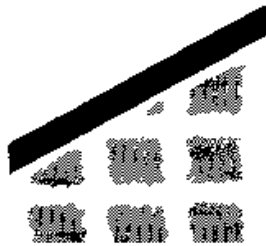


GOOD PRACTICE FOR IMPROVING DISADVANTAGED SINGLE YOUNG PEOPLE'S ACCESS TO COMMUNITY HOUSING.



**COMMUNITY HOUSING
FEDERATION OF AUSTRALIA**



**NATIONAL YOUTH
COALITION FOR HOUSING**

**A Joint Initiative of The National Youth Coalition for Housing (NYCH) and
The Community Housing Federation of Australia (CHFA).**

Written by Sean Ling

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Services.**

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Special recognition must be given to the multitude of agencies (including housing providers, peak bodies and State Housing Authorities) that participated in this project. It is hoped that this report will provide a valuable source of information on the housing needs of young people as well as practical examples of how to increase and improve the community housing response to disadvantaged, single young people.

Lastly a special thank you must go to the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services for providing the funding to undertake this project.

DISCLAIMER

While every effort has been made to ensure that the information contained within this report was accurate at the time of writing, no responsibility will be taken by NYCH, CHFA, FaCS or the project consultant for any inaccuracies contained herein.

Community housing providers are encouraged to seek expert legal and/or financial advice before acting on any recommendations or advice contained within this report.



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GUIDE TO FINDING IDEAS FOR GOOD PRACTICE

Please note that ideas for good practice are contained at the end of each section in chapters four through six.

These provide readers with an indication of strategies that have been developed and implemented by community housing providers across the country. These respond to the range of difficulties young people experience both accessing the sector and maintaining tenancies.

**THE NATIONAL YOUTH COALITION FOR HOUSING**

The National Youth Coalition for Housing (NYCH) is an Australia-wide peak organisation that has represented the needs of homeless and 'at risk' young people to both Commonwealth and State/Territory Governments since 1982. NYCH federates all state/territory Youth Accommodation Coalitions that are in turn made up of SAAP youth services, young people, youth and housing workers and concerned individuals. Consequently NYCH is widely regarded as the national representative of the youth housing sector.

In September 1998, The Australian Federation of Homelessness Organisations (AFHO) was established to provide a more coordinated and effective national response to issues relating to homelessness. As a founding member of AFHO, NYCH continues to highlight the specific needs of young homeless people within a wider policy framework. This includes coverage of housing and homelessness issues relating to: women and families escaping domestic and/or family violence; single adults; and families generally.

THE COMMUNITY HOUSING FEDERATION OF AUSTRALIA

The Community Housing Federation of Australia (CHFA) is the peak organisation representing the views of the community housing sector nationally. CHFA was established in 1996 as a federation of the state/territory peak community housing organisations. Other national housing organisations are associate members of CHFA. Consequently CHFA is able to represent the views of community housing providers across Australia.

CHFA works toward the development of the national community housing system through the promotion of community housing to government, the non-government sector, and the general community. CHFA is a member of the National Community Housing Forum (NCHF), a forum with government, non-government and community housing providers, which provides the opportunity to work towards the development of national infrastructure with all stakeholders.

THE COMMONWEALTH DEPARTMENT OF FAMILY AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

The Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services not only had the foresight to recognise the value of this project but also provided valuable feedback throughout the project via its representatives on the Project Advisory Committee.

PROJECT CONSULTANT

This report was written and prepared by Sean Ling of *Sean Ling Social Research Solutions* in conjunction with the above Project Partners and the following Advisory Committee Members.

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THE REASON FOR UNDERTAKING THIS STUDY

This project examines the feasibility of community housing as an option for young people between the ages of 16 and 21 years in response to the difficulties experienced by this population group in accessing appropriate longer term housing options.

As a result, many find the only option is to seek crisis and/or transitional accommodation via the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP). Given that SAAP accommodation is linked to support, for young tenants with underdeveloped independent living skills and/or support issues, the program offers a highly appropriate housing response. However due to the transitional focus of SAAP there is the need to ensure young people are able to 'exit' the sector when support needs have been addressed or they have stayed in the program for the maximum period allowable.

Given the benefits offered by community housing there is a growing government emphasis on the sector to provide a pathway out of SAAP accommodation. This was articulated most recently at a national level within the *Draft National Homelessness Strategy Discussion Paper*.

PROJECT TARGET GROUP

The project focuses principally on young single people between the ages of 16 to 21 years who are unable to live with their families or carers and are therefore seeking independent accommodation. It was decided not to include coverage of young single parents in this study given the fact that they often enjoy greater access to housing.

While the principle project target group is 16 to 21 year olds, coverage is also given to issues relating to young single people between the ages of 15 and 25 years to reflect commonly accepted definitions of 'youth' within the community and relevant programs.

PROJECT OUTCOMES

The project sought to identify the current community housing sector's response to young people exiting SAAP accommodation including the identification of case examples that respond well to the project target group. This information is then used to provide the basis of a good practice framework to enhance the sector's capacity to house the target group.

KEY FINDINGS

The Benefits Of Community Housing

Community housing offers young people a range of opportunities and advantages over other housing options such as private or public rental. The project found that the main benefits of the sector include:

- Increased flexibility.
- Greater capacity to resolve problems before they impact on housing.
- Greater affordability of properties offered.
- Access to better quality stock and choice over location.
- Security of tenure.
- Tenant participation.
- Access to support.
- Accountability and integration with local communities.

A full discussion of the relative benefits of community housing is provided in Chapter 3.

Factors That Impede Young People's Access To The Sector

Currently young people comprise only 7% of community housing tenants nationally. When reviewing available literature and surveying the sector it was evident that young people face a range of overt and covert barriers to securing community housing.

The project found that the range of overt barriers to accessing the sector include:

- Perceptions of the relative strains of housing young tenants.
- The ability to provide/ensure support is available when required.
- The ability to manage the impact of housing young people.
- Awareness of young people's housing need and the difficulties they face.

Perceptions Of The Relative Strains Of Housing Young Tenants

Given the range of age related issues faced, young people are often regarded as a 'high' need tenant group. When there is a perceived mismatch between available resources and demand, there may be reluctance to house 'high' need groups given the impact of unsuitable tenancies on the provider and other residents. In order to avoid suitable young applicants being overlooked allocation decisions must be based on an awareness of the actual (rather than perceived) needs of the individual.

The Ability To Provide/Ensure Support Is Available When Required

The ability to provide or link tenants to support is a key consideration for young people who lack the skills to sustain independent living or who find themselves in either housing 'difficulty' or 'crisis' (see Chapter 2 for an analysis of young people's housing needs).

The project identified a number of key areas that will need to be addressed in order to rectify the difficulties community housing providers often experience linking tenants to support and ensuring that support is available for the period required. These include:

- Providing greater flexibility in the permitted 'length of stay' for SAAP clients to ensure multiple and/or complex needs are adequately addressed before exiting the program.
- Developing a greater outreach capacity in key support programs.
- Establishing more effective linkages including Referral Protocols and Support Service Agreements between community housing providers and these programs.
- Avoiding inappropriate referrals to SAAP by increasing the knowledge of other potential support programs.
- Increasing the community housing sector's access to brokerage funding to purchase support if required.
- The inclusion of 'exit' support to assist young people make the transition from supported accommodation to independence in SAAP client 'exit' and case management plans.

The Ability To Manage The Impact Of Housing Young People

The project found that housing young people can have a considerable impact on viability due to diminished rent return and greater overheads resulting from increased property damage and rent arrears. The project highlights the need for:

- Greater access to recurrent subsidies.
- Property and/or tenancy management fees to reflect the increased cost of housing tenants in the target group.
- The ability to absorb these costs through the process of cross subsidisation.

The life stage development, support needs and level of skill development of young tenants often means there is a limited willingness and capacity to participate in activities required of tenants. This is a key consideration for housing co-ops given the reliance on active participation on the part of members. Key findings include the need for:

- Flexible participation requirements that account for the needs, desires and abilities of young people.
- Adequate access to 'in-house' or external support to facilitate greater participation levels.

Awareness Of Young People's Housing Need And The Difficulties Faced

Community housing providers are unlikely to increase stock targeting or allocation to young people unless they are aware of the range of housing needs that exist among young people as well as the difficulties experienced accessing housing. The project highlights the need for access to greater information in this area through:

- Wider access to and participation in training on working with young people.
- The inclusion of issues pertaining to young people in existing training offered to the sector.
- Improved data collection practice to identify demand levels and demography.
- The use of information networks and peak bodies.

See Chapter 4 for discussion on the overt barriers faced as well as good practice strategies developed to overcome these barriers.

Apart from the overt barriers faced, a number of potential covert barriers were also identified, including:

- The availability of appropriate stock.
- Vacancy rates and waiting times to be housed.
- Difficulty in being contacted when a vacancy arises.
- The relevance of community housing to young people
- Lack of knowledge of community housing
- Age based eligibility criteria.
- Low incomes and an inability to cover household establishment and ongoing costs.
- Waiting lists.
- Targeting and allocation practices
- Housing and support are culturally inappropriate.

The Availability Of Appropriate Stock

The relatively small size of the sector suggests that significant stock growth will be required before the community housing is able to accommodate greater numbers of young people. Further the level of capital funding available to the sector indicates that governments will need to seek alternative funding sources and strategies to effect required growth. A range of strategies have been highlighted including joint ventures, stock transfers and headleasing.

Given the fact that much of the current community housing stock is 'family' sized there is an urgent need for greater numbers of 1 and 2 bedroom properties. As providers often report a higher incidence of property damage when housing young people, the scarcity of purpose built and modified properties for young people is a key area of concern.

Vacancy Rates And Waiting Times To Be Housed

Vacancy rates in the sector are currently very low, indicating both a shortage of properties as well as the financial imperative to ensure occupancy rates are as close to capacity as possible. Naturally low vacancy rates often result in lengthy waiting times to be housed and therefore the ability to effect a timely housing response is limited.

Due to the characteristic transience of young people, lengthy waiting times often result in housing providers experiencing difficulties contacting applicants when a vacancy arises. As a result the report highlights the need for providers to:

- Provide young applicants with the contact details of other potential housing options in the local area.
- Remain in contact with young applicants on the waiting list.

The Relevance Of Community Housing To Young People

When reviewing available literature, it is evident that very little research has been conducted to identify young people's housing preferences. Given that young people are not an homogenous group however, it is important that community housing is able to offer a level of choice in terms of:

- Housing type and location.
- Tenant participation requirements.
- Duration of tenure.

Increasing The Knowledge of Community Housing

Naturally young people will not view community housing as a potential option unless they are aware of the sector, the benefits offered and how to apply. While providers rarely need to advertise to fill vacancies, promotional activities offer significant advantages in terms of:

- Allowing potential applicants to make an informed decision regarding their suitability.
- Minimising inappropriate referrals.

The Impact Of Age Based Eligibility Criteria

While young people in the project target are not excluded from the sector on the basis of state based eligibility criteria, the level of participation afforded to under 18 year olds is limited in Tasmania, Queensland, Victoria, and South Australia by legislation covering membership entitlements.

Low Incomes And An Inability To Cover Household Establishment And Ongoing Costs

Young people often experience difficulties meeting household establishment and ongoing costs as a result of:

- High levels of unemployment.
- The reduced entitlement offered under the Youth Allowance.
- Exposure to low waged, low skilled and casualised employment opportunities.

Consequently the ability to secure and sustain independent living is a key concern for many young people. Further the low incomes of young people may have a significant effect on housing providers and therefore act as a disincentive to house tenants in the project target. The report highlights the need for:

- The provision of basic household items to minimise establishment costs.
- Linkages to financial assistance programs such as the Commonwealth Emergency Relief program and Housing Establishment Funds as offered in Victoria.
- The capacity to pay related costs in instalments via Centrepay for tenants receiving social security payments.

Targeting and Allocation Decisions

These have a considerable impact on young people's access to the sector. As the vast majority of

housing providers base allocation decisions on applicant need, the fact that young single people are often regarded as having a lower level of need compared to older people and families may in part account for access difficulties.

The fact that stock allocations to young applicants exceeds the level of stock targeted to this group is encouraging, as is the level of preparedness to increase both stock targeting and allocation to young people demonstrated by project participants. It is evident however that there is a discrepancy between the proportion of stock and organisations targeted at young people within the sector. The ability to increase allocations to young people will be reliant on the ability of providers to manage the impact of housing young people. Once strategies have been implemented in this area, providers may be more willing to increase the proportion of stock targeted at young people.

Ensuring The Cultural Appropriateness Of Housing

Project participants outlined a number of areas requiring further development before the housing response offered is culturally appropriate for Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders and people from non-English speaking backgrounds. These include:

- Improved access to interpreter, translation and cultural support services
- Training in working with diverse communities
- A greater understanding of relevant cultural beliefs and practices
- Increased access to specialist support
- Greater linkages to cultural groups to promote the sector, gain an insight into demand levels within these communities as well as gaining a stronger understanding of cultural sensitivity issues.

Assisting Young Tenants To Maintain Community Housing Tenancies

Apart from identifying good practice strategies to improving young people's access to community housing, the project also examined strategies implemented to assist young people to sustain tenancies. These include:

- Undertaking adequate induction
- Assisting tenants to manage problem visitors
- Minimising the incidence and likelihood of property damage
- Addressing financial difficulties
- Resolving disputes
- Managing drug and alcohol related issues

Readers are referred to Chapter 6 for a full discussion of these strategies.

The Ability To Improve Access To The Sector

The experiences of community housing providers who currently accommodate young people present a range of innovative 'good practice' ideas that may be adopted by the sector generally to improve access and assist young people to maintain their tenancy. As many of the barriers faced result from either service practice or resourcing levels it is imperative that governments work in partnership with the sector to address these barriers.

It is hoped that by highlighting good practice strategies community housing providers will be more willing and able to increase stock targeting and allocation to disadvantaged single young people.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1/ That SAAP providers be encouraged and resourced to provide the support required by young tenants when exiting intensive supported accommodation to independent living within community housing as an integral part of tenant's exit and case management plans.



- 2/ That the NDCA collect data on the numbers of young people exiting SAAP accommodation to community housing.
- 3/ That the NCHF be funded to hold a National Seminar for peak bodies, state administrators and relevant youth services and advocates to discuss strategies to promote good practice within the community housing sector.
- 4/ That CHFA contact all state peaks with good practice units to consult on how the good practice framework contained in this report could be integrated into their advice, training and materials.
- 5/ That the National Accreditation Council consider the good practice framework contained in this report when reviewing national service standards.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

1.1 PROJECT OUTCOMES

The project had three outcomes, namely:

- 1/ To identify the community housing sector's current response to young single people exiting SAAP accommodation.
- 2/ To document case examples that respond well to the target group.
- 3/ To develop a good practice framework to enhance the community housing sector's capacity to house the target group.

1.2 DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT

This project was designed in three discreet stages, covering all major stakeholders ie.

Stage 1/ The community housing sector

Stage 2/ Young people

Stage 3/ The youth SAAP sector

This report represents the completion of stage 1, that is working with the community housing sector.

1.3 STAGE 1 OBJECTIVE

To investigate and develop innovative workable community housing responses to homeless single young people's housing needs.

1.4 PROJECT TARGET GROUP

The project focuses principally on young people between the ages of 16 and 21 years who are living independently of their parent/s or carer and who are seeking accommodation with neither a partner nor dependent children.

The range of issues faced by young people are often compounded by early life stage development and a lack of independent living skills. Further many young people in this group are coming to terms with changing family and financial structures as they seek to live independently.

Housing options for young people in the target group are very limited. While young people represent 36.6% of all SAAP clients, only 7% are able to access public housing after exiting the program and consequently comprise the lowest percentage of public housing tenants.

While the majority (69.2%) of independent young people reside in the private rental market¹, this may reflect an inability to access other housing options. While private rental accommodation

offers greater mobility and choice over location, young people face a range of difficulties accessing the market and maintaining tenancies as a result of:

- Discrimination faced².
- Inadequate incomes to meet household establishment costs and to cover ongoing living expenses.
- Inadequate financial assistance via Rent Allowance.
- Rental increases are disproportionate to increases in social security payments or salary.
- Lack of security of tenure.
- The necessity to live in group housing in order to save money.
- Lack of knowledge of tenant support services, tenant rights and dispute resolution mechanisms.

Young people comprise only 7% of community housing tenants nationally³. It is evident that many young people also face considerable difficulty accessing the sector as will be demonstrated in Chapters 4 and 5. This project aims to highlight the needs of these young people as well as innovative good practice strategies, that may be implemented to improve their access to the sector. Due to the difficulties experienced in establishing and maintaining independent accommodation, young people are characteristically more transient than other age groups. In the 1996 census, the Australian Bureau of Statistics found that 53% of young people lived at a different address than they did 5 years previously⁴. This transience may also be the result of the requirement to relocate in order to secure education, employment and training opportunities.

While the principle focus is on 16-21 year olds, the project also includes coverage of 15 to 25 year olds to reflect the commonly accepted definition of 'young people' as applied by both community housing providers and relevant authorities.

1.5 PROJECT METHODOLOGY

This project stage comprised:

- 1/ A Literature Review to examine coverage of young people's access to, and experiences of, the community housing sector.
- 2/ A phone survey of 4 agencies per state/territory representing a range of management models and geographical localities in order to compare issues raised within the literature with current service considerations.
- 3/ A written survey of the community housing sector in Australia to further examine these issues and identify examples of 'good practice' within the sector.
- 4/ A survey of all State/Territory Housing Authorities to gain information on a range of issues relevant to the environment in which community housing operates.
- 5/ A National Workshop to finalise the material presented in this report. This workshop was attended by

	Community Housing Association	Housing Co-op	Local Government	Church Based	Other Welfare/ Non-Profit	TOTAL
ACT	5	3	0	1	1	10
NSW	48	16	20	24	34	142
NT	0	0	0	1	3	4
QLD	40	3	14	15	21	93
SA	14	15	1	3	8	41
TAS	5	5	5	3	9	27
VIC	35	8	18	26	42	129
WA	18	5	14	5	12	54
TOTAL	165	55	72	78	130	500

The number of management models and therefore agencies who actually participated in the survey is outlined in Table 2.

a number of peak representatives (including NYCH, CHFA, NCHF), agency representatives and staff from the Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS).

