

**Submission
No 87**

**INQUIRY INTO HOMELESSNESS AMONGST OLDER
PEOPLE AGED OVER 55 IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

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Submission



New South Wales Legislative Council Standing Committee on Social Issues: Inquiry into homelessness amongst older people aged over 55 in NSW

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1

Key messages

Acknowledgement of Country

We, the NSW Government, acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the lands where we work and live. We celebrate the diversity of Aboriginal peoples and their ongoing cultures and connections to the lands and waters of NSW.

We pay our respects to Elders past and present and acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples that contributed to the development of this Submission.

Key messages

- NSW Government is investing \$1 billion a year towards homelessness and social housing programs.
- In 2021-22 the NSW Government is committing \$295.9 million to continue a range of specialist homelessness services across NSW, referral services such as Link2home, enhancements for youth refuges and after hours Domestic and Family Violence (DFV) services, and Homelessness Strategy initiatives.
- In October 2021, the NSW Government announced a landmark investment of \$484.3 million to support women and children escaping domestic abuse with housing and specialist services
 - \$52.5 million over four years for the Community Housing Innovation Fund (CHIF).
 - \$426.6 million over four years to expand Core and Cluster.
 - \$5.2 million over four years to provide dedicated supports for accompanied children and young people impacted by DFV.
- In 2021-22, the Temporary Accommodation budget is \$29.3 million and an additional \$28.3 million in stimulus funding in response to COVID-19. Of the \$28.3m, \$21.2m has been allocated directly to the Temporary Accommodation budget, bringing the total budget to \$50.5m.
- Homelessness is a growing issue in NSW. Between 2011 and 2016, homelessness in NSW rose 37 per cent.ⁱ
- Aboriginal people are overrepresented amongst people experiencing homelessness in Australia. ABS Homeless Estimates (2016) indicate Aboriginal people experience homelessness at a rate 2.16 higher than the non-Aboriginal population.
- Nationally, the largest rise in homelessness has been among people leaving correctional facilities, increasing 67 per cent over eight years (2011–12 to 2018–19).ⁱⁱ
- In NSW 17 per cent of people experiencing homelessness are over the age of 55.ⁱⁱⁱ
- Older women are experiencing and becoming at risk of homelessness at a higher rate than most other cohorts of people.
- The three key drivers of homelessness for older people are financial difficulties, housing crisis and housing affordability stress. For older women Domestic and Family Violence (DFV) is also a significant factor.
- There is a strong and well-established association between housing and health. Homelessness can lead to and exacerbate poor health outcomes and poor health, in particular mental health, can be a contributing factor leading to homelessness. However, people entering the health system represents an opportunity for intervention.
- A key point for older people to access early intervention and crisis support, as well as immediate access to accommodation, is through the dedicated homelessness phone line Link2Home.

- Specialist Homelessness Services are the primary NSW government response to homelessness supporting people who are experiencing, or are at risk of homelessness providing, including older people.
- Any change to access or eligibility requirements for homelessness and/or social housing services, including to reduce the eligibility age to access social housing, would need to be assessed against the impact of the proposed change on other people in need of housing and homelessness supports.
- Social housing is available for people on low and very low incomes who experience or are at risk of homelessness. Under Future Directions for Social Housing and other programs, the Government is increasing the number of social housing dwellings in NSW and ensuring that new dwellings are suitable for the range of people who need them, including setting minimum standards to improve housing for people living with a disability.
- The Social and Affordable Housing Fund (SAHF) is expecting to deliver 3,485 social and affordable dwellings across NSW by the end of 2023.
- The Community Housing Innovation Fund (CHIF) is a DCJ \$150m fund available to all registered Community Housing Providers (CHPs) for co-funded grants over the 2020/21 to 2025/26 period.
- The NSW Government provides access to a number of supports which enable people to establish or maintain private rental tenancies such as Start Safely, a subsidy and supports to people impacted by domestic or family violence.
- The NSW Homelessness Strategy 2018-2023 drives a systemic response to homelessness with a focus on prevention and early intervention. It is based on and contributes to international and local evidence and data on what works to prevent, reduce and address homelessness.
- The Premier's Priority to reduce street sleeping by 50% by 2025 is breaking through barriers to address persistent rough sleeping through gathering accurate data, collaborating with partners and implementing Housing First initiatives including Together Home and Assertive Outreach.
- The NSW Government alone cannot respond to homelessness and social housing need. The Commonwealth Government must take action to address housing affordability to ensure sustainable social housing and specialist homelessness systems. The Commonwealth Government must increase funding under the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA). In particular:
 - Dedicated funds are required to increase and improve the stock of social and affordable housing
 - Collaboration and effort in housing and homelessness should take into account the shared commitment to Close the Gap and overcoming inequality experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
 - However, even with more NHHA funding, there is likely to be a growing gap between supply and demand of both homelessness and social housing due to the bigger unaddressed issue of housing affordability in Australia
- Collaboration and partnership between homelessness, housing, health services and other organisations is key to provide early intervention opportunities to prevent homelessness and improve health and wellbeing outcomes for all people experiencing homelessness.

2

Introduction to
homelessness in
NSW

Homelessness in NSW: rates of homelessness

In 2020-21, 70,600 clients were assisted by Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) in NSW which represents 25 per cent of the national SHS population (278,300 total clients). Of these, 31 per cent were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, 41 per cent were male and, 59 per cent were female.^{iv}

The top three reasons for clients seeking assistance were:^v

- housing crisis (37%, compared with 34% nationally)
- financial difficulties (37%, compared with 39%)
- domestic and family violence (36%, compared with 39%).

ABS Homeless Estimates (2016) indicate Aboriginal people experience homelessness at a rate 2.16 higher than the non-Aboriginal population. The true number of Aboriginal people who are homeless remains hidden by greater 'couch surfing' and rough sleeping rates, due to cultural and kinship obligations and familial structures.

The largest rise in homelessness has been among people leaving correctional facilities, increasing 67 per cent over eight years (2011–12 to 2018–19), although the NSW homelessness rate for this group remains below the national average.

Table 1 below shows the proportion of different cohorts accessing SHS services. By far the largest cohort of people presenting to SHS was Aboriginal people at almost 700 people per 10,000 clients in 2020-21. The next highest rates of presentations were people experiencing or who have experienced DFV and those who have mental health issues. In 2020-21 compared with the previous year, higher rates were reported for Aboriginal clients, older people, people who have experienced family and domestic violence, clients with disability and clients with a mental health issue.

Table 1: Rate of homelessness per 10,000 people, 2019-20 and 2020-21^{vi}

Clients per 10,000, by interest groups

	NSW		Australia	
	2019-20	2020-21	2019-20	2020-21
All clients	87.0	86.5	114.5	108.3
Indigenous	673.6	692.3	799.9	810.6
Young people presenting alone (15-24)	16.9	16.5	16.7	16.2
Older people (55 and over)	6.2	6.4	9.6	9.3
Family and domestic violence	33.9	34.6	47.0	45.2
Disability	2.0	2.2	2.6	2.7
Mental health	31.4	32.5	34.8	34.3
Exiting custodial arrangements	2.6	2.5	3.7	3.5
Leaving care	2.2	2.0	2.7	2.5
Children on protection orders	3.0	3.0	3.5	3.2
Drug/alcohol use	9.5	8.9	11.2	10.6

Homelessness of people over 55

There is a growing trend for people becoming homeless in later life for the first time, particularly older women. In NSW 17 per cent of people experiencing homelessness are over the age of 55 and this figure is increasing.^{vii} This is a 2 per cent rise since 2011.

