitted that a national housing and homelessness strategy should include a ‘commitment to the eradication of homelessness, and clear targets to achieve that goal’ and consideration of broader systemic issues, such as income support and housing availability and affordability.¹⁷⁸

4.207 In advocating for a national housing and homelessness strategy, Per Capita argued that the Australian Government should have the same role in housing as it has in education and health:

¹⁷³ National Shelter, *Submission 86*, p. 6.

¹⁷⁴ Mr Adrian Pisarski, Executive Officer, National Shelter, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 8 July 2020, p. 15.

¹⁷⁵ Ms Trudi Ray, Chief Operations Officer, Loddon Mallee Housing Services Trading as Haven; Home, Safe, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 29 July 2020, p. 55.

¹⁷⁶ Link Housing, *Submission 93*, pp. 5–6.

¹⁷⁷ Link Housing, *Submission 93*, pp. 5–6.

¹⁷⁸ Salvation Army, *Submission 70*, p. 51.

... there has been a strong public consciousness of the fundamental role of the Commonwealth government in funding and framing the right to health and education, even though most of these services are delivered by the states and territories. In the main, however, the same does not go for housing. It is time housing was treated as a national priority and responsibility.¹⁷⁹

4.208 Per Capita said any national strategy should be coordinated by a 'permanent, dedicated national housing authority' and include a broad series of reforms to taxation settings, planning legislation and market regulations.¹⁸⁰

4.209 Ms Abigail Lewis from Per Capita argued that a national strategy had been a successful approach in the past:

We support a national strategy because we have seen it work before. The Road Home strategy under the Rudd government was the only time in my lifetime that we saw a significant increase in social housing stock in Australia. Looking back through our policy history at what has worked before, when have we actually managed to increase the stock of social housing in this country? It was under that national strategy.¹⁸¹

4.210 The Public Interest Advocacy Centre similarly recommended a national housing strategy 'to address systemic policy issues', including reforming taxation settings; increasing Commonwealth Rent Assistance; working with states and territories to invest in social and affordable housing; and developing a national framework for tenancy legislation.¹⁸²

4.211 Other suggestions also focused on increasing the supply of social and affordable housing. For example, Anglicare recommended:

Establishing a national housing plan across all levels of government to increase the supply of Social Housing and meet demand within five years. The plan should be co-designed with housing service leaders and residents to identify the mix of housing, and pathways between transitional and supported housing into permanent options.¹⁸³

¹⁷⁹ Per Capita, *Submission 68*, p. 12.

¹⁸⁰ Per Capita, *Submission 68*, pp. 3, 13.

¹⁸¹ Ms Abigail Lewis, Research Associate, Per Capita, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 7 July 2020, p. 47.

¹⁸² Public Interest Advocacy Centre, *Submission 115*, p. 11.

¹⁸³ Anglicare Australia, *Submission 173*, p. 4.

- 4.212 St Vincent's Health Australia advocated a national housing strategy that included new capital investment in social housing and incentives or subsidies to leverage additional private sector investment in low-cost rental properties.¹⁸⁴
- 4.213 CHIA argued for a 10-year national housing strategy 'to tackle the supply and demand drivers of housing affordability in a coordinated way across all levels of government'. It said such a strategy 'should contain clear targets for overall housing supply, and for homes that are affordable to households in all income quintiles' and should include a 'separate but fully integrated plan' to address homelessness.¹⁸⁵
- 4.214 Ms Wendy Hayhurst from CHIA argued that 'the sheer scale of the problem' requires national leadership articulated in a national strategy.¹⁸⁶
- 4.215 A number of state and territory governments expressed support for a national strategy and made suggestions for issues that could usefully be included in any such strategy. For example, Ms Louise Gilding from Housing ACT told the Committee that:

We need to increase the supply of affordable housing, and we need to be able to develop both community and public housing stock together, not one at the expense of the other. This is where we need to work together as national, territory, state and local players. We all influence the supply and cost of housing across the continuum, and we need to consider how we work together to collectively leverage our efforts. To that end, the ACT would welcome the development and implementation of a coordinated national housing strategy, which incorporates homelessness but has contributions and tangible commitments from all players.¹⁸⁷

- 4.216 Ms Karen Walsh from the Northern Territory Government said a national strategy should:

... consider alignment of all of the subsidies and policy settings, including things like Commonwealth rent assistance, the tax settings, the welfare policies and the impact of how they actually influence each other, so that there's actually a coordinated response at the Commonwealth level, from

¹⁸⁴ St Vincent's Health Australia, *Submission 133*, p. 17.

¹⁸⁵ Community Housing Industry Association, *Submission 89*, p. 19.

¹⁸⁶ Ms Wendy Hayhurst, Chief Executive Officer, Community Housing Industry Association, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 30 July 2020, p. 9.

