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KEY FINDINGS

SUPPORT REQUIREMENTS AND ACCOMMODATION OPTIONS FOR PEOPLE IN THE ACT WITH HIGH AND COMPLEX SERVICE NEEDS



THE UNIVERSITY
OF QUEENSLAND
AUSTRALIA

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WHY DO WE NEED THIS STUDY?

Homelessness can sometimes be seen as a transient issue; a short-term problem that can be resolved. For some people this is indeed the case and we have many success stories in the ACT. For others the reality is somewhat different and they can remain chronically homeless.

People who have enduring mental health issues, those battling drug and alcohol addictions, and those who have lost their community connections often need long-term managed support just to stay housed.

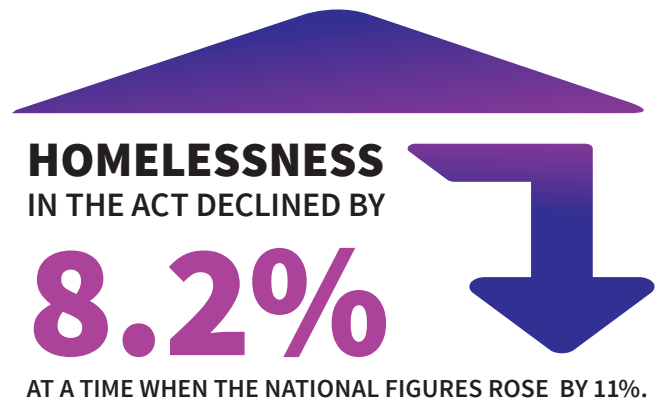
Without sufficient supports, many of these people are unable to live independently and can cycle in and out of our crisis system or remain for long periods of time. In 2017, the ACT Government conducted an extensive consultation process in the lead up to the first ACT Housing Summit. A clear message from the consultations, and at the Summit, was that there is a lack of exits from crisis accommodation, particularly for those who have **complex and interrelated needs for support**.

In February 2018, the ACT Government commissioned research (the 'Cohort Study') to better understand the specialist care, support and accommodation requirements of people with **high and complex service needs (HCSNs)** who are either homeless or at risk.

The aim was to develop a current picture of the homeless and at-risk population in the ACT, identify a range of models and options for responding to the needs of that population, and contribute to the development of methodologies and tools to underpin tailored responses to the needs of people with high and complex service needs.

Our research found that around 10% of people who accessed homelessness services were homeless or at risk of being homeless, and had high and complex service needs. This averaged around 380 people each year.

THE CURRENT STATE OF HOMELESSNESS IN THE ACT



Source: ABS, 2016 Census

The Australian Bureau of Statistics estimated that 1,738 people in the ACT were homeless on Census night 2016.

- 50% were in supported accommodation
- 23% were living in severely overcrowded dwellings
- 17% were couch surfing
- 3% were sleeping out in the open or in an improvised dwellings such as cars and tents

Homelessness in the ACT declined by 8.2% at a time when the national figures rose by 11%.

SPECIALIST HOMELESSNESS SERVICES

The ACT Government provides over **\$21m** annually to the specialist homelessness services sector to provide supports to those who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.

IN 2016-17
4,585
PEOPLE



SOUGHT ASSISTANCE FROM THESE
SPECIALIST HOMELESSNESS SERVICES

Source: AIHW, 2018, Specialist Homeless Services Collection, data cubes 2011-2017.

- 36% experienced mental health issues
- 14% experienced drug or alcohol misuse
- 35% experienced domestic and family violence
- 9% exited either care or custody
- 4% needed disability assistance

Many individuals experienced one or more of these vulnerabilities.

WHAT WE ARE SEEKING TO UNDERSTAND

How many people in the ACT who are homeless or at risk of homelessness have **high and complex service needs**?

What is this group's current and likely future demand for housing?

What are the characteristics of this group?

Are there any key demographics, such as age, gender, social history and cultural background?

What specific, tailored supports do they require and for how long?

What is the best physical environment for people who need permanent supportive accommodation?

How can we guide future accommodation planning and service provision?

WHAT WE MEAN BY HIGH AND COMPLEX SERVICE NEEDS (HCSNS)

Some people have multiple and complex service needs. They often experience multiple disadvantage and social exclusion.

