



# Positioning Paper

## **Reconceptualising housing need in the context of 21st century Australian housing policy**

authored by

**Tim Seelig, Vivienne Milligan, Peter Phibbs and  
Alice Thompson**

for the

**Australian Housing  
and Urban Research Institute**

Queensland Research Centre  
Sydney Research Centre  
UNSW-UWS Research Centre

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## **ABBREVIATIONS**

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACT	Australian Capital Territory
AHURI	Australian Housing & Urban Research Institute
AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
ARHP	Aboriginal Rental Housing Program
CHC	Commonwealth Housing Commission
CMHC	Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation
CSHA	Commonwealth State Housing Agreement
DSS	Department of Social Security
FHOG	First Home Owners Grant
GNI	Generalised Needs Index
HMAC	Housing Ministers Advisory Committee
HNI	Housing Needs Index
LGA	Local Government Area
NHS	National Housing Strategy
ODPM	Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (UK)
RA	Rent Assistance
SAAP	Supported Accommodation Assistance Program
SCIH	Standing Committee on Indigenous Housing
SHA	State Housing Authority

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Housing need is a term which is used within a wide range of housing policy and procedural documents. Clearly, conceptualising and operationalising 'need' is especially pertinent to housing assistance systems that seek to identify and assist those in 'greatest need'. For example, at the service delivery level, this can be seen in action in every State Housing Authority (SHA), in the context of determining who is believed to be in need of social or other housing assistance, and in attempts to estimate the level of unmet need in SHA jurisdictions through needs assessment or planning exercises.

Despite the significant challenges associated with the conceptualisation of need, there are strong imperatives to improve both our theoretical and practical understanding of housing need, and our understanding of enhancing operational approaches to measurement, assessment and responses. SHAs and other housing assistance providers face considerable demands for services, usually far in excess of capacity to supply. Navigating the options for responding to demand through the determination of needs is crucial.

But how should need be conceptualised and measured? This Positioning Paper is the first output of a study that aims to critically review a range of approaches to conceptualising need in housing and social policy fields in Australia and internationally. The study seeks to provide an analysis of how housing needs in Australian housing might be reconceptualised in light of that review, and what implications this might have for housing policy. The array of issues raised by the notion of needs is complex. What exactly are needs, and how should we think about them? Whose needs are we most concerned about, and why? What sorts of theoretical underpinnings have been developed around whether we ought to respond to certain needs, and how best to make such responses? These are difficult questions which require theoretically informed and ethically focused analysis, as well as practically minded responses. This Positioning Paper provides a critical discussion of the theoretical and conceptual issues surrounding these questions.

There has been widespread debate in the theoretical literature about the usefulness of 'need' as a concept which can be operationalised in social policy. One view is that the concept of needs is of little value in social policy, given its subjective nature. The positioning paper rejects this view and provides a conceptual foundation for the measurement of needs (see Chapter 3). It is considered that housing needs can be analysed conceptually in terms of their distinctions from wants or desires, and can be theoretically positioned either in more universalist or relativist contexts. However, needs can also be conceived in ways that move away from this traditional binary, into a form where basic or foundational housing needs and responses to culturally-relative housing need can be seen as quite compatible.

At the most fundamental level, it is evident that discussion of basic housing needs is essentially a discussion of basic human needs, with subsequent debate concerning how to conceive and operationalise the role that housing plays in addressing those human needs. It is widely held that basic human needs exist in the forms of shelter and protection from the elements, avoidance of physical and psychological harm, and facilitation of personal and social well-being. Housing needs clearly can play a critical role in the achievement of these basic human needs, but it might be argued that housing needs are really instrumental in nature, in that they are the means (facilitator) of achieving human needs, rather than being ends in themselves. At the same time, the most basic forms of housing need – physical shelter which is safe and protective, and which is secure in an ontological as well as personal sense – are virtually



synonymous with the basic human needs as identified by several theorists, to render the distinction between means and ends almost redundant. However, the actual forms that housing responses take to these and additional human and housing needs may of course vary, and may require more deliberation and discretion.

Key questions thus arise regarding who undertakes the expression, recognition, measurement and prioritisation of needs, and the basis upon which responses should be framed. A variety of approaches and models can be identified to conceptualise the basis for the articulation of needs, and the matching of needs with responses. Of particular relevance is the work of Maslow, Bradshaw and Doyal and Gough.

Housing as a need ought to be recognised as something special in social policy terms, as it has characteristics that are unlike many other issues addressed by social programs. Despite housing's economic and social policy significance, there has been precious little exposition of needs issues in Australian housing research. Many of the existing studies have focused, exclusively or in the main, on the more methodological and technical aspects of need, rather than the underlying concepts and assumptions.

At the same time, needs conceptualisation does not merely concern the hypothetical or abstract nature of need. It requires analytical and grounded reflection of how need is to be operationalised in terms of definition, measurement, assessment approach and response. As Chapter 4 shows, throughout the history of housing assistance in Australia, and especially with regard to the Commonwealth State Housing Agreement (CSHA), 'needs' have been variously implied, applied, adapted and redefined as the policy contexts of housing assistance priorities and funding have shifted over time.

Chapter 4 also documents how approaches to the measurement and assessment of housing needs in Australia have been designed and applied. One area has been as a tool to help the allocation of resources. The main policy application of these models at the time was to inform decisions about the share of new housing supply (or other funding) that should be allocated to each sub-region or target group, with the aim of achieving equity of responses in relation to the distribution and profile of unmet needs. Another context concerns the generation of local housing needs studies, and a range of common needs measures have been developed and applied in Australian housing policy. Perhaps the most recent area of development around assessment and measurement of need involves assessment of applicants for public housing, where State Housing Authorities (SHAs) in Australia now tightly ration entry into public housing, and are increasingly using a housing need approach to help select public housing tenants. While need has seemingly been an enduring consideration in housing assistance, the nature of thinking about need, and the processes used to apply assessments of need have altered significantly over the last few years in many SHAs.

This paper's analysis of how the idea of needs is used in policy and practice demonstrates both the importance and centrality of the concept, but also the mystery and ambiguity that surrounds it. Processes of needs-based planning and assistance prioritisation can be highly transparent, while obscuring the more theoretical and conceptual dimensions of need upon which they rely. The challenge lies in attempting to elucidate the concepts and the ways they can be and are applied. As a starting point for the further development of conceptualising needs in ways which link theoretical aspirations and practical imperatives, at least eight discrete theoretical approaches are discussed in Chapter 5, illustrating the different ways that needs are acknowledged, analysed and potentially responded to.

Ultimately the broader study, of which this report is the first output, represents an opportunity to assess whether it is necessary and possible to arrive at clearer

frameworks for needs conceptualisation, which then can be used in housing policy and management situations. In an era of SHAs moving away from traditional notions of generalised housing need and focusing ever more on the prioritisation of assistance to those believed to be in 'highest' or 'most urgent' need, the significance of debates about needs is clear – whether those debates are about assessment and measurement, or more philosophical and conceptual concerns. These debates form a central part of housing policy and service delivery development, and it is certain that the importance and relevance of 'needs' will continue to grow.

It is hoped and anticipated that this initial report, and the study behind it, will provide a vehicle for exploring a range of questions from both conceptual and practical perspectives, and will contribute in some small way to the further development of housing policy frameworks and housing assistance systems.

# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background to the study

This study critically reviews a range of approaches to conceptualising need in housing and social policy fields in Australia and internationally. In light of that review, it seeks to provide an analysis of how housing needs in Australian housing might be reconceptualised, and of the implications this might have for housing policy.

Over the last few decades various attempts have been made in the literature and in practice to determine particular needs, including housing needs, effectively commencing with Maslow's 'hierarchy of needs' (Maslow 1954). Subsequent theoretically-focused work on housing needs and how they may relate to basic human needs (see Stone 1970; Doyal and Gough 1984, 1991; Soper 1993, 2006) has further developed the philosophical basis for conceptualising needs. However, it remains the case that the concept of 'housing need' is both contested in theoretical terms, and is applied in a variety of ways in policy and practice. At the service delivery level, this can be seen in action in every State Housing Authority (SHA), in the context of determining who is believed to 'be in need of social or other housing assistance', and in attempts to estimate the level of unmet need in SHA jurisdictions through needs assessment or planning exercises.

More definitionally-oriented work has also been produced concerning the general range of housing needs (NHS 1991a), meanings and measurement of affordability (King 1994, Hulchanski 1995, Karmel 1998, Seelig and Phibbs 2006), multi-measures of Indigenous need (AIHW 2005a, Neutze et al. 2000 building on earlier work by Roger Jones), notions of overcrowding/under-utilisation (Batten 1999), homelessness (Chamberlain and MacKenzie 1992, Coleman 2000), Indigenous homelessness (Memmott et al. 2003), and complex needs (Purdon and Associates 2000, Bleasdale, 2006).

The array of issues raised by the notion of needs is complex. What exactly are needs, and how should we think about them? Whose needs are we most concerned about, and why? What sorts of theoretical underpinnings have been developed around whether we ought to respond to certain needs, and how best to make such responses? These are difficult questions that require theoretically-informed and ethically focused analysis, as well as practically-minded responses.

While the challenges associated with the conceptualisation of need are significant, there are strong imperatives to improve both our theoretical and practical understanding of housing need, and to develop ways of enhancing operational approaches to measurement, assessment and responses. SHAs and other housing assistance providers face considerable demands for services, usually far in excess of capacity to supply. Navigating the options for responding to demand through the determination of needs is crucial. So is the concurrent, accurate assessment of unmet or unaddressed needs for policy and planning purposes.

Ultimately, this study represents an opportunity to assess whether we can arrive at clearer frameworks for needs conceptualisation that can be used in housing policy and management situations. In an era of SHAs moving away from traditional notions of generalised housing need and focusing ever more on the prioritisation of assistance to those believed to be in 'highest' or 'most urgent' need, this is a timely juncture to reflect on needs issues.