	Church Based	Local Government	Housing Co-op	Community Housing Association	Other Welfare/ Non-Profit	SAAP	TOTAL
ACT	0	0	1	1	0	1	3
NSW	2	0	4	20	6	5	37
NT	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
QLD	0	0	7	10	1	2	20
SA	1	0	1	5	1	1	9
TAS	1	0	3	1	0	0	5
VIC	4	1	1	4	3	5	18
WA	0	2	1	3	0	0	6
TOTAL	8	3	18	45	11	14	99

1.6 PROJECT PARTICIPANTS

Surveys were sent to a total of 404 generalist community housing providers across the country. The number of surveys sent to agencies in each state/territory was reflective of:

Agencies	Number
Housing Association / SAAP agency	4
Church Based Organisation / SAAP agency	3
Other Welfare / SAAP agency	2
Housing Association / Church Based Organisation	2
Co-op / Housing Association	1
Housing Association / Other Welfare	1
Local Government / SAAP agency	1
TOTAL	14

- The relative contribution each state/territory makes to the total number of community housing providers nationally⁵.
- The proportion of management models represented in each state/territory.
- The proportion of regional/rural and metropolitan agencies in each state/territory.

	Large Rural	Other Rural/ Remote	Capital City	Other Metropolitan Centre	TOTAL
ACT	0	0	2	0	2
NSW	8	9	12	4	33
NT	0	1	0	0	1
QLD	7	2	6	5	20
SA	0	1	4	1	6
TAS	1	0	2	1	4
VIC	5	0	5	5	15
WA	1	1	3	1	6
TOTAL	22	14	34	17	87

96 youth targeted community housing providers were also included in the project, thus creating an overall sample of 500 agencies.

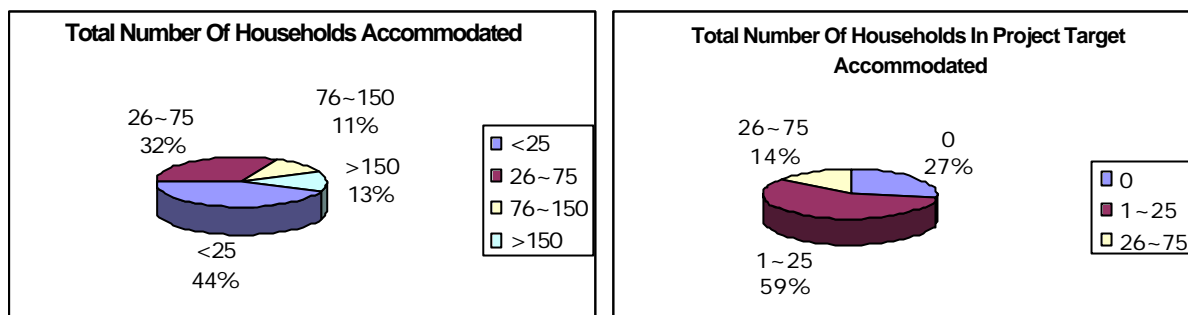
Table 1. Number of Surveys Sent to Each State/Territory by Management Model

Table 2. Number of Actual Participants Per State/Territory by Management Model

Fourteen agencies reported their service is a combination of management models and thus gave a multiple response when identifying their management model, thus the discrepancy between the number of management models represented (99) and the total number of agencies (85) participating. The breakdown of these agencies is outlined in Table 3.

Table 3. Agencies Identifying With More Than One Management Model

The survey sample also attempted to provide an accurate reflection of the relative proportion of agencies



located in a range of geographical locations in each state/territory. Table 4 outlines the relative location of participating agencies.

Table 4. Location of Participants By State/Territory

Two Queensland agencies that border on 'other metro' and 'large rural centre' gave multiple responses to this section thus the discrepancy between the number of responses and the total number of participating agencies.

1.7 SIZE OF ORGANISATIONS PARTICIPATING

The definition and categories of organisational size were derived from the NCHF Mapping project. Consequently organisational size was determined on the basis of the total number of households accommodated.

Figure 1.

Figure 2.

It is evident from from Figure 2. that the vast majority (59%) of agencies participating in the project housed between 1 and 25 young people in the project target group.

1.8 PROBLEMS EXPERIENCED WITH DEVELOPING THE PROJECT SAMPLE

Without an adequate, up to date national database of community housing providers, it was difficult to ensure that the total sample was reflective of the composition of the community housing sector nationally.

While contact lists were requested from each relevant state/territory peak body, not all lists were made available to the project. Additional contacts were provided via the 'Low Income, Aboriginal and Crisis Accommodation Providers' List developed for the purposes of the AFHO/CHFA GST Start Up Training Project.

Access to the National Organisation of Aboriginal Housing (NOAH) contact list was not provided and therefore the project sample does not include as strong a coverage of agencies targeted at Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders as desired. Further, given tight project timelines, there was insufficient time available to send copies of the survey to state/territory based Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peak housing bodies for distribution to their members. This would have provided a stronger coverage of the issues pertaining to this segment of the community. Despite these



difficulties, 70.6% of participating organisations currently house Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders.

It was decided that agencies which target older and/or frail people would be excluded from the project sample on the basis that they are unlikely to include young people within their tenant population nor have experience in housing young tenants. While the project attempted to avoid the inclusion of SAAP agencies in the sample, it was evident that a number of community housing providers also operate SAAP programs and that a number of SAAP programs provide longer term tenure for tenants. These agencies were included in the project sample.

1.9 ACTUAL PROJECT SAMPLE SIZE AND RESPONSE RATE

A total of 31 agencies that returned the survey were considered ineligible on the basis that they were either SAAP agencies and/or did not provide medium to long term housing. A further 16 surveys were returned as undeliverable as a result of agencies either changing address or ceasing operations. Consequently the potential total number of eligible responses was 453 agencies. A total of 85 community housing providers participated in the project. Given the reduced sample size, the actual eligible response rate for the project overall was 18.8%.

YOUNG PEOPLES' HOUSING NEEDS

The National Youth Housing Strategy⁶ provides perhaps the most useful categorisation of young people's housing need. Accordingly the strategy identifies three principle categories of need, namely:

1. Those with 'minimal' need.
2. Those in housing difficulty.
3. Those in housing crisis.

2.1 THOSE WITH MINIMAL NEED

Young people who fall into this category characteristically have the independent living skills and income to live independently. They may however require information and referral support to identify the range of housing options available to them. A lack of rental history (and consequently references) may act as a significant barrier to these young people accessing housing options.

2.2 THOSE IN HOUSING DIFFICULTY

Young people often experience housing difficulty for a number of reasons, though mainly as a result of inadequate incomes.

From available Australian Bureau of Statistics data, it is evident that 19.1%⁷ of people between the ages of 15 and 19 years and 11% of people between the ages of 20 and 24 years are unemployed or not in the workforce. Despite varying unemployment rates across the country, young people are more likely to be unemployed than any other age group, other than those approaching retirement age.

Exposure to low waged, low skilled and casualised work⁸, results in a lack of income security among young people which effects their ability to secure, establish and maintain housing while meeting other living expenses.

The main form of income support available to young people is Youth Allowance (YA). While the rate of payment offered under the YA is approximately \$60 per fortnight less than other social security payments, young people living independently may face similar expenses to older independents.

For those living in remote areas, the cost of independent living can be considerably higher than in metropolitan areas yet rates of payment offered under the Remote Area Allowance (a supplement to other benefits) have continued to diminish⁹.

The capacity to save for household establishment costs while on the YA is limited by the practice of income testing payments. Consequently both ACOSS¹⁰ and AFHO¹¹ have called for a reduction in the income test taper to avoid young people on the YA falling into, and remaining, within a poverty trap that can act as a pathway into homelessness.

Apart from the impact of low incomes, young people in 'housing difficulty' often find they require support to:

- Address the reasons for and consequences of not being able to live at home.
- Develop adequate independent living skills¹².
- Successfully make the transition from supported accommodation or homelessness to independent living.

Elizabeth Matka in *Local Youth Housing Strategies* concludes that people in housing difficulty require:



...secure low-cost housing and some short term support to ensure that housing tenancy is maintained, as well as help with their other difficulties. If these needs can be met their prospects for independent living are good. If they are not met, this group risks slipping from housing difficulty into housing crisis¹³.

2.3 THOSE IN HOUSING CRISIS

Young people in this group also face the problems associated with inadequate incomes and independent living skills. The distinguishing factor of young people in this category is that these problems tend to be compounded by personal difficulties such as family trauma, mental illness, or drug and alcohol misuse.

Young people in this category are more likely to be homeless, in unsuitable accommodation or in SAAP accommodation, than those in the above categories. From available SAAP data, it is evident that the majority of young people seeking SAAP support did so as a result of family or relationship breakdown¹⁴. Those in housing crisis not only need support to address the above issues, but also to rectify issues that compound housing difficulty.

Matka suggests:

Response	Total Responses
Capacity to access support	13
Properties are more affordable	11
Tenure	10
Personal/ community development opportunities	8
Greater capacity to resolve problems before they impact on housing	7
Tenant participation	5
Better quality housing for the money	3
Greater choice of location of property	2
Better recreational facilities/ opportunities	1
Provides tenancy references	1
Total	61

ssue for this group is how to move out of the crisis cycle. 'Exit point' housing providing medium or even long term accommodation may not be readily available. Added to this, support workers are often tied to crisis accommodation, meaning that once a young person leaves the refuge the support is no longer available either. As a result, the transition from crisis care to independent living is very hard¹⁵.

2.4 CONCLUSION

While community housing is geared more toward meeting the housing needs of young people in category 1, with adequate access to support, a quality housing response may also be provided for young people in housing difficulty or crisis.

Given the often intense or multiple support needs of young people in the latter category, it may be more appropriate for them to be housed in SAAP until major issues requiring support have been addressed and regular daily functioning resumed.

Response	Total Responses
Flexibility in length of agreement	65
Flexibility in participation requirement	61
Flexibility in lease procedures	56
Flexibility across all three areas	47
0 Response	3

THE BENEFITS OFFERED BY COMMUNITY HOUSING

Community housing is widely regarded to provide tenants with a range of advantages not commonly available in other forms of housing such as the private rental market or public housing. These include:

- Increased flexibility.
- Greater capacity to resolve problems before they impact on housing.
- Greater affordability of properties offered.
- Access to better quality stock and choice over location.
- Security of tenure.
- Tenant participation.
- Access to support.
- Accountability and integration with local communities.

When asked what are the main benefits offered by community housing, participants in the phone survey generally concurred with the benefits outlined above. Their responses are provided in Table 5.

Table 5. The Benefits Of Community Housing

Given that there has been considerable coverage given to the benefits of community housing in available literature, only a summary will be given below.

3.1 INCREASED FLEXIBILITY

Community Housing is not tied to a narrow range of existing and established approaches; it can offer options not available elsewhere and can vary these according to local conditions and resources¹⁶.

Given the range of models, participation requirements and housing types offered, community housing can offer young people a medium to long term housing response that reflects their interests, abilities and capacity to participate.

Organisations participating in the written survey were asked whether they were able to provide a level of flexibility in terms of length of tenancy agreement, participation requirements and lease procedures. Responses provided are outlined in Table 6.

Table 6. The Type Of Flexibility Offered

	Number Of Participants Charging Bond	Proportion of Total State Participants
ACT	0	0%
NSW	24	72.7%
NT	1	100%
QLD	8	44.4%
SA	6	100%
TAS	1	25%
VIC	2	13.3%
WA	6	100%
TOTAL	48	

This data provides strong support for the claim that community housing providers are able to provide a flexible service approach. This flexibility however may be limited by a range of service, funding and

Amount Charged	Number Of Participants
\$100 - \$200	9
\$201 - \$300	4
2 weeks subsidised rent	7
2-4 weeks subsidised rent	2
4 weeks subsidised rent	21
4 weeks rental market value	3
\$5 per week	1
Unspecified	1
TOTAL	48

legislative requirements as will be discussed in the following chapters.

3.2 GREATER CAPACITY TO RESOLVE PROBLEMS BEFORE THEY IMPACT ON HOUSING

Where resources and service practices allow, many community housing providers are able to offer a flexible approach to resolving issues that would potentially result in evictions from other housing forms. These include:

Rent Arrears

Tenants may be offered a choice of rent payment procedures to make payment as easy as possible and to allow for changing circumstances¹⁷. Organisations who undertake regular reviews of rental payments are able to identify potential financial difficulties and link tenants to support if required to address the reasons for financial difficulty and to establish payment plans¹⁸.

Often rent arrears are only pursued through the Small Claims Tribunal or the Residential Tenancies Authority when all other avenues of resolution including mediation, financial planning and payment plans have been unsuccessful.

Further information on how community housing providers manage the problem of rent arrears is provided in Section 4.3.

Disputes Between Tenants

Many organisations have developed dispute resolution procedures that focus on resolution, if possible, rather than eviction. Consequently, community housing organisations often encourage tenants to attempt to resolve the dispute themselves, offer mediation and/or conciliation and only

refer the matter to the Residential Tenancies Authority when all other avenues have been exhausted.

An analysis of dispute resolution procedures is provided in Section 6.8.

3.3 GREATER AFFORDABILITY

The vast majority of community housing tenants pay a set percentage of their income on rent. Rental payments usually equate to 20 – 25% of tenants' incomes. Consequently community housing tenants often pay considerably less than those in the private rental market.

Some providers establish a set rental level below the private rental market value, or means test rental charges up to a level equivalent to the private rental market value of the property.

Community housing providers may assist in providing essential household items if required¹⁹, thus providing valuable savings in terms of household establishment costs.

Not all community housing providers charge up front bonds, and those who do often allow the tenant to make regular instalments rather than paying the full sum up front. This is particularly important for young tenants on low incomes. Table 7 outlines the percentage of organisations in each state/territory that charge up front bonds.

Table 7. Number of Organisations Charging Bond Per State/Territory

Organisations who require bond payments were asked what the level of bond charged was. Their responses are provided in Table 8.

Table 8. Level of Bond Charged

It is evident that the most common response from community housing providers is to charge bond equivalent to 4 weeks rent at the subsidised level.

3.4 ACCESS TO BETTER QUALITY STOCK AND CHOICE OVER LOCATION

Given the subsidised nature of community housing the accommodation available is often superior to that which could be secured in the private rental market at a similar expense.

In some states, such as Queensland²⁰ and Tasmania²¹, the SHA has developed asset management guidelines to ensure that spot purchased housing is equal to, or better quality, than public housing stock.

Community housing organisations apply quality standards to stock headleased from the private rental market. Consequently tenants benefit from access to better quality stock than what, anecdotal evidence suggests, would otherwise be available to them if they were attempting to access the private rental market themselves. Headleasing also allows for a greater choice over location of properties. Given the need for housing to be in close proximity to:

- Education, training and employment options.
- Support services.
- Transport.
- Recreational facilities.

this is a significant advantage to tenants. Further flexibility over location may be offered by allowing

tenants to apply to move to another property within the portfolio of stock managed.

3.5 TENURE

It is evident that 83% of community housing properties nationally are intended for long term accommodation. Eleven percent of properties are intended for transitional or medium term tenancies²². Given the relative lack of security offered by private rental, the tenure offered by community housing is a significant advantage.

As a significant majority of project participants reported a capacity to provide flexibility in terms of the length of tenancy agreements (see Table 6), even if a young person is not seeking long term tenure, community housing may provide a quality housing response for the period required.

3.6 TENANT PARTICIPATION

Tenant participation is a key characteristic of community housing. Tenants are offered the opportunity to participate in activities broadly relating to property management and tenant selection, and in the case of some providers, organisational management.

Participation not only affords tenants a level of input and control over their housing but also offers the opportunity to develop a range of very useful skills and experiences.

In a study of young people's participation in community housing, Alice Thompson found that the main benefits of participation, as defined by young tenants and community housing workers include:

- *An increased sense of responsibility.*
- *An increased sense of community.*
- *Interpersonal skills.*
- *Social networks/ made new friends.*
- *An increased sense of ownership over own housing.*
- *Increased confidence/ self esteem.*
- *Learning meeting procedure²³.*

3.7 ACCESS TO SUPPORT

Community housing providers may attempt to link tenants to support if required to maintain stable tenancies. While this support is usually sourced from an external provider, some community housing providers also operate a SAAP program (as evidenced within the project sample) and therefore are able to offer support 'in-house.'

3.8 ACCOUNTABILITY AND INTEGRATION WITHIN LOCAL COMMUNITIES

There is often a strong emphasis on community connectedness among community housing providers. Consequently many organisations demonstrate a clear commitment to involving local communities (or communities of interest) in the planning and development of community housing.

Small scale organisations are often well placed to respond to the changing needs of the local community and to tap into local expertise and resources²⁴. Housing associations will often have members of the local community represented on their board of management, thus providing direct linkages with the wider community.

Networking between local services and community housing providers provides the basis for developing an integrated regional response to housing need.

3.9 BETTER RECREATIONAL FACILITIES

Many community housing providers organise social activities for residents or are able to link tenants to



local sporting bodies and opportunities.

3.10 PROVISION OF TENANCY REFERENCES

As outlined in Chapter 2, young people often experience difficulty accessing housing as a result of a lack of tenancy histories. Should young tenants wish to move into the private rental market, the experience gained in community housing, and the ability to provide references, may assist these young people to access the housing of their choice.

3.11 CONCLUSION

The range of benefits and opportunities offered by community housing

Causes of Difficulties	Number of Responses	% of Total Responses
Lack of suitable properties/ long waiting times	23	24.4%
Discrimination / preference to house those considered with higher need (eg. single parents etc)	16	17.0%
Lack of living/ social skills	10	10.6%
Behavioural problems (including problems with visitors, irresponsibility etc)	9	9.6%
Low incomes	8	8.5%
Hard to contact when vacancy arises	7	7.4%
Lack of support available	7	7.4%
Lack of knowledge of Community Housing	4	4.3%
Increased damage to properties	3	3.2%
Lack of references	3	3.2%
Lack of household items & personal belongings	2	2.1%
Participation expectations are based on adult requirements not those who are young and homeless	1	1.1%
No adult to sign lease	1	1.1%
Total organisations	69	
TOTAL RESPONSES	94	

Community housing combine to provide a highly unique housing response that can often be tailored to reflect tenant needs, abilities and desires. While the sector developed largely to meet the needs of older residents, many of the benefits offered are equally applicable to younger tenants. The ability to link tenants to support is a significant advantage for people in the project target group given that many require some level of support to either address personal support issues or to make the transition to independent living. Through participation in property management activities, young tenants are able to further develop independent living skills that provide the basis for stable and sustainable tenancies.

The ability to offer flexible solutions to issues that would otherwise result in eviction is particularly important given that young people are prone to make mistakes while they become familiar with the responsibilities associated with independent living. Given the difficulties experienced accessing other housing options, young people, if evicted from community housing, may find there are few other options available.