¹⁸⁷ Ms Louise Gilding, Executive Group Manager, Housing ACT, Australian Capital Territory, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 7 August 2020, p. 2.

a policy and planning perspective. I think it needs to be absolutely systemic, it needs to be long term and it needs really solid investment for the long term.¹⁸⁸

- 4.217 Ms Christine Fitzgerald, also from the Northern Territory Government, added that a national strategy would serve to connect the work of individual housing and homelessness agencies, which she said would reduce duplication and result in better outcomes for clients.¹⁸⁹
- 4.218 The Queensland Government said consideration should be given to a nationally coordinated housing and homelessness strategy to align with and augment existing efforts.¹⁹⁰
- 4.219 Mr Troy Sloan from the Department of Social Services cautioned that a national strategy, if it were concrete and prescriptive, could 'limit states' ability to respond in a way that is addressing their local needs and their local challenges'. Mr Sloan said the NHHA provides 'a really good framework that sets the broad direction', which the states and territories could then adjust to their own circumstances.¹⁹¹
- 4.220 However, Ms Smith from Homelessness Australia stressed that the purpose of a national strategy would not be to abrogate the responsibilities of the states and territories or limit their flexibility to address the needs of their own populations. Rather, she said:

It is really important that the states and territories are held to account for the funding that is given to them by the federal government and that is very tightly managed. ... It's a partnership in terms of strategy that we are looking for. That is why a national homelessness strategy is so important: not only to sit above and guide the strategies of the states and territories but also for the partnership in investment and the accountability of both parties. ... We're talking about a partnership, and that is when we have done the best in housing and in ending homelessness in this country in the past.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁸ Ms Karen Walsh, Acting Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Department of Local Government, Housing and Community Development, Northern Territory, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 30 July 2020, p. 52.

¹⁸⁹ Ms Christine Fitzgerald, Executive Director, Strategy, Policy and Performance, Department of Local Government, Housing and Community Development, Northern Territory, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 30 July 2020, p. 52.

¹⁹⁰ Queensland Government, *Submission 197*, p. 18.

¹⁹¹ Mr Troy Sloan, Group Manager, Housing and Homelessness, Department of Social Services, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 7 July 2020, p. 15.

¹⁹² Ms Jenny Smith, Chair, Homelessness Australia, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 8 July 2020, p. 5.

4.221 The Committee also heard evidence, as discussed in Chapter 2, about the need to include local government in national responses to homelessness. Ms Liz de Chastel from the Australian Local Government Association outlined what she saw as the benefits that had been forgone from having less dialogue between the three levels of government:

What's happening is that local governments are using a lot of innovation ... but they feel that there isn't that recognition about what they're doing. Also, there's value for local governments to actually let governments know what is working on the ground and what measures are making an impact. We feel that's the sort of dialogue that could increase solutions, innovation, conversations between the levels of government, even in terms of how funding is allocated. We know there's duplication in some areas, so just having that ability to have that dialogue would be really useful.¹⁹³

4.222 The Municipal Association of Victoria said there was a need for 'a co-ordination of roles and responsibilities of federal, state and local government, private industry and non-government organisations', which it said could be best addressed through a national housing strategy. It called for a national strategy to include 'a plan to increase social and affordable housing through investment and support for mechanisms such as mandatory inclusionary zoning'.¹⁹⁴

4.223 Similarly, the City of Adelaide expressed its support for the establishment of a 'clear framework outlining the roles and responsibilities of all three tiers of Government, the private sector and the broader community in delivering a well-connected and accessible housing and support system'.¹⁹⁵

4.224 The City of Hobart said that 'one of the biggest hurdles' to implementing change is 'the lack of coordinated, collaborative and aligned partnerships between stakeholders at all levels of government and the community'.¹⁹⁶

4.225 In its submission, the Australian Government said it is 'using City Deals to bring together the three levels of government'. It said that as part of the Hobart City Deal, it was providing more than \$30 million to community

¹⁹³ Ms Liz de Chastel, Senior Policy Adviser, Australian Local Government Association, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 29 July 2020, p. 4.

¹⁹⁴ Municipal Association of Victoria, *Submission 159*, p. 18.

¹⁹⁵ City of Adelaide, *Submission 79*, p. 8.

¹⁹⁶ City of Hobart, *Submission 44*, p. 19.

housing providers to increase the supply of social and affordable housing in Greater Hobart.¹⁹⁷

Committee comment

Prevention and early intervention

- 4.226 The Committee considers that prevention and early intervention are critically important elements of efforts to overcome homelessness. Prevention strategies can target root causes of the problem by dealing with risk factors that may lead to homelessness, while early intervention is essential for ensuring that people experiencing the early stages of housing stress do not become chronically homeless.
- 4.227 The Committee also notes the evidence that prevention and early intervention initiatives represent the most effective and cost-efficient approaches to addressing homelessness. Strategies that address the factors that increase a person's risk of homelessness—such as family and domestic violence, disadvantage, ill-health and substance abuse—will ultimately be less costly to the community and the public purse than managing entrenched and chronic homelessness.
- 4.228 Unless homelessness is addressed in its incipient and early stages, we are merely deferring the problem to a time when it is more urgent, more complicated and more expensive.
- 4.229 While there was general support among stakeholders for existing early intervention programs such as Reconnect, evidence to the inquiry also suggested that the effectiveness of these programs could be improved with better coordination and cooperation across governments and services sectors, and with local community organisations.
- 4.230 The Committee therefore considers that there is a role for the Australian Government to work with the states and territories and others to identify opportunities for a more integrated approach to prevention and early intervention, which focuses on 'place-based' approaches.
- 4.231 This should include the development of a strategic framework for prevention and early intervention, and work to identify what structural supports may be required to facilitate a broader rollout of 'place based'

¹⁹⁷ Department of Social Services (multi-agency submission), *Submission 57*, p. 25. See also: Tasmanian Government, *Submission 179*, pp. 14-15.

programs across Australia. It could also include funding for research and pilot programs, including programs based on the COSS model.