The term 'high and complex service needs' is a way of focusing on the kinds of tailored supports some people who are homeless or at risk need.

When a person is described as having high and complex service needs, this is more than having multiple vulnerabilities, such as mental health issues or drug and alcohol misuse. It is about the interplay between these issues.

In our study, a person was identified as having high and complex service needs if their main reason for seeking assistance was any of the following:

- mental health issues or medical issues
- drug/substance or alcohol misuse
- because they were exiting from custody, out-of-home care or other kind of care arrangements

FINDINGS

Client data from the specialist homelessness services sector for the six years from 2011-12 to 2016-17 identified around 20,000 clients who had sought support.

Researchers interviewed government employees, providers of crisis services, community housing, specialist homelessness services, and those who have a lived experience of homelessness or of being at-risk of homelessness.

Of the total population who sought assistance from specialist homelessness services, an annual average of 10% (around 380 people each year) were people with high and complex service needs.

Of these, around 200 were people at risk of becoming homeless and about 180 were people who were homeless. Over the 6 years from 2011-12 to 2016-17, the number of people who were at risk rose, while the number of people who were homeless fell.

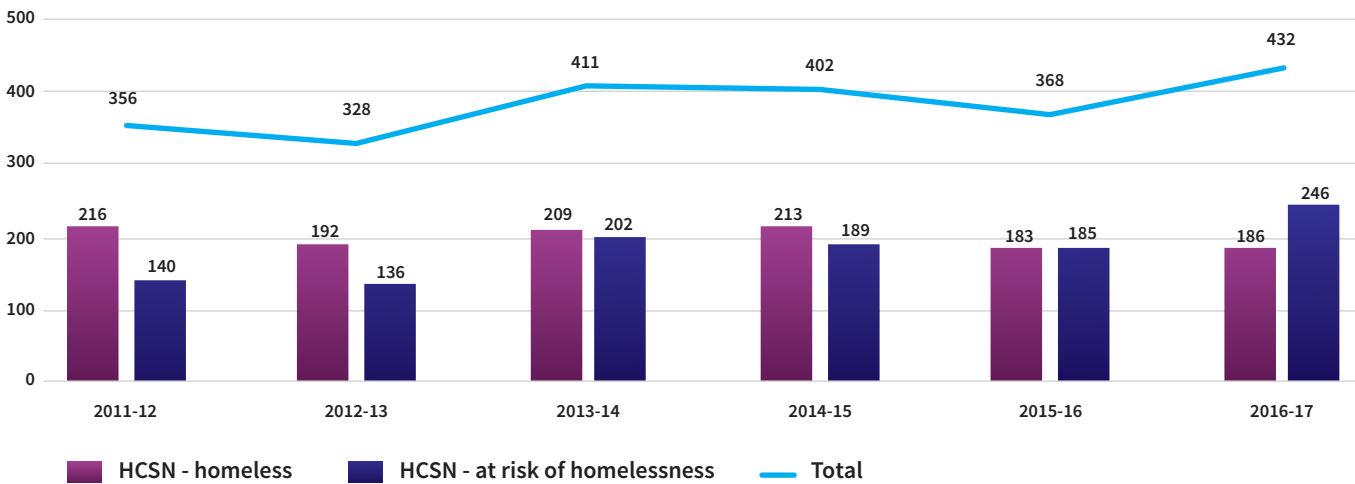
People with high and complex service needs were more likely to:

- be male
- live alone
- be aged between 25 and 44
- be unemployed or out of the labour force
- receive government income support

Consistent with the general trend of homelessness in the ACT, there has been a decline in those clients with high and complex service needs who are homeless when they first seek support.¹

At the same time, there has been a rise in the number of clients at risk of homelessness with high and complex service needs.