IMPROVING YOUNG PEOPLE’S ACCESS TO THE SECTOR – ADDRESSING THE OVERT BARRIERS FACED

Young people often experience difficulties accessing the community housing sector. This was strongly reported among organisations participating in the project surveys. Only 13 participants (15%) reported that young people do not experience access difficulties. The remaining reported difficulties were experienced for the following reasons:

Table 9 Reasons Given For Young People Experiencing Difficulties Applying For and Securing Community Housing

	1	2	3	4	5	No Response	TOTAL
Young people are harder to contact when vacancies arise	15	7	21	20	16	6	85
Young people are less interested in participating.	12	14	17	13	21	8	85
Young people are less likely to take care of a property.	15	15	26	16	8	5	85
Young people require greater support to live independently.	6	8	23	17	24	7	85
Young people are better suited living with people their own age.	12	9	32	13	14	5	85
Young people are less financially secure.	6	4	19	16	34	6	85
Young people are more likely to be in arrears with rent than older tenants.	13	14	24	11	18	5	85
Young people are more likely to prematurely terminate a lease agreement.	6	10	20	28	21	0	85
Young people experience more problems with visitors than older tenants.	7	3	19	18	32	6	85

These results tend to concur with difficulties outlined in available literature as will be demonstrated in the following sections.

Elton, in his research into young people in community housing concluded that:

Young people as a group suffer discrimination in the community housing sector. In part this is overt; they are seen as a financial liability, too poor to pay viable rents, and there is an expectation that they will require special support and management provision. In part it is covert resulting from lettings, management, and procurement policies incompatible with the needs of young people.²⁵

Elton's recognition of both covert and overt barriers is a useful framework by which to analyse factors which impede access to the sector. For the purposes of this discussion the range of overt factors that impede young people's access include:

- Perceptions of the relative strains of housing young tenants.
- The ability to provide/ensure support is available when required.
- The ability to manage the impact of young people on an agency.
- Awareness of young people's housing need and the difficulties they face.

The following coverage of barriers (including Chapter 5) has been drawn from available literature and the responses of project participants. This material has been presented in such a way that reflects the relative emphasis placed on these barriers and therefore the degree to which they serve as an impediment to young people entering the sector. Further, good practice strategies have been provided at the end of each section. These strategies were identified by participants in the project survey and National Workshop. Additional strategies have been sourced from existing good practice projects. While an overview of these projects has been provided in this report, readers are directed to the relevant report for further analysis and discussion.

4.1 PERCEPTIONS OF THE RELATIVE STRAINS OF HOUSING YOUNG TENANTS

...part of the problem of effectively working with young people is a tendency to view them as an homogenous group, such as 'homeless' or 'unemployed'. This serves to diminish many of the individual attributes of youth need and makes the delivery of appropriate information and services in an appropriate form a difficult task²⁶.

Organisations participating in the project survey, were asked how strongly they supported a number of common stereotypes pertaining to young tenants. Their responses are provided in Table 10.

Table 10. Perceptions of Young Tenants

Participants demonstrated the degree to which they supported the above perceptions of young tenants by giving a rating from 1 to 5, where 1 equals 'Disagree' and 5 equals 'Agree'.

The propensity to treat young people as an homogenous group ignores the diversity of need that exists among young people as outlined in Chapter 2 and may result in young people with only 'minimal need' experiencing difficulty accessing the sector even though they may be highly suitable tenants.

When young people generally are seen as 'high needs' or 'challenging' tenants, community housing providers may be inclined to allocate properties to tenants that are considered more stable, more reliable and ultimately more suitable.

4.2 THE ACTUAL AND PERCEIVED ABILITY TO MEET TENANT SUPPORT

REQUIREMENTS.

Young people are often considered to have higher support needs than older tenants (see Table 10). While it is true that young people in both housing 'difficulty' or 'crisis' require support, those with only 'minimal' needs may only need assistance making the transition to independent living.

The prevailing perceptions of young people regarding the level of support required and the ability to provide such, may act as a significant barrier to young people accessing community housing unless assessment is undertaken and individual needs identified.

Ensuring Adequate Initial Assessment

Needs should be assessed on a case by case basis before generalisations are made regarding young people's suitability or eligibility for community housing.

Consequently assessment should aim to:

- *Determine the applicant's real support and housing needs*
- *Establish whether the applicant falls within the organisation/program target group*
- *Collect relevant background information that will help the delivery of appropriate support services*
- *Clarify the expectations of the client by explaining the aims and key features of the organisation and the management model including the roles, rights and responsibilities of the tenant, the housing provider and the support provider (if applicable)*
- *Negotiate a plan of action to meet short, medium and long term needs and a way of monitoring that plan²⁷.*

Forty nine percent of project participants reported undertaking assessment themselves with 68% of these participants reporting having undertaken assessment training. In 27% of cases assessment was performed by a support agency. This may reflect the number of ex-SAAP clients entering the community housing sector. As the NDCA does not currently collect data on community housing as an exit point for SAAP clients, this is difficult to verify.

The focus on independent living within community housing may make young people reluctant to identify multiple or complex support needs if by doing so they could jeopardise their chances of being housed. Therefore, if possible, time should be taken to develop a relationship of trust with prospective tenants during the application process.

The Delineation Between Support And Tenancy Management Requirements

When support and tenancy management practices become blurred, community housing providers are likely to overestimate young people's support needs.

The *St George Community Housing/ SAAP Tenancy Management & Support Project* provides a useful indication of the actual support needs of young people although given the relatively small sample size, it is difficult to draw general conclusions. The review of this Project found that the average number of support hours required by young people was significantly less than for women with dependent children. Accordingly young people required 22.1 support hours over a period of 5.6 months compared to women with children who required 31.8 hours over an average 7.1 months.

The fact that 25% of young tenants required additional support hours than those allocated (compared to 16.7% of women with children) may reflect the fact that tenancy management services were provided by the support agency and all young tenants were housed in group living situations. The review indicated that much of the support provided was spent on tenancy management issues resulting from shared accommodation²⁸.

On the basis of this review, the NSW CAP/SAAP Innovation Initiative Project allocated 30 hours of

support to young tenants to be utilised over a period of time ranging from 3 to 6 months to assist tenants to make the transition to independence²⁹.

The CAPII Program Guide provides a good analysis of what should be considered to constitute support:

- *Developing and producing the tenant case plan.*
- *Accompanying prospective tenants to important appointments as a supporter.*
- *Researching and preparing information on referral options to external support services and networks.*
- *Individual tuition in the development of life skills needed for living in community housing.*
- *Regular meetings with tenants to monitor progress against the objectives, tasks and targets of the case plan.*
- *Assisting tenants through a period of unforeseen crisis or difficulty.*
- *Organising and facilitating case conferences to discuss and resolve complex issues.*
- *Administrative tasks to complete the above³⁰.*

These support tasks should be provided by an external support worker or, in the case of community housing organisations that also operate a SAAP program, by a different worker than those responsible for tenancy management.

Other issues such as rent arrears, problems with visitors etc are tenancy management issues in that they have a direct impact on tenancy. Where these issues are underpinned by personal support issues, linkages to support should be provided. This may also be considered a tenancy management issue because, by proving such linkages, the housing provider is assisting the tenant to maintain a more stable tenancy.

Community housing providers may be able to access subsidies to cover the increased tenancy management hours resulting from housing young people or negotiate higher payments when renewing contracts with funding providers.

Making The Most of Prior Assessment

When an applicant is exiting SAAP, or other supported accommodation, assessment has been completed and case management plans developed to address support requirements.

Young people may feel more comfortable discussing support needs if they are able to take their support worker to meetings with the housing provider, given the relationship of trust that ideally develops between a young person and their support worker. The St George Pilot found that allowing the relationship between the support worker and the SAAP client to continue when the client was accommodated in community housing resulted in significant benefits³¹.

Sixty percent of project participants reported inviting support workers to attend initial meetings with the applicant. Despite this, there remains the need for greater streamlining of assessment and referral and the development of stronger links between support and community housing to:

- Eliminate overlap in assessment practice between community housing and support providers.
- Provide more timely access to community housing.
- Minimise the need for applicants to repeatedly provide information on potentially sensitive and/or emotional issues.

The Difficulties Experienced In Securing Support

Community housing providers often rely on external agencies for support provision³². Given that youth SAAP services record the highest level of unmet demand in that program, community housing providers often report difficulties in providing for tenant's support needs. Elton found that at the time of his study many young community housing tenants have no access to support at all³³.

Due to high (and often inflexible) case load requirements in SAAP, it is imperative that vacancies are filled as soon as possible to meet contractual and funding obligations. Consequently, the ability to provide ongoing, outreach support to community housing tenants (even those who have recently exited their service) is extremely limited.

Currently only 5.3% of SAAP agencies nationally are categorised as providing outreach support. Although this figure may be higher given that the number of agencies reporting multiple service delivery models, may provide support on an outreach basis³⁴. Naturally the proportion of agencies providing outreach support was the highest in remote areas (11.4%) and 'other' rural areas (5.8%)³⁵. The proportion of youth SAAP services providing outreach support (7.1%) is slightly higher than for other services of. Again this figure may be higher given the number of such agencies reporting a multiple service delivery model³⁶.

When asked what difficulties young people experience in accessing community housing, a lack of access to support was the sixth most popular response given (see Table 9). However when asked what difficulties young people experience maintaining a community housing tenancy, the second most popular response given was support needs and the inability to ensure ongoing support when required.

While 58.8% of project participants reported that SAAP support was ongoing after tenants are housed with them, the difficulties experienced indicate that support is not provided for the period required to sustain stable tenancies.

One survey participant commented:

Even when a support agreement is made with SAAP, the support offered is usually not ongoing. WA Community Housing Association

There is little incentive for community housing providers to house young people with support needs given the time and expense of developing the necessary referral linkages. Consequently some providers have little choice other than to make access to external support a condition of eligibility³⁷.

The Perceived Ability To Meet Support Requirements

Bisset, in a study of appropriate responses for 'high needs' clients in SAAP, provides an indication of the difficulties that sector experiences in meeting the needs of 'high needs' clients.

- *Services cannot deal with the disruptive aspect of the client's behaviour;*
- *Needs have not been accurately assessed*
- *Specialist services are not available;*
- *Services are culturally inappropriate*
- *Needs cannot effectively be met by standard service support/responses; or*
- *Required long term... support is not available.*³⁸

Consequently Bisset concludes that tenant needs may not actually be complex in themselves but are difficult to meet for the above reasons. While these issues relate directly to SAAP, they provide a useful indication of issues that also impact on community housing due to:

- The reliance on SAAP to provide much of the outreach support required by community housing tenants
- The significantly greater resourcing of SAAP indicates that smaller programs will face many of the same challenges.

Bisset also found that the perceived ability to address these issues may have a significant impact on access.

There is a tendency for some to "problematise" high needs... This is particularly the

*case when there is a mismatch between services resources and client need. Consequently, in some instances, the most vulnerable clients are excluded... on the basis of being too difficult.*³⁹

Generalist community housing providers may be more likely to refer a young applicant to a youth targeted service when it is perceived that their needs are more able to, or will be better, met through a specialist service response⁴⁰. Further, generalist community housing providers may be reluctant to house a young applicant if there are not accessible youth targeted support services locally even though adequate support may be accessed through generalist support providers.

As indicated by Bisset, access to generalist organisations may be reliant on those responsible for tenant selection being aware of the strategies and supports available to counteract the perceived difficulties of housing young tenants.

Possible sources of support (pending availability) include:

- *SAAP services with outreach and/or follow up support services.*
- *Home and community Care Services for those young people with disabilities.*
- *Neighbourhood Centres.*
- *Alcohol and drug workers.*
- *Domestic violence workers.*
- *Sexual Assault workers.*
- *Mental health workers.*
- *Community health workers*⁴¹.

The Separation of Housing And Support

The separation of housing and support, can be considered both a strength and weakness of the community housing sector. Advantages of the separation include:

- The ability for tenants to remain in a property once support needs have been addressed and support provision has ceased. This is particularly important given housing needs remain relatively stable while support needs fluctuate over time.
- Housing management and case management functions involve very different skills. By separating these functions, organisations are able to focus on what they do best.
- The linkages developed between housing and support providers serves as a strong basis on which to improve the longer term housing needs of SAAP clients.
- These linkages can also provide the basis for improved referral processes and encourage other potential partnerships⁴².

The separation may also be appealing to young tenants. Janine Combes in a study of homeless under 18 year olds in Tasmania, found that the supported accommodation model:

*...was not viewed as positively by most young people as [was] the outreach model. As the prime task they see themselves undertaking at this time is achieving independence it is not surprising that support is preferred from a more distant source.*⁴³

Elton, supported the separation of housing and support on the following basis:

*...there is an inherent conflict of interest if the same people provide both. (For example, someone responsible for the welfare or support of a tenant is hardly in a position to take an objective view if the tenant fails to pay rent regularly)*⁴⁴.

The differing perspectives of housing and support providers may however make it difficult to negotiate suitable outcomes for tenants. On the part of support providers there is the need to ensure client access to longer term housing in an appropriate service culture and that there is the flexibility to

meet the financial and other circumstances of individual clients. On the other hand community housing providers must address the issue of risk management in terms of minimising rent arrears and property damage as well addressing occupational health and safety issues⁴⁵.

This difference in perspectives can cause significant strain on the relationship between housing and support providers and severely impact on young tenants. In their submission to the Queensland Government's Best Practice Project, Gateway Community Group and Mangrove Housing Association found that difficulties arose:

- *When other referrals are prioritised over Gateway referrals workers have experienced frustration and client confidentiality considerations have restricted discussions.*
- *When a client has been evicted from Mangrove, Gateway workers have felt pressured to do something as the eviction may reflect on them or the service.*
- *When the number of evictions are considered, Gateway workers feel concerned they may be referring too many difficult clients to Mangrove⁴⁶.*

Further disadvantages of the separation include:

- Difficulties in ensuring support is available for the period required.
- The potential for a breach of confidentiality when support issues have an impact on tenancy management⁴⁷.
- The lack of clarity regarding the duty of care⁴⁸.
- The impact of the need for advocacy support by tenants facing eviction from a community housing provider⁴⁹.

Community housing providers may have more success in linking tenants to support if able to access brokerage funding to purchase these services from appropriate providers. In the St George Pilot Program, it was found that it would be preferable for SAAP brokerage funds to be provided directly to the local SAAP services (as an add-on to the level of SAAP funding currently received). This would have the advantage of increasing the outreach capacity of SAAP and avoid large numbers of hours being spent administering brokerage funds and managing payments on the part of the housing provider⁵⁰.

Given the difficulties experienced by the separation of housing and support, Elton concludes that the only way to ensure adequate support is available may be to employ a support worker⁵¹. Considering the number of community housing providers participating in this project who also manage a SAAP program, there is a level of support for providing support 'in-house.' A separation between housing management and support functions is achieved in these situations by ensuring support and tenancy management tasks are provided by separate workers.



IDEAS FOR GOOD PRACTICE



ENSURING ADEQUATE INITIAL ASSESSMENT

- Hold assessment interviews over a number of sessions to foster a sense of familiarity with the housing provider and make the applicant more comfortable discussing personal support issues. An initial session could provide prospective applicants with required information which would then be followed-up with an assessment interview to discuss this information and determine eligibility and suitability for the vacancy. (see also induction techniques)
- The CAPII Program Guide suggests that the following issues should be considered when assessing the level of development of applicant life skills:
 - *The ability to live as independently as possible – budgeting, banking, dealing with government departments and non-government agencies, applying for jobs, paying rent on time, controlling substance abuse and dealing with average day-to day tasks.*
 - *The ability to do day-to-day tasks like shopping, washing, cooking and cleaning, operating household appliances.*

- *Relative experience and ability to live in shared accommodation or in close proximity to others, if appropriate.*
 - *Willingness to participate in formal and informal programs that develop needed life skills⁵².*
- When relying on assessment undertaken by an external support provider you may need to request any further information specific to the applicant that is relevant to determining housing eligibility, selection and allocation if not provided⁵³.
- When an applicant is exiting SAAP or other supported accommodation, invite the applicant's support worker to attend initial interviews. This may result in the applicant feeling more confident to discuss support issues and requirements⁵⁴ and allow you to start to develop a relationship with the support worker.
- Alternatively, when a young applicant is not exiting SAAP, you may consider allowing the applicant to invite a 'significant support giver' to attend assessment interviews.
- Apart from information pertaining to an applicant's level of life skills development, housing providers should also collect/request access to information on:
- *Personal details including name, age, gender and contact details*
 - *Housing needs assessment based on current housing situation, nature of housing need, approaches to other housing providers*
 - *Household type and size*
 - *Preference for housing type ie. private rental, community housing or public housing.*
 - *Relevant accommodation history including previous community housing and Department of Housing tenancies*
 - *Recommended duration of any support periods required and details of any other key agencies involved in the applicant's support case plan, if relevant*
 - *The possible need for property modification*
 - *Details of income and assets*
 - *Locational preference and type of dwelling required*
 - *Need for interpreters⁵⁵.*
- You may wish to develop a Standard Assessment Form containing additional, optional sections to be filled in when applicable. Additional sections might cover domestic violence issues, drug and alcohol abuse, mental health issues or other issues that may impact on a tenancy or have implications for housing and support provision.

Joint Practice Forums/ Networking

- Establish and maintain a database of relevant potential support providers and send them notices of meetings and other activities, newsletters/bulletins etc.
- Encourage other service providers to include your organisation on their mailing database.
- Networking is about developing contacts rather than just collecting names. It is important then to take time to maintain these contacts in order for them to be effective.
- Participate in regional practice forums if they are offered in your area. If not, seek to have one established through relevant government departments or peak bodies.

Further information on networking is provided on Page 38.

Improving Referral Practice

- Develop a clear and realistic understanding of the level of support available and accessible. This will assist in avoiding situations where there is a mismatch between available resources

and tenant need.

- Ensure potential referral agencies are aware of the level of support that can be provided as well as organisational/program target groups.
- Send these agencies a basic Information Kit on your organisation, this could be same as any Induction Kit developed (see page 61).
- Stress the importance of an ongoing Support Service Agreement when receiving referrals. Meet with the support worker to discuss and garner support for establishing such an agreement (see Support Service Agreements on Page 30).
- Negotiate a clear Support Agreement with the tenant (if applicable) at the time of referral.
- You may want to establish a standard Referral Report Document and distribute this to potential referral agencies. This could be the same as any Standard Assessment Form developed.

Improving Selection Procedures

- Establish clear eligibility criteria on which to base selection procedures.
- When developing a Tenant Selection Process and Procedures Policy allow for a certain level of flexibility to respond to the needs of individual applicants.
- If an applicant requiring support refuses to agree to such in an initial interview, discuss the relative benefits with the applicant⁵⁶.
- If the applicant continues to refuse support, a decision will need to be made as to whether they are eligible to be housed⁵⁷.