## **1.2 Purpose of Positioning Paper**

This Positioning Paper has four main purposes. Firstly, it lays out the background to the study including its rationale, key aims and central research questions. Secondly, the paper positions the study within its policy context, and highlights its relevance and potential utility. Thirdly, it attempts to provide a concise summary of the main areas of previous research and analysis that are pertinent to the current investigation. Lastly, the paper provides a procedural map of the study's methods, approaches, scope and time frames.

## **1.3 Research questions**

In its 2007 Research Agenda, AHURI articulated several important lines of enquiry concerning needs. Specifically, the following questions were posed: "Internationally, what conceptualisations of 'need' inform housing policy? Within Australia, what conceptualisations of 'need' inform a range of social policy fields, including housing? What implications for housing policy in Australia do these different conceptualisations of need have?" (Question 2 under 1.3 'Housing management practice' of the 2007 AHURI Research Agenda (see AHURI website: [www.ahuri.edu.au](http://www.ahuri.edu.au)).

These questions were posed in context of a discussion within the 2007 AHURI Research Agenda about the different ways that needs can be both conceived and operationalised in social policy, amidst claims about some ways being "apparently (more) objective" than others. The policy significance of 'needs' in the design and application of housing assistance systems was also emphasised.

Accordingly, the study has been constructed with the aim of addressing four questions:

1. How is housing need conceptualised internationally?
2. How is housing need conceptualised in Australian housing policy and management?
3. How is 'need' conceptualised in other social policy fields?
4. What implications do the various conceptualisations of need have for housing policy in Australia – is there a case for housing need concept reform?

It is envisaged that through this study, it will be possible to elucidate on the central issues concerning notions of 'need', 'being in need' and 'responding to need'. Fundamentally, this study seeks to improve our theoretical understanding of housing need, with a view to being more informed about how needs conceptualisation, measurement and assessment can best be approached. The study is mostly a desk-top exercise, based on a critical review of key literature, including policy documents, and a critical reflective analysis of the central issues and challenges presented. However, an element of qualitative empirical testing of the resultant ideas has been incorporated into the methodology.

## **1.4 Overview of Positioning Paper**

Following this introductory chapter, the Positioning Paper is organised into four other chapters.

Chapter 2 outlines the policy context, and briefly canvases why we are interested in needs; the role that conceptualisation, measurement and assessment of need plays in providing housing assistance; and the increasing importance of needs in 21st century Australian housing policy. The 'politics of need' are also discussed.

Chapter 3 examines the theoretical dimensions of the conceptualisation of needs. This material incorporates a critical review of some of the prominent frameworks and approaches for thinking about needs (Maslow, Stone, Doyal and Gough, Bradshaw and others) in an attempt to consider what needs are and how we can think about them. As well as focusing on approaches and frameworks for conceptualising need, the chapter reflects on who gets to identify needs and who gets to decide about them.

Chapter 4 takes the analysis from abstract to practical domains by reviewing the housing policy and practice considerations of conceptualising needs. In particular, it examines how needs have been articulated in housing and related social policy documents, and how needs are measured and assessed in practice. Other aspects of operationalising the concepts of need are also discussed.

Chapter 5 concludes by considering a framework for theorising the bases on which needs are (or might be) responded to, linking the various strands of theory and practice considered in the Paper. This Chapter also maps the remainder of the study, including setting out the next stages of the project, the methods and approaches to be applied, and a sense of outcomes that might be expected from the study and their policy relevance.

## 2 POLICY CONTEXT OF HOUSING NEED

### 2.1 Setting the scene

Why are we interested in needs? Whether we hold need to be a ‘universal phenomenon’ or a ‘question of relativities’, the idea of need plays a central role in the provision of housing assistance. The wide acceptance of the critical place that need occupies in housing policy concerns is not to suggest, however, that there is agreement on what kinds of needs we should be focusing on. Indeed, beyond ‘motherhood’ statements, there is considerable disagreement about need – both in terms of how needs might be measured, assessed and utilised in a service delivery context, and also at the more theoretical and conceptual level.

Part of the problem is that, as conservative theorist Kenneth Minogue (cited in Fitzgerald 1997: p201) colourfully and rather dismissively observes, the “emotional overtones” associated with the concept of need are “beautifully persuasive”. In other words, it is actually quite difficult to dissent from the idea of need because of its intuitive attraction and sense of moral imperative. This characteristic lies behind a wide array of government and non-government policy developments and service provision.

Most commonly, the areas of immediate relevance, and hence debate and disagreement, concern the process of allocating assistance, and the associated measurement and assessment of individual ‘housing needs’. Less frequently, issues of how needs are conceptualised and approached also receive some attention. In general, the whole purpose of housing assistance is to address an area of (unmet) housing need. It may be argued that the importance of needs – as a concept, a process, and a practice – will arise further in 21st century Australian housing policy, for the following reasons.

The centrality of ‘need’ as a principle in Australian housing is linked to the social welfare system and broader political economy. Australia has never had a universalist approach to housing assistance, relying instead on a ‘mixed economy of welfare’ model, and the ‘wage earners welfare state’. This means, however, that connections between ‘needs’ and housing assistance are not always straightforward or transparent. In Australia, ‘housing assistance’ varies quite significantly in terms of how it is delivered and whom it is delivered to.<sup>1</sup>

Some assistance is made available on an entitlement basis, once certain eligibility conditions have been met. This ranges from fairly simple and untargeted programs — such as the First Home Owners Grant (FHOG), where you merely need to be a first home buyer (but you still need to apply for assistance) — to more complex programs. Rent Assistance (RA) is a complex case in point, which requires that you be an income support recipient renting privately, pay above a minimum rent threshold (set according to household type and size), and receive 75 per cent of the difference between that rent and an upper rent threshold (household type and size dependent). Fortunately, the client need only supply the rent details; Centrelink does the calculations, and payment is ‘as of right’ rather than through application. Other forms of entitlement-based housing assistance include some private rental assistance programs operated by state and territory Housing Authorities, and past (and some present) public housing systems, where wait turn allocation processes remain the underlying means of housing applicants, even where priority allocations now

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<sup>1</sup> Tax concessions to owner occupiers and rental investors are not included in this discussion.

dominate. In theory at least, once eligibility criteria (income, assets, etc.) have been met, someone can expect to be assisted at some point.

The significance of these entitlement-based forms of assistance is that they guarantee a response once eligibility is achieved. Thus, the role of needs in shaping this type of assistance is an implied one. They do not require a detailed assessment of an individual's unique needs or circumstances, and do not involve prioritisation of individual needs. Instead, they tend to be based on fairly generic tests. As Karmel (1998: p3) indicates, "The desire to target housing assistance to those most in need has been a feature of government housing policy since the 1973 Commonwealth State Housing Agreement" (see Chapter 4). However, historically this has been addressed in a collective, systemic sense rather than in a dynamic, client-based way.

These forms of assistance do still involve a connection with 'need' in that the rules of eligibility, and the volume of assistance budgeted for, implicitly indicate assumptions of needs – who needs assistance and how much they should be entitled to. Levels of demand or usage can also inform future planning around budgets and policy at the macro level. Access to social housing – particularly over the last three decades – has been based on notions of eligibility and targeting, which are implicitly designed around particular forms and levels of need.

This situation is now shifting. Social housing in many jurisdictions can increasingly be classified into a different set of processes, in common with some other forms of housing assistance, such as the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) accommodation and other homelessness support. These are set more according to the direct and explicit assessment of individual needs. This change has been driven by both macro policy commitments, and also by pragmatic responses to funding and demand circumstances. The 2003-08 CSHA maintains the focus on targeted need in two key statements:

- Recital C states: "The aim of this Agreement is therefore to provide appropriate, affordable and secure housing assistance for those who most need it, for the duration of their need"; and
- Recital K states: "The Commonwealth and the States acknowledge that the Commonwealth's policy is to target Aboriginal Rental Housing Program (ARHP) funds to rural and remote areas where there is high need and where mainstream public housing and private housing are unavailable".<sup>2</sup>

However, while this appears to maintain a tradition, the processes used to deliver assistance in this way in fact are now changing. In Australia, the discourse of 'most in need' (or related expressions) is connected to the idea of individual need, relative to others, as being a foundation for how social housing assistance ought to be provided into the future.

In parallel, it is interesting to note how the emphasis on needs in the UK housing and broader social welfare system has increased, but the way that the term 'needs' is used has shifted. Referring to the UK situation in the 1980s, Bradshaw (1994: 48) indicates that "Policy-makers have become more and more obsessed with need. Indeed, the 1980s could be described as the decade of need". And yet, in the same article, Bradshaw (1994: 49) critiques the application of needs (especially concepts of 'greatest/highest need') in the context of neo-liberal policy and the process of prioritisation, exclaiming that "If the word 'need' ever had any analytical purpose in the

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<sup>2</sup> The context for this statement is the expectation of the Commonwealth Government that states will assist Indigenous households with a housing need in urban areas through mainstream programs.

social sciences, it has been cynically adulterated in the last ten years or so” (i.e. during the 1980s).

In a similar vein, Heywood (2004) suggests that in the welfare traditions of Western societies, the emphasis in policy thinking is what means can be devised to distribute insufficient resources in a manner that appears just. In these circumstances, Heywood (2004: p711) laments that:

“It is necessary not so much to understand human need as to have an administrative means for comparing needs and controlling the demand for public policy assistance. This welfare discourse has so dominated the subject of human need in public policy that it has almost overwhelmed it.”