Table 2 below shows the number of clients over 55 and all clients accessing various homelessness support services in NSW.

Table 2: Number clients over 55 vs total clients accessing homelessness support services in NSW

	FY2021-22 as at 31 Mar 2022 Clients >55	FY2021-22 as at 31 Mar 2022 All Clients	FY2020-21 Clients >55	FY2020-21 All Clients
SHS Clients	n/a	n/a	5,216	70,588
Link2home	5,350	68,976	5,155	72,643
Temporary Accommodation	2,136	22,727	2,215	25,542
Priority Housing	1,944	6,296	1,856	5,801

In 2020-21, specialist homelessness services assisted 5,216 older clients aged 55 years and older (2,774 women and 2,442 men), representing 7.4 per cent of all SHS clients. This equates to 86.5 clients per 10,000 estimated resident population (ERP).^{viii} The rate of older people accessing SHS in NSW increased by an annual average of 6.9 per cent over the period 2011-12 to 2020-21 (8.5 per cent for women and 5.3 per cent for men).^{ix}

Between 2011 and 2016 the number of women aged 55 and over experiencing homelessness increased by 48 per cent. The number of women aged between 65 and 74 experiencing homelessness increased by 78 per cent.^x The rate of older women accessing SHS in NSW increased by an annual average of 3.8 per cent over the period 2015-16 to 2020-21, higher than the increase for all SHS clients (0.2 per cent).^{xi}

Data from Link2Home, the NSW Government's state-wide homelessness information and referral telephone service, suggests at least a 4 per cent increase in requests for assistance this year from people aged 55 year and over, in comparison to 2020-21.^{xii} This service is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, every day of the year. It is a key assistance point in NSW for all people experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness to access housing and housing support services.

The Link2Home 2021-22 financial year (FY) data as of March 2022, has seen:^{xiii}

- 5350 instances of clients aged 55 years and over, who have contacted Link2Home for assessment, specialist homeless support and accommodation assistance
- Of the 5350 instances, 3344 identified as male and 2006 identified as female.

The 2020-21 FY data showed:^{xiv}

- 5155 instances of clients aged 55 years and over accessing Link2Home services
- Of the 5155 instances, 3266 identified as male and 1889 identified as female.

For people needing immediate emergency accommodation, Link2Home provides referrals to SHS crisis accommodation, Supported Temporary Accommodation or Temporary Accommodation. Temporary Accommodation (TA) is immediate short-term accommodation in hotels, motels, caravan parks and other locations for people experiencing homelessness. As at 31 March 2022, there were 22,727 households assisted with Temporary Accommodation across NSW YTD (1 July 2021 – 31 March 2022). Of these, the main person requesting a service was aged 55 and over in 9.4% (2,136) households.^{xv}

To meet the needs of people requiring urgent long term housing, people can be assessed for priority social housing.

A priority housing category exists for elderly people if they are aged 80 years and over or are confirmed to be an Aboriginal person or Torres Strait Islander and aged 55 years and over. However, all people over 55 are able to access priority housing if they are eligible for social housing, are in urgent need (e.g. due to homelessness or risk of harm, including domestic or family violence) and are unable to resolve their housing need in the private rental market.

In current social housing, older people make up more than half of all tenants in NSW and a growing portion of private renters.

Factors affecting the incidence of homelessness

Pathways to Homelessness

In 2018, the Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) commissioned actuarial analysis on the pathways that lead to homelessness. This research was a key commitment under the NSW Homelessness Strategy.

The Pathways to Homelessness report (Dec 2021) and accompanying data dashboards are publicly available on the DCJ website. Its case group is 202,927 people who accessed SHS in NSW from 1 July 2011 to 30 June 2017.

The analysis found eight key cohorts at risk of homelessness, as set out in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Pathways to Homelessness: Key findings

Cohort	Key findings
Mental health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> People with evidence of acute mental health issues in their service history are nine times more likely than those in the general population to present to homelessness services. TA, Legal Aid, and heavy Emergency Department use are other potential intervention points for this cohort
Substance use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> People with drug and alcohol-related service history are eight times more likely to access homelessness services. People with drug and alcohol-related service use are more likely to be male and older compared to all homelessness services clients, although younger people with drug and alcohol service use still appear to be at higher risk of needing support.
Domestic & Family Violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The risk of accessing SHS is high soon after a victims incident report and falls quickly TA and ambulatory mental health are also relevant risk factors and potential intervention points, although this group has a less intensive cross-sector service use history than other clients. Homelessness services may represent an early point of contact with government services for many within this vulnerable group.
Exiting Custody	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> One in eight (12.4%) people leaving custody access homelessness services within a year – 20 times the rate of the wider NSW population. The rate for Aboriginal people is double that for non-Aboriginal people. A large proportion of people exiting custody also access Legal Aid (40%) and appear in court (38%) between their custody exit and accessing homelessness services.
Young people leaving Out of Home Care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 17% of OOHC leavers access SHS in the next year, Previous homelessness, walk-in mental health service use, and court appearances (including Youth Justice Centres and police cautions) are all predictive of increased risk of later accessing homelessness services
Aboriginal people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> One-third of people (30%) who access SHS identifying as Aboriginal, a significant over-representation.

- Aboriginal people have elevated service use across all services compared to the broader NSW population, but particularly for homelessness services (10x), court appearances (7x), Legal Aid (6x) and walk-in mental health services (4x).
- For Aboriginal people, the highest increases in homelessness risk are associated with accessing mental health services.

In relation to older people, the analysis found three broad pathways to homelessness^{xvi}

- People with conventional housing histories (69.2 per cent)
- People who had lived with ongoing housing disruption, including living in shelters (22.3 per cent)
- People with geographically transient housing histories (8.6 per cent).

More than two thirds of older people experiencing homelessness were doing so for the first time in their lives,^{xvii} meaning they likely had not had an interaction with DCJ homelessness services or been considered for support services earlier. These people may have experienced homelessness after critical life events such as relationship breakdown, financial trouble, or the onset of illness.

Service data

The NSW Government Link2Home service collects information from callers during the assessment process. The data is captured in the NSW housing database, HOMES. Currently, the assessment captures the primary reason of homelessness as well as the secondary reason for homelessness.

Some of the main factors affecting the incidence of homelessness include: relationship and family breakdown, overcrowding, substandard accommodation, eviction, property has become unaffordable, domestic and family violence (DFV) and Notice of Termination.

In 2020-21, the top eight reasons for older clients seeking SHS services were^{xviii}:

- Financial difficulties (38.8%)
- Housing crisis (37.0%)
- Housing affordability stress (31.3%)
- Inappropriate dwelling (24.1%)
- Medical issues (19.2%)
- Mental health issues (18.6%)
- Lack of support (17.5%)
- Family and domestic violence (17.0%)

In 2020-21, the top four SHS services that older clients needed were^{xix}:

- Accommodation (59.8%)
- Assistance to sustain housing tenure (41.7%)
- Other specialist services (21.6%)
- General services (95.3%)

Drivers of homelessness for older women

Older women commonly report DFV as a reason for their homelessness or risk of homelessness.