Managing Confidentiality Considerations

- Develop clear Confidentiality and Privacy Policies and Procedures to ensure accountability. These may include:
 - *Interviews being held in spaces that provide privacy*
 - *An outline of who has access to what information*
 - *Specifications of what information can be released both internally and externally and to whom*
 - *Details of when the informed consent of the tenant is required before information is released*
 - *Protocols for the exchange of information between organisations*
 - *How tenants may access their records⁵⁸.*
- Talk applicants through these policies to ensure they feel comfortable discussing personal

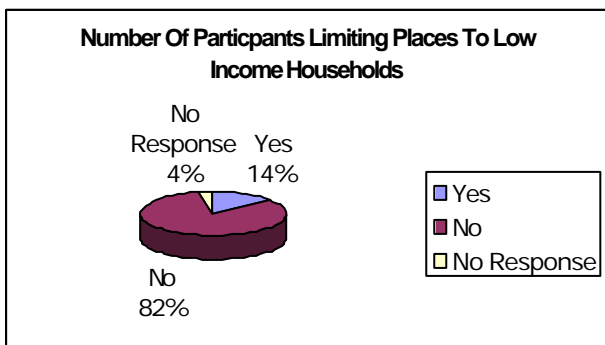


Figure 3.

This may reflect the fact that eligibility for community housing is dependent on applicants being on low incomes. As young people on the YA receive lower incomes than other social security recipients, Elton, found that:

issues. Provide them with a copy to take home.

- You may consider developing a Disclosure of Information Form⁵⁹ setting out the parameters of the type of information the tenant agrees can be discussed with the support worker.

Developing A Support Service Agreement

- Support Service Agreements provide the basis for ensuring clarity in the relationship between housing and support providers. CAPII recommends that Support Service Agreements include:
 - *The respective roles and responsibilities of the housing and support provider.*
 - *The respective services to be provided by the housing and support provider.*
 - *How the housing and support provider are going to contact and communicate with each other during the support period.*
 - *Dates of the support agreement.*
 - *The number of support hours allocated to tenants and the type of support involved.*
 - *The requirement for a written case plan to be developed and monitored.*
 - *Tenant rights.*
 - *Procedure for when support ends prior to the termination of the agreement.*
 - *Procedure for extending the term of the agreement.*
 - *Procedure for when additional support is required.*
 - *Requirements and procedures for case closure.*
 - *Information to be provided to the housing provider at the end of the support period.*
 - *Requirements and procedures for evaluation the effectiveness of the agreement.*

Response	Number of Responses	% of Total Responses
Greater maintenance expense	24	40%
Rent collection is less due to low incomes of young tenants	11	18.3%
Greater staff time required	8	13.3%
Greater rent arrears	7	11.7%
Extra support required	6	10%
Greater turnover of properties	3	5%
Theft of furnishings is greater	1	1.7%
Total Organisations Responding	40	
TOTAL	60	

- *Disputes resolution procedures⁶⁰.*

Leebeek's Good Practice Report provides further areas which may be covered including:

- *The availability of support workers, and out of hours arrangements.*
- *Tenant involvement with the support agency/agencies.*
- *Extent of the housing provider's involvement in any case management determination.*
- *Emergency procedures including re-housing options.*
- *Relationship management structure if there is more than one support agency involved⁶¹.*

- In order to avoid the potential for conflict in the relationship between the housing and support provider/s the following areas could be included in any such agreement:

- *The advocacy role of the support provider*
- *Other advocacy arrangements if appropriate*
- *The role of the organisations in relation to the termination of tenancy and the use of the*

Residential Tenancies Tribunal

- *Dispute and appeal procedures for the tenant regarding the actions of both the housing and support providers*⁶²

- To avoid a conflict of interest arising, housing and support providers may agree to have tenant advocacy support provided by an external party to the Support Service Agreement⁶³.

Monitoring The Support Agreement

- Develop a system for monitoring not only the provision of long term housing but also the effectiveness of the support provided and its impact on client outcomes⁶⁴.
- This may involve an external review panel in order to provide a high level of objectivity.

Brokering Support

- The use of brokerage funds (when available) to purchase support may improve access to these services.

Peer Support and Mentoring

- For tenants with only minimal support needs, the provision of peer/mentor support may be a suitable response.

4.3 The Ability To Maintain Viability When Housing Young Tenants

As community housing providers often rely heavily on the income generated from rents to cover cyclic maintenance, public liability insurance, water rates and administrative overheads⁶⁵, the low incomes of young people may force providers to limit the number of places to them to ensure viability⁶⁶

When asked whether providers found it necessary to limit the number of low income households to ensure viability, the vast majority of project participants (82%) reported this was not the case as shown in Figure 3.

...many specialist, youth housing associations continue to operate despite not being, strictly, financially viable, largely because of voluntary inputs of unpaid labour, permanent deferral of cyclical maintenance requirements, and cross subsidies from other services.

The Tasmanian Affordable Youth Accommodation (TAYA) Project is one such example of a youth specific agency that was not viable as a stand alone community housing organisation due to the low incomes of tenants and high cost of maintenance and property damage⁶⁷.

A number of initially youth targeted organisations have, over time, altered their demographic target group in favour of housing older people who present fewer problems to the organisation and can bring in more income via rent collection⁶⁸.

Apart from the reduced income offered, housing providers often find that agency overheads are greater when housing young people than other age groups.

*...there are greater cost overheads for young people, even for those capable of independent living: their need for support networks, housing redesign, maintenance costs, tenancy turnover, lower tenant participation, generally poorer financial capacity, comparative lack of experience etc*⁶⁹.

A total of 41.2% of project participants reported higher overheads when housing young tenants. The following reasons were offered as to why this is the case:

Table 11. Reasons Given For Greater Agency Overheads When Housing Young Tenants

From these responses it is clear that maintenance expenses and diminished rental return were key considerations for housing providers.

Participants at a Tasmanian Community Housing Forum highlighted the effect of properties being badly vandalised or damaged. In such situations, the provider, unable to utilise the stock until maintenance has been completed, suffers financially as a result of the diminished income generated from rents. Given that young people are often considered to take less care of properties (see Table 10), organisations may be hesitant to offer properties to young people on this basis.



IDEAS FOR GOOD PRACTICE



MANAGING THE FINANCIAL IMPACT OF YOUNG PEOPLE

Cross Subsidisation

Explore the possibility of cross subsidisation to reduce the impact of low incomes on financial viability. This involves using the rental return from higher income households to subsidise lower income groups.

Determine the number of low income tenants that can be housed (while maintaining financial viability) by calculating projected annual costs (overheads), averaging the rent required per unit, and then determining what mix of incomes can be housed⁷⁰.

Inclusion of Rent Assistance In Rent Formula

Regard RA as tenant income, thereby increasing the income base on which rents can be calculated.

Negotiating Increased Resourcing For Maintenance Costs

Investigate the possibility of negotiating increased resourcing to cover maintenance costs to reflect increased expenditure in this area when housing young tenants.

Providing A Flexible Approach To Rental payments.

Provide tenants with a range of rent payment options to make payment as easy as possible and minimise the risk of rent arrears.

Potential options include:

- Payment by cheque, cash or money order.
- Providing tenants with a rent payment book that allows a direct deposit into the organisation's account.
- Electronic transfer into the organisation's account.
- Direct debit systems⁷¹.

Register as a Third Party Organisation with Centrepay. This will allow tenants in receipt of Centrelink payments to organise rental payments to be paid directly to their housing provider in full or in pre-arranged instalments before the balance of the payment is credited to the tenant.

For tenants not in receipt of income support a direct debit system could be established. Negotiate with the banks to have associated fees waived or agree to pick up these fees. While this may represent a cost to the organisation, the guarantee of receiving rent on time may be worth the expense.

Taking Quicker Action on Rent Arrears

- ☑ Taking quicker action on rent arrears before they become unmanageable offers benefits to both the tenant and their housing provider. Naturally this involves regular review of rent payments to identify arrears.
- ☑ Direct tenants to financial counselling support if rent arrears is a frequent problem resulting from a lack of budgeting skills or other reasons requiring such support⁷².
- ☑ Negotiate Rent Arrears Payment Plans with tenants. Allow tenants to pay arrears in instalments in order to avoid them experiencing difficulties meeting other living expenses. The agreement could be formalised by having both parties sign the document, which is then kept in the tenant's confidential file.
- ☑ By formalising this agreement, the parameters are well defined and understood by both parties. This agreement can then be upheld through the Small Claims Court, if the agreement is breached.

4.4 THE ABILITY TO MANAGE THE IMPACT OF REDUCED PARTICIPATION

The nature of young people's support needs, personal priorities, and life stage development, all influence young people's interest and motivation to participate.⁷³ Thompson found that the greatest barrier to young people's participation is a lack of motivation and interest⁷⁴. On this point, Elton concluded that it was important that the natural desire to control one's living environment is not confused with a desire to take part in the management of a housing organisation⁷⁵.

Many young people have no interest in carrying out the administrative tasks which are essential to the running of a housing organisation⁷⁶.

Young people's level of participation varies considerably according to the management model of the organisation with which they are housed. Given their emphasis on participation it is not surprising that young people had the highest participation rates in housing co-operatives. Community youth based organisations were found to have the next highest participation rate by young people. Housing Associations tend to have very low participation rates among young people⁷⁷.

Thompson found that the following factors also tend to result in reduced participation:

- *Under developed skills and experiences.*
- *Group dynamics often lead to conflict and non-participation.*
- *Tenants require transport to attend.*
- *Tenants are transient creating a lack of consistency among office bearers or a stable skills base on which to develop further participation.*
- *Tenants have difficulty making the time commitment⁷⁸.*

A reliance on tenant participation may form a barrier to accessing community housing when young applicants are unwilling to participate or lack the skills required. Housing co-ops participating in the project, were four times more likely than other management models to indicate a reluctance to house young applicants who were unwilling to participate.

Co-ops often require a relatively high level of skill and responsibility on the part of tenants because management tasks are performed on a volunteer basis⁷⁹. Young people without the managerial, legal and financial skills⁸⁰ required to participate in the co-op structure may be less suited to this form of housing. Elton concluded that the difficulties experienced by youth focussed co-ops has often been the result of the fact that:

They have tended to underestimate the high skill and commitment required of a co-op member, and to overestimate the priority which most young people give to controlling all aspects of their housing.⁸¹

Furthermore a low level of participation on the part of tenants may threaten a co-op's ability to meet the requirements of incorporation in terms of meetings being quorate etc.

The characteristic transience of young people may also make co-ops less favourably disposed to housing young people due to:

- The investment required to establish a strong and diverse skill base among tenants.
- The need for continuity provided by a low turnover of members⁸².

Given that other management models do not require the same level of participation as co-ops, young people's ability to participate is less likely to have the same impact on these models and therefore on their access to housing.

Thompson found that young people rarely take the opportunity to sit on management committees of housing associations even though training is often provided to support tenant members of the management committee⁸³. While housing associations face difficulties encouraging tenant participation, the continuity and expertise provided by the board of management often means that the agency is better equipped to resolve these difficulties⁸⁴.



IDEAS FOR GOOD PRACTICE



FOR MANAGING THE IMPACT OF REDUCED PARTICIPATION

- Ensure applicants are given adequate information on the need for tenant participation, what is involved and how participation is managed in initial interviews⁸⁵.
- Minimise the risk of inappropriate referrals by facilitating an increased understanding of what community housing involves within the community and key programs. This will also ensure that potential applicants are able to make an informed decision as to whether community housing is appropriate for them before making an application⁸⁶.

Encouraging Tenant Interest To Participate

- Seek applicant/tenant input into what activities they would be interested in to develop a Tenant Participation Policy that is inclusive of young people and reflective of their interests.
- Ensure there is a match between the level of commitment to participate on the part of applicants and organisational requirements.
- Discuss what is required of tenants and ways in which they can participate in initial interviews. This allows the applicant and those responsible for tenant selection to make an informed decision whether community housing is a suitable tenure for the applicant.
- In the case of co-ops, ensure induction processes are adequate to provide applicants with a good understanding of what is required of them. Potential induction processes could include
 - Inviting applicants to a committee meeting where all aspects of co-op living are explained
 - Inviting applicants to attend an information session
 - Initial interviews⁸⁷

- Co-ops could use probationary periods to allow applicants to gain an insight into co-op living over a period of time. This will prevent applicants making hasty decisions regarding their suit ability as well as allowing co-op members to assess actual participation levels on the part of the applicant. Probationary periods should be long enough to allow young tenants to settle in before being expected to participate.
- When applicants require support in order to actively you may consider
 - Referring the young person to an external youth support service or internal support workers (as applicable),
 - Establishing a peer support or mentoring program, and/or
 - Providing the support 'in-house' when the level of support required is minimal.
- Provide a social aspect to being involved by offering social events, providing food at meetings etc. This may make participation a more attractive prospect for young tenants.
- Consider employing a Community Development Worker to both encourage and manage participation⁸⁸.

Improving Skills Development

- When housing large numbers of young people with underdeveloped skills, consider developing Tenant Training Modules⁸⁹. This may not only increase the likelihood of participation but also the level and range of skills available to the organisation.
- Encourage young tenants to ask for help when they require it. While this may seem an obvious strategy, the provision of an environment where young people feel comfortable seeking assistance is important.

Avoiding Group Dynamics Leading To Conflict And Non-Participation

- Consider the following strategies to overcome this problem:
 - Being aware of basic group dynamics and processes.
 - Ensuring tenant mix is appropriate initially.
 - Increasing the social aspect of meetings to encourage interpersonal relations.
 - Providing training on interpersonal skills and conflict resolution.
 - Clarifying dispute resolution procedures.
 - Increasing the level of education on meeting procedure⁹⁰.

Data Collected	Number of Organisations	Percentage
Age of tenants when first housed	69	81.2%
Age of applicants	69	81.2%
Length of tenancy	76	89.4%
Number of referrals received from SAAP or other support providers	52	61.2%
Tenancy outcomes (for example: suitability of housing, skills development; trends in income etc)	40	47.1%
Tenant race, ethnicity and language spoken	60	70.6%
Cost of property maintenance required after exit by age of tenant	38	44.7%
TOTAL	404	

- Ensure housing allows for the privacy or 'time out' required to manage conflict between tenants. This is a key consideration for tenants in group living situations as it can be difficult for tenants to live and work together particularly when there is conflict involved.

Addressing Transport Difficulties

- Ensure meetings are held in an easily accessible venue.
- Car pooling may be a quick and easy strategy to ensure tenants without access to transport are able to attend meetings, activities etc.

Managing The Impact Of Transience

Develop secondary or 'vice' positions (ie. vice secretary, vice treasurer etc) for tenant committee members to ensure tenants are being skilled to replace committee members as they leave⁹¹. This will also provide for a level of continuity on the board.

Committee members could be encouraged to commit to remaining in their position for a period of 2 years to create continuity⁹² subject to constitutional requirements.

Overcoming The Impact Of Other Tenant Commitments On Participation

- This may be a difficulty for tenants engaged in education, training or employment. Potential strategies include:
 - Rotating jobs among those available
 - Being aware of tenants' commitments and allocating jobs accordingly

4.5 AWARENESS OF YOUNG PEOPLE'S HOUSING NEED

Community housing providers are unlikely to increase stock targeting and allocation to young people unless they are aware of young peoples' housing needs and the difficulties they face accessing housing.

Organisations may increase their knowledge of young people's housing needs by:

- Participating in training on working with young people.
- Using data to analyse the demographics of housing demand.
- Using information networks.

Participating in Training

Generalist housing workers need training on young people's issues, to have a better understanding of how to work with them.
New South Wales 'Other Housing Organisation'

Participation in training on working with young people provides the basis for a better understanding of age related issues and consequently practical service requirements and considerations. Participants at the National Workshop stressed the importance of exploring innovative presentation techniques to provide variety and appeal.

Given the associated expenses of participating in training (for example transport costs and potentially, the cost of relief staff) access to financial assistance to cover these costs and/or training at a subsidised cost may encourage stronger participation levels. No State/Territory offers financial assistance to attend training and consequently this is an obvious area for attention.

The level of access to relevant training varies considerably among the states and territories. Providers in all states/territories other than the ACT, Tasmania and the Northern Territory are able to access informal 'in service' training⁹³. Accredited property management training is only directly available in New South Wales, Queensland and South Australia. Providers in the ACT are able to access training developed for the sector in New South Wales on a fee for service basis. Generic

community management training is available in most states and territories. In Western Australia this training has been accredited and is available via the community housing peak in that state.

Given the time and expense of developing training material and having it accredited, it may be more feasible to include a greater coverage of youth related issues in existing training courses than to develop youth specific training programs aimed at the community housing sector. Further in states/territories with relatively undeveloped training infrastructure, it may be more cost effective to purchase accredited training material based on relevant National Competency Standards and have it modified to account for state/territory specific issues.

Data Collection

The ability for community housing providers to respond to local housing demand is dependent on their knowledge of the numbers and demographics of people seeking medium to long term rental housing.

The NCHF Mapping Project found that only 39% of CSHA funded organisations and 19% of non-CSHA funded organisations collected information on local demand⁹⁴. Further, it was found that 67% of CSHA funded and 33%⁹⁵ of non-CSHA funded organisations do not currently collect age based data.

Project participants reported a significantly higher level of age based data collection than that found by the NCHF. Eighty one percent of project participants reported they collected data on the age of applicants. This may be the result of the number of SAAP agencies participating as well as the targeted nature of the project sample.

The level of data collection reported among project participants was strong as indicated in Table 12.

Table 12. Data Collection Practices Among Project Participants

Despite 80% of project participants indicating they valued data collection, only 6% reported that increased data collection would result in a better understanding of young people's needs and only 12% reported that it would provide the basis for improving services to young people.

The majority of project participants focused on the potential impacts of increased data collection requirements. Sixty seven percent reported an increase in staff time would be required, while 16% they would have less time to spend in other core areas of their work. Only 10% of providers reported that increased data collection would have a minimal impact on their agency.

The majority of participants (40.3%) who reported targeting housing on the basis of local need, did so on the basis of data collected by external agents. Only 24.6% of participants reported using their own data collection or waiting list as the basis on which to target housing. Participants also reported using the incidence of homelessness and domestic violence, the availability of low cost housing locally, the rate of tenant turnover as well as their own housing study, as the basis for targeting decisions.

Governments must take a strong role in coordinating and resourcing improved data collection practices within the community housing sector. The Commonwealth Government has an obvious role to play if there is to be a level of consistency across the states.

Given the discrepancy between what data is considered valuable by key players, any data collection procedure proposed for the community sector must take this into account to ensure relevancy.