At the same time, it is also important to acknowledge that in many of the needs debates in the UK and other places, to which comparisons are often made in Australia, the role of legislated entitlements to services plays a much stronger role (Sheppard and Woodcock 1999). In Australia, the issues of needs and access to services is less ‘rights-based’ or ‘prescriptive’ depending on your perspective, and the basis for assistance provision is therefore more ambiguous. This really highlights the need to look at need!

Much Australian housing research that purports to identify or enumerate housing needs<sup>3</sup> does not explicitly define ‘need’ and its concerns, nor examine how identified needs have actually been determined. Consequently, the term ‘housing need’ has been used in a number of housing policy contexts, but often to mean quite different things.

Physical shelter and other basic attributes of housing have generally been regarded as essential goods or services for life, and as necessary for any meaningful quality of life, as Chapter 3 discusses. Everyone therefore has housing needs, and in some senses, those people already housed are often the recipients of ongoing (implicit) assistance. So it would be superficial to say that we are only concerned with the unmet needs of the population. Nevertheless, the dominant discourses concerning housing need tend to focus attention on those people whose needs have not been met at all, or only partially so, to the effect that they remain in some form of deprivation which risks health or well-being. Housing in this context is seen as an integral part of life and, over time, the debate has moved from a concern about housing outcomes alone, to one which also incorporates the ‘non-shelter’ effects of housing (Bridge et al. 2003; Phibbs and Young 2005).

Discussion about the impacts of housing leads to considerations of who benefits (most) from housing, and who does not – i.e. who may have outstanding potential benefits from housing that are not currently realised. This analysis is based necessarily on conceptions of housing need: What do we expect to receive from housing, and who is not in receipt of it now. The more theoretical aspects of this discussion are examined in Chapter 3. The policy ramifications for SHAs are real and omnipresent, in an era of ongoing rationalisation of public resources, political debates about who ‘deserves’ access to those resources (and who does not), and concerns about rising expectations about living standards and access to goods and amenities. See for example the discussion in Chapter 4 about the evolution of the CSHA.

At the practice level, there have been at least four separately defined contexts of how ‘housing needs’ are applied. The first, coming from a UK tradition, talks about a

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<sup>3</sup> See for example AHURI work on ‘medium term projections of need’ (Project ref: 10187), or the needs of sole parents (Project ref: 50011, 50012) or refugees (Project ref: 40048). See table at end of references for further information on these and other AHURI projects related to needs.



Housing Needs Assessment as a way of counting the number of households that are unable to obtain appropriate or adequate housing. Various methodologies are used to count these households (see for example ODPM (2000)). This tradition has been adopted more recently in Australia, using a test of whether a household is hypothetically able to 'afford' housing which 'meets their needs' on the basis of the supply and availability of such housing. A good example of the conceptual underpinnings here is encapsulated by Karmel (1998), who states, "people have housing needs if they cannot afford their current housing, or their current housing is not appropriate and adequate" (1998, p1)<sup>4</sup>. While dressed up in the language of 'needs', this practice context is essentially about housing supply.

The second area is in the context of assessing the intensity of housing need, often as part of an assessment or screening process undertaken by SHAs (e.g. Hulse and Burke 2005). The third is where there is an attempt to address the housing needs of particular groups or segments of the population. For example, the housing needs of refugees have received attention in the AHURI research agenda (Beer and Foley 2003). In this context housing needs could refer to anything from tenure or living arrangements to the design of the bathroom.

The final context refers to attempted assessments of the extent to which a particular dwelling matches the specific needs or dwelling requirements of the household occupying it. While at a very broad level, this may form a component of the analysis of dwelling supply and the availability of suitable housing discussed above, the example here concerns instances where there has been an explicit attempt to match need with a dwelling. The assessment of need in this case is often undertaken in the context of a post-occupancy evaluation of a dwelling and its household.

Examining these four different contexts identifies the potential for confusion. Households identified within the first context are usually associated with a negative housing outcome, while households included as part of the last concept might be associated with very positive housing outcomes. Needs-based approaches have been widely adopted in other social policy arenas, although they have come under increasing scrutiny (Baldwin 1986, Wadsworth 1992, Dill 1993, Temple and Steele 2004). For example, in the context of public health, Asadi-Lari et al. (2003: 4) argue that:

"Existing definitions of 'need' seem to justify resource constraints rather than seeking to satisfy the genuine health needs of the population in the context of a needs-driven healthcare system. If needs analysis is intended to be meaningful rather than an academic exercise or political propaganda, definitions must reflect clinical reality."

Seelig and Phibbs' (2006) work examined the tensions between normative (provider) and felt (client) descriptions of need in the context of housing affordability, and illustrated how key housing need concepts require rethinking. Such reconceptualisations of affordability can result in a more nuanced appreciation of need without necessarily creating ever-growing numbers of those identified as being in housing need. As the authors argue:

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<sup>4</sup> There are a number of other definitions, though in general the definitions usually combine some combinations of affordability, adequacy, appropriateness and security. This approach of course suggests that 'need' involves an equation of housing cost and income, but the needs assessment processes which are associated with the analyses of such needs normally apply simplistic tests of affordability. See Seelig and Phibbs (2006) for a brief discussion of alternative approaches to affordability measures, including residual income models.

“Conceptualising and measuring housing needs is far from straightforward, and yet issues such as affordability are commonly assessed through blunt instruments.... The study shows that the conceptualisation by low income renters of their household budgetary situation is critical to self-perceptions and self-assessment of being in housing need. Even if they are paying high percentages of their income on rent, this does not often translate into a perception that housing is the problem.” (Seelig and Phibbs 2006: p64)

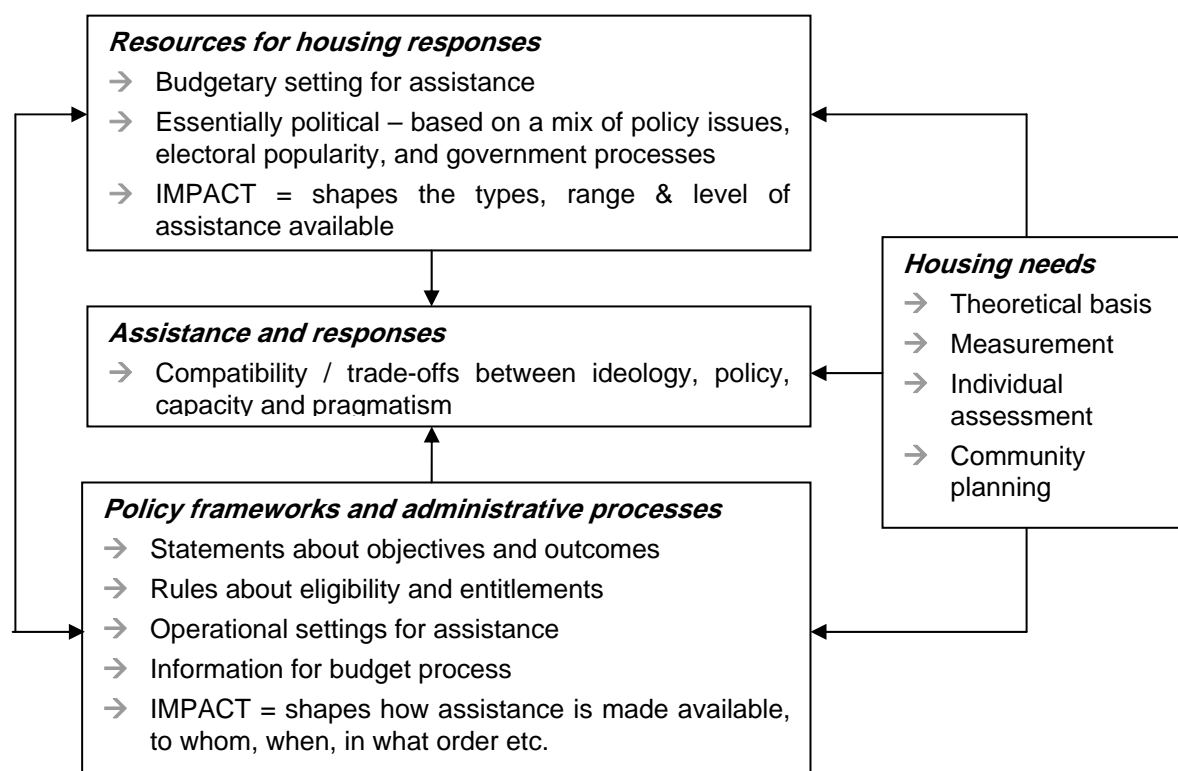
A recent study of people’s experience of housing stress provides further empirical evidence to support this argument (Burke 2007). On a related point, Karmel (1998: p3) suggests that “housing affordability can also be considered solely an income issue, since (theoretically) adequate financial resources should allow families to buy or rent suitable housing”.

This emphasises two of the complexities involved in needs debates and articulations: firstly, that we need to be mindful of who is doing the needs articulation – consumer, expert, service provider, etc. Secondly, we need to address the associated assumptions being made, in terms of availability of affordable housing, capacity of households to make trade-offs, and so on.

## 2.2 The politics of need

Another way of looking at need in a policy context is to accept its inherently political undertones. The idea of a ‘politics of need’ concerns the way needs are responded to through political and high level policy processes, and how needs fits into the schema of key factors shaping delivery of housing assistance. This acknowledges that, in practice, key decisions about housing assistance funding and responses (as is the case with other social and economic policy areas) clearly are not based solely on research, analysis or other forms of ‘evidence’ about need.

**Figure 2.1: Key factors shaping delivery of housing assistance**



Source: Seelig 2007.

While needs are embraced widely as an important component of deciding how, when and to whom housing assistance should be provided, in reality, need is only one input into the process of setting the parameters for such housing assistance responses. The key factors shaping delivery of housing assistance include need. But they are also based in an essentially political and administrative process, where the levels of resources for assistance are set according to a range of policy inputs and other considerations.