Number of clients with high and complex service needs (HCSNs), 2011-2017



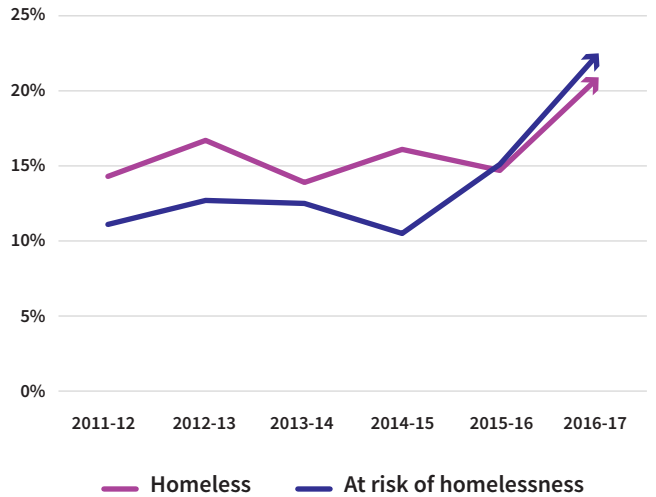
Source: SHS CURF data

1. SHS annual datasets (Confidentialised Unit Record Files or CURFs) have a unique identifier for every client. These change annually. When annual data sets were combined, it was not possible to identify clients who appeared in multiple years. If a client sought assistance in more than one year, they appeared more than once.

ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLE

The research also found that the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People who were homeless with high and complex service needs increased significantly over the 6 years from around 14% in 2011-12 to almost 21% in 2016-17, while the proportion of those at risk of homelessness rose from 11% to 22.5%.

Homeless and at risk people with HCSNs, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People (%), 2011-2017

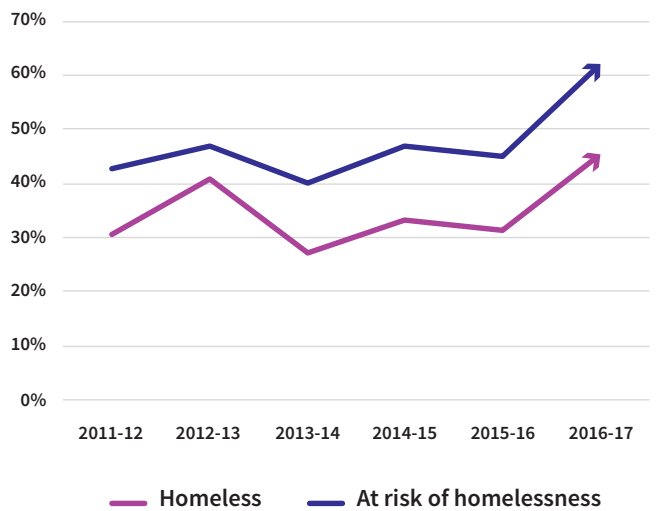


Source: SHS CURF data

WOMEN

The proportion of women with high and complex service needs who were homeless also increased significantly over the study period from almost 31% in 2011-12 to around 45% in 2017, while the proportion of those at risk of homelessness rose from around almost 43% to around 62%.

Homeless and at risk people with HCSNs, Women (%), 2011-2017

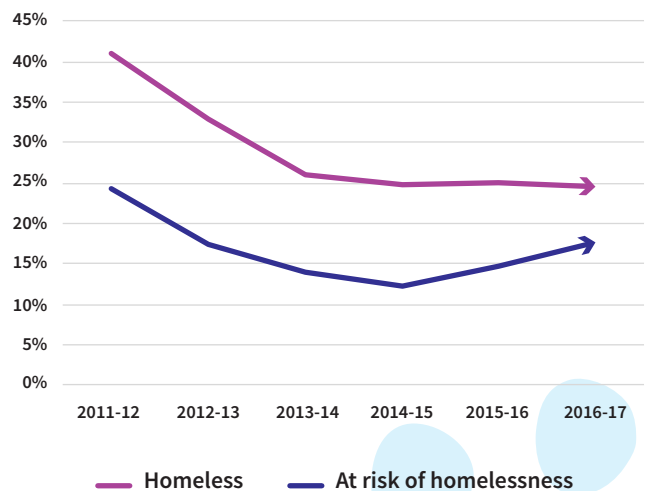


Source: SHS CURF data

YOUTH

In contrast, there was a notable decrease in the proportion of younger people (15-24 years) with HCSNs who were homeless or at risk of homelessness. Over the 6 years from 2011-12, the proportion of homeless youth with HCSNs fell from 41% to almost 21%, while the proportion of those at risk of homelessness fell from around 24% to just under 18%.