Utilising Information Networks

Of those project participants who take part in networking activities, 69% reported that a strong understanding of local need was gained. Seventy two percent of participants reported that networking activities gave the capacity to identify changes in local housing and support needs.

While a number of states/territories coordinate networking activities that include community housing providers (the Northern Territory, ACT, Queensland, and Victoria) no financial assistance is currently provided to the sector to cover the associated expenses of participation.

Housing Queensland is one of the only state departments that continues to fund a *Community Housing Resource Worker Program*⁹⁶. This program is responsible for providing information and research support to the sector and coordinating networking among long term housing providers. In Victoria SAAP Networkers are responsible for coordinating networking at a regional level. Organisations in South Australia may access limited funding for attendance at specific conferences.

Given the current emphasis on developing a more integrated and collaborative approach contained in the Memorandum of Understanding for SAAP IV as well the National Homelessness Strategy Discussion Paper, it is evident that there is considerable support at both a state/territory and Commonwealth level for establishing multi-program service linkages. Effective linkages at a government level will provide the necessary basis on which to broaden current networking activities among housing and other service providers.

The tyranny of distance experienced by organisations in rural and remote areas often means that face to face meetings are difficult and sometimes costly to attend. Electronic communication may provide an alternative way to exchange ideas and information. The establishment of regional intranets such as that set up by the Infoxchange for the Loddon Mallee SAAP Regional Network is a prime example of good practice in supporting regional networking activities. Given that the Infoxchange was announced as joint winner in the 'Public Services and Democracy' category of the 2000 Stockholm Challenge, there is much that other state internet providers can learn from this example.

Utilising Peak Bodies

Peak bodies provide a very valuable source of information and advice to organisations. Membership of peaks bodies ensures access to well researched information, details of consultation forums and workshops being held, as well as providing members with a link to government departments. Peak bodies also offer a great source of contacts within the sector and therefore can assist community housing providers to link to required services.

Not all states/territories currently have access to funded peak services, and therefore services will be limited by resourcing restraints. These states/territories include: Victoria, The Northern Territory and Tasmania.

Funded state community housing peak bodies include:

ACT.....Community Housing Federation of Australia (Secretariat)
Shelter ACT

NSWNSW Federation of Housing Associations
Association To Resource Co-operative Housing (ARCH)

SA.....Community Housing Council of SA Inc.

QLD.....Queensland Community Housing Coalition

WA.....Community Housing Coalition of WA

Community housing providers may also benefit from becoming members of The National Organisation Of Aboriginal Housing (NOAH) or The Aboriginal and Torres strait Islander Commission (ATSIC).



IDEAS FOR GOOD PRACTICE



**FOR INCREASING THE AWARENESS OF YOUNG PEOPLE'S HOUSING NEED****Training**

- When reviewing available training courses ensure that the material presented provides coverage of age related issues as well as the practical considerations of good practice when working with young people⁹⁷.

Key areas that should be covered include:

- Worker issues
- Drug and alcohol issues
- Case management practice
- Ethnicity and culture
- The causes and effects of youth homelessness
- Sexuality
- Mental health
- Communicating with young people and establishing rapport
- Conflict resolution
- Religion and spirituality
- Adolescent development

- Encourage workers/members to report back or provide a briefing to other staff/members on what was covered in training and what implications there might be for service practice.
- Ensure copies of handouts provided in training are readily available to all staffmembers.

Data Collection

- Clarify what data will actually be useful to inform service practice and development to avoid unnecessary collection and to minimise the potential impact on the organisation.
- Seek worker/member input into identifying an appropriate system to ensure the process is manageable and that there is a strong level of compliance.
- Consider developing a standard Data Collection Form to be used and ensure copies are readily available in the office. These forms could then be entered into an appropriate computer database.
- Promote data collection as an integral part of daily activities to avoid work building up and becoming unmanageable. Obviously the longer the time taken to record data, the less accurate data will be.

Networking

- Consider developing a short list of standard questions that all workers/members take to meetings. The answers to these questions could then provide the basis for a feedback session involving staff/ members and the management committee. This would ensure that all workers/ members had access to the information obtained.
- Explore alternative forms of communicating such as the use of the internet. Lobbying your SHA to resource and develop regional intranet systems is a key strategy to improving networking activities.

Utilising Peak Services

- Become a member of relevant peak services. This is particularly important in state/territories where peak bodies are un-funded and rely heavily on the income generated from

memberships.

ADDRESSING THE COVERT BARRIERS YOUNG PEOPLE FACE

As outlined in Chapter 4, Elton reports that young people face a range of covert barriers to accessing the community housing sector. For the purposes of this discussion, the covert barriers faced by young people include:

- The availability of appropriate stock.
- Vacancy rates and waiting times to be housed.
- Difficulty in being contacted when a vacancy arises.
- The relevance of community housing to young people and therefore the relative appeal of the sector.
- Lack of knowledge of community housing as an option including: knowledge of providers; how to apply; location of stock; selection procedures; what is required of tenants once housed etc.
- Age based eligibility criteria.
- Low incomes and an inability to cover household establishment and ongoing costs.
- Waiting lists.
- Targeting and allocation practices
- Housing and support are culturally inappropriate.

5.1 THE AVAILABILITY OF APPROPRIATE STOCK

When asked what strategies could be implemented to improve young people's access to community housing the most common response given by project participants (46%) was an increase in appropriate stock numbers. The relatively small size of the sector and the types of properties managed, means that many providers do not believe they have suitable stock for housing young people.

Many Community Housing organisations say they have little or no housing suitable for young people, especially single people. What this usually means is that they are unwilling to let their available stock to young people. It is true that one bedroom flats or bedsits are in very short supply in many areas, and stock procurement methods often favour the family sized dwellings which are readily obtainable in most locations. However, these are generally suitable for sharing by young people, an option which is often rejected as too difficult⁹⁸.

Where community housing providers manage predominantly family sized properties, the ability to provide the desired housing response to young people is limited unless they wish to live in a shared housing situation.

Shared housing can cause significant strain on co-tenants and consequently result in unstable tenancies. The review of the *St George Community Housing/ SAAP Tenancy Management & Support Project* found much of the support provided was to maintain shared accommodation⁹⁹.

Given the financial imperative to ensure occupancy rates are as close to capacity as possible, there is little incentive to offer a young single independent person a larger property than required, due to diminished return.

Young people often compete with older people for similar (ie. 1 or 2 bedroom) stock. Given the propensity to house older people within the sector, when such stock becomes available, providers may prefer to let the property to older applicants.

When reviewing the appropriateness of stock for young people, it is important that properties:

- Have the requisite number of bedrooms for the number of applicants.
- Are easily maintained.
- Have durable fittings and furnishings to minimise the risk of damage.

- Meet the stated needs of the applicant.

Only 36.6% of project participants manage stock modified for young people. Of those providers who currently house young people in the target group, 25 reported that they have modified stock for young people, representing 43.2% of the total number of such providers. It is unclear as to what proportion of this modified stock is suitable for young people with physical disabilities.

The Western Australian Ministry of Housing reported they have 25 properties specifically modified for young people, representing 4.3% of Community Housing Program stock. These properties are predominantly based in metropolitan areas.

In 1998/99 the Queensland Long Term Community Housing Program conducted a Youth Initiative which provided funds of \$4.172M for the purchase, construction and modification of 55 properties specifically for young people. In addition to the Youth Housing Initiative, there are 121 properties funded under the Long Term Community Housing Program, which have been specifically purchased or constructed for young people. This figure doesn't include properties, which may have been funded under the Long Term Community Housing Program for lease to services with mixed target groups, which may include young people¹⁰⁰.

In Tasmania there is only property that has been specifically modified for young people although a small number of other modified properties do in fact accommodate young people. The modified property for young people represents 0.01% of community housing stock in that state.

According to the South Australian Housing Authority, there is currently no up to date information on the number of properties that have been specifically modified for young people. Under a previous funding model however, 30 properties were purpose built to accommodate young tenants.

Increasing Overall Stock Numbers

Increases in stock numbers may be effected by:

- Stock purchase or construction.
- Joint ventures.
- Stock transfers.
- Headleasing.

Stock Purchase or Construction

Stock purchase and/or financing the construction of purpose built stock are the most desirable methods of increasing net stock numbers as there is greater control over location, design and the standard of properties.

The fact that community housing providers are not often granted equity (and the fact that income is often insufficient to meet mortgage repayments) results in difficulty securing loan finance to purchase or build properties. This is a situation that will need to be addressed to support growth in the sector.

Given the current level of capital works funding allocated by the SHA's, it is likely that other sources of funding will need to be secured to effect a significant increase in the numbers of properties available.

Potential alternative sources of funding include:

- Superannuation funds.
- Joint funding initiatives with local government, philanthropic bodies and the corporate sector.

Joint Ventures

Community housing providers are able to draw on the experiences of existing joint venture projects when investigating this option. The manual *Building a Better System*, developed by the NCHF provides a range of examples of good practice in developing and managing joint ventures.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that the corporate sector will not be interested in participating in joint housing ventures unless there is return on their investment. SHA's may need to investigate ways of providing greater liquidity and security of investment to counteract this problem. Further incentives could be offered via preferential tax treatment¹⁰².

Given the expense of negotiating joint venture arrangements, SHA's have a key role to play in both attracting private sector interest and resourcing the process.

Stock Transfers

Many SHA's currently seek to increase community housing stock numbers via the process of transfers. Johnson and Turnbull suggest that stock transfers:

...will only result in public housing categorised as no longer suitable for that purpose being passed to the community sector. As often as not, this would be because the SHA would be otherwise unable to sell it. For young people in particular, such housing is even less likely to be either appropriately located or suitably designed¹⁰³.

Given that much of the current community housing stock is 'family sized' the ability to create an adequate portfolio of properties may be limited by demand levels for 1 and 2 bedroom properties within the public housing sector. In areas with little public housing stock, the ability to transfer properties to community management will be further limited.

The process of transfers may allow community housing providers to target and allocate a greater number of their smaller properties to young tenants by increasing the overall number of properties managed. Further the transfer of stock to community management may allow for more targeted allocation of those properties in order to meet the needs of specific, disadvantaged groups such as young people.

Greater clarification of the respective roles and responsibilities of the SHA and community housing provider will be required to address problems commonly associated with transfers. Further, resourcing levels must be increased commensurate with the number of additional properties to be managed.

Headleasing

Under headleasing arrangements, properties are leased from the private rental market and then sub-let to community housing tenants. While this results in considerable government funds being given to private land owners, the practice does offer certain advantages in terms of:

- Increasing net stock numbers in areas where stock purchase is unaffordable or unviable due to high

Waiting Time	Number of Responses
No Response Given	30
Less Than 1 Month	3
1-12 Months	29
13-24 Months	12
25-36 Months	4
37-48 Months	2
48 Months and over	5
TOTAL	85

property values.

- Providing tenants with greater 'safe-guards' than offered under private rental arrangements.
- Increasing young people's access to rental property while providing all the benefits offered by community housing.
- Offering a greater choice over location of properties so that community housing providers can ensure easy access to local services and infrastructure.

Difficulties that may be experienced with this arrangement include:

- Decisions regarding the stock are limited by the lease agreement.
- The tenure offered may be limited as a result of long term lease agreements not being available¹⁰⁴.



IDEAS FOR GOOD PRACTICE



ENSURING HOUSING IS APPROPRIATE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

- Ensure young tenants are offered appropriate accommodation. Given the problems reported with some young tenants and their visitors being noisy and annoying neighbours, it may be more appropriate for them to be housed in detached housing than shared living situations.
- Ensure the sound proofing of cluster housing (if offered) is adequate to avoid tenant noise disturbing other residents.
- Ensure that the portfolio of stock managed provides an appropriate mix of properties in terms of:
 - Property type ie. detached and semi-detached housing and flats or apartments.
 - Property sizes ie. number of bedrooms (this may involve increasing the number of 1 or 2 bedroom properties).
 - Properties suitable for people with physical disabilities.
 - Properties suitable for young indigenous tenants and those from non-English Speaking Backgrounds.
- Ensure fittings and furnishings are durable and easily maintained.

ESTABLISHING PURPOSE BUILT STOCK

- When assessing the appropriateness of properties for young people, take into account:
 - Proximity to public transport.
 - The social environment – ie. areas where young people will feel safe, identify with the people around them and be accepted as part of the community.
 - Proximity to services.
 - Access to shared outdoor space.
 - Energy efficient design.
 - Safety and security.
 - Provision of adequate storage.
 - Provision of carparking space.
 - Access to private outdoor space.
 - Providing sufficient built-in storage space.
 - Room sizes are appropriate for their functions.
 - Room relationships provide privacy and security.
 - Surfaces and finishes are easy to keep clean and well maintained.
 - Diversity of design but with an overall sense of unity.
- Allow young people to personalise their accommodation.
- Provide equipment and guidelines so tenants can maintain communal outdoor spaces.

ENSURING HOUSING IS ACCESSIBLE FOR PEOPLE WITH PHYSICAL DISABILITIES

- Develop a Housing Acquisition and Selection Plan that includes coverage of acquiring properties suitable for people with physical disabilities and outlines minimum standards that can be applied to new stock acquisitions.
- Involve people with expertise in accessible housing design and construction when undertaking property assessments to save time and money in the longer term and ensure suitability of stock.
- Be aware of the need for property modifications and develop strategies to assess modification possibilities.
- Take into account access into and out of the property, internal layout, safety and security, appropriateness of materials, outdoors spaces and air circulation.
- Provide a specification to Real estate Agents setting out both minimum and desirable housing criteria and encourage them to contact you when suitable properties are put up for sale or lease.

- If you experience difficulties acquiring suitable properties it may be beneficial to:
 - Identify properties suitable for modification and seek funding to cover associated expenses.
 - Seek funding to purpose build properties.
 - Seek joint project opportunities with other relevant services to purpose build properties¹⁰⁵.

5.2 VACANCY RATES AND WAITING TIMES TO BE HOUSED

Young single people will naturally experience difficulty accessing community housing unless there are suitable vacancies in organisations that either target or have stock targeted at this group. At the time the NCHF Mapping project was undertaken, only 4% of dwellings and 5% of boarding or group housing stock was vacant.

Given that community housing providers rely heavily on income generated from rent there is often the necessity to ensure occupancy rates are as close to capacity as possible. The low vacancy rates reported reflects this financial imperative. According to the NCHF Mapping Project, the highest vacancy rates were found in 'Welfare and Other non-Profit' Organisations and 'Educational' organisations (5-6%). Housing Associations were found to have a vacancy rate at about 3% with Co-ops reporting the lowest vacancy rate at only 1%¹⁰⁶.

There is considerable variance in vacancy rates across the states and territories, with the ACT, Northern Territory and Victoria having the lowest dwelling vacancy rates at between 0-2%. The highest dwelling vacancy rates were found in Western Australia (5%). Both Western Australia and South Australia were found to have comparatively higher bedroom vacancy rates than the other states at 13% and 16% respectively.

Vacancy rates indicate a shortage of dwellings in capital cities (3%) and large rural centres (2%) although vacancy rates of dwellings in remote areas and 'other' metropolitan areas was only 6%. The vacancy rate of bedrooms in remote areas was found to be 26% compared to 6% in rural areas.

While there is very little coverage given to the effect of low level tenant turn over on community housing vacancy rates, it is reasonable to assume that when long term tenure is offered and stock growth is not considerable, vacancy rates will be low. Consequently, one of the biggest benefits offered by community housing, ie. long term tenure, may act as a significant barrier to young people entering the sector.

Current vacancy rates do not provide a positive picture for young people attempting to access

community housing. While the highest vacancy rates are found in 'Other Welfare and non- Profit' Organisation, young people tend to experience difficulty accessing these models.

While young people enjoy greater access to housing associations, young people will find access limited by low vacancy rates. Higher vacancy rates in shared accommodation tend to suggest that young people may have more luck accessing group housing if this is the housing of their choice and they are compatible with existing tenants.

Low vacancy rates will naturally lead to lengthy 'wait' times to be housed. When asked the average waiting times to be housed, project participants gave the following responses:

Table 13 Waiting Times To be Housed

SHA's were also asked the average waiting time to be housed. Unfortunately no SHA was able to provide waiting times relevant to community housing.

Due to the discrepancy between demand and available housing stock, the ability to provide a timely housing response is severely limited.

5.3 Difficulty In Being Contacted When A Vacancy Becomes Available

Regardless of whether transience is the result of necessity or choice, it nevertheless acts as a significant barrier to accessing community housing in that housing providers often report difficulties in contacting young people when suitable vacancies occur.

Sixty seven percent of project participants reported that young people are often harder to contact than other applicant groups, while only 18% reported that this was not the case. (see Table 10).

Remaining in contact with applicants on the waiting list is a key strategy to overcoming the impact of transience on the housing options of young people. Of those project participants who have adopted this practice, the frequency of contact made ranged from 3 to 12 months. One agency reported that:

We review the waiting list every 6 months instead of yearly. We make it clear to them when they apply that they are required to let us know of a change of address if they wish to stay on the waiting list.
NSW 'Other Welfare/Not-for-profit' Organisation

Seventy three percent of project participants reported that they do not send periodical statements to applicants while waiting to be accommodated, thus this is an area for further service improvement.



IDEAS FOR GOOD PRACTICE



MANAGING THE CHARACTERISTIC TRANSIENCE OF YOUNG PEOPLE

- Review the waiting list on a regular basis by contacting applicants in writing. If no response is received within 1 month, you may decide to remove the applicant's name from the list¹¹⁹.
- Encourage applicants to make regular contact with your organisation. This will allow you to determine their interest in remaining on the waiting list. When regular contact is not made a 'Sleepers List' may be established that contains the names of applicants who have fulfilled this requirement.
- Ensure young people are aware of any requirement to make regular contact when lodging an application or expressing their intention to be placed on the waiting list.
- Send applicants copies of newsletters or bulletins to keep them informed of activities and service changes. The newsletter could contain a 'change of address' section for applicants to return when applicable. Alternatively include a Change of Address Form in Applicant

Information Kits. Once one of these forms has been received, the applicant should then be

State/Territory	Minimum Age Allowable	Additional Conditions Applied
Western Australia	16 years	NA
Tasmania	16 years	Must have a support network in place, including an adult who can sign legal documents on their behalf
Queensland	No minimum	People must be under 25 years to access assistance under the Youth Headlease Transfer Scheme
Victoria	15 years	Applicants must be between 15 and 25 years to access youth specific community based housing. Under 15's must be referred to local Adolescent Community Placement Agency or Protection and Care Unit.
South Australia	No age limit set	Tenants must be 15 years or over to sign lease
Northern Territory	Not known	NA
New South Wales	16 years	NA
ACT	16 years	NA

sent another for future use¹²⁰.