Older women face challenges that increase risks of homelessness such as lower lifetime incomes, less access to financial assets including low superannuation, discrimination and health risks. They are especially vulnerable

when they have complex circumstances such as mental health issues, financial stress, isolation or experience of DFV.

These factors are further impacted within Aboriginal communities due to the racism faced by older Aboriginal women as well as increased risk of family violence within Aboriginal communities.

Drivers of homelessness in Aboriginal communities

Housing crisis and DFV were the most common main reasons for Aboriginal people experiencing homelessness to seek assistance in 2017–18: housing crisis was the main reason over one in four (27 per cent) Indigenous clients were seeking assistance in 2017–18; one in five (19 per cent) reported DFV violence as the main reason.^{xx}

Key social factors specific for Aboriginal people and communities that have been raised by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare in its Specialist Homelessness Services annual report 2020-21 include:

- Intergenerational homelessness, which have been a result of past government policies, strategies that have displaced Aboriginal people from their lands
- Ongoing housing shortages, especially in Aboriginal communities has led to overcrowding
- Housing affordability as well as housing that does not meet the needs of Aboriginal people have restricted older Aboriginal people's ability to access stability housing.

Older Aboriginal people may face the same drivers to homelessness younger Aboriginal people do, potentially compounded by deteriorating health and increased care needs. While within Aboriginal communities, family and kinship responsibilities often ensure older Aboriginal people (i.e. Elders), are cared for within and by the community, due to historical experiences, many family and kinship connections may be broken or lost.

People in custody

The NSW Government is committed to working with partner agencies to improve access to appropriate accommodation for all people leaving custody – the fastest growing cohort amongst homeless clients. With an increasing aged population in NSW prisons, the proportion of older people leaving prison into unstable accommodation may increase.

Many adults entering prison were previously experiencing homelessness, with one in three homeless in the 30 days prior to being incarcerated.^{xxi} More than a quarter (27 per cent) of surveyed women in prisons were in short-term or emergency accommodation in the 30 days prior to being incarcerated.^{xxii}

Upon release, people discharged from prison can face stigma associated with a history of incarceration and discrimination from landlords and potential employers. Prisoners applying for parole may experience difficulties securing appropriately located and affordable accommodation, leading to refusal of parole or breach of parole conditions and subsequent return to prison.

The inter-relationship between housing insecurity and imprisonment and re-imprisonment is well established. Post-release housing assistance can be an effective measure in addressing the imprisonment–homelessness cycle.

3

Impacts of
homelessness on
older people in NSW

Impact of homelessness on health

There is a strong and well-established association between housing and health. Homelessness can lead to and exacerbate poor health outcomes. Likewise, some health conditions, such as mental illness, may contribute to the onset of homelessness. This interrelationship between health and homelessness is further exacerbated by the impact unstable housing has on a person's access to effective health care, including barriers to referrals and follow-up care.

At a population level, people experiencing homelessness have a higher prevalence of a range of chronic conditions, including mental health problems and problematic drug and alcohol use, and are at higher risk of both injury and trauma. For many people, these conditions are significantly exacerbated by homelessness and ultimately result in increased rates of access to acute healthcare services (emergency departments, ambulance and hospital admissions).

People with mental health issues

Mental health impacts all ages. Environmental stress associated with experiences of housing instability or homelessness can trigger, exacerbate or magnify mental health issues. Symptoms of mental illnesses that increase psychological distress and impair decision-making in daily life can contribute to worse health outcomes, reduced support and experiences of financial hardship. In this way, people with mental health issues are especially susceptible to entering or maintaining homelessness. This further impacts on the acute and emergency health care system. Homelessness can also impact how a person accesses and engages with mental health supports, meaning they require a flexible service system.

People with disabilities

Older people can face the compounding impact of deteriorating health that can exacerbate the impacts of their disability on their capacity to access services and amenities. However, people with disability are a diverse group, with varying types and levels of disability across all socioeconomic and demographic groups. Their pathways into and out of homelessness are just as varied, and can be influenced by disability type, location and the level of their disability.

People with disability may have a greater exposure to risk factors associated with homelessness than the general population. Low income, lack of social support, limited engagement with the labour market, compounded by the need for specialised assistance and services, can leave some people with disability increasingly vulnerable to the risk of homelessness and its negative impacts. Accessing supports through the National Disability Insurance Scheme can be harder for people experiencing homelessness, in particular for those with a psychosocial disability.

Older people

It is difficult to provide reliable estimates of the acute health utilisation and costs specifically for older people experiencing homelessness. This is mainly because there is very limited Australian research investigating health costs specifically for this group, and there are risks in extrapolating estimates of the health costs of a broader homelessness cohort to older people experiencing homelessness.

Older people accessing SHS have a different 'vulnerability profile' from other groups experiencing homelessness. For example, nearly half (47 per cent or 40,600 clients) of older men and women accessing SHS support during 2013-14 to 2017-18 did not report any of the three key vulnerabilities (DFV, mental health issues and problematic alcohol and other drug use).^{xxiii} By comparison, only 37 per cent of all clients of all ages supported by SHS in 2020-21 did not report any these three key vulnerability areas.^{xxiv} Nonetheless, there is still a considerable portion of older people accessing SHS with health-related vulnerabilities.

Impact of homelessness on older vulnerable groups

Older women experiencing domestic and family violence

One of the main drivers for older women accessing specialist homelessness services is experience of DFV. DFV has a deleterious impact on the physical, psychological, and social health of many women, including as a contributor to risk of homelessness. There is an extensive body of evidence about the effects of DFV on health. These health impacts are not only injury-related; they affect multiple domains of physical and mental health and can continue beyond the relationship in which the violence occurred and are associated with higher rates of health care use in both the immediate and longer term.

The health impacts of DFV would be further compounded by women's lack of access to secure housing and experiences of homelessness.

Victims of DFV often present to emergency departments with mental health issues such as generalised depression and anxiety, as well as chronic medical conditions such as upper and lower abdominal issues, fatigue, pain, and inflammatory conditions^{xxv}. The estimated costs of violence against women and their children to the health system in Australia in 2015-16 was \$1.4 billion.^{xxvi} While the cost of DFV to the health sector is significant, victim-survivors bear a much greater cost.

NSW Government is engaged in a comprehensive program of work to build the capacity of the health system to prevent and respond to DFV which is detailed within the [NSW Health Strategy for Preventing and Responding to Domestic and Family Violence](#). NSW Health services are often an early point of contact and therefore have an important role to play in improving victim-survivors safety as well as addressing health and social impacts of domestic violence, including homelessness.

Aboriginal communities

It has been recognised that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have had significantly less access to affordable or secure housing or accommodation than other Australians, and that historical events have impacted housing situations and experiences of homelessness within the current Indigenous population.

Australia's homeless population are among the most vulnerable groups in the community. Homelessness can profoundly affect a person's mental and physical health, their education and employment opportunities, and their ability to participate fully in society.