Homeless and at risk people with HCSNs, Youth (15-24 years, %), 2011-2017



Source: SHS CURF data

MEETING SERVICE NEEDS

For those with high and complex service needs:

- Demand for support services (health and social) was met in the majority of cases, either through direct provision or referral. This includes assistance with mental health, drug and alcohol, domestic and family violence, legal/financial services, immigration/cultural, family services, and general services
- Demand for permanent/long-term accommodation services went unmet in most cases
- People with high and complex service needs were more likely to be provided with short-term rather than long-term housing options (i.e. a high unmet need for long term accommodation)
- Those who sought support to sustain their tenancies (i.e. with a roof over their heads but at risk of homelessness) had their needs met in most cases

The best outcomes for those with high and complex service needs are when permanent supportive housing meets the following criteria:

- owned or rented through a formal lease held in a tenant's name
- a legal and functional separation between the landlord and the support provider
- housing that is integrated into the community/ neighbourhood
- affordability
- the availability of voluntary services
- housing not contingent on behaviours, such as sobriety (other than standard tenancy obligations)
- resident choice in terms of housing and services
- community based services with no live in staff

WHAT DO SERVICE PROVIDERS AND USERS IDENTIFY AS GAPS IN HOMELESSNESS ACCOMMODATION?

There is currently a range of short and medium-term accommodation options for homeless people, many of which entail (or indeed mandate) access to support services.

There is also a range of services that provide alcohol and substance abuse treatment services, case management and conduits, and referrals to specialist support services (medical, legal etc.) to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. But there are some who miss out on accommodation.

Service providers and service users identified gaps in accommodation options for:

- couples

“ If a couple without children comes to us we’re going to say, ‘You’re going to have to split up’. Again, this is a terrible thing, but there is no accommodation for couples. And the sad thing is we could usually house the guy ... within a short time, but the woman has to wait. ”

- pet owners

“ If you’ve been long-term homeless with your dog for five or 10 years, you’re not going into any accommodation where you have to leave your dog behind. ”

- people with criminal histories

“ I think there’s a huge amount of stigma for people who have a criminal history and it’s difficult for us because we can’t actively conceal information about people because staff who might be coming into contact with our consumers, I believe they have a right to know at least some of the information that we hold about our consumers. For instance, if one of our consumers is wanting to access crisis accommodation and we know that they’ve got a history of violent offending it’s very difficult for us. ”

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People

“ We find it quite difficult to navigate through that system, especially when our clients don’t want to go there ... So, there’s still that fear factor for a lot of Aboriginal people. ”

“ Even if you’ve got a mainstream service... with Aboriginal workers the trust might be in the workers, but they won’t trust because the service is not Aboriginal community-controlled. ”

- people with a physical disability

“ For someone that’s using a wheelchair and that’s needing to be able to get in the door of a crisis accommodation facility. If that crisis accommodation facility has steps on the way up, narrow doorways, which is immediately ruled out as a possible, even just temporary, option. ”

- women and families not escaping domestic violence
- single fathers
- people with a psychosocial disability.

BACKLOGS AND BOTTLENECKS IN CRISIS ACCOMMODATION

A lack of affordable and accessible housing options means that people are often unable to access homelessness accommodation in times of crisis.

Those who do access accommodation often spend long periods of time in crisis or transitional accommodation due to lack of other permanent housing solutions.

Government income support is often not sufficient to cover rent in the private market, particularly for those on Newstart.

Demand for public housing can mean long waits, even for those with high and complex service needs.



OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

RETHINKING THE 'STAIRCASE MODEL' OF SUPPORT

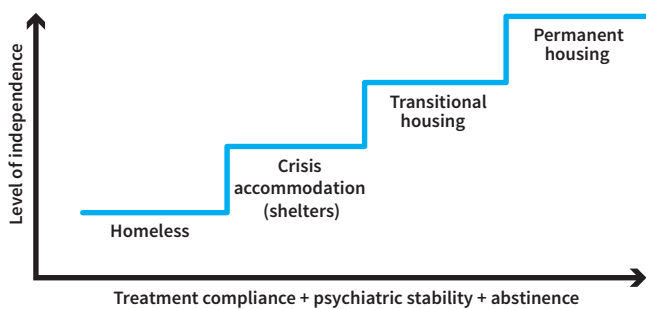
Like elsewhere in Australia and overseas, housing and support services in the ACT often adopt a **conditional approach** to the housing options offered. This is often referred to as the 'staircase' model of housing support.