5.4 THE RELEVANCE OF COMMUNITY HOUSING MODELS TO YOUNG PEOPLE

It is apparent that some of the benefits offered by community housing such as tenant participation, may actually dissuade young people seeking housing in the sector, although further research will be required to ascertain whether this is the case.

As pointed out in Section 4.4, tenant participation models have often overestimated young people's interest and ability to participate. Management models which do not provide a flexible approach to tenant participation then, may be seen by young people as being out of touch with their needs and abilities.

There is currently very little research into young Australian's housing preferences, particularly among young indigenous people¹⁰⁷. The research available suggests that young people often prefer to live within more conventional forms of housing such as private or public rental¹⁰⁸.

As young people are not an homogenous group, it is impossible to generalise about the type of housing 'young people' prefer. Grieve and Hillhouse, in a study of Tasmanian young women, found that issues such as:

- *The ability to access support.*
- *Affordability.*
- *Quality of stock.*
- *Security.*
- *Privacy.*
- *Independence.*
- *Access to local social/support networks and required services.*

were the key housing requirements of the young women surveyed¹⁰⁹.

Community housing undoubtedly offers many young people a high quality housing response, whether this is long term or only for an interim/transitional period, until issues requiring support are addressed and preferred housing is secured.

An examination of young people’s views and experiences of the sector would provide a valuable indication as to service practice and management areas that will require further refinement to more effectively reflect and meet the needs of young tenants.

☑☑☑ **IDEAS FOR GOOD PRACTICE** ☑☑☑

INCREASING THE RELEVANCE OF COMMUNITY HOUSING MODELS TO YOUNG PEOPLE

- ☑ Investigate strategies to allow for flexible participation levels.
- ☑ Seek young people’s input when developing or reviewing models to ensure the model developed is inclusive of young people and reflects their needs, abilities and desires.
- ☑ Discuss activities that will be of interest and benefit to individual young tenants and encourage them to participate in these.

5.5 LACK OF KNOWLEDGE OF COMMUNITY HOUSING OPTIONS

The preference young people have expressed for ‘conventional’ housing forms may be more a reflection of the fact that these forms are more familiar to them than community housing, rather than an informed statement of preference.

The lack of easily obtainable, culturally appropriate information on community housing is widely considered to be an impediment to young people accessing the

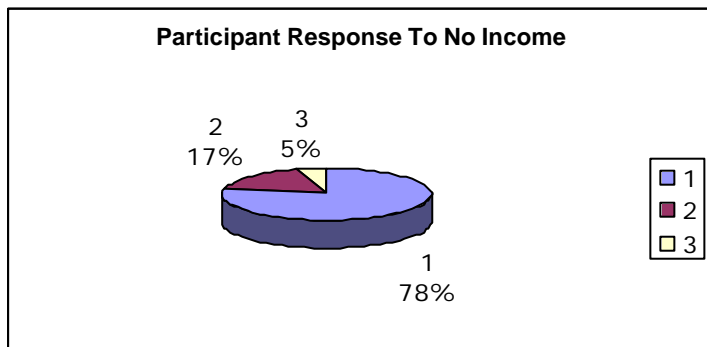


Figure 4 considered to be an impediment to young people accessing the

Key:
 1 - Refer to SAAP to be housed
 2- House and attempt to rectify lack of income
 3- House on the condition of external support

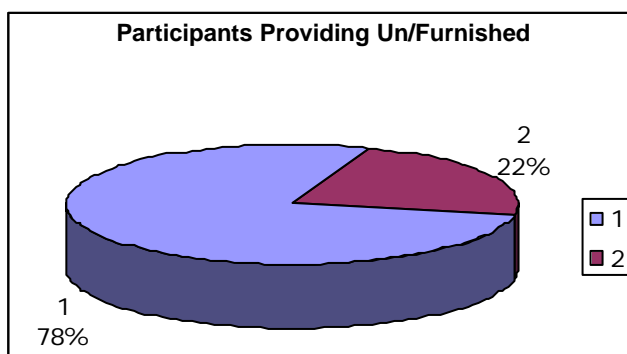
sector¹¹⁰, particularly young indigenous Australians and those from non-English Speaking Backgrounds and recently arrived refugees¹¹¹.

When asked whether information was available in community languages, only 35% of project participants who currently house people from non-English speaking backgrounds answered in the affirmative. It was evident however that 21% of participants who do not currently house people in this group, do in fact offer information in community languages.

The ability to access translation services is a key consideration for organisations in rural and remote areas. Figure 5.

An awareness of community housing options among SAAP and other support providers is fundamental to ensuring young clients are referred to

Key:
 1 - Unfurnished
 2- Furnished



community housing and are encouraged and supported to apply for vacancies when they arise. The majority (82%) of project participants reported receiving referrals from SAAP. The frequency of referrals received varied from less than 1 per fortnight to 40 per fortnight. The majority of participants (51%) however, reported that between 1 and 10 referrals were received on a fortnightly basis.

It was evident among National Workshop participants that community housing providers rarely have to advertise in order to fill vacancies. Promotional activities may offer significant longer term advantages such as ensuring an adequate awareness of community housing, what it offers, and how it is different from other housing forms within the wider community.



IDEAS FOR GOOD PRACTICE



PROMOTING A GREATER AWARENESS OF COMMUNITY HOUSING

- Ensure up to date information is provided to the following potential referral agencies:
 - *Real estate agents*
 - *Local offices of government departments*
 - *Support agencies*
 - *Inter-agency networks*
 - *Community Information Notice Boards*
 - *and the Court House¹¹²*
- Use the local media to promote activities as well new initiatives, significant achievements, changes in service operations or opening hours and policy changes¹¹³.
- Ensure copies of the Association's brochure (including basic eligibility and application details) are available at community and government organisations in the local area.
- Target promotional activities and material to young people by:
 - Ensuring information provided is youth specific
 - Providing information in areas accessed by young people such as schools, Youth Centres, Centrelink offices, caravan parks etc.
 - Ensuring information is presented in a way that appeals to young people – involve young people in designing posters, brochures etc
- Ensure promotional material allow readers to differentiate community housing from other housing forms. Include coverage of the focus on independent living (as opposed to the supported accommodation model of SAAP), as well as the emphasis on community connectedness within such material.
- Work closely with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and those from non-English Speaking Backgrounds to promoting housing options within these communities and gain a stronger awareness of relevant cultural issues, beliefs and practices. This will provide the basis for ensuring a culturally sensitive and appropriate housing response.

State/Territory	Percentage of Participants Targeting Tenants 15-24 Years	Percentage of Total Tenants Aged 15-24 Years*
ACT	13%	28.2%
NSW	3%	15.2%
NT	0%	5%
QLD	23%	8%
SA	9%	6.4%
TAS	4%	5.8%
VIC	13%	2.8%
WA	6%	5.9%

5.6 AGE BASED ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

SHA's were asked to identify age based eligibility criteria for community housing. Their responses are provided in Table 14.

Table 14 Aged Based Eligibility For Community Housing In Each State/Territory.

~~Obviously program targets may also set age based eligibility criteria.~~

While it is evident that young people in the project target group are not excluded from community housing on the basis of SHA eligibility criteria, they may find they are restricted from becoming a member of a housing association or co-op.

Tasmanians under the age of 18 years are excluded from full membership of both of these management models, although may be accepted as tenants on the basis that they have an adult who will sign legal consent forms on their behalf.

In Queensland, under 18 year olds are eligible to become a member of a co-op unless the rules of that co-op state otherwise. Under the Queensland Co-operatives Act of 1997, young people under 18 are not considered 'competent' to hold office in a co-op, nor are they entitled to vote. Young people under the age of 18 years are not excluded from membership of a housing association in this state.

In Victoria people under the age of 18 years are excluded from becoming a member of a co-op on the basis that minors are unable to enter into a legal contract on his/her own behalf. The South Australian Housing Authority reported that while under 18's are eligible for membership of both co-ops and housing associations, though are excluded from sitting on management committees or boards.

5.7 LOW INCOMES

Young people often experience financial difficulty meeting household establishment and ongoing costs. The practice of charging bond payments may result in difficulties unless tenants are able to negotiate a payment plan. Further, young people may struggle to meet bond requirements when they are based on the market rather than subsidised rental value of the property.

The fact that community housing tenants benefit from subsidised rental often means that they are ineligible for Bond Assistance from their State/Territory Housing Authority. States where community housing tenants are ineligible for Bond Assistance include:

- Western Australia
- Tasmania
- Queensland
- Victoria
- Northern Territory
- ACT
- New South Wales

Of these states, Victoria and Queensland reported that tenants were ineligible for Bond Assistance as a result of receiving subsidised rental. In ACT community housing tenants are not charged bond and

therefore do not require such support. Only South Australia reported that community housing tenants are able to apply for Bond Assistance if they are on low incomes or are in receipt of Centrelink benefits.

Community housing tenants may also be ineligible for Bond Assistance when there is an outstanding debt to the Housing Authority.

Young people who are not in receipt of any form of income may find that they are ineligible for community housing in those states where receipt of income support is a criteria of eligibility. Only Victoria stated that long term community housing tenants must be eligible for and in receipt of a Centrelink Payment of at least \$1 per fortnight to be eligible. Obviously this requirement would exclude young people on part time wages who are eligible for income support though do not wish to register for such.

Housing Queensland reported that community housing tenants are generally required to be in receipt of some income in order to be able to pay rent and contribute to the viability of the housing provider.

While most states did not set minimum income levels for community housing tenants, most participants (78%) demonstrated an unwillingness to house young people who were not in receipt of any income, as is evident from Figure 4.

Figure 6 It is evident from these responses view a lack of income as a

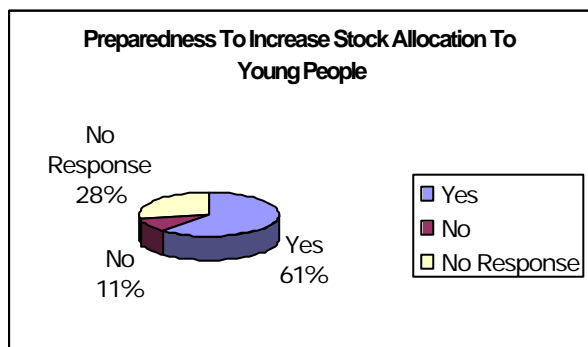
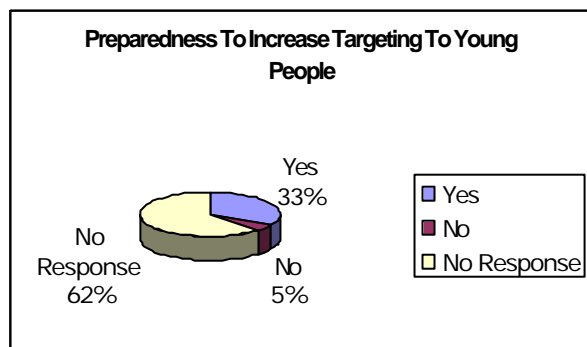


Figure 7 that the majority of participants



significant support need and questioned their ability to provide such. Obviously the financial impact (ie. diminished return) of young people who are not in receipt of income is a further disincentive to house these young people.

Community housing providers could alleviate some of the difficulties experienced in meeting household establishment expenses by offering fully or partially furnished properties. It is evident that the majority of project participants offered unfurnished properties as indicated in Figure 5.



IDEAS FOR GOOD PRACTICE



ADDRESSING YOUNG PEOPLE'S LOW INCOMES

- Investigate whether large non-government agencies in your area are able to provide community housing tenants with cheap (or free) white-goods and furnishings.
- Attempt to negotiate payment arrangements via Centrepay and essential utility providers (ie. gas, electricity, phone and water) for young tenants on Centrelink payments. This system has been established by Canberra Community Housing For Young People (CCHYP) and allows tenants to pay utility connection fees over a 12 month period with payments directly debited from their social security payment. CCHYP has agreed to meet the Centrepay administrative charge associated with this system.
- Link young tenants to Commonwealth Emergency Relief Program funds and any similar programs provided by the SHA. In WA financial assistance is available from the Department of Family and Children's Services. Tasmanians may access funding to cover either the cost of the bond or moving expenses. The Victorian SHA offers Housing Establishment Funds (HEF) to cover storage costs, removal expenses or to purchase essential furniture (where the provision of such is a prerequisite to housing the applicant and no acceptable alternative option is available)¹¹⁴.

5.8 TARGETING AND ALLOCATION PRACTICE

One of the most direct barriers to young people accessing community housing is the practice of targeting and stock allocation on the part of providers. It is important to note the difference between agency targets (ie. the specific groups targeted by an agency) and stock targeting (the number of properties an agency will target at specific groups within their overall target populations). The NCHF found that 99% of properties targeted at young people are managed by CSHA funded organisations with the remaining 1%¹²¹ managed by non-CSHA funded organisations.

The NCHF found that only 8% of CSHA funded and 0%¹²² of non-CSHA funded stock was targeted to young tenants¹²³. In comparison, between 30 and 50% of stock is not targeted to specific tenant groups or is targeted to people on low incomes generally¹²⁴.

Young people experience differing levels of access depending on the funding source of providers. People between the ages of 15 and 24 years are more than twice as likely to be housed within CSHA funded organisations. This may reflect the propensity of non-CSHA funded organisations to house older people as well as the comparative number of organisations targeted to young people. The NCHF found that 14% of CSHA yet only 5%¹²⁵ of Non-CSHA funded providers were targeted toward this tenant group. An increase in the number of providers that actively target young people will naturally result in improved access to the sector.

Young people's access also varies according to the state/territory of residence. Table 15 outlines the percentage of community housing providers targeting young people compared to the actual percentage of total tenants young people comprise. This data has been derived from the NCHF Mapping Project.

Management Model	Number Of Participants	% of Total Number of Participants Per Management Model
Church Based Organisation	4	50%
Local Government	2	66.7%
Co-operative	3	16.7%
Housing Association	42	89.4%
Other Welfare	8	72.7%
SAAP	9	64.3%
TOTAL	68	

Table 15. Percentage of Youth Targeted Providers And Young Tenants Per State/Territory

* This data has been based on the number of tenants for which age was known.

It should be noted that the NCHF experienced difficulty in collecting relevant data from all Victorian CSHA funded providers as well organisations reported on under the Ecumenical Housing Survey and for Queensland Community Rent Scheme organisations¹²⁶.

These difficulties may account for the apparently low number of young people housed in Victoria, given the fact young people are more likely to be housed in CSHA funded organisations. It may also account for the considerable discrepancy between the percentage of Queensland providers targeting young people and the actual percentage of community housing tenants young people comprise in that state.

It is difficult to draw any solid conclusions as to young people’s access in each state/territory given the data collection difficulties experienced by the NCHF Mapping Project. This is an area that will require further attention if an accurate picture of young people’s access on a state/territory basis is to be gained.

NCHF data indicates that the proportion of stock actually allocated exceeds that targeted to young people. Accordingly young people between 15 and 24 years comprise 11% of CSHA and 5% of non-CSHA funded agency tenants¹²⁷. When examining the data however it is also apparent that the proportion of total community housing stock targeted at young people (CSHA - 8%, non-CSHA – 0%) is less than the proportion of organisations targeting this group (CSHA 14%, non-CSHA – 5%). The NCHF also found this was the case when comparing agency and stock targeting to homeless people generally¹²⁸.

Young people enjoy greater access to community housing associations (representing 14% of tenants), student based housing association (32%) and ‘other type’ organisations (14%). Young people represented the least number of tenants in ‘other welfare/not for profit organisations (4%), Local Government providers (4%) and church based organisations (2%)¹²⁹.

When reviewing the proportion of young tenants by the location of providers, young people constitute the largest percentage (12%) of tenants in ‘other metropolitan centres’, followed by large rural centres (10%), capital cities (9%) and other remote areas (8%). Young people constituted the smallest percentage of tenants of providers based in ‘other’ rural areas (7%). It can be concluded then, that agency location has a lesser impact on young people’s access to community housing than other factors such as funding source or management model. This data however, may indicate a need for greater number of community housing providers in ‘other rural and remote’ areas.

The Impact of Priority Waiting Lists

The NCHF found that 59% of organisations surveyed maintained waiting lists¹¹⁵. The findings of the current project largely concurs with NCHF data, with 56% of project participants reporting maintaining such lists. The majority of community housing providers who maintain waiting lists also maintain priority waiting lists. The NCHF found that about 59% of participating organisations maintained a priority waiting list. Again the findings of this project largely concurs with the number of participants (54%) maintaining priority waiting lists.

Priority waiting lists do little to improve access unless information is collected on the particular needs of individual applicants. The NCHF found that 67% of organisations surveyed collected such information. The vast majority of project participants (64%) reported that applicants were prioritised on the basis of need such as health and safety issues, low incomes, discrimination faced etc. The second most commonly reported basis for prioritisation is the suitability of the housing offered and applicant compatibility with existing tenants. Other factors such as length of ‘wait turn’, government criteria, program targets and quotas, referral from a support agency and links to the local area were also reported as the basis for prioritisation.

Where priority waiting lists are used as the basis for selection, young people may experience difficulty

gaining access due to the tendency to down grade young single people's housing need in comparison to single parents, families and older people for example.

Young singles with no dependents often find themselves at the 'bottom of the list' so to speak because they have no dependents or are not in a violent, abusive relationship where their physical safety may be in danger.
New South Wales Co-operative

Yet another agency reported:

Young tenants are told that they are not considered under priority housing as there are more urgent needs out there ie. terminal illness, escaping domestic violence etc.
New South Wales 'Other Welfare or Not-for-Profit/ SAAP agency

In order to address access difficulties experienced by young people, community housing providers must look at ways to measure and compare the level of need among applicants. Where applicants demonstrate similar levels of disadvantage, providers must be willing to accept give the housing needs of young people the same weighting as other applicants.

When allocation decisions are based principally on the length of time an applicant has been on the 'wait list', young people are often excluded due to the fact that they have often not been waiting as long as older applicants¹³⁰.

Preparedness to Increase Stock Targeting and Allocation To Young People

The overwhelming majority of project participants who currently target housing to young people reported a preparedness to increase stock allocation to young people on the basis of demonstrable local need, as is shown in Figure 6.

A strong level of support for increasing young people's access to community housing was also evident among organisations that do not currently target young people (see Figure 7).

Johnson and Turnbull also found a high level of commitment to improving young people's access to and experiences of community housing¹³¹.

The ability to increase the level of stock allocation to young people, however is largely dependent on:

- A perceived and actual ability to meet tenant needs.
- The capacity to manage the potential impact of 'high needs' tenants on the organisation and other tenants.
- The need to ensure young applicants are compatible with existing tenants if they are to be housed in group housing situations.