4.232 In this way, while the Committee recognises the importance of ‘place-based’ approaches to prevention and early intervention, these would be designed, funded, implemented and evaluated in a coherent way with the involvement of all levels of government. The Committee suggests that achieving this would be an important objective of a national strategy on homelessness, as recommended below.

4.233 The Committee further recommends training in the health and community services sectors and better data collection and reporting to support improved prevention and early intervention.

Recommendation 27

4.234 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government work with state, territory and local governments and community organisations to develop a more integrated ‘place-based’ approach to homelessness prevention and early intervention. This should include:

- establishing a national strategic framework for prevention and early intervention, setting out targets, roles and responsibilities, data collection and reporting requirements, and evaluation;
- identifying the structural support and resources required to support ‘place-based’ programs; and
- funding for ‘place-based’ research and pilot programs.

Recognising the importance of stopping homelessness early in life, the Committee further recommends that there be a particular focus on prevention and early intervention of youth homelessness.

Recommendation 28

4.235 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government work with state and territory governments to strengthen training across the health and community sectors on prevention of and early intervention in homelessness, particularly for disadvantaged and vulnerable children and families.

This should include training on the impact of homelessness and family, domestic and sexual violence on the social and emotional wellbeing of children.

Recommendation 29

4.236 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government work with state and territory governments to ensure that data collection and reporting systems adequately capture the experiences and needs of disadvantaged and vulnerable children and families, in order to support the early identification, assessment, support and/or referral of those experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

Adopting a 'Housing First' approach

4.237 The Committee notes that national and international best practice in addressing homelessness is increasingly influenced by the Housing First approach.

4.238 For some people at risk of chronic homelessness, Housing First can be seen as an effective example of early intervention, as it involves remedial action before problems often associated with homelessness can multiply or become entrenched.

4.239 The Committee recognises that Housing First is best thought of as a principle or paradigm, rather than a specific model to be replicated in all circumstances. However, the Committee considers that key to the approach is the provision of a broad range of 'wrap-around' services, on a flexible basis.

4.240 The Committee supports the view that the adoption of Housing First principles is not inconsistent with measures such as 'three-strikes' policies which seek to ensure that social housing tenants pay their rent, meet their tenancy obligations and are mindful and respectful towards property and their neighbours.

4.241 The Committee was provided with a range of examples of the application of the principles of Housing First, both internationally and increasingly among governments and housing providers in Australia.

4.242 To further the adoption of Housing First initiatives in Australia, the Committee is keen to ensure that, where appropriate, and particularly for priority at-risk groups, the principles of Housing First are reflected in formal

funding arrangements involving the Australian Government and state and territory governments.

- 4.243 The Committee acknowledges that a prerequisite for the successful design of Housing First initiatives is an adequate supply of affordable housing in which to accommodate homeless people before associated problems can be addressed. That issue is discussed further below.

Recommendation 30

- 4.244 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government, in making relevant funding agreements with state and territory governments and housing providers, incorporate the principles of 'Housing First', particularly for any priority groups identified in those agreements.**

Enhancing social housing

- 4.245 The Committee recognises the important role that social housing has in reducing the incidence and risk of homelessness, particularly among the most vulnerable in the community. The Committee also accepts that there is an ongoing need for both public housing and community housing to meet the needs of individuals and families in different life circumstances, and with different housing needs and requirements for other wrap-around services.
- 4.246 The Committee notes and supports the trend for state and territory governments to transfer management of state-owned housing to CHPs and the evidence that, in many circumstances, these arrangements can offer benefits to both governments and social housing tenants.
- 4.247 It is clear, however, that the availability of social housing has not kept up with demand and that, as a result, there is currently a significant shortfall of both public and community housing. Addressing this shortfall will be an important part of the collective response of all Australian governments to homelessness.
- 4.248 The Committee notes that provision of housing is primarily a state and territory responsibility, but also acknowledges the Australian Government's involvement: particularly through NHFIC and the AHBA, but also through the provision of CRA to tenants in community housing.
- 4.249 The Committee commends the AHBA as an important initiative which has enabled CHPs to strengthen their investments in new housing stock. The

Committee supports the increased funding made available to NHFIC in the 2020-21 Budget.

- 4.250 Further to this, in Chapter 2 the Committee has recommended that the Australian Government waive or refinance the historical housing-related debts of the states and territories, in exchange for investment in affordable housing including community housing and planning and zoning reform. If implemented, the Committee expects that this measure will further expand the funds available to CHPs to invest in new housing stock.
- 4.251 In addition, in Chapter 3 the Committee has recommended funding for emergency and crisis accommodation, which may ease the burden on social housing to provide short-term or transitional accommodation.
- 4.252 The Committee heard about innovative proposals such as the PRADS model, which seeks to attract private-sector investment in the construction of social and affordable housing. While the PRADS model involves local governments negotiating with developers, the Committee considers there is a role for the Australian Government to assist in the facilitation of its viability at a national scale.
- 4.253 While acknowledging the important work of NHFIC, the Australian Government should seek to identify additional opportunities to leverage private-sector investment to address the shortfall in social housing, including from superannuation funds.