Indigenous people make up 3.3 per cent of the Australian population, yet they made up 22 per cent of all people who were homeless on Census night in 2016 (of those for whom Indigenous status was stated).^{xxvii}

The Australian Institute of Health and Wellbeing (AIHW) has identified a range of factors that have resulted in the increase of Aboriginal people experiencing homelessness, especially for older Aboriginal people.^{xxviii} These include:

- historical experiences of Aboriginal people including displacement from traditional lands, separation of children from their families
- transgenerational impact of policies and services that conflict with Aboriginal values and culture that have resulted in poverty, low self-esteem, poor physical, mental health and social and emotional well-being, welfare dependency, poor living skills, high levels of DFV and substance abuse, and low levels of educational attainment.

As with non-Aboriginal people, many Aboriginal people who experience homelessness for the first time later in life have led conventional lives involving employment, residential stability and family and may have experienced homelessness after critical life events.

Older Aboriginal people may seek to age on Country and within their own community and require a holistic, culturally appropriate, and culturally safe healthy ageing program.

4

Responses to homelessness amongst older people in NSW

Service system responds to those in greatest need first

The service responses described in this section are available to multiple cohorts of people experiencing homelessness, or at risk of homelessness. Unless otherwise specified, they are available to older people.

As a general rule, the NSW homelessness and social housing systems are designed to provide support for the most vulnerable first, no matter how that vulnerability arises. Any change to access or eligibility requirements would need to be assessed against the impact of the proposed change on other people in need of housing and homelessness supports. For example, any change that increased the number of people eligible for priority applicant status would have a consequent significant increase in the time those applicants were on the Housing Register before they could be housed.

Accessing homelessness support in NSW

As well as a dedicated information and referral service, Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) in NSW operate under a “No Wrong Door” policy to improve access to early intervention and crisis homelessness services.

Link2Home

Link2Home is the NSW Government’s state-wide homelessness information and referral telephone service. It is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, every day of the year. It is a key point for information, assessment and referral for older people experiencing, or at risk of homelessness, to access accommodation and support.

Link2Home provides access to early intervention services, assessment and referral to SHS crisis support and accommodation, as well as providing Temporary Accommodation. Callers to Link2home will receive one or more of the following:

- information about local services
- an assessment to determine what kind of help is needed
- referral to appropriate SHS, support services, temporary accommodation and/or other services.

Link2home also provides information about homelessness services across NSW to SHS providers and homelessness advocates acting on behalf of clients.

Specialist Homelessness Services

The SHS program is commissioned by DCJ and is the NSW Government’s primary service response to homelessness. With the exception of youth services, SHSs service all age groups. All SHS providers operate using a No Wrong Door approach to people who are experiencing homelessness or who are at risk of homelessness. The No Wrong Door approach refers to the principle that a person will receive support, or will be assisted to find support, wherever they access the SHS service system.

When a person accesses a SHS and are assessed as experiencing or being at risk of homelessness, their immediate needs will be met at first point of contact, or a connection made to more appropriate supports as efficiently and effectively as possible.

Research done by the AIHW found that older people accessing SHS support had good long term housing outcomes. By the end of their SHS support, housing outcomes generally demonstrated fewer older clients were known to be experiencing homelessness (27 per cent) and most (73 per cent) were living in stable accommodation in 2020–21, be it public or community, private or other housing or an institutional setting.^{xxix}

Homelessness services – emergency responses

Temporary and emergency accommodation

Temporary Accommodation (TA) is the provision of short term, immediate accommodation. Requirements around TA are modified to respond to circumstances, in particular in times of emergency. In response to COVID-19, TA has been made available to a wider range of individuals and for longer than the standard program.

Emergency accommodation is also made available to support people made homeless by natural disasters. Following the 2019/20 bushfires and the recent flooding in various parts of NSW, emergency accommodation has been made available as part of the State's response.

Specialist Homelessness Services

The SHS program provides emergency crisis, temporary and transitional accommodation to people experiencing homelessness. It supports people to achieve safe and stable housing in the community, aiming to minimise the adverse impacts of experiencing homelessness. Services provide a client-centred response built around the needs of each client's circumstances, experiences and choices.

Domestic and Family Violence Services

Specialist SHS services provide accommodation and support to women and children escaping domestic violence. This includes crisis accommodation and supports. In October 2021, the Government announced that it would invest an additional \$484.3 million to support women and children escaping domestic abuse with housing and specialist services. The funding package includes \$426.6 million over four years to deliver and operate around 75 new women's refuges that will support women and children escaping DFV across NSW.

These refuges are contemporary, independent accommodation, known as the Core and Cluster model. This involves self-contained accommodation units (the cluster) located close to communal facilities/areas (the core), which provide access to services such as counselling, legal assistance, education and employment support as well as shared spaces.

Responses for people sleeping rough

The NSW Premier's Priority to reduce rough sleeping by 50% by 2025 is underpinned by a commitment to Assertive Outreach. The assertive outreach model takes services directly to people sleeping rough rather than waiting for individuals to come to services on their own. This approach supports the process of engagement, in doing so, validating the process and the time it takes to establish positive rapport and engagement between the outreach worker and the person sleeping rough.

Assertive outreach teams coordinate with other agencies and services to identify people who are sleeping rough and help them directly into housing with wrap around supports to keep them housed. Assertive outreach services have been expanded to over 50 local government areas across NSW.

Together Home is a \$122.1m program that aims to transition people onto a trajectory away from homelessness and into long-term stable housing, while improving overall personal wellbeing. The program is based on internationally recognised Housing First principles. Housing is provided by Community Housing Providers through private leaseholds, with NGO partners providing wrap around support to help people maintain their housing. The program aims to address people's support needs, build individual capability and capacity, and foster connections to community.

On the Central Coast, DCJ partnered with the local community to design an Aboriginal led Together Home program. The key aim of the program is to transition Aboriginal people experiencing street homelessness into long-term, stable housing, while improving overall personal wellbeing.

Since the start of the pandemic, more than 1300 people sleeping rough across NSW have been assisted into social housing, and 630 have been assisted into private accommodation.

Homelessness services – prevention and early intervention

Prevention and early intervention are key to both the NSW Homelessness Strategy and the Premier's Priority to reduce street homelessness. The Department of Communities and Justice is also represented on the reference

group for the Ageing on the Edge Project which explores how to reduce the risk of older people experiencing homelessness by using an early intervention and prevention framework with a focus on achieving long term sustainable housing outcomes.

The NSW Homelessness Strategy is a five-year framework for action to drive a systemic response to homelessness with a focus on prevention and early intervention. The Strategy is designed to pilot approaches which help to identify the best prevention and early intervention measures for state-wide roll out after the Strategy's five-year term.

Early intervention and prevention programs being implemented under the Homelessness Strategy include:

- Next STEP - Funding for transitional accommodation with supports
- Sustaining Tenancies in Social Housing - Funding to support people to sustain their social housing tenancies by addressing complex needs
- Staying Home Leaving Violence (SHLV) - Expansion of SHLV to six new sites to support women and their children to remain safely in their own home
- Universal Screening and Supports - Universal risk screening and supports delivered in schools for young people at risk of homelessness.

