



# LSIC Housing Research Report Factsheet

## Housing pathways for Indigenous children

### Footprints in Time - The Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children (LSIC)

From 2008, the LSIC has been following a cohort of Indigenous children, interviewing their families each year as they grow up. The initial sample comprised of 1,671 children from two age groups: from 6 months to 2 years and 3½ years to 5 years.

This factsheet is based on data up to Wave 13 (2020), when the children were aged 13 to 18 years. It looks at the main housing pathways those children experienced as they grew up, and their outcomes as they approach adulthood.

### Key Points

- Children's housing experiences are extremely diverse and dynamic. The study children were grouped into one of four pathways based on childhood housing experiences in terms of family type, crowding, stability, need for repairs, and affordability.
- Four main groups are identified: Stable Couples, Mobile Sole-parents, Full-house, and Precarious Housing.
  - On conventional measures of housing quality, the Stable Couple pathway represented by far the most favourable housing circumstances.
  - The least favourable Precarious Housing pathway was experienced mainly by children in Remote Australia.
- Indigenous youths' health and socio-emotional wellbeing appear highly resilient to less favourable housing experiences during their childhood. This may be due to conventional measures of housing quality failing to capture aspects of remote housing that promote the wellbeing of Indigenous youth, including greater connection to country, kinship networks, and culture.

### Analysis of housing experiences

The analysis was based on 537 children for whom data was available in all of the first 12 waves. Housing experiences looked at included:

- living in a sole-parent versus couple family
- having moved house in the past year
- crowding, and experiences of homelessness
- housing affordability stress
- the home needing major repairs

The measures of family type, instability and crowding were available in all 12 waves, and the other variables only in a subset of those waves. Crowding is based on the number of additional bedrooms required to ensure couples or single adults had their own bedroom and no more than two kids shared a bedroom.

The analysis assigned the children to one of four distinct housing pathways:

**Stable Couple** - the largest cluster, with 241 children. What most distinguishes this group of children is almost always living with both parents and rarely in a household that would be considered crowded. Of the four groups, they experienced the fewest changes of address and their homes were the least likely to require repairs. Their parents reported the most incidences of having trouble meeting housing costs.

**Mobile Sole-parent** - the second largest cluster. On average, these 169 children were living with only one parent in around 10 of the 12 waves, compared to an average of 5 of 12 waves for the overall sample. This group experienced the highest number of address changes.

**Full House** - the third largest group with, 95 children, is characterised by living in high occupancy housing, typically requiring one additional bedroom. Their homes were also more likely to have had major things that needed fixing.

**Precarious Housing** - the smallest group, with 32 children, is characterised by living in housing with very high crowding (typically requiring two additional bedrooms given household occupancy) and frequently requiring major repairs. The group were also susceptible to spells of homelessness.

On objective measures, children in the Stable Couple group clearly had the most favourable housing pathways, and the Precarious Housing group the most challenging housing circumstances.

Remoteness and housing tenure (owning or renting by landlord type) are important aspects of housing for Indigenous Australians. These variables were not used to define the housing pathways because we were interested in seeing how the pathways themselves varied across these dimensions.