Later stages of this study will consider further how needs are used in a political context, by seeking the views of senior officials, political advisors and politicians. For this paper, it was instructive to briefly examine how 'needs' were being used in the political and policy discourses of housing statements during the 2007 Federal Election. Four key documents were analysed.<sup>5</sup> They indicated that needs can be used in political comments and commitments to support some policy objectives around housing assistance. They also showed how housing assistance can be proposed and prioritised without any reference to need in other cases.

### **2.3 Capacity to inform policy**

Despite all the apparent challenges and difficulties posed by the idea of 'need', this study has the capacity to inform policy in several ways.

At the outset, housing as a need ought to be recognised as something special in social policy terms, as it has characteristics that are unlike many other issues addressed by social programs. It is the largest single expense in a household budget, and hence dominates the economic welfare of those on lower incomes. It provides not only shelter but determines our access to a range of other services like health and employment. It is hard to do without, often costly to access and maintain, and it is difficult financially and practically to change, as that process commonly involves high transaction costs and a physical relocation.

Despite this economic and social policy significance, there has been precious little exposition of needs issues in Australian housing research. Most existing studies have focused, exclusively, or in the main, on the more methodological and technical aspects of need, rather than the underlying concepts and assumptions. The present research thus has the potential to clarify uses of the term 'housing needs' and to identify more helpful conceptualisations of need from both international and interdisciplinary research. In providing a clearer framework for the conceptualisation of needs, this research will benefit housing policy and practice communities, by helping them to appreciate how needs approaches ought to be situated theoretically.

A better conceptual understanding of housing needs, including a focus on Indigenous housing needs, will also inform how needs may be recognised and measured. It will assist in identifying who is in housing need; what sorts of needs people have; what triggers the presence of housing need; and how needs vary over time. These are key conceptual concerns in an era of changing approaches to social housing access and a growing focus on prioritising assistance to those in 'highest' or 'most urgent' need.

State Housing Authorities, housing service providers, and other housing sector agencies working at a policy or practice level are all grappling with several key questions relating to need and responses to need. These questions include:

→ Who should get assistance?

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<sup>5</sup> *Savings for the future: helping young Australians buy their own home*, Liberal Party 2007 Election Policy; *New directions for housing affordability*, Australian Labor Party 2007 Election Policy; John Howard's 2007 Election Coalition Campaign Address, Brisbane 12/11/07; Kevin Rudd's 2007 ALP Election Coalition Campaign Address, Brisbane 14/11/07.

- What form should that assistance take?
- How quickly should those persons be assisted?
- For how long should they be able to receive assistance?
- What other options are there for providing assistance?

It is hoped and anticipated that this study will provide a vehicle for exploring a range of questions from both conceptual and practical perspectives, and will contribute in some small way to the further development of housing policy frameworks and housing assistance systems.

## 3 CONCEPTUALISING NEEDS – THE THEORETICAL DIMENSIONS

### 3.1 Introduction

As Chapter 2 suggested, the term ‘housing need’ is often used without any clear or agreed meaning. This is potentially problematic as the notion of need is not axiomatic: it cannot be conceptualised a priori, and there are multiple definitions and meanings attached to both the use of the term ‘housing need’ at the macro level, and a plethora of examples of how specific housing needs have been articulated and applied. ‘Need’ can be taken to mean quite different things in different contexts. As Fitzgerald (1977: p201) remarks:

“The very ambiguity of the concept ‘need’ in large part explains its plausibility in use... on the one hand it involves imperatives and on the other because it appears to root them in common sense and in empirical reality.”

This chapter reviews some of the key relevant literature about the origins of ‘needs’ from a theoretical and conceptual perspective. The study of needs is positioned around two central questions: how needs have been thought of to date, and whether there is a case for reconceptualising our approaches. Writing in 1982, Martin was concerned about making headway on the issue:

“The definition and assessment of ‘need’ remains a complex and contentious subject. Differences and disagreements continue at both the theoretical and practical levels of defining what is ‘need’, discussing how it can and should be assessed, and clarifying the desirable or actual relationship between need assessment and decision making about social intervention.” (Martin 1982: p190)

Despite its frequent usage in housing research and policy documents since this time, ‘housing need’ remains a very imprecise concept which, if left as such, can and will be interpreted in many ways. The study of additional housing needs undertaken for the Australian Housing Research Fund provides an example. It stated that:

“...there is an assumption that needs can be objectively defined and measured. However, definitions of need are subjective and influenced by the values of the measurer ... the approach adopted in this project was to examine what constitutes housing needs for different population groups and in different jurisdictions, in order to examine housing situations that were common to a range of groups. These were assumed to imply additional housing needs.” (Purdon/Twyford 2000: p2)

Although in that study it was acknowledged that “Despite [the] limitations, the concept of need is a useful if imperfect tool for defining and prioritising the distribution of resources” (Purdon/Twyford 2000: p2), it is true to say that most often, the idea of needs is not analysed or discussed at all. Generalised statements about needs are made in an effort to advance assessment or measurement issues, which apparently are more tangible. This is unfortunate. Debates and examinations of housing and other social need ought to be properly and more precisely informed, and they require clear conceptual underpinnings across both the theoretical and practical aspects of what ‘housing needs’ concern. As Clayton (1983: p216) proposes, we need to “identify more clearly the variety of ways in which the term [need] is, and can be, used, and to be more explicit about the assumptions underlying its usage, in the development of social policies”. This chapter aims to examine such matters more closely than is commonly the case in housing work.

In the area of needs – whether it be assessment, measurement or (less frequently) theorising and formal conceptualisation – the works of Bradshaw and Maslow are perhaps the most often-cited materials. Their respective contributions to the concept and analysis of needs are quite distinct, however, in terms of which aspects of the various needs debates they actually address, and how their work has been used since. Maslow was interested in articulating a hierarchy of essential needs from the perspective of behavioural psychology. His well-known schema seeks to lay out a sense of what people's needs might be. Bradshaw, meanwhile, developed his framework for needs as a means of categorising how needs can be recognised and assessed.

Both Maslow and Bradshaw are essential coordinates in any analysis of needs conceptualisation. Both are also limited in many respects, however, and have been critiqued accordingly, either directly or obliquely. While noting and acknowledging the importance of these two authors, it is necessary to examine other key social policy theorists who have also struggled with the idea of needs.

This chapter will also review Len Doyal and Ian Gough, Kate Soper, Michael E Stone, and others who have expanded and helped to clarify the discourse around needs. Doyal and Gough, together and separately, have made important contributions to the broad conceptual debates about the nature of social and individual needs. Their key text, *A Theory of Human Need*, was released in 1991, but many of the ideas originally were expressed in a paper in the early 1980s (Doyal and Gough 1984), and Gough has since written and presented on the same issues. Soper is a contemporary theorist who has provided over the years useful commentary and critical analysis of the Doyal and Gough position. Stone (1970), in fact preceded these theorists with an early analysis of Maslow, and anticipated many of the debates as they relate to housing needs. In more recent writings, he has used his framework on basic need (Stone 1993) – which in many ways parallels Doyal and Gough's work – to underline broader discussions regarding the concept of 'shelter poverty', and later, rights to housing (in Bratt, Stone and Hartman 2006).

The discussion in this study is thus based on significant literature concerning individual and social needs, spanning a range of disciplines including moral and political philosophy, sociology, economics, health, and human geography. At the core of the various debates, approaches and frameworks used in conceptualising housing and other forms of need, there lies a set of key questions, which form the conceptual foundations for a more practical focus on addressing housing need, as examined in Chapter 4. These core questions are:

- What makes needs different from other concepts and ideas?
- What are 'needs' and where do they come from?
- Who gets to identify needs and who gets to decide about them?

Accordingly, the remainder of this chapter will examine these critical theoretical issues, by examining (in Section 3.2) what conceptually separates 'needs' from other things such as 'demands', 'rights', 'social needs' and the proposition that needs are a social construct. This leads into discussions (Section 3.3) on how needs might be conceived in terms of being objective and universalist or more subjective and culturally relative. These questions about how we are to acknowledge the existence of needs raise a more detailed and philosophical analysis of the specific forms of needs we are talking about (Section 3.4), and how these might enable us to position theoretical discussions of specific housing needs. The chapter concludes (Section 3.5) with a parallel but related set of issues of how needs are legitimated (recognised and accepted), and more importantly, by whom.

## 3.2 What distinguishes needs from other forms of demand?

There are a number of important theoretical debates relating to questions about what needs are, and how we can think about them. These have a tendency to be fairly abstract and philosophical, but they are nevertheless central to gaining an understanding of how to approach the issue of conceptualising need at a more practical and applied level. In the theoretical-leaning literature about 'needs', three of the most critical issues encompass definitions, contexts and gradation.

The significance of these issues is highlighted by Gough (undated), when he considers who the 'critics of need' might be, and on what grounds their critiques of previous work by Doyal and Gough (1984 and 1991) may be based. Gough (undated) suggests, rhetorically and sardonically, that different disciplines and perspectives have a tendency to adopt common positions on needs, as follows:

- "Economists: needs are preferences
- Sociologists: needs are socially constructed
- Radical democrats: needs are discursive
- Feminists & anti-racists: needs are group specific
- Cultural critics: needs are Western." (Gough undated: p3)

For some, it would appear that needs are more than just problematic – they are also seemingly quite threatening: "One of the most dangerous euphemisms in the sociological vocabulary, a misnomer for a political decision based on questionable advice by idiosyncratic or paternalist experts" (Seldon cited in Gough undated: p3) Illich too was apparently gravely concerned: "'Basic needs' may be the most insidious legacy left behind by development" (cited in Gough undated: p3). To others still, needs have no place: "The word 'need' ought to be banished from discussion of public policy" (Culyer et al. cited in Doyal and Gough 1984: p7).