NSW Government intends to use the gathered data from implementation of the Strategy to expand effective prevention and early intervention measures. It is expected that, over time, these initiatives will reduce the demand for crisis services.

Under the Premier's Priority, in July 2021 the Government introduced the new two-year \$4.5 million Reintegration Housing Support Program (RHSP), in partnership with the Community Restorative Centre (CRC).

The RHSP aims to connect people who are leaving custody and at risk of homelessness with specialist support workers before they leave prison who will assist with securing access to suitable accommodation, as well as wrap around psychosocial support, so they can sustain long-term housing once they leave custody and help support their reintegration into society.

Social housing

Social housing is reserved for low and very low income earners. Applicants identified as being priority social housing applicants are typically the most vulnerable in the community, have an urgent and unmet need for housing that cannot be met in the private rental market and often require the greatest long-term government assistance through their use of crisis accommodation services, as well as the health, justice, and child protection systems.

Applicant profile

The past years have seen a significant increase in the growth and complexity of social housing need. There has been a 29 per cent growth in Priority Applicant Households on the NSW Social Housing Register over the past two financial years of official published figures (at 30 June 2021). There has also been an increase in Aboriginal priority applicant households by over 58 per cent between 2019 and 2021 to over 900.^{xxx}

These increases are in spite of an overall reduction in the total number of households on the NSW Social Housing Register, which dropped from 51,395 households in 2020 to 49,928 households in 2021.

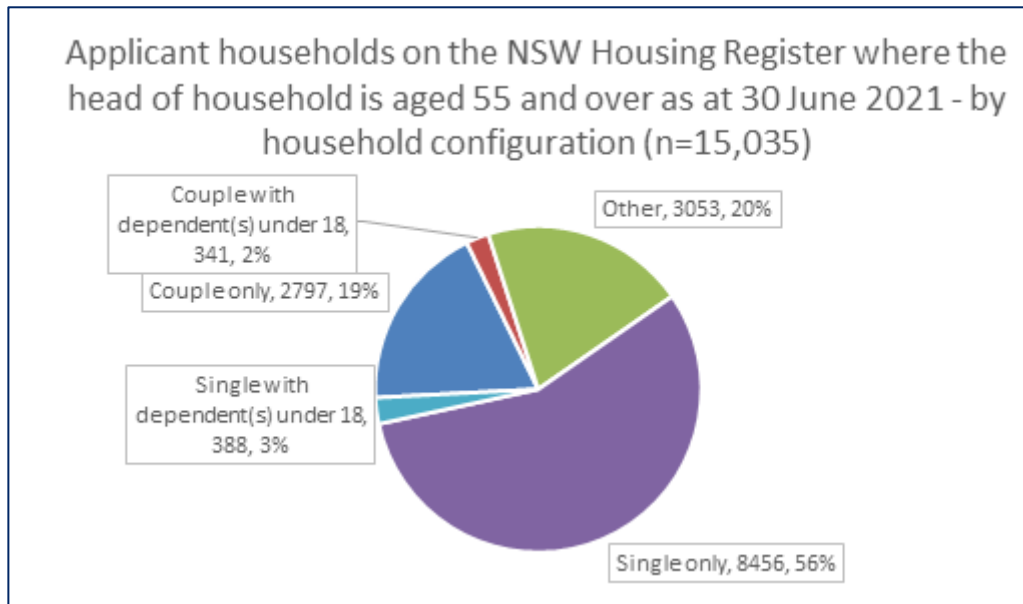
In 2020-21, 9,354 households on the waitlist were newly housed in social housing. This is 8.3 per cent more households than in 2019-20 (8,635).

The median waiting time (in months) for priority approved applicants to be housed has steadily decreased over time, reaching 2.2 months in 2020-21. These results are the best in over ten years, compared to a high of 4.8 months in 2010-11.

Of the households waiting for social housing around 73 per cent are single person or single parent/guardian households as shown in the figure below.^{xxxi}

See Figure 1 (pie graph) for the Applicant households on the NSW Housing Register by household configuration at 30 June 2021.

Figure 1 – Applicant households on the NSW Housing Register where the head of household is aged 55 and over by household configuration as at 30 June 2021



Clients who have met the normal eligibility criteria for social housing may be approved for housing assistance under the Housing Elderly Persons priority group, as an elderly client if they are:

- aged 80 years and over, or
- confirmed to be an Aboriginal person or Torres Strait Islander and aged 55 years and over.

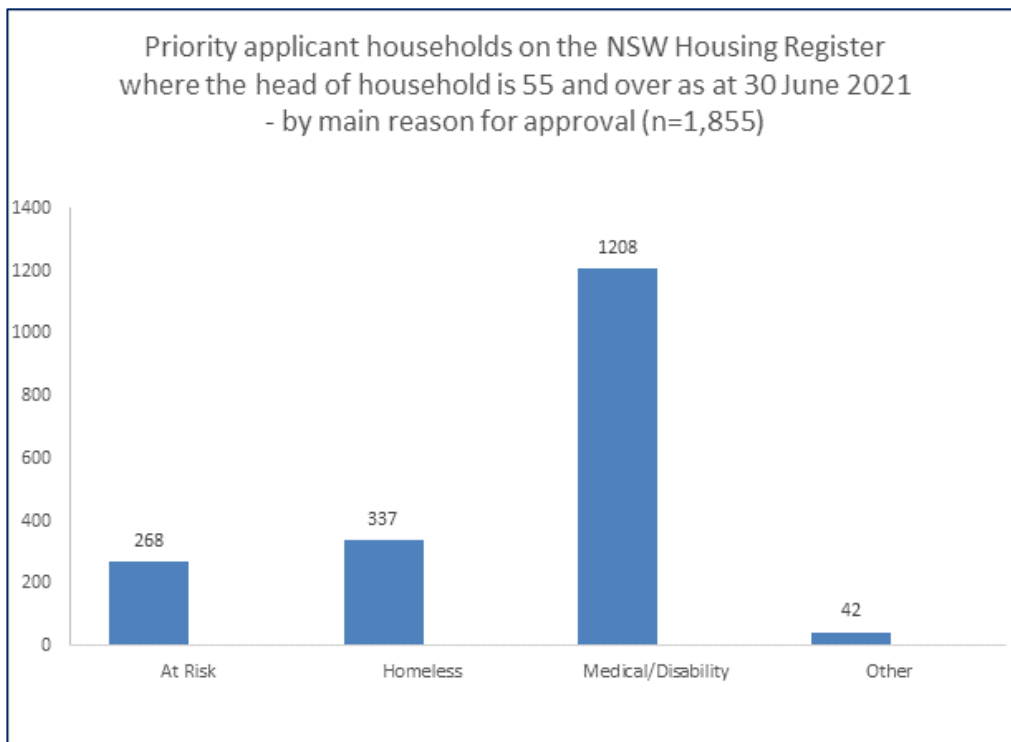
Applicants eligible under this group are prioritised for housing after people approved for emergency and temporary accommodation, people approved for priority housing and, current tenants requiring transfers. Any changes to expand eligibility to priority housing would likely result in increased wait times for all people on priority housing, putting vulnerable groups at risk of homelessness, including vulnerable older people.