Recommendation 31

- 4.254 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government, in consultation with state, territory and local governments, seek to increase affordable housing supply when land is rezoned for residential development, through the introduction and harmonisation of inclusionary planning approaches across Australia.**

Recommendation 32

- 4.255 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government, through the National Housing and Finance Investment Corporation, investigate opportunities for attracting greater private-sector investment in social and affordable housing, including from superannuation funds.**
- 4.256 Finally, recognising that there is a limited amount of social and affordable housing, the Committee considers there is a need for additional measures to ensure that this housing stock is allocated efficiently.

- 4.257 In particular, there should be a uniform approach to allocating housing stock to people at different life stages. This approach should seek to avoid circumstances where, for example, an older couple whose children have left the family home still occupy a large house, which could instead be used to meet the needs of another family. It should also seek to ensure that, in so far as possible, the allocation of social and affordable housing stock accommodates different household family structures.
- 4.258 The Committee also recommends in appropriate circumstances and locations, the amendment of restrictions on secondary dwellings ('granny flats') to further encourage the use of these kinds of dwellings to free up more large houses for families to use.
- 4.259 Furthermore, there should be a nationally consistent approach to removing social and affordable housing tenants who continue to seriously breach their tenancy obligations. There may be a view amongst some that such breaches can be made with impunity, but the Committee rejects this and considers that priority in the allocation of social housing should be given to those who are willing to meet their obligations. As noted above, the Committee does not consider that this is inconsistent with Housing First principles.
- 4.260 To this end, the Committee recommends the adoption across all states and territories of a 'three strikes' policy for eviction on the grounds of criminal offending and repeated anti-social behaviour, as already exists in some jurisdictions such as New South Wales.
- 4.261 In making this recommendation, the Committee reiterates its support for the adoption of Housing First principles. It is the view of the Committee that the provision of housing should be a priority and provide a foundation for wrap-around support services for people who are homeless or at risk. However, once people are housed, and immediate issues are addressed, all tenants should be required to meet reasonable requirements as a condition of maintaining their tenancy in social housing.

Recommendation 33

- 4.262 **The Committee recommends that the Australian Government work with state, territory and local governments to:**
- **ensure the appropriate allocation of social and affordable housing stock to meet the needs of individuals and families at different life stages and accommodate different household family structures;**

- in appropriate circumstances and locations, amend local government restrictions on secondary dwellings ('granny flats'); and
- consider new measures to encourage the use of secondary dwellings to free up primary dwellings for larger families, including grants to Indigenous community-controlled organisations to construct new secondary dwellings.

Recommendation 34

4.263 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government work with state and territory governments toward implementing consistent national legislation imposing a 'three strikes' policy for the eviction of social and affordable housing tenants who repeatedly breach their tenancy obligations.

Developing a national strategy

4.264 The Committee acknowledges the strong view in evidence to the inquiry about the need for a national strategy on housing and homelessness.

4.265 As discussed in Chapter 3, evidence suggested that the issue of homelessness is difficult to separate from broader issues related to housing supply and housing affordability. Further, in calling for a national strategy, many submitters noted that all levels of government have responsibility for a broad range of policies and programs that ultimately impact on the prevalence of homelessness in Australia. The complexity of these issues led to concerns and some criticism about the effectiveness of existing arrangements for coordination and cooperation.

4.266 The Committee observed that there was limited consensus on the scope of any national strategy, especially on how far the strategy should extend beyond the immediate issue of homelessness, into broader housing policies and programs, or into other issues such as taxation settings, planning and zoning, and social welfare.

4.267 However, the Committee accepts that a strong theme in evidence was the need for the Australian Government to have a stronger leadership role.

4.268 The Committee notes that the Australian Government through the NHHA has sought to bring together the states and territories, setting the overall policy direction in relation to housing and homelessness while—

importantly—retaining the flexibility for states and territories to implement specific measures suited to their own circumstances and requirements.

- 4.269 The Committee also acknowledges that the NHHA requires state and territory governments to have homelessness strategies in their own jurisdictions.
- 4.270 The Committee's view is nevertheless that more could be done to improve coordination in the national response to homelessness, and the Committee considers that a national strategy is a worthy objective.
- 4.271 The Committee stresses that any national strategy should not represent a transfer of what are primarily state and territory responsibilities to the Australian Government. Similarly, the Committee's view is that care is required in determining the scope of any national strategy to ensure it is well targeted at the problem of homelessness and its causes.
- 4.272 In any national strategy the Committee would be particularly keen to see greater formal recognition of the important role of local government, particularly in relation to the use of zoning reform to contribute to increased housing supply. A national strategy should also provide for more formal opportunities for community organisations and the private sector to contribute to national efforts to reduce homelessness.
- 4.273 Further to this, the Committee suggests that other recommendations made in this chapter could usefully be considered in developing a national strategy. These include more integrated approaches to early intervention, the adoption of Housing First principles, and investigating opportunities for more private-sector investment in social and affordable housing.
- 4.274 Similarly, the Committee suggests that negotiations on a national strategy could address the recommendations made in Chapter 2 in relation to needs-based funding and historical housing-related debts. In this regard, the Committee considers that the development of a national strategy should include consideration of the role and scope of the NHHA, and how a new strategy would be coordinated with, or even incorporate, the existing funding arrangements under that Agreement.
- 4.275 Finally, the Committee believes that a national strategy should provide clear objectives, key performance indicators and accountability measures for states and territories in the way that they use Australian Government funding.