# Housing pathways for Indigenous children

Figure 1: Housing pathways by remoteness, 2008 - 2019

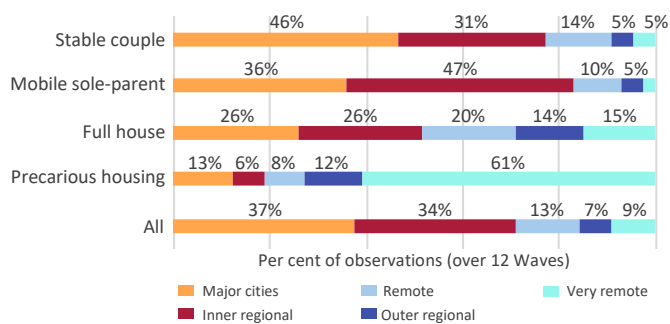


Figure 2: Housing pathways by housing tenure, 2008 - 2019

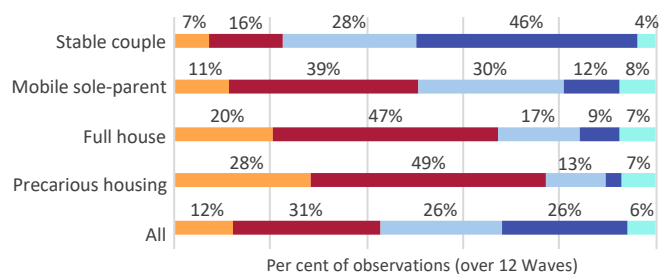


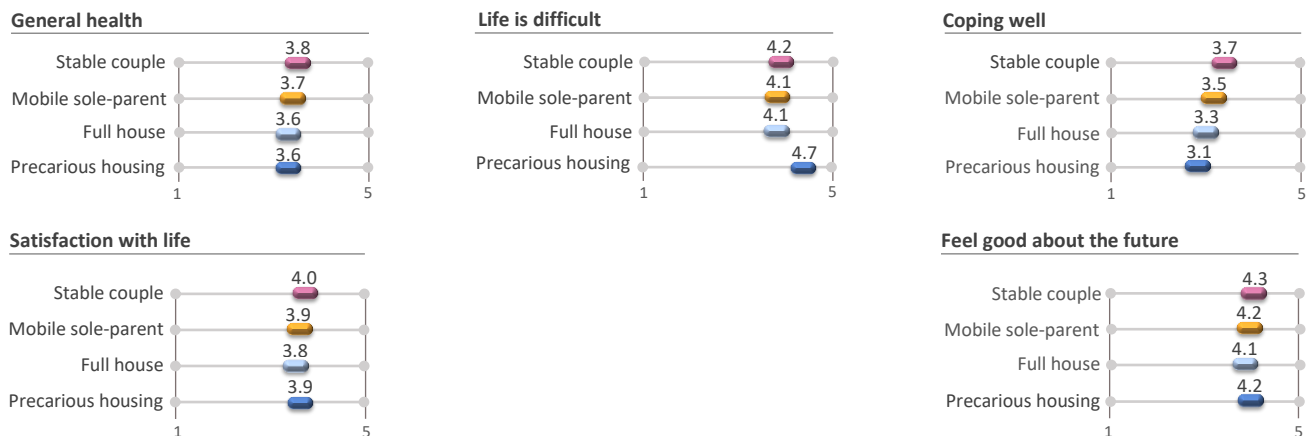
Figure 1 shows the geographical distribution of children by housing pathway (Waves 1 – 12), while Figure 2 shows the distribution by tenure type (Waves 1- 12). Children from the Mobile Sole-parent and Stable Couple groups lived primarily in urban Australia (Major Cities and Inner Regional areas). Children in Very Remote Australia were much more likely to experience the Precarious Housing pathway.

Only the parents of the Stable Couple group owned their own home to any substantial degree (46 per cent of observations across the 12 waves). The Precarious Housing and Full House groups were associated with renting from public (state government) or community housing organisations, while housing tenure for the Mobile Sole-parent group was quite representative of the wider sample.

## Youth health and wellbeing

In Wave 12 (2019) and Wave 13 (2020), the study youth were asked a number of questions relating to their wellbeing. The results highlight a resiliency among Indigenous youth with respect to starkly contrasting housing pathways as they grew up. On the measures relating to general health, life satisfaction and optimism about the future, there is little to differentiate the groups. Youth from the Precarious Housing pathway, who clearly grew up in the most challenging housing circumstances, actually report the least difficulties in life as adolescents. Their assessments are otherwise similar to the Stable Couple group with the exception of feelings of how well they are coping, where the Stable Couple group do report the most favourable responses on average.

Figure 3: Average health and wellbeing outcomes by housing pathway



Note: Each measure is scaled from 1 (worst outcome) to 5 (best outcome).

The surprising finding that wellbeing was quite similar for youths across the four housing pathways was confirmed in the LSIC Housing Research Report using responses to the ‘Strong Souls’ instrument designed to measure resilience among Indigenous youth.

Youth from the Precarious Housing pathway scored particularly highly on the item for knowing a lot about their family history and Indigenous culture. This is consistent with other findings in the report that housing for Indigenous families in remote areas is often inferior on mainstream measures, but provides offsetting benefits in terms of connection to country, kin, and culture.

It suggests, first, that typical measures of housing quality overlook important aspects of Indigenous families’ housing needs. Second, increased investment in housing in remote communities is needed so Indigenous Australians do not have to live in worse housing in order to stay on Country or stay connected to family and culture.

This factsheet is based on the LSIC Housing Research Report by A. M. Dockery and M. Moskos. This factsheet uses unit record data from Footprints in Time: the Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children (LSIC), conducted by the Australian Government Department of Social Services (DSS). The views are those of the authors and should not be attributed to the Australian Government, DSS or the Indigenous people and their communities involved in the LSIC.

The full report can be accessed at <https://bit.ly/footprintsintimeLSIChousing>.