Suitability of social housing portfolio

Figure 2 below shows that a high proportion of applicants and tenants require dwellings with configurations and/or modifications that accommodate medical or disability needs.. Social housing being increasingly occupied by people with higher needs means more tenants need to access supports to help them sustain their tenancy and live well.

LAHC has a significant program of modifications of existing public housing dwellings to accommodate disability needs. Mostly, the need for modification arises from the existing or new tenant's age-related physical needs. Over the last four financial years, LAHC has invested \$11.6 million per year resulting in around 2,500 modifications. DCJ is rolling out an initiative under which DCJ Districts will employ Occupational Therapists so that assessments of tenant and applicant need can be identified and modifications made more quickly.

Figure 2 – Priority applicant households on the NSW Housing Register where the head of household is 55 and over by main reason for approval as at 30 June 2021



Minimum accessibility standards

“Creating Liveable communities” is one of the four focus areas of the NSW Disability Inclusion Plan 2021-2025, the aim being:

To increase participation of people with disability in all aspects of community life, through targeted approaches to address barriers in housing, learning, transport, health, social and cultural engagement and wellbeing.

Housing 2041 sets a long-term vision and objectives for better housing outcomes across NSW. It embodies the Government’s goals and ambitions to deliver better housing outcomes by 2041. Action 2.7 of the strategy’s Action Plan commits the Government to “[s]tart driving change in the application of universal design across the housing sector”.

The overwhelming majority of new social housing dwellings in NSW are built to at least Silver standard. Land and Housing Corporation (LAHC)’s Dwelling Requirements (2020) stipulate minimum Silver Standard for ground level and lift-accessible properties and Silver standard interiors where lifts are not available.

The minimum accessibility standards are based on the Liveable Housing Design Guidelines Silver Standard. They focus on structural and spatial elements to ensure the dwelling can be flexible and adaptable into the future. The Silver Standard has seven core design elements:

1. A safe and continuous step free path of travel from the street entrance and/or parking area to the dwelling entrance that is level
2. At least one step free entrance to the dwelling
3. Internal doors and corridors that facilitate comfortable and unimpeded movement between spaces
4. A toilet on the ground (or entry) level that provides easy access
5. A bathroom that contains a hobless shower recess
6. Reinforced walls around the toilet, shower and bath to support the safe installation of guardrails at a later date
7. Stairways designed to reduce likelihood of injury and enable future adaptation.

The estimated percentage of people expected to benefit from accessible housing is set to increase over time with the ageing population and increased lifespan of people with disability in the community.

NSW Government initiatives to increase social and affordable housing

Under Future Directions for Social Housing, the Government's ten year plan to drive better outcomes for social housing tenants, new and more accessible social housing is being constructed. The Communities Plus building program will deliver more and better housing. The delivery of new homes is transforming local communities by creating jobs, encouraging new investment, and delivering housing for those who need it most. Communities Plus will deliver a significant number of new and replacement social and affordable housing plus new private housing in partnership with the private, non-government and community housing sectors.

The \$1.1 billion Social and Affordable Housing Fund (SAHF) is expected to deliver 3,485 social and affordable dwellings under the first two phases of the program. The SAHF program is an innovative approach to the way we deliver social and affordable housing in NSW. The program is based on an outcome focused model which promotes the partnership with community housing providers (CHPs) partnering with developers, financiers and human services providers.

A total of 1,414 SAHF dwellings are targeted to older people (55 years and over or 45 years and over for people identifying as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander) and an additional 232 dwellings targeted specifically for older women. Latest tenancy data shows as of 30 September 2021 1,581 of the 3,520 people living in homes delivered through SAHF contracts are older people and 1,006 are older women. As of 31 December 2021, the SAHF has delivered 2,901 new social and affordable homes and an additional 350 dwellings are currently under construction. All dwellings are expected to be completed by the end of 2023.

The Community Housing Innovation Fund (CHIF) is a \$150 million program delivering more social and affordable housing in collaboration with Community Housing Providers (CHPs) across NSW. Under Round One, approximately 171 dwellings will be constructed comprising 108 social housing and 63 other housing types (e.g. affordable to rent, affordable to buy and transitional housing). In addition, on 16 October 2021, it was announced that \$50 million of the CHIF will be allocated to fourteen approved projects that will deliver more than 270 social and affordable housing properties valued at approximately \$116 million.

In October 2021, the NSW Government announced a COVID-19 economic recovery strategy that will significantly increase the supply of social and affordable housing, with an additional \$183 million dedicated to fast-tracking more than 1,400 new social and affordable homes. Part of this package includes \$50 million for the delivery of around 290 new social houses in partnership with community housing providers (CHPs) through the CHIF.

LAHC continues to deliver a program of next generation boarding house developments, supporting the Homelessness Strategy. Over 100 self-contained homes are being delivered across projects in Heckenberg, Peakhurst, Seven Hill, Revesby, Maroubra, St Marys, Merrylands, Penrith, Airs and Camden. Projects range from being in design, tender, development application or construction phase. Most projects are due for completion in 2023.

Private rental assistance and supports to obtain accommodation

The NSW Government provides assistance ranging from one-off supports to medium term rental subsidies to help people access housing in the private rental market. Private rental assistance significantly contributes to the financial sustainability of the social housing system by supporting households before they need to enter the social housing system.

These products and supports include:

- Rentstart Bond Loan, an interest-free loan to help clients start a private rental tenancy, providing up to 100% of the bond. Rentstart Move is also included under this product and is specifically for public housing

tenants who want to leave public housing voluntarily or for those who are ineligible for a further public housing lease and are required to vacate their property.

- Advanced Rent (up to two weeks) to assist clients to secure a property in the private rental market.
- Bond Extra, previously known as Tenancy Guarantee, a product that offers an additional \$1,500 to encourage private sector landlords and agents to rent properties to clients.
- Tenancy Assistance for clients in a private rental property who are in rent and/or water arrears. Assistance may be in the form of rent arrears, water arrears or a combination of both. The maximum amount of assistance cannot exceed the equivalent of four weeks rent.
- Tenancy Facilitation a service that assists clients to understand renting in the private market; this includes help to search for properties, making applications and dealing with landlords.
- Private Rental Brokerage Service helps people with complex needs, including those with physical or mental illness, drug or alcohol problems, a physical or intellectual disability or other complex needs, to find and sustain private rental accommodation.
- Private Rental Subsidy provides assistance for clients with a disability or clients at risk in their current situation to find affordable accommodation in the private market, while waiting for a suitable social housing property.

Rent Choice

Rent Choice is a form of private rental assistance that supports households experiencing or at risk of homelessness to access safe and affordable housing in the private rental market. It provides a time limited, tapered private rental subsidy for up to three years and facilitates access to support, training and employment opportunities needed to sustain independent housing without the need for ongoing government assistance. Rent Choice supports a number of vulnerable cohorts:

- Start Safely provides a subsidy and links to supports, to help people rent privately who do not have a stable and secure place to live due to domestic or family violence.
- Rent Choice Youth is available to eligible young people aged 16-24 who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Priority groups are those leaving out-of-home-care; and/or who have experienced domestic violence or family breakdown.
- Rent Choice Veterans is for veterans experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness and is available state-wide.