Recommendation 35

4.276 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government, in consultation with state, territory and local governments, develop and implement a ten-year national strategy on homelessness. The scope of a national strategy should include, but not be limited to:

- creating new and strengthening existing arrangements for inter-governmental coordination and funding accountability of state and territory governments;
- formally recognising and strengthening the role of local government;
- identifying opportunities for greater involvement of community organisations and the private sector;
- encompassing existing arrangements under the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement and reflecting other relevant Australian Government policies and programs; and
- giving effect to other relevant recommendations made in this report.

Mr Andrew Wallace MP
Chair
26 July 2021

Additional comments – Labor members

- 1.1 Homelessness in Australia is a national crisis. There are today more Australians experiencing homelessness than ever before.
- 1.2 On Census night in 2016, more than 116,000 people were estimated to be homeless in Australia – a 14 per cent increase between the 2011 and 2016 censuses.
- 1.3 There are more people on social housing waiting lists than ever before, and wait lists continue to grow. There is less public housing today than there was ten years ago and the percentage of social housing as a proportion of all national housing stock also continues to decline.
- 1.4 In some parts of Australia, there are more people sleeping rough now than before the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 1.5 In 2020, 10,000 women and their children fleeing family and domestic violence were turned away from refuges because there wasn't an available bed.
- 1.6 According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), over the 2019-20 financial year, around 95,300 people were turned away from Specialist Homelessness Services – that's 260 people a day.
- 1.7 There is no simple or single solution to reduce homelessness, but it does require leadership from the Australian Government. This includes the development and implementation of a National Housing and Homelessness Strategy. Housing industry experts have been calling for this for years, but the Morrison Government has refused to act, saying this is the responsibility of state and territory governments.

- 1.8 Labor welcomes the Committee's recommendation (recommendation 35) that the Australian Government develop and implement a ten-year national strategy on homelessness.
- 1.9 In March 2021, at the Australian Labor Party Special Platform Conference, Labor committed to developing a National Housing and Homelessness Strategy in government.
- 1.10 Labor notes that the Committee received evidence about the urgent need to increase investment in social housing and concerns that the availability of social housing has not kept up with demand, however, there is not a single recommendation in this report to deliver new social housing stock.
- 1.11 The Morrison Government refuses to show leadership and take responsibility for increasing investment in social housing. This is a government that is tone-deaf to the dire circumstances of so many Australians who need a safe roof over their heads. The chronic shortage of social and affordable housing is forcing record levels of homelessness, but the Morrison government says, "not our problem".
- 1.12 In contrast, during the Opposition Leader's Budget-in-Reply speech in May 2021, Labor announced that a future Albanese Labor Government will create a \$10 billion off-budget Housing Australia Future Fund to build social and affordable housing.
- 1.13 Over the first five years the investment returns will build around 20,000 social housing properties. Four thousand of the 20,000 social housing properties will be allocated for women and children fleeing family and domestic violence and older women on low incomes who are at risk of homelessness.
- 1.14 Over the first five years 10,000 affordable housing properties will also be for frontline workers.
- 1.15 In addition to this, a portion of the investment returns will be available to fund acute housing needs in perpetuity. This funding will be used for additional crisis, transitional and long-term social housing in parts of the country with the greatest need.
- 1.16 In the first five years these investment returns will:
 - invest \$200 million for the repair, maintenance, and improvement of housing in remote Indigenous communities.
 - invest \$100 million for crisis and transitional housing options for women and children fleeing family and domestic violence and older women on low incomes who are at risk of homelessness.

- invest \$30 million to build more housing and fund specialist services for veterans who are experiencing homelessness or are at-risk of homelessness.
- 1.17 The combined 4,000 social housing properties and this \$100 million for crisis and transitional accommodation represents a total of \$1.7 billion earmarked for women and children fleeing family and domestic violence and older women at risk of homelessness.
- 1.18 Finally, Labor Members wish to put on record our serious concerns about the inclusion of recommendation 34 in this report. We note that the efficacy or otherwise of the so-called “three strikes” policies and legislative amendments intended to facilitate termination proceedings and eviction of social and affordable housing tenants was not part of any evidence received by the Committee.
- 1.19 Labor Members further note a recent study undertaken by the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) that specifically warns against the use of these policy approaches, which stand in conflict with the objective of sustaining tenancies for vulnerable persons and families. As noted by AHURI:
- ... these are aspects of law, policy and practice that do not appropriately address vulnerable persons and families: women who have experienced domestic and family violence, children, Indigenous persons and families, and persons and families with members who problematically use alcohol or other drugs. These aspects of social housing law, policy and practice insufficiently reflect, or are contrary to, leading policy principles and frameworks regarding those vulnerable types of persons and families.¹
- 1.20 To be clear, social and affordable housing landlords’ legal responses to misconduct are governed by states’ and territories’ residential tenancies laws, so the Australian Government has no jurisdiction over the “three strikes” approach.
- 1.21 Instead of cheering-on an already flawed approach from the sidelines, Labor Members recommend that the Australian Government work collaboratively with state and territory governments towards implementing consistent national best practice guidelines for the eviction of social and affordable housing tenants on the grounds of criminal offending and repeated anti-social behaviour.