While the generalised claims about disciplinary perspectives are sweeping, masking differences in approach and ontology, it should be apparent that the mere notion of needs, and reflections on their nature and form, raise significant debates and arguments. Some of these are deeply felt, and are more than mere academic jousting.

### 3.2.1 *Need vs. want*

In the main, the literature behind the analysis of needs supports the proposition that, on the issue of definition, there are distinctions to be made between the concept of 'needs' on the one hand, and other concepts such as 'wants', 'desires', 'choices' and 'preferences' on the other. Orthodox (neo-liberal) economic theory holds that markets are paramount, and that suppliers are essentially responding to consumer demands as choices and preferences. It does not examine the distinctions between needs and wants. As Raiklin and Uyar (1996: p50) suggest, "economists recognise that the two concepts (needs and wants) are indeed different, and that the two words are not synonyms ... [but] economists in general have chosen not to dwell on the differences".

However, others reject the economic position. Doyal and Gough (1991) claim that at their most base point, there are certain services or outcomes that are held in common, and this makes them qualitatively distinct from wants or desires. They reject the argument by others that "the distinction between needs and wants is essentially normative" (Doyal and Gough 1984:p13). Soper (2006: p355) supports this line:

"Needs refer us to the essentials, to what is indispensable rather than to what we would merely like to have. To impute a need, therefore, is to imply that it

ought to be met, that we are dealing not with what is optional but with what there is an obligation to provide.”

In other words, needs are what you must have; while wants are more based in preferences. Raiklin and Uyar (1996) indicate that such a position is in fact also possible within economics. Soper (1993: p118) stresses that the ‘must have’ characteristic may be innate, but is taken to be more than merely Darwinian mechanics: “it is also important to recognise that needs are properties of subjects rather than biological organisms. They must thus be differentiated not only from wants, but also from instinctual urges and biological drives”. At the same time, people may sometimes be quite oblivious to such needs:

“Doyal and Gough’s essential argument here is that needs are distinguished from wants in being goals which all human beings have to achieve if they are to avoid ‘serious harm’, this latter being defined in terms of the maintenance of physical health and autonomy.... Needs, then, according to Gough and Doyal, are to be differentiated from wants and subjective preferences in terms of their possibly unconscious status. Unlike our wants, our needs are such that we may be unaware of them and thus incapable of naming them. Experienced and articulated as they often are, it is not essential to the ascription of a need that it be subjectively apprehended.” (Soper 1993: p116)

This difference between need and want has been described in another way. To ‘need’ something implies that there is an obvious follow-on outcome, or an alleviation from a situation (Sheppard and Woodcock 1999). To want something does not imply the same imperative or effect. In a related way, Flew (in Fitzgerald 1977: p216) links the issues of end purpose with achieving a positive outcome:

“...the satisfaction of people’s needs must be in their interests, or in some other way good for them...whatever is needed is needed not for its own sake but as a means to the fulfilment of some further function, purpose or end.”

A medical analogy of ‘needs vs. wants’ provides another simple way of illustrating how needs can be considered as more objective (as a prelude to a subsequent discussion), and clearly distinct from wants:

“...the diabetic may want sugar so badly that their perception is one of need.... But what they need is insulin – even if they have never heard of it and do not have the capacity to conceptualise it as a choice.” (Doyal and Gough 1984: p12)

Finally, Ytrehus (2001) makes a helpful connection between the arguments that needs are essentially subjective, and more market-oriented approaches to addressing needs. The inferred point here is a good one – that if we are to rely solely on the marketplace for the allocation of services, we may also more readily accept that needs are synonymous with consumer demands, rather than with any other standards. Acceptance that the market ought not be the sole arbiter of who gains access to which services, however, leads inextricably to a corollary proposition: that needs must be more than ‘demand’, and are capable of being more objectivised, to exist in some form beyond simple market-based relations.

### 3.2.2 *Need vs. rights*

Debates about need are potentially related to, but also distinct and separate from, notions of rights – be they social (citizenship) rights in the sense of T. H. Marshall, and those human or supra-national rights arising from documents such as the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights (Plant in Franklin 1998), or the assistance



'entitlements' which can also be a form of response to need (as discussed in Chapter 2) and which necessarily incur certain rights to assistance.

Thus, for example, the UN Universal Declaration on Human Rights (1948) states that: "Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for himself and his family, including food, clothing, housing ..." (Article 25). The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966) provides for "... the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions" (Article 11(1)). Subsequent General Comment from Special Rapporteurs on the Right to Adequate Housing in the early 1990s and again in the early 2000s, have maintained the claim of right.

However, these are effectively assertions of humanity, rather than theories of need. The relationship between rights and needs arises because rights are usually based on an implicit acceptance or explicit statements about needs. It may be also argued that once clearly established, needs may lead to claims about rights (Gough in Franklin 1998), which may then lead onto further questions about housing responses which are based more in entitlements than the discretionary management of demand. Acceptance and recognition of needs can result in rights and entitlements, and while this suggests that needs and rights can become developmentally and sequentially connected, it does not make them synonymous. They will be regarded here as sufficiently unrelated in a theoretical sense, so as to focus only upon 'need', given that the central issue at hand is about what needs are, and how they can be conceptualised.<sup>6</sup>

### *3.2.3 Individual need vs. social or community need*

It is also recognised that needs can be discussed and analysed at the level of the individual or at a social or community level. In some cases, this difference is effectively between processes, where a 'needs assessment' that is conducted spatially or around particular population groups (usually undertaken for social planning or enumeration purposes) can be contrasted with an assessment and prioritisation of the needs of an individual vis-à-vis applications for specific assistance.

However, the difference can become somewhat murky: the literature also draws a distinction between 'individual' and 'social needs', which for some are essentially the same forms of need, but merely at aggregate or person levels. Alternatively, social needs could be considered conceptually as need at a community or societal level as something distinct from merely the aggregation of individuals' needs. However, for the purposes of this Paper, the distinction between individual and social need at the more theoretical level is not considered to be of special importance.

### *3.2.4 Needs as a social construction*

Following in the footsteps of Berger and Luckmann, Smith (1980: p68) argues that 'need' ought to be "viewed as a socially constructed reality; as the objectification of subjective phenomena...closely dependent upon the concepts of professional practitioners". Adopting a less theoretical, but equally constructivist line, Armstrong for example (cited in Doyal and Gough 1984: p7) argues that, "The idea of 'need' is subjective, transient, fleeting and based on value-judgements".

A more detailed analysis of how needs can be considered from a social constructionist position, particularly in terms of marketing and the psychology of

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<sup>6</sup> In the US, Bratt, Stone and Hartman (2006) provide detailed analysis of the arguments in their recent book, *A Right to Housing*. Shorter, and much less sophisticated claims, based on the UN Charter of Human Rights have appeared from time to time in Australia (see for example, Sidoti 1996).

needs, is provided by Buttle (1989). The crucial debate over connections between who is identifying needs, and the articulation of such needs, will be examined later in this study. However, the proposition that there can be no sense of need beyond something socially constructed in the minds of practitioners and others seems to take us down a philosophical and micro-sociological cul-de-sac from which there is no escape or recovery. It might also be argued that, as the earlier example of the medical analogy of the diabetic, needs must be capable of being more than a mere social construct, otherwise we are left with the proposition that even basic medical issues are potentially a fabrication and not real!

For these reasons of logic alone, the strong constructionist position on need will not be further considered here. However, the related issue of whether it is necessary to consider oneself in need to actually be in need, will be examined later in the context of Bradshaw's work.

### **3.3 How needs are conceived and acknowledged to exist**

The distinctions between 'needs' and other concepts are important to acknowledge. However, they do not directly answer questions about the kinds of needs we are distinguishing. The need-want binary and other debates about the idea of needs lead directly into a related discourse about whether needs are held to be universal, objective or absolute, or whether they are relative, subjective or culturally specific. These debates are sometimes seen as being connected to those concerning social constructionism, and while at some level there is an affinity between the claim that needs are socially constructed (i.e. subjective) and arguments that they are culturally or socially dependent (i.e. relative), this does not make them synonymous. For example, it is entirely possible for a theorist to reject the constructionist proposition that there is no independent social reality, while holding that needs are in fact socially or culturally relative, and vary according to context.

There have been several attempts to define the basis on which needs should be focused. Broadly, these fall into one of three camps: those who argue that needs are necessarily relative; those holding needs as being absolute; and campers in the middle who seek to combine aspects of the other two. While the debates appear rather academic and abstract, they are also important to acknowledge because, as Chapter 4 will show, they sit behind the principles used in assessing and measuring need, albeit implicitly in many cases.

#### **3.3.1 Needs as a relativist concept**

In some ways, debates about absolute and relative approaches to need effectively mirror related debates about other social policy issues, particularly poverty (cf., Townsend 1979)<sup>7</sup>. The key point of argument is whether we should regard needs in terms of being measurable only in the context of a range of circumstances and situations, where the test is one of general community or average conditions; or whether to regard need against a more fixed set of criteria. In essence, what the relativist positions on need hold in common is the argument that needs are contingent on the social norms and common standards which apply to any given area, such as housing. Fitzgerald (1977: p204) argues: "Because the notion 'need' combines both empirical and normative elements, one cannot produce a purely empirical theory of human needs". He adds that, "As in all other contexts of use, to speak of 'a need' or

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<sup>7</sup> In Australia, this is commonly known as the 'Saunders vs Saunders debate', where some (e.g. Peter Saunders from the Centre for Independent Studies) hold that poverty is concerned with an absolute standard of deprivation, while others (e.g. Peter Saunders from the Social Policy Research Centre) view poverty as being relative to income and wealth distribution overall (i.e. more a question of social disadvantage and inequality).

being ‘in need’ presupposes a standard or norm, and different norms will create different ‘needs’”.