Management Model	Number of Providers	% of Total Number of Participants Per Management Model
Church Based Organisation	5	62.5%
Local Government	2	66.7%
Co-operative	6	33.3%
Housing Association	32	68.1%
Other Welfare	6	54.5%
SAAP	11	78.6%
TOTAL	62	

- Program eligibility and targets.



IDEAS FOR GOOD PRACTICE



WAITING LISTS

- Ensure initial assessment provides adequate information on the applicant's housing and support needs to provide a strong basis on which to prioritise applications.
- Establish clear allocation procedures to ensure transparency.
- Ensure the waiting list contains only those eligible for housing by requiring application forms to be accepted by the Committee of Management or Tenant Selection Committee before applicant names are placed on the waiting list¹¹⁶.
- Encourage applicants to inform you of any changes that may impact on eligibility or allocation.
- Ensure that information on applicants is updated and ineligible applicants are removed (or placed on a sleepers list as outlined on Page 46).
- Notify applicants whose names have been removed from the waiting list, provide relevant reasons for the decision and provide information on how they may lodge an appeal¹¹⁷.
- Record the date and reason for why applicants are removed from the waiting list and include this information in the applicant's file. If applicant files are not retained once they have been removed from the waiting list, record this data for future reference.
- Keep waiting lists in a secure place and limit access to those responsible for making allocation decisions¹¹⁸.

MAKING TARGETING AND ALLOCATION PRACTICE MORE INCLUSIVE OF YOUNG PEOPLE

- Ensure allocation decisions are based on both the level of need as well as the length of time spent on the waiting list.
- Where possible (and viable) increase the number of properties targeted at young people.
- Investigate developing a process of planning and reviewing waiting lists. Where priority waiting lists are maintained, undertake regular reviews of how effectively these lists ensure local needs are met.

5.9 ENSURING HOUSING AND SUPPORT OFFERED ARE CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE FOR ABORIGINES AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDERS

A total of 70.6% of project participants reported that they currently house indigenous people. There was however, considerable variation among the management models in terms of the number of participants housing people from indigenous communities as indicated in Table 16.

Table 16 Housing Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders By Management Model

The majority (65.9%) of project participants reported the level of information and support was adequate to ensure an appropriate service level and response to Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders. However 22% of participants that currently house Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders,

reported improvements were needed in this area.

Participants gave a range of responses regarding what further information and/or support is required to ensure an appropriate service level and response to indigenous communities. The most common responses given include:

- Increased access to training in working with these communities.
- Greater consultation with indigenous communities.
- A greater understanding of cultural perceptions of homelessness and housing need.
- An increased support capacity including access to specialist support.
- Strategies to improve the cultural sensitivity of housing and support.

The ability to access training in working with indigenous communities is fundamental to achieving a more appropriate housing and support response for these tenants. Only 50.5% of participating organisations reported that they have access to such training. Given the availability of training, it is commendable that 45.8 % of participants who currently house Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders reported they have undertaken training on working with these communities.

While funding to community housing has been substantial, it is said to be still insufficient to meet the demand in some communities for new housing or to cover the cost of repairs or operations.¹³²

According to the findings of the Community Housing and Infrastructure Needs Survey undertaken by the Australian Bureau of Statistics in 1999, 33% of housing managed by an indigenous housing organisation is in need of major repair or replacement¹³³.

It has been estimated that under current funding levels it would take 20 years to clear the back log of housing and infrastructural needs of Indigenous communities¹³⁴.

Given the backlog of indigenous people waiting for housing, the discrimination faced in the private rental market and the reported problems of overcrowding¹³⁵, there is an obvious need for greater access to community housing on the part of Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders. Further research will be required however, to identify the housing preferences of young indigenous people and their communities, to ensure an adequate and appropriate housing response.

Improving indigenous communities' access to community housing will have significant resource implications. That only 56% of indigenous housing organisations received a government grant in the 1998-99 financial year¹³⁶ is consequently an area for concern.

The fact that many houses are not culturally appropriate in their design, are poorly built and there has been no systematic approach to maintenance and repairs, has arguably contributed to the housing problems faced by indigenous communities. Further, building codes must more adequately account for the particular requirements of indigenous housing in rural and remote areas¹³⁷.

The *National Principles For The Design, Construction and Maintenance Of Indigenous Housing* outline four basic principles including:

- *Houses will be designed, constructed and maintained for safety.*
- *Houses will be designed, constructed and maintained to support healthy living.*
- *Quality control measures will be adopted in the design and construction of houses.*
- *Houses will be designed and constructed for long term function and ease and economy of maintenance¹³⁸.*

Other key areas for consideration include:

- Housing design should be appropriate to the location and cultural and social requirements of the community.

- Houses should be designed in accordance with ways indigenous people use their houses.
- The quality of indigenous housing in rural and remote areas should not be less than the standard applying to urban areas.

ATSIC is currently developing a set of performance indicators for indigenous housing provision that will provide a useful tool for community housing providers who house people from indigenous communities.



IDEAS FOR GOOD PRACTICE



ENSURING HOUSING AND SUPPORT ARE CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE FOR ABORIGINALS AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDERS

- When seeking to build new stock targeted at indigenous households ensure that the *National Principles For The Design, Construction and Maintenance Of Indigenous Housing* are complied with.
- Ensure that long term maintenance costs are included in initial housing design and life-cycle budgets given that overcrowding often results in greater maintenance expenses¹³⁹.
- Encourage staff to participate in training on working with local indigenous communities if available.
- Contact regional departments of ATSIC to gain information on relevant housing and service issues as well as linkages with local communities.
- Liaise with key indigenous leaders to promote community housing and gain an insight into cultural sensitivity considerations.

5.10 HOUSING AND SUPPORT OFFERED ARE CULTURALLY INAPPROPRIATE FOR PEOPLE FROM NON-ENGLISH BACK GROUNDS OR NEWLY ARRIVED MIGRANTS

People from non-English backgrounds may be hesitant to access community housing unless the housing and support are offered in a culturally appropriate manner.

A total of 61.2% of project participants currently house people from non-English Speaking Backgrounds or newly arrived migrants. There was considerable variation among the management models represented, in terms of the number who currently house people from this group as indicated in Table 17.

Table 17 Housing People From non-English Speaking Backgrounds By Management Model

Fewer participants (52.9%) reported that the level of information and support was adequate to ensure an appropriate service level and response to people within this group than for Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders.

Participants reported that the following areas require improvement:

- Greater access to interpreter and translation services.
- Training in working with a diversity of cultures.
- More housing and service based information in community languages.
- Greater knowledge of local, specialist support services.
- Greater awareness of local housing need of different cultural groupings.

Of those participants who currently house tenants from Non- English Speaking Backgrounds 53.8%



reported participation in multicultural training.



IDEAS FOR GOOD PRACTICE



ENSURING HOUSING IS CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE FOR PEOPLE FROM NON-ENGLISH SPEAKING BACKGROUNDS.

- Refer to the document *Working With A Multicultural Community* for good practice information on working with these communities.
- Ensure assessment techniques are appropriate, with access to translators provided, if required and requested by the applicant/tenant. This may require holding face to face interviews rather than assessment over the telephone.
- Encourage workers/members to participate in training on working with people from diverse cultural backgrounds.
- Take the time to discuss needs and experiences with individual applicants or tenants rather than relying on assumptions or stereotypes of ethnicity.
- An awareness of cultural/religious beliefs, practices and values should be actively used to inform service provision.
- Cultural barriers should not be used as an excuse to deny or ignore tenant rights.
- Use ethno-specific welfare agencies, migrant support organisations and workers experienced in working with people from similar ethnic backgrounds as a valuable source of information. Where access is available to appropriate cultural support workers, these can provide a very valuable intermediary or advocacy role for tenants/applicants.
- Allow tenants/applicants to nominate if they feel more comfortable with a male or female worker and interpreter.
- Ensure flexible timeframes are provided and take into account the client's unfamiliarity with organisations and systems in Australia, the need to book interpreters, or to attend appointments when the cultural support worker is available to advocate on behalf of the tenant/applicant. Tenant/applicants may also need time to attend cultural and religious commitments.
- Ensure all information regarding rights and responsibilities are provided in the tenant's/ applicant's preferred language.
- Collect and record information on applicants/tenants from non-English Speaking backgrounds to assist in improving the housing and support services offered. Useful information may

Information Given	Number Of Organisations
Background information on the agency	68
Agency rules/regulations	51
Tenant selection procedure	47
Tenant participation requirements	46
Dispute resolution material	48
Application form	75
TOTAL	335

include:

- Cultural identity or religion.
- Main language and other languages spoken.
- Preferred language used for service provision and for printed or audio material.
- Level of fluency in English.
- Requests for phone and/or on-site interpreter services.
- Ease of obtaining an interpreter for the language required.
- Requests for cultural support workers.
- Contacts and contact details of appropriate services.
- Requested needs from tenants/applicants from diverse cultural communities that went unmet.

- Develop strong links with these communities through direct, regular contact and by attending cultural events etc.

5.11 CONCLUSION

While young people face a range of barriers to accessing the sector, the successes of youth targeted providers and a willingness on the part of the sector to increase targeting and allocation to young people indicate that there is a strong basis on which to ensure community housing is an option for a greater number of young people.

It is important to recognise that these barriers are not only the result of current service practice but also resourcing limitations. Consequently government needs to work in partnership with the sector to facilitate greater access and effect better housing outcomes for young people.

As community housing was largely designed for tenants with adequate independent living skills, community housing providers are often reliant on major support needs being adequately addressed before tenants enter the sector. Given the need for pathways out of SAAP, it is to be expected that community housing will take on a larger role in this area in the future. However, the reported difficulties SAAP experiences in addressing multiple and/or complex support needs indicates that service improvement will be required to ensure support needs are addressed prior to clients exiting intensive supported accommodation.

Given the time limitations attached to SAAP accommodation there will always be a number of young people whose needs are such that support is required for a longer period than can be provided when housed in the program. If these young people are unable to remain in SAAP for the period required, there will naturally be the imperative to exit to longer term accommodation. When adequate support is not available however, these young people will be set up to fail.

Due to the fact that young people often face multiple difficulties achieving and maintaining independent living, and providers experience difficulties linking tenants to support, it is not surprising that many community housing providers view young people as 'high' needs tenants. As indicated above, it is important that a clear delineation is made between tenancy management and support issues to avoid overestimating the support needs of young people. A greater analysis of the relative time spent in each of these areas will allow community housing and support providers and governments to gain a clearer indication of service and resourcing implications when housing young tenants.

Given the relatively low numbers of SAAP services providing outreach support, governments should explore strategies to expand practice in this area. In order to identify the current capacity to provide outreach support, a clearer indication of the numbers of agencies providing outreach support and the proportion of total support hours this comprises is required. Consequently the NDCA should consider collecting data on the number of outreach support periods provided by SAAP services rather than merely the number of agencies categorised as outreach support providers.

Further consultation with young people will assist in refining community housing models to more adequately meet their needs. A greater emphasis on community housing however, will naturally

result in increased demand levels. The relatively small size of the sector, the currently low vacancy rates and the rate of growth are significant impediments to housing greater numbers of young people. Further the financial impact of these tenants on housing providers must be recognised and addressed in order to ensure ongoing viability.

The lack of consistency regarding the entitlements of under 18 years olds is a considerable cause for concern for young people in the lower end of the project target. The inconsistency regarding age based eligibility for membership of housing associations and co-ops that exists in Queensland and Victoria limits the range of models available. This is unfortunate in that under 18 year olds may benefit significantly from the supportive nature of co-ops. Further the inability for under 18's to participate in management committees in South Australia and Queensland effectively excludes them from enjoying the full benefits of membership.

The ability of generalist community housing providers to increase targeting to young people will be limited by the ability to refine policies and procedures to respond to the needs, abilities and desires of young people. Therefore it may be more appropriate to establish additional youth targeted services rather than attempting to promote a stronger level of targeting among generalist providers.

Given the high levels of demand for indigenous community housing, an increased awareness of cultural beliefs, practices and service considerations among providers not funded under the Aboriginal Rental Housing and Community Housing and Infrastructure programs, will be pivotal to increasing access for young Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders.

Project participants outlined a range of service improvement areas that will need to be addressed to provide a more culturally sensitive housing response to diverse communities.

IMPROVING THE SUSTAINABILITY OF TENANCIES

Project participants identified a range of issues that often result in young tenants experiencing difficulties maintaining tenancies. The most common difficulties raised by participants include:

- Lack of independent living skills (37%)
- Inadequate support available (19%)
- Problems experienced with visitors (20%)
- Greater property damage (13%)
- Financial Difficulties (12%)

Other less frequently reported difficulties included:

- Transience (10%)
- Drug and alcohol issues (7%)
- The inflexibility of service/agency requirements (4%)

Participants reported adopting a range of strategies to manage these difficulties. These will be discussed in turn below. Note that discussion of support issues has been provided in Chapter 4.

A total of 37 participants either gave no response when asked what strategies had been implemented to manage the difficulties experienced by young tenants or reported that no strategies had been developed, representing 44% of the total number of project participants.

6.1 ENSURING YOUNG PEOPLE ARE ABLE TO MAKE AN INFORMED DECISION ABOUT THE SUITABILITY OF COMMUNITY HOUSING

When asked whether young people experience difficulties maintaining community housing tenancies, a South Australian co-op highlighted the need for young to be adequately informed of their rights and responsibilities before joining, thus reducing the likelihood of unsuitable or unsustainable tenancies. This was supported by attendees at the National Workshop who stated that most successful tenancies resulted from adequate time being spent in the initial assessment and interview stages.

Participants reported adopting a range of induction techniques to introduce prospective applicants to the service and the property offered. Fifty six percent of project participants reported holding face to face interviews with prospective applicants. A small number (21%) reported that prospective applicants were invited to inspect the property and meet existing tenants before being invited to lodge an application.

Fifteen percent of participants reported providing prospective applicants with information they could take away with them so they could think about the offer and then get back to the agency after a couple of days if they wished to proceed with their application. When asked what information prospective applicants were provided with, the following responses were given:

Table 18 Information Given To Prospective Applicants

Participants also reported providing information on:

- Tenants' rights and responsibilities within the agency (29%);
- Other local services including housing and support agencies and emergency services (20%),
- Copies of the agency's newsletter, Annual Report and handbook (14%)
- Relevant policies and procedures (11%)
- Information on the Residential Tenancies Agreement 9%

Housing co-operatives often require prospective applicants to attend a set number of meetings, and in some instances, social activities, before being eligible to apply. Given the high level of participation required of co-operative tenants and the need to ensure compatibility with other residents, it is important prospective applicants have as much information as possible before lodging an application. Through these more rigorous induction processes, co-ops are not only able to assess the suitability of applicants but prospective applicants are afforded the time and opportunity to gain an understanding of co-op living.

As prospective applicants often have to wait before a vacancy arises, the ability to access information on other potential housing options is vital to addressing their immediate housing needs until gaining access to community housing. This is particularly important for young homeless people. Of the project participants, only 12% reported providing such information to prospective applicants.



IDEAS FOR GOOD PRACTICE



INDUCTION TECHNIQUES

- Develop a checklist of information to be provided to all applicants and to tenants once an offer has been made. This information could then be compiled into an Induction Kit to be given to prospective tenants.
- The Induction Kit could contain information on:
 - The length and type of tenancy agreement.
 - Type and location of accommodation available.
 - Respective rights and responsibilities.
 - Associated costs including rent, bond (if applicable) utility connection fees and furniture that will be required as well as potential payment options and sources of assistance.
 - Legal requirements and information on tenancy laws – this may need to be provided over a number of sessions in order to avoid overloading the applicant with difficult to understand information and to allow them to absorb what has been discussed.
 - Dispute resolution procedures.
 - Eviction procedures.
 - Tenant participation requirements and opportunities.
- Send potential applicants a copy of the Induction Kit prior to a face to face interview being held. This allows the young person to read and think about the information provided in their own time. Discuss all information provided in a follow-up interview and provide applicants with the opportunity to ask questions.
- Go through all induction information verbally with young people. This is particularly important for young people who have literacy, language or comprehension problems and when providing legal information.
- Where possible and appropriate introduce applicants to existing members or potential co-tenants in order to determine compatibility. This is particularly important for of co-ops, or when shared housing is offered.
- Co-op's may consider running periodical workshops on co-op living for prospective applicants.
- Consider establishing a 'buddy system' to support applicants or new tenants through the induction process. Accordingly applicants are supported through the induction process by one or more existing tenants or members. The 'buddy' could encourage and assist new tenants to attend and raise issues at meetings as is the case at¹⁴⁰.

- Allow young people to involve a significant person in their lives (for example a relative or friend) in the application and induction process. This may make them feel more comfortable approaching community housing providers and applying for housing.

6.2 ENCOURAGING SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

Given the often under-developed independent living skills of young people in the project target group the provision of education and training not only benefits young tenants but also their housing provider. Of the project participants, only 41% reported that they provided education and/or training to tenants. The majority (55%) of these participants however, do provide training in independent living skills. When asked whether this training was developed to encompass the needs of young people, 65% of relevant participants answered in the affirmative.

IDEAS FOR GOOD PRACTICE

FOR ENCOURAGING AND SUPPORTING SKILL DEVELOPMENT

- The idea of developing Tenant Training Modules was discussed in the good practice section of supporting tenant participation (see Page 35). The modules might focus on the following areas:
- Living skills.
 - Group and/or community living skills.
 - Organisational management.
 - Anger management and conflict resolution.
 - Self development.
 - Managing relationships.
 - Study skills.
 - Computer skills.
 - Parenting.
 - Managing drug/alcohol and gambling issues.
- Attempt to link young tenants to local education and training providers if the provision of in-house training is not viable.

6.3 MANAGING PROBLEMS WITH VISITORS

It is evident that community housing providers often have difficulties with young tenants having visitors over stay. This may be the result of young tenants being the first in their circle of friends to live independently. Friends will naturally be keen to stay over due to the relative freedom offered.

Having visitors over stay not only breaches the tenancy agreement but may result in increased noise and disruption to other tenants and neighbours.

They have all their friends around causing problems and then the tenant gets evicted. Either they do not understand the rules or do not want to know, and do not realise that a lease agreement is a legal and binding document.

New South Wales Community Housing Association

Organisations have adopted a range of strategies in order to resolve the problems caused by tenants' visitors.

We explain to the tenant that they are responsible for the behaviour of guests and are required to ensure the lease agreement is upheld. We talk to friends and explain the situation as clearly as possible so that everyone understands the

framework in which the tenancy can operate successfully.
Tasmanian Church Based Organisation/Community Housing Association

When discussion with tenants and problem visitors does not resolve the situation, organisations may find there are few options available other than enforcing the conditions of the lease agreement.