People with high and complex service needs often have to demonstrate their **'housing readiness'**—their capacity to live independently and maintain a tenancy in order to progress to permanent (including public) housing.

Many said that this can create additional barriers to engaging with services and exiting homelessness.

“When we're talking about the high and complex service needs, it's very hard for a lot of these people to go through the process of even getting to the stage where they can put in an application, let alone then maintaining [support] while they're waiting for their application.”

Staircase approach to homelessness services



Source: After Padgett et al., *Housing First: ending homelessness, transforming systems, and changing lives*, 2016

SUPPORTIVE HOUSING MODELS FOR PEOPLE WITH HIGH AND COMPLEX SERVICE NEEDS

There is a large body of evidence which demonstrates that affordable and secure housing with some form of voluntary support services can successfully enable chronically homeless people with complex issues to sustain housing.

There is no single model of supportive housing for people with high and complex service needs but all link housing and ongoing support.

Supportive housing can be **'congregate'**—located on a single site with shared accommodation or independent units and onsite support.

Supportive housing can be **scattered** through buildings or neighbourhoods with off-site, mobile and person-centred support.

Common Ground in Gungahlin is an example of permanent supported housing with a mix of tenants, some who are formerly homeless and others on lower incomes who need affordable housing.

“Things like Common Ground ... that provides a fantastic example of how you can provide services, like in a geocentric location, and you also have, because it's a combination of people who are homeless and affordable housing, you provide people with opportunities to step up. You provide them with access to a different peer and social network, to co-locate Northside's case management services in the building so it's available for everybody. Not a requirement, but available. That model is brilliant.”

WHERE TO NEXT?

PATHWAYS OUT OF HOMELESSNESS

“ I think we’re all talking from experiences where it’s just not been achievable ... We all know that the evidence suggested that model [Housing First] is better for long-term outcomes for people rather than the transitional process of having to go through crisis accommodation and then move somewhere. We know that’s destabilising. ”

The hidden costs of homelessness are far reaching. Homelessness is associated with poorer health, wellbeing and employment outcomes as well as limited familial, social and support networks.

The costs associated with these poorer outcomes are borne by the health, justice, child protection and welfare sectors.

Research on the outcomes of permanent supportive housing shows that the provision of affordable housing together with voluntary support can successfully enable people to exit homelessness and sustain housing.

People who are homeless often experience poor physical and mental health. Integrating health care with supportive housing can turn this around dramatically, as the program at Brisbane Common Ground has shown.

A study of costs and cost offsets at Brisbane Common Ground showed that tenants reduced their use of health, criminal justice and homelessness services after becoming tenants.

There is considerable evidence that permanent supportive housing can effectively end homelessness for people who are chronically homeless and have high and complex service needs.

Chronic homelessness and rough sleeping endures for this group, not because of their complex needs, but because policy and practice systems do not facilitate exits from homelessness and sustainable housing outcomes.

The Cohort Study will assist us with the planning of services and anticipation of future needs.

- It gives us a clearer sense of how people with HCSNs may move through different supports and services, compared with people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness but do not have HCSNs
- It identifies emerging cohorts including Indigenous people and women requiring support, and linkages and services across the human services system
- And it has highlighted the role of supportive housing in addressing homelessness for a relatively small group of people in our community who have very complex issues and needs

THE ACT HOUSING STRATEGY

The Study also supports implementation of commitments under the ACT Housing Strategy, such as:

- addressing gaps in our services systems and directing resourcing towards new and emerging needs with a focus on flexibility, early support and prevention
- implementing a model of support that draws upon the principles of Housing First, particularly for the long-term homeless
- establishing a diverse range of support and housing models for people who require permanent supportive housing
- developing a holistic and client-centred model of social housing
- developing a second Common Ground complex for Canberra
- establishing a strategic vision and plan for the growth and renewal of public housing

SUPPORTIVE HOUSING

The principles of permanent supportive housing are critical to success:

- housing affordability
- tenant control
- choice
- separation between tenancy manager and support provider
- normality

The principles can be actioned through a diverse suite of supportive housing models.



HOMELESSNESS SUPPORTS

By and large, stakeholders thought that a diversity of models is needed for people with high and complex service needs— single men or women, Indigenous people, families, and young people.

The community-based Reference Group which assisted the study team suggested trialling models, showcasing those that are successful, and taking a whole-of-government perspective on costs and services.