The corollary of these positions is that a relativist position, in general, will be culturally sensitive, as social norms vary between or even within societies; while an absolutist position concurs with a more universalistic approach. In the needs literature, this debate is sometimes framed as being between ‘thin’ (absolute, universalist) and ‘thick’ (cultural relativist) theoretical approaches to need:

“...whereas a ‘thin’ theory is said to aim at what is universally needed independently of cultural content and subjective report, a ‘thick’ theory is particularist, focusing on ‘needs’ as these are experienced and named within a specific culture.” (Soper 1993: 116)

The difference between the thin and the thick forms of needs theory can, in actual fact, also be more complex than it may seem. Some thick positions might accept a basic universal need, while some thin theorists might accept that relativities enter the fray at some point. Theoretically at least, a universalist stance could be subtly distinct from an absolutist one, where the former is claiming that all people everywhere share the same needs, and the latter is more about basic needs — which might be more historically, socially and politically contingent if connected to social participation. However, this potential difference is largely ignored in the literature.

This is not to suggest that different advocates of cultural relativist notions of needs agree among themselves on the specific articulation of such needs. Indeed, this is surely one of its weaknesses as a useful approach to conceptualising need: relativism spreads from the social environment down to the individual definer of need. A relativist position is not necessarily a social constructionist one, and it is entirely possible and coherent to have expert-based (normative) relative measures of need, where the focus is less contingent on broader cultural definitions, and more concerned with the relative prioritisation of need. This will be explored further in Chapter 4. However, ‘strong forms of relativism’ (from Ytrehus 2001) clearly have a constructionist tendency.

Within the Australian context, there is a separate, parallel debate concerning the cultural basis for needs, which is more concerned with the distinctive needs of cultural groups within society than it is with the relativities of need across society as a whole. Perhaps the most important example here relates to Indigenous needs. Taking account of cultural differences in housing utilisation, and in concepts of home and household, presents a strong theoretical challenge. Differences may exist between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities and between urban and non-urban Indigenous households. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) has developed a ‘multi-measure’ needs model for Indigenous housing, and they state:

“Indigenous people may place cultural values on the dimensions of housing needs that are different from those placed on them by others. Housing need is culturally and socially constructed. For example, an Indigenous family in a remote area may not define overcrowding in the same way as a non-Indigenous family in an urban area, or even in the same way as an Indigenous family in an urban area.” (AIHW 2005a: p5)

It has proved difficult to develop needs frameworks that are based in clear theory about how, and to what extent, culturally discrete standards and basic requirements might vary from broader social norms. The AIHW itself has acknowledged that there is much still to do in the area:

“Despite the importance of capturing information on Indigenous people in a culturally appropriate way, it is not currently possible to adopt culturally appropriate measures. Such measures will take some time to develop. In the interim, Australian community standards are used, and in this report Indigenous housing needs are treated in the same way as all Australian housing needs are treated.” (AIHW 2005a: p5)

There are other concerns about relativism as an approach to needs conceptualisation and definition. As Ytrehus (2001: p171) suggests:

“The problem with the relativist position would be that there would be no common frame of reference for a lower limit for housing needs-satisfaction. It does not provide guidelines for what constitutes acceptable housing conditions: ‘anything goes’.”

This is a real challenge in the scenario of any future decline of social standards. Soper (1993: p113), in reviewing Doyal and Gough (1991), suggests that:

“Not even the most committed cultural relativist on needs is likely to disagree with Aristotle when he remarks in *Metaphysics* that, ‘when life or existence are impossible (or when the good cannot be attained) without certain conditions, these conditions are “necessary”, and this cause is itself a kind of necessity’. If, that is, we construe this as an argument to the effect that all human beings have a need for whatever is essential to the maintenance of life and the provision of the ‘good’, then few will dissent from it.”

In response, Ytrehus (2001) cites Sen as arguing in favour of a minimum, absolute limit which is also potentially flexible in its application.

### 3.3.2 *Needs as a universalist concept*

While it may seem attractive to adopt a position that sees relativities as a sound basis for a concept of need, it is only one of several theoretical models. In fact, far more has been theorised and written about needs from a more absolute or universalist approach. Two concepts that share some themes, while also diverging in style and content, are contributions from Maslow, and from Doyal and Gough. They hold in common an idea of basic needs, sometimes referred to as ‘categorical needs’:

“...these needs, which a human cannot do without, are overriding and include health, nutrition and shelter. These are overriding because they are inherent to the need itself and our nature as human beings.” (Bradshaw 1994: p48)

For Doyal and Gough, the issue of basic needs is connected to physical health, harm avoidance, and social autonomy. At their very ‘basest’, we are essentially dealing with matters of life and death, and of simple social existence – although it is expressed in somewhat more sophisticated terms than this:

“...aims and goals are classified as needs if they are believed to be applicable to all persons or to all people in specific groups. This is because it is thought that under specified circumstances, if a human remains without the relevant satisfier(s) then damage of some sort will be done.” (Doyal and Gough 1984: p11)

For Doyal and Gough, there is a set of base line needs — essentially, those necessary for health and survival, and for living as a social being. Doyal and Gough’s basic needs thus have two main generic characteristics: firstly they are more than wants, they are instead imperatives; and secondly, they are universal and absolute (and objective). Basic needs satisfaction in this argument equates to “objective welfare”, which aims to avoid “either embracing relativism or working at such a level of

generality that the relevance of our theory for specific problems concerning social policy is lost” (Doyal and Gough 1991: p156). As Soper (1993: p123) explains:

“...the idea of a ‘basic’ need implie(s) a capacity to discriminate not only between needs and wants (or, relatedly, between needed and luxury items of consumption), but also between basic and non-basic needs, on the one hand, and non-basic needs and wants, or luxuries, on the other. The concept, that is, relies on a distinction within the concept of need itself between that which is absolutely indispensable, and that which, relative to what is basic, is dispensable, yet relative to the merely preferred, objectively essential.”

On the question of how a basic needs theory might link into the notion of cultural relativities of need, Doyal and Gough argue that these are not necessarily completely incompatible. They propose that we make a critical distinction between what base needs are (static), the factors or ‘intermediate needs’ that are required to address them (constant), and the varying forms of needs responses (which may commonly be culturally sensitive). Gough has maintained that: “Basic needs can never be satisfied independently of the social environment, but must be conceptualised independently of any specific social environment” (Gough, undated: p9).

Accordingly, Doyal and Gough (1984: p12) suggest that with food, clothing and housing, we can see a distinction between our basic need for nutrition, covering, and shelter, and the more ‘culturally specific’ ways that they may be delivered. Soper (2006: p355) makes the same difference “between basic needs and the culturally specific modes in which they are gratified”. This means that while we all share a basic need for various things — including basic housing both as shelter, and as a base for essential social participation — the ways that these needs are addressed in practice will be influenced by wider social norms and cultural contexts.

This does not undermine the argument for universal, objective need, which we all share irrespective of culture. Rather, it provides a baseline that is absent in a relativist position — but in a way that acknowledges how social and cultural contexts are likely to shape de facto debates about needs and how to respond to them.

### 3.3.3 *Summary*

In their basic form, it seems possible to conceive of housing needs as needs that are held in common (universalist in nature); are fixed, in the sense that they create a foundation and minimum condition; and that are different from ‘wants’, in that they logically require a response. Despite their existence as real phenomena, there seems to be wide agreement that the means through which housing needs (‘basic and beyond’) are addressed are necessarily sensitive to social and cultural standards. In other words, although we all share the same basic needs, for housing and other essentials of life, how we choose to respond to needs is relative to the context in which those needs are situated.

In summing up the potential uses of these arguments, Soper (1993: p128) claims that:

“Doyal and Gough’s emphasis on ‘basic’ needs, and their commitment to a theory which observes the logical distinction between the ‘needed’ and ‘wanted’ or ‘subjectively preferred’, has for me the very considerable value of allowing us to see how and why a theory of welfare will need to be placed within (a) broader framework of social and ecological considerations.”

This brings us to the next logical question in this theoretical discussion: What kinds of needs are we seeking to examine?

### 3.4 The forms and manifestations of need

As the previous section has indicated, there is a close connection between whether needs are seen as being relative or universal, and what sorts of needs are intended to be recognised as needs, as opposed to something else. Conceptually, there is an immediate problem in defining needs in a broad brush or global sense from a relativist perspective, since such defining is anathema to the whole idea of needs being contingent on context and culture. Essentially, once the point of relativities is made, there is nowhere to go in terms of then defining how needs might be manifested since the answer will be a temporal and cultural moving feast.

However, for the more universalist approaches to needs, there is the important question of the forms that needs might take, and in particular, if needs are universal because we all have common basic needs, then what exactly are these basic needs? This section examines some of the important contributions to this issue, by looking further at Gough and Doyal's work on human needs, but also at Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and how this has been critiqued, adapted and synthesised by the likes of Alderfer (1972) and Stone (1970).

#### 3.4.1 Maslow's 'hierarchy of needs' theory

The work of Abraham Maslow and his Hierarchy of Needs is perhaps the most commonly cited framework in defining and conceptualising needs. Despite being 'well-known', his theory is not necessarily 'well understood', and there are some critical points that need to be appreciated to make best use of his approach in a needs context. Stone (1970) provides a very helpful synopsis and critique of the main components of the hierarchy, and the nature of needs themselves, particularly in terms of how they may then help us understand how people experience housing need.

Maslow was a Developmental Psychologist interested in human motivation and personal development. His framework was initially developed and published as a paper during the 1940s (Maslow 1943), but was reproduced and more formally articulated in Chapter 4 of his book *Motivation and Personality*, published in 1954. In the second edition of this (released in 1970 around the time of his death), he sought to further clarify his original framework, and he expanded on how supplementary and related needs issues formed part of his thinking. The need for such explanation and clarification arose (and indeed remains) through widespread misunderstandings, adaptations and appropriations of Maslow's principal ideas.