¹ Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, *Social housing legal responses to crime and anti-social behaviour: impacts on vulnerable families*, AHURI Final Report No. 314, June 2019, p. 2.

- 1.22 At the very least, the Australian Government should take a lead on better integrating social housing policy with other national policy frameworks and principles, specifically the National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children, the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children, the National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Plan, the principles of self-determination for First Nations peoples, and the principle of harm minimisation in the National Drug Strategy. That's the public policy work that is required of the Australian Government.

Ms Sharon Claydon MP
Deputy Chair

Ms Peta Murphy MP
Member

Dr Mike Freeland MP
Member

A. List of submissions

- 1 Dr. Simon Quilty
- 2 Ms Jan Lacey
- 3 Mr Benjamin Cronshaw
- 4 Saint Benedicts Homeless Foundation Limited
- 5 City Futures Research Centre
 - 5.1 Supplementary
- 6 Dr Olav Nielssen
- 7 Housing All Australians
 - 7.1 Supplementary
 - 7.2 Supplementary
- 8 Jesuit Social Services
- 9 cohealth
- 10 Shelter SA
- 11 End Street Sleeping Collaboration
- 12 Justice Health Unit, University of Melbourne
- 13 Ruah Community Services & St Bart's
- 14 SANE Australia
- 15 Blue Sky Community Services
- 16 David Hale
- 17 Bolton Clarke Homeless Persons Program
- 18 City of Darwin

- 19 Dementia Australia
- 20 Young People Ahead Youth and Community Services Inc.
- 21 Victorian Public Tenants Association
- 22 Australian Human Rights Commission
- 23 Civil Liberties Australia
 - 23.1 Supplementary
- 24 Young Crisis Accommodation Centre
- 25 St John's Crisis Centre
- 26 *Confidential*
- 27 Exodus Foundation
- 28 Tamworth Family Support Service
- 29 Coast Shelter
- 30 Emerging Minds
- 31 City of Sydney
- 32 Compass Housing Services Co Ltd
- 33 IFYS (Integrated Family and Youth Service)
- 34 Professor Thalia Anthony
- 35 Mercy Foundation
- 36 YACSA (Youth Affairs Council of South Australia)
- 37 Dr Duncan Rouch
- 38 Shelter TAS
- 39 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
 - 39.1 Supplementary
- 40 Equality Rights Alliance
- 41 eS4W (economic Security4Women)
- 42 Sacred Heart Mission
- 43 The Constellation Project
 - 43.1 Supplementary
- 44 City of Hobart

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- 45 Housing With Dignity
- 46 McAuley Community Services for Women
- 47 Launch Housing
- 47.1 Supplementary
- 48 YWCA Australia
- 49 Australian Specialist Homelessness Legal Services
- 50 LawRight
- 51 Women's safety Services of Central Australia (WoSSCA)
- 52 Central Australian Aboriginal Family Legal Unit (CAAFLU)
- 53 Pride Foundation Australia
- 54 Mornington Peninsula Shire Council
- 55 Homes for Homes
- 56 Mr Corey Allen CF APM
- 57 Department of Social Services (multi-agency submission)
- 57.1 Supplementary
 - 57.2 Supplementary
 - 57.3 Supplementary
 - 57.4 Supplementary
 - 57.5 Supplementary
- 58 Positive Life NSW
- 59 Kids Under Cover
- 60 Domestic Violence Victoria
- 61 *Name Withheld*
- 62 Northern Territory Government
- 63 Forcibly Displaced People Network
- 64 Southern Downs Regional Council
- 65 City of Whittlesea
- 66 Unison Housing
- 67 Australian Local Government Association
- 67.1 Supplementary

- 68 Per Capita
- 69 Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence for Children and Families over the Life Course
- 70 The Salvation Army
 - 70.1 Supplementary
- 71 HammondCare
- 72 Council of Single Mothers and their Children (CSMC)
- 73 Ms Emma Perske
- 74 Hope Street Youth and Family Services
- 75 Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation
- 76 National Council of Women Australia
- 77 Australian Community Support Organisation
- 78 Australian Community Safety & Research Organisation (ACRO)
- 79 City of Adelaide
- 80 SYC
- 81 Australian Bureau of Statistics
 - 81.1 Supplementary
 - 81.2 Supplementary
- 82 Queensland Nurses and Midwives' Union (QNMU)
- 83 Council of Capital City Lord Mayors
 - 83.1 Supplementary
- 84 Central Australian Aboriginal Congress
- 85 SEARMS Aboriginal Corporation
- 86 National Shelter
 - 86.1 Supplementary
- 87 Women's Legal Service Qld
- 88 South Port Community Housing Group
- 89 Community Housing Industry Association
- 90 Australian Alliance to End Homelessness
- 91 Melbourne City Mission