“ The comment I’d make is ‘variety’. Your client group is so very diverse that there’s not going to be one solution that is going to meet everyone’s needs. It needs to be a variety of different options available because different people will need different things. ”

The Reference Group also pointed to the imposition of conditional support and requirements for ‘housing readiness’ on homeless people with high and complex service needs as inappropriate.

The evidence from the Cohort Study can help guide responses that make sense for the people who may need permanent supportive housing.

There is an opportunity to look at policies and practices that underpin the way we deliver services and accommodation in the homelessness and social housing sectors.

And we can look at practical ways to back these responses up including knowing who is homeless, reaching out to them assertively, improving access to affordable and secure housing through housing allocation policies, and freeing up crisis housing for those who really need it.

HOUSING MODELS – RESPONDING TO HOMELESSNESS AND HOUSING NEED

Model	Key features	Strengths	Limitations	Suitable for	Example
Crisis accommodation	<p>Low threshold of access</p> <p>Access to case management</p> <p>Referral gateway for support services (mental health, alcohol/ drug etc.</p> <p>Short-term (usually around 3 months)</p> <p>Shared facilities</p>	<p>Provides immediate shelter for people in crisis situations</p> <p>Can enable people to exit violent relationships</p> <p>Hub for service delivery</p>	<p>Short-term</p> <p>Shared amenity subverts autonomy</p> <p>Stigma</p> <p>Successful outcomes contingent upon the existence of exit points</p>	<p>People experiencing housing crisis</p> <p>People escaping domestic and family violence</p>	<p>Samaritan House (ACT)</p> <p>Toora House (ACT)</p> <p>Youth Emergency Accommodation Network ('YEAN', Salvation Army, ACT)</p>
Congregate – permanent supportive housing	<p>Secure, long-term tenure</p> <p>Affordable rent</p> <p>Independent, self-contained units in a single complex</p> <p>On-site voluntary support services</p> <p>Separated tenancy, management and service provision</p> <p>Purpose designed communal spaces</p> <p>Building visual amenity consistent with neighbourhood standards</p> <p>On-site security e.g. concierge</p>	<p>Independent living</p> <p>Reduced experiences of isolation</p> <p>Close proximity to other service users increases sense of community</p> <p>Social mix (if both tenants of social housing and affordable housing are included)</p> <p>Highly responsive support services</p> <p>Economies of scale</p> <p>Sense of safety and security</p>	<p>On-site support and security can be experienced as intrusive</p> <p>Close proximity to other service users increases risk of conflict</p> <p>Greater chance of place-based stigma</p>	<p>People with HCSNs who experience:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> chronic homelessness mental illness drug and alcohol issues leaving institutions medical conditions social isolation 	<p>Common Ground</p> <p>Lu'ma Aboriginal Children's Village (BC, Canada)</p>

Model	Key features	Strengths	Limitations	Suitable for	Example
Scattered site – permanent supportive housing	Secure, long-term tenure Affordable rent Independent, self-contained units Cap on number of program units in any one area Unit visual amenity consistent with neighbourhood standards Mobile voluntary support services Separated tenancy, management and service provision	Independent living Normalised living conditions Reduced place-based stigma Easier integration with mainstream community Greater user autonomy and choice	Less responsive support services Risk of social isolation More resource intensive	People with HCSNs who experience: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • chronic homelessness • mental illness • drug and alcohol issues • leaving institutions • medical conditions • or who desire more privacy, independence and choice 	Pathways to Housing (USA) Housing & Accommodation Support Initiative ('HASI', NSW) Supported Accommodation Innovation Fund ('SAIF', CatholicCare, Canberra and Goulburn)
Social housing	Secure, long-term tenure Publicly managed stock	Affordable rent e.g. 25% of income Housing security	Limited access to support	Homeless or at-risk non-HCSNs People on income support	Housing ACT Public housing authorities (Australia)
Affordable housing	Secure, long-term tenure Privately or community managed	Affordable rent e.g. 75% of market rent Housing security	Limited access to support	Homeless or at-risk non-HCSNs Low income earners	Community Housing Canberra ('CHC', ACT)

Source: ISSR, UQld, *Support requirements and accommodation options for people in the ACT with high and complex service needs: final report*, 2018