As Stone (1970: p6) indicates:

“There are four basic premises that characterize Maslow's theory of basic needs: 1) the satisfaction of a basic need is an end in itself, not a means to some further end; 2) the set of basic human needs appears to be humanly universal; 3) basic needs should be distinguished from the classical 'drives' as motivational forces; and 4) [Quoting Maslow directly] “the basic human needs are organized into a hierarchy of relative prepotency.”

This last point is quite critical as it explains how Maslow sees the hierarchy operating. The 'prepotency' nature of each of the levels of need means that as the lowest order (or most basic) of the basic needs are met, there is the potential for the next level of need to become dominant. This indicates that “an individual is motivated only by unsatisfied needs, and ...of the unsatisfied needs, the most basic ones will have the highest priority, except in rare cases” (Stone 1970: p8). However, this does not mean that people can not be driven by several (or even all) of the basic needs simultaneously. The nature of the prepotency hierarchy means in fact that someone

can be motivated by all unsatisfied needs; but it will be the lowest (most basic) needs which will be the most crucial.

Maslow conceived these basic needs in the context of the motivators of behaviour, and the framework seeks to lay out a series of deficiency-based basic needs, which escalate in relative importance as each preceding level of needs is satisfied. The theory therefore starts with one's most basic or immediate survival needs, and shows how each level is reached in turn, based on the satisfaction of the preceding level. The first four levels were referred to by Maslow as "deficiency needs". They concern 'basic' needs that, once met, no longer have a motivating force. The need for self-actualisation was referred to as more of a 'being need' and was considered to be an enduring motivator of behaviour.

Traditionally, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is described in terms of five categories or levels, which in ascending order of motivations relate to:

1. physiological needs
2. safety needs
3. belongingness and love needs
4. esteem needs, and
5. the needs for self-actualisation.

The physiological needs are more 'biological', and include food, water and protection from the elements. The safety needs are both physical and ontological, and include security, stability, dependency, and a sense of structure. The belongingness and love needs are more 'social', in the sense of affectionate relationships (being loved by others, and loving others), as well as needing interactions and association. Esteem needs are more personal (ego) and interpersonal, and include both self-esteem and esteem or respect of and by others). Finally, self-actualisation needs are about fulfilment, and capture creativity, personal growth, and realisation of potential.

These are then commonly portrayed in terms of a five-level pyramid to illustrate the hierarchical structure of the theory (but seemingly not by Maslow himself). However, while these five categories of need form the core of the framework, Maslow also discussed the notion of cognitive need ("the desire to know and understand"), and then later, 'aesthetic needs' (see the 1970, 2nd edition of *Motivation and Personality*). These are frequently left out of the use or analysis of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. The five basic needs are what Maslow calls the 'conative' forms of need, which he saw as being conceptually distinct but not completely unrelated to cognitive and aesthetic need. These may operate at a higher level than the basic (conative) needs, and may be structured around their own hierarchies (Stone 1970: p10).

It should further be acknowledged that the hierarchical nature of needs is arguably not as clear cut as Maslow seemingly purports, in that not everyone aims to satisfy one need before turning to the next, in a neat sequence. The potential for a different order of need was in fact considered possible by Maslow, which is perhaps why the traditional portrayal as a pyramid is misleading, because it suggests both a level of rigidity which was not intended, and also that needs somehow decline in scale or importance as someone moves through the stages. It is important to recognise that Maslow's needs hierarchy contends that all of the basic needs humans identified are motivated to meet are innate and broadly universal.

Maslow's theory has also been criticised, particularly at the higher self-actualisation level, as it lacked a rigorous empirical methodology in general and especially in terms of on what to base the construct of self-actualisation. Buttle (1989: p202) has

commented that while Maslow's theory satisfied all the "formal requirements of a 'good' theory" including "face validity...broad scope...an attractive picture of mankind...a theory we would want to believe", it lacked both empirical validation and any rationale for either the selection of the five needs, or their ranking. Indeed, the case studies for the self actualisation construct were selected subjectively, and were small in number. It may thus be claimed that while intuitive and accessible, the hierarchy of need lacks social scientific rigour or empiricism to be considered anything more than a hypothetical and heuristic tool.

One attempt to further elucidate and refine Maslow into a simpler framework was developed by Clayton P. Alderfer, in his 'ERG' or Existence, Relatedness and Growth theory of motivation (1972). Alderfer (1972: p7).makes a distinction between 'primary and secondary needs', where the former are innate (although not necessarily biological in nature), and the latter are "acquired or learned tendencies to respond". He claims that: "Existence, relatedness and growth are the basic categories used to conceptualise human needs..." (Alderfer 1972: p2), and positions these needs as primary needs. In essence, Alderfer seeks to condense the levels of need from Maslow into three categories which still cover the same range of needs, although Alderfer also argues that while he is in some senses building on Maslow's hierarchy of need, in other ways this is more of an adaption which will in practice lead to varying sets of analyses and outcomes (Alderfer 1972: p2).

Housing is often discussed as though the shelter attributes of housing — which correlate with the lower two stages of Maslow's framework — are the most important features for housing interests. However, Maslow's need framework can be interpreted much more broadly in terms of what else housing provides as a base for emotional development, social participation, personal status and ontological security, where notions of place and home, neighbourhood and community, capacity and opportunity, all correlate with the higher aspects of basic need. Aspects of housing can thus be seen in each of the stages and across all of them.

Stone has made various important contributions to recognising how Maslow's framework can be used in a housing need context. In an unpublished paper examining how housing and human needs can be linked conceptually, Stone (1970) provides a concise review of classic U.S. literature on human needs satisfaction and housing, as a means of analysing and interpreting Maslow's hierarchy of needs, and the role that housing might play (instrumentally) in basic needs satisfaction. In this 1970 paper, which went on to consider the relationship between basic human needs and housing needs, Stone provides insights into how Maslow ought to be understood in its own right, and then how 'housing needs' are perhaps conceptually quite different in that while Maslow's basic needs are ends in themselves, housing needs are invariably 'intervening needs' or and effectively instruments or processes through which we can seek to address basic needs. In other words, the 'need for housing' is actually about the physiological and safety needs under Maslow:

"...there may be some minimum physical standards which are necessary, though not sufficient, for the satisfaction of human basic needs for safety and security. Above this minimum the physical characteristics are generally no more than enabling conditions for the satisfaction of higher needs, and whether they are either necessary or relevant for the satisfaction of the higher needs is socially variable." (Stone 1970: p18)

In subsequent published work, Stone (1993: p16) subtly collapses Maslow's three higher levels of basic needs (love and belonging, esteem and self-actualisation) into a broader category of 'identity' need. While not explicated in the material, it appears that Stone's intent here is to produce a more universal higher level of need in a way that



self-actualisation may not have been seen, particularly if we are to consider the potential for housing to satisfy basic needs. Stone also discusses 'intervening needs', and argues that housing needs are more instrumentalist than basic human needs, given that the housing is effectively a means of addressing basic need, rather than being an end in itself. This of course is firmly based in Maslow's thinking, but is also an artefact of Stone's adoption of a functionalist view of housing as a framework for his analysis. Nevertheless, Stone (1993:p13) states early on in his book on shelter poverty that:

"Housing is more than physical shelter. The residential environment consists of not only the dwelling unit but the site and setting, neighbours and community, municipality and public services, habitability and accessibility, rights and responsibilities, costs and benefits. Yet housing is even more than the residential environment, for it is only in relation to those who inhabit and use it that housing has meaning and significance – not only physical and economic, but emotional, symbolic and expressive."

Clearly, Stone sees housing as something both essential and central to life and being. His more philosophical point about the nature of housing needs is important, but does not undermine the significance of housing, and by implication, the imperative to actively address housing needs and issues.

### *3.4.2 The contribution of Doyal and Gough – basic and intermediate needs*

A separate, although potentially compatible theoretical analysis of needs in both a basic human context and more specifically in a housing context, has been provided by Doyal and Gough. As has already been highlighted, Doyal and Gough have viewed needs in terms of objective, universalist phenomena, and they begin their theoretical analysis of needs with the concept of basic needs (previously discussed in Section 3.3). However, they also discuss the notion of 'intermediate needs', which sit on top of these basic needs, and which effectively operationalise those needs:

"Intermediate needs ... (those needs which must be satisfied for all of us as a condition of health and autonomy) ... are listed as: nutritional food and clean water; protective housing; a non-hazardous work environment; a non-hazardous physical environment; appropriate health care; security in childhood; significant primary relationships; physical security; economic security; appropriate education; safe birth control and child-bearing." (Soper 1993: p122)

This list suggests that housing needs feature prominently at a critical level. After adequate nutritional food and clean water, "Adequate housing is the next important intermediate need which must be satisfied if illness is to be avoided". (Doyal and Gough 1991: p196) Rejecting the argument that basic standards are relative, Doyal and Gough state that: "there are three satisfier characteristics related to housing, which if not met, are everywhere inimical to physical or mental health", and these concern "adequate housing", "adequate basic services" and "adequate basic space" (1991: p219). As they explain:

"...a dwelling must offer reasonable protection from climatic extremes, from exposure and from pests and disease-carrying vectors. It should be able to withstand the normal demands of weather, provide adequate sanitation, and in colder climates, appropriate heating and insulation." (Doyal and Gough 1991: p196)

and

“...dwellings which are overcrowded can also undermine the health of their occupants ...The weight of evidence from different societies now suggests that overcrowding contributes, among other things, to respiratory illness, slow physical and cognitive development in children, and stress and depression in adults – all factors contributing to physical illness and impaired autonomy.” (Doyal and Gough 1991: p197)