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- 92 Mental Health Association Central Australia
 - 93 Link Housing
 - 94 Australian Housing Initiative
 - 95 Miss Tracey Hoolachan
 - 96 Youth Off The Streets
 - 97 Australian Women Against Violence Alliance
 - 98 *Name Withheld*
 - 99 Adelaide Zero Project
 - 100 Wintringham
 - 101 CatholicCare NT and University of South Australia
 - 102 Northern Territory Mental Health Coalition
 - 103 Flat Out
 - 104 liveWELL CQ
 - 105 ACOSS (Australian Council of Social Services)
 - 106 Mr Jackson Ho
 - 107 Wayside Chapel Foundation
 - 108 National Older Women's Housing and Homelessness Working Group
 - 109 Women's Legal Service NSW
 - 110 Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists (RANZCP)
 - 111 Housing for the Aged Action Group - LGBTI working group
 - 112 Northern Sydney Housing & Homelessness Collaboration
 - 113 Community Housing Industry Association QLD
 - 114 Community Restorative Centre
 - 115 Public Interest Advocacy Centre
 - 116 B Miles Women's Foundation
 - 117 Anglicare WA
 - 118 Brisbane Youth Service
 - 119 Justice Connect
 - 120 Jesuit Refugee Service

- 121 NT Shelter
 - 121.1 Supplementary
- 122 Wentworth Community Housing
- 123 Wollongong Emergency Family Housing
- 124 WA Commissioner for Children and Young People
- 125 Wellways Australia
- 126 Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA)
- 127 Grattan Institute
- 128 CISVic (Community Information & Support Victoria)
- 129 Youth Affairs Council Victoria
- 130 Haven; Home, Safe (HHS)
 - 130.1 Supplementary
- 131 Centre for Social Impact (CSI)
- 132 Homelessness NSW
- 133 St Vincent's Health Australia
- 134 PowerHousing Australia
- 135 Canberra Community Law
- 136 Northern Territory Council of Social Service (NTCOSS)
- 137 Mission Australia
- 138 Housing for the Aged Action Group
- 139 Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI)
- 140 Everybody's Home
- 141 Social Futures
- 142 St Vincent de Paul Society National Council of Australia
- 143 St Benedict's Community Centre
- 144 Homelessness Australia
- 145 Shelter WA and WA Alliance to End Homelessness
- 146 City of Boroondara
- 147 Queensland Youth Housing Coalition

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- 148 Southern Youth and Family Services
- 149 National Health Leadership Forum (NHLF)
- 150 ACT Government
- 150.1 Supplementary
- 151 Yfoundations
- 152 Economic Justice Australia
- 153 Victorian Council of Social Services (VCOSS)
- 154 Castan Centre for Human Rights Law
- 154.1 Supplementary
- 155 Barwon South West Homelessness Network (VIC)
- 156 Melbourne Medical School - University of Melbourne
- 157 Tenants' Union of NSW
- 158 Western NSW Community Legal Centre and Western Women's Legal Support
- 159 Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV)
- 160 Danila Dilba Health Service
- 161 Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW)
- 162 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing Authority (NATSIHA)
- 163 Tabitha Lloyd
- 164 Queensland Shelter
- 165 Tangentyere Council
- 165.1 Supplementary
 - 165.2 Supplementary
- 166 National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO)
- 167 City of Port Phillip
- 168 Inner South Rooming House Network
- 169 City of Melbourne
- 170 Aboriginal Peak Organisations of the Northern Territory (APO NT)

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- 171 *Name Withheld*
- 172 National Mental Health Commission
- 173 Anglicare Australia
- 174 Barnardos Australia
- 175 National Rural Women's Coalition
- 176 Community Connections
- 177 Quantum Support Services
- 178 Government of Western Australia
- 179 Tasmanian Government
- 179.1 Supplementary
- 180 Mallee Family Care
- 181 Older Women's Network NSW
- 182 Victoria Police
- 183 NXT TEC Ltd
- 184 Sarah
- 185 *Confidential*
- 186 *Confidential*
- 187 *Confidential*
- 188 National Housing Finance and Investment Corporation
- 189 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service (NATSILS)
- 190 Southern Homelessness Services Network (SHSN)
- 191 Association of Superannuation Funds of Australia Limited (ASFA)
- 192 Eastern Homelessness Service System Alliance (EHSSA)
- 193 Mr Clayton Silverlock
- 194 Regional Local Government Homelessness & Social Housing Charter Group
- 195 Australian National Audit Office
- 196 Upstream Australia and 17 other organisations
- 197 Queensland Government
- 198 *Name Withheld*

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- 199** Youth2 Alliance
- 200** Victorian Government
- 201** Victorian Gay & Lesbian Rights Lobby and three other organisations

B. List of public hearings

Tuesday, 7 July 2020 - Canberra

Department of Social Services

- Mr Shane Bennett, Acting Deputy Secretary, Social Security
- Mr Troy Sloan, Group Manager, Housing and Homelessness
- Mr Sidesh Naikar, Branch Manager, Housing and Homelessness Policy

Services Australia

- Ms Caroline Manning, Acting National Manager, Social Work Services
- Ms Kirsty Faichney, General Manager, Families, Child Support, Veterans & Partnerships

National Indigenous Australians Agency

- Mr Blair Exell, Deputy Chief Executive Officer
- Mr Ryan Bulman, Group Manager, Economic Policy and Programs

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

- Dr Gabrielle Phillips, Head, Housing and Specialised Services Group

Australian Bureau of Statistics

- Mr Stephen Collett, Program Manager, Indigenous and Social Information

Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute

- Dr Michael Fotheringham, Chief Executive

Australian Council of Social Service

- Ms Jacqueline Phillips, Director of Policy and Deputy Chief Executive Officer
- Dr Peter Davidson, Principal Adviser