Rent Choice pilots include:

- Rent Choice Assist for people experiencing a destabilising event that jeopardises their private rental tenancies and puts their households at risk of homelessness.
- Rent Choice Transition which supports households in social housing transition to independence in the private market.
- Family Assist supporting families with an identified housing need access private rental accommodation to allow restoration, where children are reunited with their families from OOHC, or preservation, where support is provided to families to prevent children from entering the OOHC system.

Supports for older women

Housing 2041 was released in 2021. It is the first end-to-end housing strategy for NSW. It sets a long-term vision and objectives for better housing outcomes across NSW - housing in the right locations, housing that suits diverse needs and housing that feels like home. It is centred on the four inter-related pillars of housing supply, affordability, diversity and resilience.

A key action under Housing 2041 is the development of State Environment Planning Policy (Housing) 2021 (Housing SEPP). The Housing SEPP consolidates five housing related SEPPs, including the Seniors housing SEPP, to incentivise supply of affordable and diverse housing for different stages of life. The Housing SEPP improves the way existing types of homes are delivered, including boarding houses and build-to-rent housing. It also introduces co-living housing and independent living units as two new housing types to meet changing needs.

The NSW Homelessness Strategy includes the delivery of targeted housing options for older women. Smaller units are being trialled to accommodate older women in financial hardship in certain LGAs to protect at-risk older women and provide them with a strong support network in a secure, affordable and stable environment.

Supports for Aboriginal communities

The proportion of Aboriginal people experiencing homelessness underpins the NSW Government's support for and commitment to achieving the targets in the Closing the Gap Agreement. The Aboriginal Housing Office (AHO) and the NSW Coalition of Aboriginal Peaks (NSW CAPO) are jointly leading the implementation of actions to achieve Closing the Gap commitments in relation to housing and homelessness, including Outcome 9: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people secure appropriate, affordable housing that is aligned with their priorities and need.

The joint secretariat is supported by an Officer Level Working Group (OLWG) that includes representatives of all relevant NSW government agencies and Aboriginal housing and homelessness organisations. The OLWG is currently developing the next Implementation Plan for Outcome 9.

NSW Government has also committed to providing grants for aged care in regional, rural and remote areas that assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, as well as those experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness, in response to the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety.

Case Study: Services our Way

The AHO's Services Our Way program provides culturally appropriate service coordination, support and capacity building for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and families experiencing vulnerability, empowering them to improve their wellbeing and achieve their goals.

Services Our Way specialist Aboriginal staff work holistically and collaboratively with clients and service providers. This ensures that a culturally suitable and tailored solution is developed to help address the underlying causes that contribute to daily instability and challenging situations. At the core of Services Our Way is an individualised and family centred approach.

Tanya's story provides an example of the potential for integrated, culturally appropriate services to support people experiencing primary homelessness:

Tanya is over 55 years old. Tanya and her partner were sleeping in a tent in a local park and suffering from serious health issues as well as the other issues that come with sleeping rough.

Within a few weeks of coming into contact with Services Our Way, Tanya had a place to call her own, where her family could visit and where she knew she was safe.

Tanya said "When I met Kate (the Services Our Way Aboriginal Service Support Specialist), it changed my whole life... Just being able to talk to her.... People don't realise how hard it is to get where you want to go, and I have respect for someone who listens and who I can talk to."

5

Better responding to
older people
experiencing
homelessness in
NSW

Role of the Commonwealth Government

NSW would welcome the opportunity to deliver further projects through its housing agencies and partners in the Community Housing Provider and NGO sector, if the necessary capital and recurrent funds are made available.

Older people should be able to transition through tiered care levels in the home (social, affordable or private) that suits their need if appropriate ageing in place support is in place and where possible seek to avoid the premature transition to residential aged care facilities.

With the increasing number of older people living in social housing, NSW would welcome engagement with the Commonwealth on support needs and the range of housing options available to older people. For example, new models or independent living options with integrated tiers of care could be delivered by the not-for-profit sector with appropriate levels of Commonwealth investment. Housing models could include congregate accommodation and core and cluster accommodation that are integrated with tiered care arrangements.

Aboriginal Elders seeking to age on Country and within their own community require a holistic, culturally appropriate, and culturally safe healthy ageing program. This creates a need for specific community-based ageing-in-place housing products that reduce the need for institutional aged care, and a greater need for culturally appropriate housing for the growing cohort of Aboriginal Elders.

The Commonwealth government has had little engagement with states and territories on ways to address increasing homelessness and falling housing affordability.

There has been no real increase in funding under the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA) since 2011.^{xxxii} In addition, the Commonwealth Government rejected a finding of the bipartisan Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs Inquiry into Homelessness in Australia^{xxxiii} that the Commonwealth “in consultation with state, territory and local governments, develop and implement a ten-year national strategy on homelessness”.

The NHHA is shortly due to be re-negotiated and the new Agreement commence in July 2023. The NSW Government’s recommendations to the Commonwealth Government for the NHHA re-negotiation include:

- The Commonwealth must fully fund its obligations to older Australians and people with disability, including those living in state government housing.
- The NHHA must reflect and be resourced to respond to the broader socio-economic context that drives need for social housing and homelessness services including income levels, employment and educational opportunities and the adequacy of funding and service levels in health, disability services and for senior Australians.
- The NHHA must reflect the accountabilities of all Parties to ensure sustainable social housing and specialist homelessness systems that respond to community need.
- The NHHA must specifically address Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing demand and need, align to Closing the Gap outcomes, and ensure commensurate resourcing is provided.
- Dedicated funding is required to support people who have been homeless to sustain long-term housing.
- Dedicated funding is required to increase the stock of social and affordable housing and quality of existing dwellings.
- Commonwealth Rent Assistance should be reviewed, including consideration of extending access to public housing tenants.
- Commonwealth taxation and funding settings that constrain housing supply should be reviewed with the intention to modify where appropriate.

Accurate data underpins evidence-based responses

The NSW Government understands that effective responses to housing need and homelessness rely on accurate data and evaluation. Improved understanding of who is affected by homelessness in NSW and what works to ensure they have stable housing is key to both the NSW Homelessness Strategy and the Premier's Priority to reduce street homelessness.

As noted in Section 4, the Premier's Priority to reduce street sleeping by 50 per cent by 2025 is breaking through barriers to persistent rough sleeping through gathering accurate data about the number of people experiencing street sleeping.

As noted in Section 2, DCJ commissioned analytics and actuarial consultancy Taylor Fry to complete detailed analysis on the pathways that lead to homelessness. This research was a key commitment under the NSW Homelessness Strategy.

The linked dataset created for the Pathways to Homelessness report is one of the most comprehensive datasets related to homelessness in NSW, covering 202,927 people who accessed SHS in NSW from 1 July 2011 to 30 June 2017. DCJ is now working to update the data and make it an enduring dataset.

DCJ is currently building the evidence base through the NSW Homelessness Strategy to generate sufficient evidence for a cost benefit analysis to support future service delivery and improve outcomes for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness, including older people. The evaluation of the Strategy will have broader benefits across DCJ and other government agencies, in providing high quality data on program performance linked to client outcomes, and cost effectiveness in terms of the resources used and the outcomes achieved.