The Queensland AIDS Council has developed very clear policies relating to visitors which are explained to a tenant when taking up residency. Accordingly the AIDS Council explains that:

The tenant will be responsible for the behaviour of their visitors. Any damage by visitors must be paid for by the tenant. Any unacceptable behaviour from a visitor will, for the purposes of the tenancy agreement, be treated as if by the tenant¹⁴¹.

Consequently the onus is placed on the tenant to manage unruly visitors. When a tenant has been found to breach their tenancy agreement the AIDS Council's Housing Coordinator attempts to resolve the situation through mediation before commencing eviction proceedings¹⁴².

Young people may lack the empowerment to manage problem visitors and may fear losing their social network by asking friends to leave. Given the importance of maintaining strong social networks, community housing providers have a key role to play in assisting tenants to manage problem visitors in a way that does not jeopardise these relationships.



IDEAS FOR GOOD PRACTICE



FOR MANAGING PROBLEM VISITORS

- Allow tenants to participate in developing a Visitors Policy to empower them to manage visitors who have overstayed their welcome and to ensure familiarity with the requirements and procedures contained.
- Where the property allows, allow visitors to stay for short, set period of time and only take action if visitors have over stayed.
- Offer to assist young tenants in managing problem visitors if the tenant is experiencing difficulties asking visitors to leave. If this is the case, a discussion should be held with the visitor to outline the fact that they are breaching their friend's tenancy agreement and action will be taken accordingly.
- Ensure tenants are aware that it is their responsibility to ensure that visitors do not over stay or annoy neighbours/ co-tenants.

6.4 ADDRESSING THE PROBLEM OF PROPERTY DAMAGE

The incidence of property damage is a key concern for organisations due to the expense of undertaking repairs and the diminished return to the agency when properties remain vacant while maintenance work is being completed. Given the low levels of income returned from rents and the reported need to defer cyclical maintenance in some youth targeted organisations, the ability to manage the impact of increased property damage is severely limited within current funding and resourcing levels.

The practice of deferring cyclical maintenance results in considerably higher, longer term maintenance expense as has been witnessed with much of the older public housing stock. Consequently community housing providers with viability issues will find these worsen over time as properties are uninhabitable for longer periods while maintenance/repair work is completed. Access to recurrent subsidies varies not only on a state by state basis (see Chapter 4) but also

according to, funding source (CSHA – 80.5% and non-CSHA – 19.4%¹⁴³) and management model. The NCHF found that 57% of Community Housing Associations have access to ongoing financial support. Local Government Housing Organisations (7%) and Educational Housing Providers (0%) were the least likely management models to receive recurrent subsidies.

Apart from recurrent subsidies offered by SHA's, community housing providers have little access to ongoing financial assistance from other sources. Only 7%¹⁴⁴ of providers receive subsidies from their local government and 12% from welfare organisations¹⁴⁵.

In the absence of adequate recurrent subsidies, community housing providers may find meeting maintenance expenses increasingly difficult, particularly when cyclical maintenance is deferred and maintenance problems are allowed to worsen. It is important then, that budget allocations to meet maintenance expenses are realistic. This depends however, on organisations having adequate operating finance in the first place.

When organisations struggle to meet both operational and maintenance expenses, there is little option other than to prioritise expenditure. Given the financial impact of having properties unoccupied, organisations may be more likely to prioritise maintenance expenses over other areas such as service development and improvement.

The ability for maintenance procedures to effect a timely response is a key consideration and providers may need to explore ways to improve these procedures.



IDEAS FOR GOOD PRACTICE



FOR ADDRESSING THE PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH PROPERTY DAMAGE

- Minimise the potential for costly repairs by ensuring fittings and fixtures are hard wearing and easily maintained.
- Young people are just like other tenants – if minor maintenance is undertaken in a timely manner they are more likely to respect the property and take care of it.
- Encourage tenants to promptly report maintenance issues by outlining the benefits to both them and the organisation.
- When negotiating property management contracts ensure increased maintenance costs are covered within the contract.
- Provide access to Minor Maintenance and Repairs Training to tenants as well as required tools.
- Sharing information regarding reliable and reputable tradespeople with other local housing providers is a good way of ensuring quality work.
- Organisations may be able to negotiate a discount cost for service from tradespeople when a number of local housing providers agree to use the same tradespeople¹⁴⁶.
- Give tenants the contact details of 'preferred' tradespeople in the case of after hours emergencies¹⁴⁷.
- Refer to The National Community Housing Standards Manual for good practice ideas for managing both responsive (ie. unplanned) and cyclical maintenance, repairs and property upgrades. These Standards focus on:

- Documenting policies and procedures
- Ensuring all key players are informed of their rights and responsibilities
- Establishing good practice management systems
- Ensuring these items are budgeted for and the amount is adequate to cover required work
- Providing a system for feedback and/or grievance

- Provide tradespeople with information on the organisation's expectation of courtesy, reliability, quality, feedback, resolution of complaints and variations of job orders¹⁴⁸.

6.5 ADDRESSING YOUNG TENANT'S FINANCIAL DIFFICULTIES

Given the fact that financial difficulties are often the result of unemployment or limited employment opportunities, it is unfortunate that only 38.8% of project participants reported assisting young tenants to identify training and/or work opportunities.

It was suggested at the National Workshop that given the relative focus and resourcing levels of SAAP and community housing, the emphasis should be on SAAP to provide the support required to address tenants' financial difficulties. This was supported by project participants as evidenced by their response to applicants with no income (see Page 50). The onus would then be on community housing providers to link tenants to support as a matter of tenancy management practice. Possible sources of support include SAAP, Jobs Placement Employment and Training (JPET) and/or Jobs Pathways program providers.

New South Wales is currently in the process of developing two 'Campus' Pilots based on the FOYER Model from the UK and The Youth Village Model from Germany. It is expected that the pilot located in the municipality of Liverpool will be launched by March 2001¹⁴⁹. The other pilot will operate from Kempsey. Both of these pilots are still very much in the initial planning stage.

These pilots will be targeted at people between 16 and 25 years who are at risk of entering the poverty, unemployment and homelessness cycle. Consequently tenants will be offered accommodation and a range of supports aimed at addressing barriers to employment and linking tenants to work opportunities. The range of supports to be offered include:

- *Labour market participation programs.*
- *Educational and developmental programs.*
- *Life and personal skills.*
- *Budget counselling.*
- *Independent living skills.*
- *Numeracy or literacy programs¹⁵⁰.*

One of the key features of this model is that all services will be provided 'in-house', thus avoiding the necessity to refer tenants to external providers. This is particularly important given the frustration that is often felt when being referred to other services.

Tenants will be selected on the basis that they express an interest in participating and will benefit from the range of supports available. Once selected, they will then be offered an individual case management plan which will inform the range of supports required, participation requirements and expected result areas. In order to maximise the opportunity for success, applicants requiring specialist and intensive support will be considered ineligible to participate.

The Campus model differs from other community housing models in that tenure is offered for a period of up to two years only. Consequently the pilot does not represent a long term housing response. Tenants however, will be supported to make the transition out of the pilot into longer term accommodation. Despite differences between the model and community housing, there is a number of elements of the latter incorporated into the model including: a focus on reflecting the characteristics and meeting the needs of the local community and affording tenants a level of

participation in the management of the pilot.

The experiences of these pilots will be very valuable in developing future programs to improve the general job readiness of young tenants.



IDEAS FOR GOOD PRACTICE



ADDRESSING FINANCIAL DIFFICULTIES

- Consider applying to operate a JPET or Jobs Pathways Program if these programs are unavailable in your local area. Alternatively link unemployed tenants to such programs when available.
- Link tenants to Centrelink Offices and offer to provide advocacy support when dealing with Centrelink staff.

6.6 COPING WITH THE CHARACTERISTIC TRANSIENCE OF YOUNG PEOPLE

All too often the short term stability resulting from a housing association tenancy is lost when the tenancy has to be given up in order to take up or seek employment¹⁵¹.

Elton implies that a key strategy to ensuring tenants in this situation are not forced out of the sector is the process of stock transfers between community housing providers or between providers and public housing. His recognition that these transfers 'are rarely easy and often impossible' suggests that further work is required to develop stock transfer systems before the sector can respond adequately to the mobility requirements of young tenants.

The lack of vacancies in the both the community and public housing sectors is an impediment to this process. Given that both of these sectors are likely to maintain priority waiting lists, the issue of where to place referred tenants in the priority list is a key management issue that would need to be considered and negotiated.

One idea suggested at the National Workshop was that of *Reciprocal Lease Agreements*. Under this system tenants would be able to take their lease with them when moving to a property managed by another community housing organisation ie. the lease would be attached to the person rather than the property. Some organisations in the ACT are currently able to transfer the management of properties to another provider. At a state/territory level this would require a tenancy register in order to work efficiently.

The fact that tenancy legislation varies among the states and territories, limits the possibility of developing inter-state Reciprocal Lease Agreements.

6.7 MANAGING DISPUTES

Disputes may arise between:

- Co-tenants
- A tenant and their neighbour/s, or
- A tenant and the housing provider

Disputes Between Co-Tenants

The experience of the St George Community Housing/ SAAP Tenancy Management And Support Project, demonstrates the impact of household configuration on the likelihood of disputes arising



between tenants. In this project all young participants were placed in group housing situations and consequently a significant level of support was required to manage disputes that developed between co-tenants¹⁵².

Group housing situations raise a number of difficulties that must be addressed including:

- How to manage lease agreements when group housing situations deteriorate.
- How to provide the opportunity for 'time out' if required.
- The ability to provide the mediation or support to resolve issues before they impact on a tenancy.

Disputes With Neighbours

When community housing properties are easily identifiable (as is often the case in rural and remote areas) participants at the National Workshop stated that disputes may arise or be exacerbated by the prejudices against community housing tenants and/or providers within the local community.

When major disputes arise and both the tenant and the housing provider are known to the neighbour/s, providers may have little choice other than to relocate the tenant and dispose of the property. This obviously has a significant impact on both the tenant and the organisation.

Disputes Between A Tenant And Their Housing Provider

Disputes may arise between tenants and their housing provider for a myriad of reasons. Housing providers should ensure that there are clear dispute resolution procedures in place to address any disputes that may arise.



IDEAS FOR GOOD PRACTICE



DISPUTE RESOLUTION

- Develop a Dispute Resolution Policies and Procedures to ensure consistency and accountability. These procedures should outline the process and avenues of appeal.
- Consider appointing a Dispute Resolution Committee or Officer to provide a clear point of contact for tenants when raising and addressing disputes.
- Take a proactive approach to minimising disputes through offering regular tenant meetings to discuss and manage issues before conflict arises.
- Link tenants to support when disputes arise as a result of a personal support issue.
- To avoid conflict arising between your organisation and a tenant's support provider, tenant advocacy support should be provided by a third party to the Support Service Agreement.
- Offer tenants Dispute Resolution and Conflict Management Training or link them to external providers who offer training in these areas.
- Minimise the potential for conflict to arise as a result of group housing by:
 - Avoiding households bigger than 2 or 3 tenants.
 - Seeking legal advice to clarify the legal relationships between co-tenants.
 - Providing tenants with option of living alone.
 - Maximising the opportunity for tenants to chose who they live with.
 - Not accommodating people with challenging behaviours or lack of independent living skills together.



- Ensuring administrative arrangements are clear in terms of responsibilities and procedures¹⁵³.

- Encourage tenants to attempt to resolve disputes themselves. This will allow them to learn valuable dispute resolution skills.
- Offer mediation and/or conciliation when tenants are unable to resolve the dispute themselves.
- Use the Residential Tenancies Authority to resolve disputes only when all other strategies have been exhausted.
- Consider giving neighbours your business card and encouraging them to call if any problems arise. Both Gladstone Youth Service (QLD) and TAYA (Tas) currently adopt this method and have found that most neighbours will only contact the organisation in genuine cases.
- Further these two services reported that neighbours are less likely to call the police in favour of attempting to resolve the dispute via the housing provider.
- If a complaint is received from a troublesome neighbour, you may want to verify the situation with other neighbours before raising the issue with tenants.
- Consider the following suggestions to avoid conflict having a negative impact on the agency contained in The Queensland Community Housing Coalition Ltd submission to the Queensland 'Best Practice Project':
 - Ensure individuals and the organisation accepts that conflict is both normal and natural
 - Make sure all people are clear about why the organisation exists, its philosophy and operating principles
 - Get an agreement in writing from everybody to act within the operating principles
 - Follow the constitution, rules or memorandum and articles
 - Develop policies and procedures to manage conflict
 - Ensure these are consistent with the organisation's legal obligations under the Residential Tenancies Act
 - Support the principles of natural justice
 - Clearly define the legal rights and responsibilities of all people and positions
 - Ensure clear decision making processes are spelt out
 - Undertake a full induction of new members or tenants
 - Organise education and training in managing conflict, interpersonal relations and communication
 - Ensure that skills are updated regularly
 - Encourage tenants to learn more about themselves ie. how they communicate with others and how they cope with conflict¹⁵⁴

6.8 MANAGING DRUG AND ALCOHOL ABUSE

Housing providers may experience problems with tenants and their visitors due to drug and/or alcohol use. Often providers only become aware of such issues when they impact on a tenancy. Consequently providers may want to take a pro-active approach by offering drug and alcohol information forums for tenants. Given that legislation varies between the states and territories, providers should ensure they are ware of the relative legal status of drug usage. Where tenants are taking legalised or decriminalised drugs, providers should only take action when usage impacts on their tenancy.

When alcohol/drug abuse is apparent, participants at the National Workshop reported difficulties resulting from:

- A lack of legal authority to remove the person to a drug treatment centre.



- Difficulties in securing places in drug and alcohol treatment centres for tenants.
- The time it takes to initiate and follow through the eviction process.



IDEAS FOR GOOD PRACTICE



MANAGING THE IMPACT OF DRUG AND ALCOHOL ABUSE

- You may also consider establishing a Drug and Alcohol Information Forum for tenants.
- Provide a non-judgmental service environment to make young people more comfortable discussing drug and/or alcohol related issues.
- Establish referral links to local Drug and Alcohol Counselling and Rehabilitation services.
- Collect information booklets on issues and services and make sure this information is readily available to tenants.
- Avoid placing young tenants in group housing situations with older tenants or those who have drug and alcohol issues.

6.9 CONCLUSION

Avoiding unsuitable tenancies is a key issue for community housing providers given the impact on both the tenant and the housing provider. Tenancies may be unsuitable however for two principle reasons, namely:

- The tenant has no real desire to live in community housing.
- There is a mismatch between tenant needs and resources.

Consequently ensuring young people are able to make an informed decision regarding whether to apply for a community housing vacancy is an important initial step in avoiding unsuitable tenancies.

If community housing providers are able to establish linkages with a broad range of services and/or programs, the range of 'suitable' tenants will become more inclusive of young people. As most of the issues reported to impact on tenancies are not peculiar to young people, housing providers may well have policies and procedures in place to manage them. Therefore it may only be a small step to ensure these are inclusive of young people.

Making mistakes is a natural part of the learning process. Therefore young people should be offered a certain level of room to make mistakes without them impacting on their tenancy. On the other hand, housing providers can avoid requirements of young tenants being unrealistic. Young people are not adults and therefore should not be expected to demonstrate the same level of responsibility as older tenants.

Given the difficulties young people face accessing other housing types, young people may find there are few options available to them once evicted from community housing. Governments need to work in partnership with the community housing sector to manage issues that impact on tenancy to avoid young people being evicted and slipping back into homelessness.

Community Housing

Refers to medium to long term rental accommodation, provided or managed with the assistance of government subsidies and run by community based organisations. The two main management models operating in the sector are housing associations and co-operatives. Community housing is also characterised by the opportunity afforded to tenants to have an input in property management, tenant selection and in the case of some providers, organisational management activities.

Organisational Targets

Refers to the specific tenants groups an organisation actively targets or directs it's housing and other services towards. It is evident that organisations will often target a number of groups.

Specifically Targeted Organisations

Refers to organisations that target housing and other services to a specific population group, for example young people, women/children escaping domestic/family violence etc.

Generalist Organisations

Tend to have broad organisational targets and therefore draw tenants from a wider population base than specifically targeted organisations. Generalist community housing providers often have eligibility open to those on low incomes.

Stock Targeting

Refers to the practice of targeting proportions of stock to particular tenant groups according to the range of such groups targeted by the organisation.

CSHA/ non-CSHA funded organisation

Refers to whether the organisation is able to draw on funding support from the pool of funds directed to the states via the Commonwealth State Housing Agreement.

The following acronyms have been used throughout this report.

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACOSS.....	Australian Council Of Social Services
AFHO.....	Australian Federation of Homelessness Organisations
ATSIC	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission
CAP	Crisis Accommodation Program
CAPII.....	CAP Innovation Initiative
CHFA.....	Community Housing Federation of Australia
CSHA.....	Commonwealth State Housing Agreement
FaCS	Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services
JPET.....	Jobs Placement Employment and Training Program
NDCA	National Data Collection Authority
NCHF.....	National Community Housing Forum
NOAH	National Organisation of Aboriginal Housing
NYCH.....	National Youth Coalition For Housing
RA.....	Rent Allowance
SAAP	Supported Accommodation Assistance Program
SACHA	South Australia Community Housing Authority
SHA	State/Territory Housing Authority
TAYA.....	Tasmanian Affordable Youth Accommodation Service
THM.....	Transitional Housing Manager
YA.....	Youth Allowance



FOOTNOTES

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GOVERNMENT COMMITMENTS TO COMMUNITY HOUSING

An integral component of this project involved the collation of information regarding the environment in which community housing organisations operate in each state and territory. Consequently State Housing Authorities were asked to provide information on a number of areas including:

- Maintenance of community housing waiting lists
- Eligibility criteria
- Length of time before being housed
- Comparative government funding commitments to both public and community housing
- Ensuring suitability of stock
- Supporting regional networking
- Brokering support
- Data collection
- Promoting community housing.
- Training.
- Specific youth focussed initiatives

While much of this material is distributed throughout the report, the current chapter will provide a brief overview of government funding and policy commitments to community housing.

THE ACT

A comparison between the relative funding levels budgeted for community housing compared to public housing was not available as a result of changes in the way housing assistance is provided, in terms of:

- Expansion of community housing through public housing stock transfers.
- Separation of ACT Government's housing provision arm from the purchasing and policy area.

The level of funding provided to community housing and public housing in the 1999-2000 period was \$1.047M and \$26.2M respectively. Consequently expenditure on community housing was just under 4% of that spent on public housing. Recently 69 properties were transferred from public housing to youth targeted community housing organisations.