Per Capita

- Ms Emma Dawson, Executive Director
- Dr John Falzon, Senior Fellow
- Ms Abigail Lewis, Research Associate

Grattan Institute

- Mr Brendan Coates, Household Finances Program Director

Wednesday, 8 July 2020 - Canberra

Homelessness Australia

- Ms Jenny Smith, Chair
- Ms Katherine McKernan, Deputy Chair

Mission Australia

- Ms Marion Bennett, Executive, Practice, Evidence and Impact
- Dr Evelyne Tadros, State Leader, New South Wales Metro

National Shelter

- Mr John Engeler, Chief Executive Officer; Deputy Chair, Shelter New South Wales
- Mr Adrian Pisarski, Executive Officer

St Vincent de Paul Society

- Mr Toby oConnor, Chief Executive Officer, St Vincent de Paul Society National Council
- Mr Brian Murnane, Chief Executive Officer, Amelie Housing Ltd

The Salvation Army Australia

- Ms Livia Carusi, General Manager, Homelessness
- Major Jenny Begent, Head of Department, Social Mission
- Major Paul Hateley, Head of Government Relations

Housing All Australians Ltd

- Mr Robert Pradolin, Founder and Director

The Constellation Project

- Ms Jacqui Jones, Executive Director
- Professor Kristy Muir, Governance Group Member; Chief Executive Officer, Centre for Social Impact

Homes for Homes

- Mr Gavin Jackman, Adviser

Wednesday, 29 July 2020 - Canberra*Australian Local Government Association*

- Ms Liz de Chastel, Senior Policy Adviser

Local Government Association of the Northern Territory

- Mr Peter McLinden, Director, Transport and Infrastructure Services

Council of Capital City Lord Mayors

- Mayor Sally Capp, Lord Mayor of Melbourne
- Mayor Clover Moore, Lord Mayor of Sydney
- Mr Barney Wilson, Team Leader City People, City of Melbourne
- Ms Gowan Vyse, Manager, Social Policy and Programs, City of Sydney

National Housing Finance and Investment Corporation

- Mr Nathan Dal Bon, Chief Executive Officer

The Association of Superannuation Funds of Australia

- Mr Julian Cabarrus, Director of External Affairs and Strategy
- Mr Andrew Craston, Director of Economics

Department of the Treasury

- Ms Vicki Wilkinson, Division Head, Social Policy Division
- Ms Carla Adami, Manager, Housing Policy Unit, Social Policy Division

Department of Veterans' Affairs

- Ms Liz Cosson, Secretary
- Ms Kate Pope, Acting Deputy President, Repatriation Commission

Australian National University Centre for Social Research and Methods

- Professor Matthew Gray, Director
- Professor Nicholas Biddle, Associate Director

Loddon Mallee Housing Services Trading as Haven; Home, Safe

- Ms Trudi Ray, Chief Operations Officer

Thursday, 30 July 2020 - Canberra

Tenants' Union of NSW

- Mr Leo Patterson Ross, Chief Executive Officer
- Dr Jemima Mowbray, Policy and Advocacy Coordinator

Community Housing Industry Association

- Ms Wendy Hayhurst, Chief Executive Officer
- Ms Rebecca Pinkstone, Chief Operations Officer, Bridge Housing Limited

Australian Alliance to End Homelessness

- Mr David Pearson, Chief Executive Officer
- Ms Karyn Walsh, Director
- Mr Scott Richards, Peer Support Officer, Neami National
- Mr James Gant, Volunteer, Neami National
- Ms Michelle Swindle, Private capacity

Tangentyere Council Aboriginal Corporation

- Mr Michael Klerck, Social Policy Manager

Wintringham

- Mr Bryan Lipmann, Chief Executive Officer
- Ms Jane Barnes, Chief of Staff

Northern Territory Government

- Ms Karen Walsh, Acting Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Department of Local Government, Housing and Community Development
- Ms Christine Fitzgerald, Executive Director, Strategy, Policy and Performance, Department of Local Government, Housing and Community Development

NT Shelter Inc.

- Mr Peter McMillan, Executive Officer
- Mr John McBryde, Vice-Chair

Friday, 7 August 2020 - Canberra*ACT Government*

- Ms Louise Gilding, Executive Group Manager, Housing ACT
- Mr Shane Nielsen, Executive Branch Manager, Policy and Business Transformation, Housing ACT
- Ms Caroline Stevens, Acting Senior Director, Housing and Homelessness Strategy and Policy, Housing ACT
- Ms Michelle Anderson, Assistant Director, Homelessness Services, Housing ACT

Tasmanian Government

- Mr Peter White, Deputy Secretary, Housing, Disability and Community Services, Department of Communities Tasmania
- Ms Jessemy Stone, Director, Housing Programs, Housing, Disability and Community Services, Department of Communities Tasmania

Inner South Rooming House Network

- Ms Kate Incerti, Co-Convenor
- Ms Maurya Bourandanis, Community member and Adviser

Australian Bureau of Statistics

- Mr Stephen Collett, Program Manager, Indigenous and Social Information

Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency

- Adjunct Professor Muriel Bamblett AO, Chief Executive Officer
- Ms Necia Stanton, Practice Leader for Nugel

Sacred Heart Mission

- Ms Cathy Humphrey, Chief Executive Officer
- Ms Olivia Killeen, Policy Officer