NSW is also working with the Commonwealth and other states and territories to improve homelessness data reporting under the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA). The NHHA Data Improvement Plan (DIP) has been agreed by all jurisdictions and aims to improve the completeness, quality and comparability of homelessness data across states and territories. A barrier to progressing data improvement initiatives has been the lack of dedicated resources to support these data improvement initiatives. At present, the DIP has committed funding contributions from the Commonwealth matched by States and Territories on a population basis to support data improvement activities. However, these funds are earmarked for activities primarily completed by AIHW. While this is welcome and necessary, it does not recognise the substantial level of input required from jurisdictions to support AIHW to complete this work.

NSW Homelessness Strategy 2018-2023

The NSW Government is committed to building on national and international best practice, and a process of continuous review and evaluation to identify, implement and scale up effective initiatives.

The Homelessness Strategy is based on international and local evidence of what works to prevent, reduce and address homelessness. This includes taking account of lessons learned from evaluations of the previous strategy, the Homelessness Action Plan 2009–2014, and of feedback from broad stakeholder consultations.

There were existing gaps in the available evidence base which made it difficult for the Department to develop a holistic, long-term state-wide solution to homelessness. The Strategy aims to fill some of the evidence gaps, to identify the best interventions for broader roll out across the state.

The Audit Office NSW tabled its final report on Responses to Homelessness on Friday 4 June 2021. The report assessed how effectively the NSW Government is responding to homelessness through the NSW Homelessness Strategy 2018-2023.

DCJ has developed an action plan in response to the recommendations, which includes:

- Using data and evidence identified through the strategy actions, individual program evaluations and the overarching Strategy evaluation to inform the development of the next Strategy business case
- Establishing and sustaining governance arrangements that enable a wide range of input from stakeholders
- Developing the Aboriginal Specialist Homelessness Services Sector Development Action Plan to expand the role for Aboriginal organisations and communities in the design and delivery of homelessness services

- Evaluating the Together Home program and drawing on external reviews of the COVID-19 response to integrate lessons learned into future practice
- Continuing work to develop and implement measures to collect client outcomes data and feedback, including progressive implementation of the Specialist Homelessness Services Outcomes Framework and tools.

Monitoring of progress towards implementing the action plan is conducted quarterly by the Internal Audit Unit (IAU). The most recent progress report identified that all actions due by 31 December 2021 had been completed on time and as intended.

The NSW Homelessness Strategy evaluation will monitor and report outcomes over time across the seven domains of the NSW Government Human Services Outcomes Framework. The evaluation is a fundamental component of the Strategy as it will assess both the effectiveness of the Strategy in achieving its objectives and the effectiveness of the programs in the Strategy to improve client outcomes. It will have a particular focus on older people, people sleeping rough, people experiencing repeat or chronic homelessness, people experiencing DFV, young people, and Aboriginal people and communities.

6

Appendix 1– NSW strategies

NSW Government housing and homelessness strategies

Ageing Well in NSW: Seniors Strategy 2021-2031

Action 3 as part of the Ageing Well in NSW: Action Plan 2021-2022 aims to create ageing and social and affordable housing through the Homelessness Strategy 2018-2023. Under Action 3 trials of smaller units to house older women in financial hardship are being undertaken, stemming from the preference of these women to have their own secure homes.

Action 32 of the Ageing Well in NSW: Action Plan 2021-2022 is focused on preventing homelessness through career upskilling. DCJ works with TAFE NSW in their Career Pathways Employability Skills (CPES) program to create Work Opportunities for Women (30s, 40s, 50s). The target group is mature aged women (30s, 40s, and 50s) who have been out of work for a significant length of time.

Housing 2041: NSW Housing Strategy

In May 2021, the NSW Government released Housing 2041, the first housing strategy for the State. Housing 2041 embodies goals and ambitions to deliver better housing and considers all housing types and tenures, from crisis to social and affordable housing, to private rental and specialist housing, to home ownership.

The Strategy sets a 20-year vision to ensure 'NSW will have housing that supports security, comfort, independence, and choice for all people at all stages of their lives'. This unified vision came from within and beyond the Government and was shaped through consultation with housing experts from across the sector. It has four pillars: supply, diversity, affordability, and resilience.

Premier's Priority to reduce street homelessness

On 26 June 2019, the NSW Government committed to reducing street homelessness in NSW by 50 per cent by 2025. The Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) is the lead agency responsible for delivering this priority. DCJ is committed to reducing street homelessness by focusing on initiatives to:

- collect and use better data to ensure we deliver the right kind of support to where they are needed most
- engage more directly and frequently with people who are experiencing street homelessness and ensuring they have a pathway to secure, stable and long-term housing
- build on and invest in prevention and early intervention.

NSW Homelessness Strategy 2018-2023

The NSW Homelessness Strategy 2018-2023 sets out the NSW Government's plan to address homelessness focussing on prevention responses to address the root causes of homelessness, and early intervention to reduce the longer-term impact of homelessness.

The strategy has three focus areas:

- prevention and early intervention
- better access to support and services
- an integrated, person-centred system.

The strategy creates a framework for collective action so fewer people experience homelessness, more people find secure places to live, and more people are empowered to tackle the issues that put them at risk of homelessness.

The strategy relies on accountability across government so all agencies, including DCJ, NSW Health and NSW Department of Education share responsibility for preventing homelessness.

Strong Family, Strong Communities (2018-2028)

Strong Family, Strong Communities is a 10-year strategy to improve the wellbeing of Aboriginal families and communities through housing. It aims to ensure all Aboriginal people in NSW have equal access to, and choice in, affordable housing. Strong Family, Strong Communities has Aboriginal culture at the centre of all activity, building the cultural appropriateness of service delivery, strengthening the capacity and sustainability of ACHPs. The strategy also has a strong focus on Aboriginal-led co-design as a vehicle to sustain tenancies and improve early intervention, education and employment supports.

Future Directions for Social Housing in NSW (2016-2025)

Future Directions is a 10 year plan to drive better outcomes for social housing tenants. The strategy has a focus on supporting people's independence so that social housing helps break the cycle of disadvantage. It aims to deliver more homes, better places, and a better experience for social housing tenants.

End notes

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- ^{viii} AIHW Specialist Homelessness Services Supplementary Tables – Historical tables 2011-12 to 2020-21
- ^{ix} AIHW, Specialist Homelessness Services Annual Report 2020-21, Table CLIENTS.1: Clients and support periods, by age and sex, 2020-21.
- ^x Australian Human Rights Commission, Older Women's Risk of Homelessness: Background Paper, 2019
- ^{xi} AIHW, Specialist Homelessness Services Annual Report 2020-21, Historical data tables.
- ^{xii} DCJ administrative data
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- ^{xv} HOMES/EDW as at 31 March 2022
- ^{xvi} DCJ, Pathways to Homelessness, 2022
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- ^{xxvii} ABS as cited in AIHW, Australian and Torres Strait Islander people: a focus report on housing and homelessness, 2019, p1
- ^{xxviii} Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Australian and Torres Strait Islander people: a focus report on housing and homelessness, 2019, p1
- ^{xxix} AIHW, Specialist homelessness services annual report 2020–21, Older clients
- ^{xxx} DCJ administrative data
- ^{xxxi} DCJ Commissioning Statement dataset 2019-20
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