Elsewhere Doyal and Gough (1991: p323) observe that “housing may be safe, warm and uncrowded yet so inaccessible that its occupants are unable to utilise or consume satisfiers for other human needs”. It seems that they had locational accessibility in mind when making this comment. But the same point applies in the context of housing costs and inaccessibility based on affordability, or where such costs render the household unable to meet non-housing basic needs (adequate food, health costs, etc.). Similarly, inaccessibility due to discrimination, including risk avoidance (i.e. not renting dwellings to tenants considered ‘risky’ in potentially discriminatory assessments), could also apply to this point. Doyal and Gough claim that such “intermediate needs” are still held to be objective and universal, since they are required to deliver the basic needs. Soper (2006: p361) refers to these intermediate needs as “universal satisfier characteristics”, and indicates that:

“...while (Doyal and Gough) readily concede that the specific form taken by the satisfiers of ‘intermediate needs’ will be culturally divergent, the ‘intermediate needs’ themselves are common to all cultures at all times and can provide a standard by reference to which levels of deprivation within particular groupings can be charted and specific welfare strategies be defended as objectively grounded rather than ethnocentrically motivated.” (Soper 2006: p362)

However, Doyal and Gough’s ‘intermediate needs’ concept does not regard the physical characteristics of need (food, shelter) as only ends in themselves. They also suggest that these needs provide the critical means of ‘social being’ which involves a basic level of participation in community life and civic activity. As Soper (1993: p114-5) describes it:

“Abstractly, (the) standard is defined at two levels: (1) that of the ‘participation optimum’ (the health and autonomy needed such that individuals can ‘choose the activities in which they will take part within their culture’, possess the cognitive, emotional and social capacities to do so and have access to the means by which these capacities can be acquired’ ... (2) that of the ‘critical optimum’ (the health and autonomy needed such that individuals can ‘formulate the aims and beliefs necessary to question their form of life, to participate in a political process directed towards this end and/or to join another culture altogether).”

Elsewhere, Doyal and Gough describe this argument in terms of autonomy. Implicitly, this involves having good mental health, cognitive skills and options for social participation, thus supporting “the opportunities to make informed choices” Ytrehus (2001: p171). As Bradshaw (2001: p4) indicates, this notion of social existence and need is one that has been promoted by various theorists and analysts. But, as Bradshaw (2001: p4) notes, this potentially raises another challenge around articulation:

“Townsend (1979), Sen (1983) and Doyal and Gough (1991) have (all) argued that basic human needs cannot be understood purely in physical terms – the essence of humanity is the capacity to make choices and any (absolute) measure of poverty has to take account of capabilities – including the capacity to participate. But at what level?”

Hawtin (in Percy-Smith 1996: pp102-3) highlights 'housing need' as something beyond what is meant by basic or adequate housing, reminding us that "housing can be understood as simply any form of shelter through to a complex arrangement of homes in a neighbourhood". Hawtin views housing in an even wider context that includes proximity to work, services and support; and tenure security.

### *3.4.3 Indigenous housing needs*

Indigenous housing needs present a potentially important challenge to this notion of basic needs, including shelter – at least as it is conventionally thought of. Back in the late 1970s, Heppell (cited in Long et al. 2007: p18) commented:

"If Aboriginal housing needs are not especially complicated, why are so many houses rejected by Aborigines? What evidence is there to support the assertion that the most immediate need is to provide 'decent housing' for different Aboriginal groups in Australia? Why are so many remote Aborigines leaving government and mission settlements to set up small homeland centres away from European influence?"

This comment was made in the context of a Senate Committee report at the time which proposed that Indigenous people's welfare was best addressed by 'housing' them in a shelter sense, and that other housing-related needs were secondary or supplementary. However, the comment clearly suggests that Indigenous people themselves may think quite differently about their housing and associated priorities, and about suitable and culturally appropriate responses.

Despite the significance of this issue, discussions in the literature of Indigenous housing needs at the theoretical and high conceptual levels are surprisingly difficult to locate. Long et al. (2007) include a number of references to the use of 'need' in various government reports and academic papers, but even here the discussion is never really taken into the abstract realm. In all likelihood, this is an area that has been neglected, with the focus instead lying in the measurement and enumeration of unmet needs. This omission has implications for the proper understanding of Indigenous housing needs, for example, the issue of overcrowding is not merely a technical question of assessing household and dwelling sizes against set formulae — it includes an appreciation of how households make use of space and how they think of their physical environment (built or not).

### *3.4.4 Summary of the manifestations of need*

Despite its deficiencies, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs remains a significant model in the field of humanist and motivational psychology, and is a useful construct in considering how needs have been conceptualised both historically and in the context of a behavioural discipline. Subsequent attempts to streamline the hierarchy by Alderfer and Stone further emphasise the contribution of Maslow and how it can be conceptualised and applied.

While Maslow is perhaps better known and more commonly referenced, the significance of Doyal and Gough's lesser known work is that it represents an extensive and serious attempt to both question the nature of need philosophically, sociologically and politically, and also to develop and propose answers to the central question: 'What is need?'. Importantly, housing is a central concern in this approach. The unpublished and later published works of Stone also make important contributions to the theoretical discussions at hand.

In summary, it is interesting to note the broad similarities between Doyal and Gough (and Soper), and Stone, whose framing and discussion of housing needs and synthesis of Maslow is very much aligned around the nature of basic needs and

subsequent instrumentalist forms of housing need. All of these theorists effectively regard basic (human) needs as those which, in most circumstances at least, are ends in themselves. There is also clear congruence in the thinking between Stone's 'shelter, security and identity' modification of Maslow's basic needs, and those of Doyal and Gough, namely 'physical health, harm avoidance, and social autonomy (and indeed of Alderfer's (1972) 'existence, relatedness and growth'.

In addition, there is seemingly common ground on how housing has the potential capacity to address these basic human needs. Gough and Doyal, and Stone following Maslow are in practice highlighting how both basic needs are at the essence of understanding needs more broadly, and that responses to needs might be socially, culturally and temporarily dependent, but there are some underlying base needs which we can't ignore. However, all of these theorists to varying degrees present a case that housing needs are perhaps conceptually instrumentalist rather than being basic human needs in themselves. Each of these approaches essentially seeks to position housing needs as qualitatively distinct from human needs because they are seen as 'intervening' (Stone), 'intermediate' (Doyal and Gough) or otherwise 'instrumental' needs (i.e. means to an end, not ends themselves).

And yet, when it comes to the provision of basic shelter (a base form of housing) and meeting the need for shelter (basic human need), it could be argued that there is really only a theoretical distinction in operation here, and there are in practical terms some aspects of housing which are so synonymous with the basic human needs in most situations that the provision of shelter and security or the securing of physical health and avoidance of harm are really only met through some form of 'housing' in its purest, most basic form. In other words, for all intents and purposes given the synonymy, basic housing in the form of shelter, which provides safety and protection from the elements, is essentially a basic human need itself. Concurrently, it is perhaps also clear that social autonomy, identity or 'relatedness and growth' are potentially of a slightly different order, although if it is accepted that they are basic human needs, then they may be regarded as part of the 'ends' that basic housing also delivers.

### **3.5 Who decides on needs?**

The discussion thus far has been structured around the abstract or intellectual recognition of needs, which has tended to be essentially a normative exercise. However, there is another aspect to these conceptual debates about needs; one which has the capacity to cut across these normative approaches. This issue concerns how needs are recognised, identified and articulated, and perhaps more pertinently by whom. This next section examines theoretical and practical debates about who it is that undertakes the identification and articulation of needs.... in other words: 'Who decides on needs?'

The question of whether needs — housing or otherwise — can independently be conceived, measured and assessed is necessarily embedded in a debate about the respective roles of several key players: the individual (deemed to be) in need, service providers and policy-makers, analysts and related 'experts', and others. The earlier debate about thin and thick theory on the basis of needs also has a connection with discussions about who gets to decide about needs, namely, "who knows best about needs, and whose voice on this should therefore be privileged" (Soper 2006: p360). Soper (2006: p362) suggests that in essence, "the thin [i.e. universalist, objectivist] theorist can acknowledge and defend objective expertise in the matter of the needs of others; 'thick' [i.e. relativist] theory prefers to listen to the voice of the claimants themselves and construe their needs on that basis".

Martin also sees importance in the overlapping of consumer and provider senses of need:

“Perceptions of need and judgements about appropriate responses to it are strongly influenced by whether they originate among those who are ‘in need’, or among those who are in a position to respond to it by some form of intervention. Nevertheless, most definitions of need refer only implicitly to the source of the perceptions and judgements involved.” (Martin 1982: p192)

Far from being a purely theoretical concern, the issue of who gets to decide on needs has practical implications. Seelig and Phibbs (2006) for example highlight that typical measures of housing need, particularly the percentage of income spent on housing costs, tends not to have been matched by the level of applications for housing assistance. In looking at decision-making among consumers and housing departments, the authors sought to emphasise that these two measures may in fact have little in common, for reasons connected to the question of the way the identification of need is approached.

### 3.5.1 *Bradshaw’s typology of need*

One of the most significant, long-lasting contributions to this aspect of the conceptualisation of need comes from Jonathan Bradshaw. Given its apparent recognised importance, it is worth noting that Bradshaw’s (1972) taxonomy of social need in fact arose out of a small component of his work for a Masters thesis undertaken in the early 1970s through the University of York. A summary of his taxonomy and an explanation of how it was intended to be applied was published subsequently in a relatively short paper in *New Society*. Bradshaw’s work represents a potentially useful and coherent schema for the different theoretical manifestations of need, and also provides important mechanisms for considering the crucial issue of who is identifying need.

What Bradshaw proposed was that social need can be conceived to exist in four main types or categories, namely 'Felt', 'Expressed', 'Normative' and 'Comparative' need:

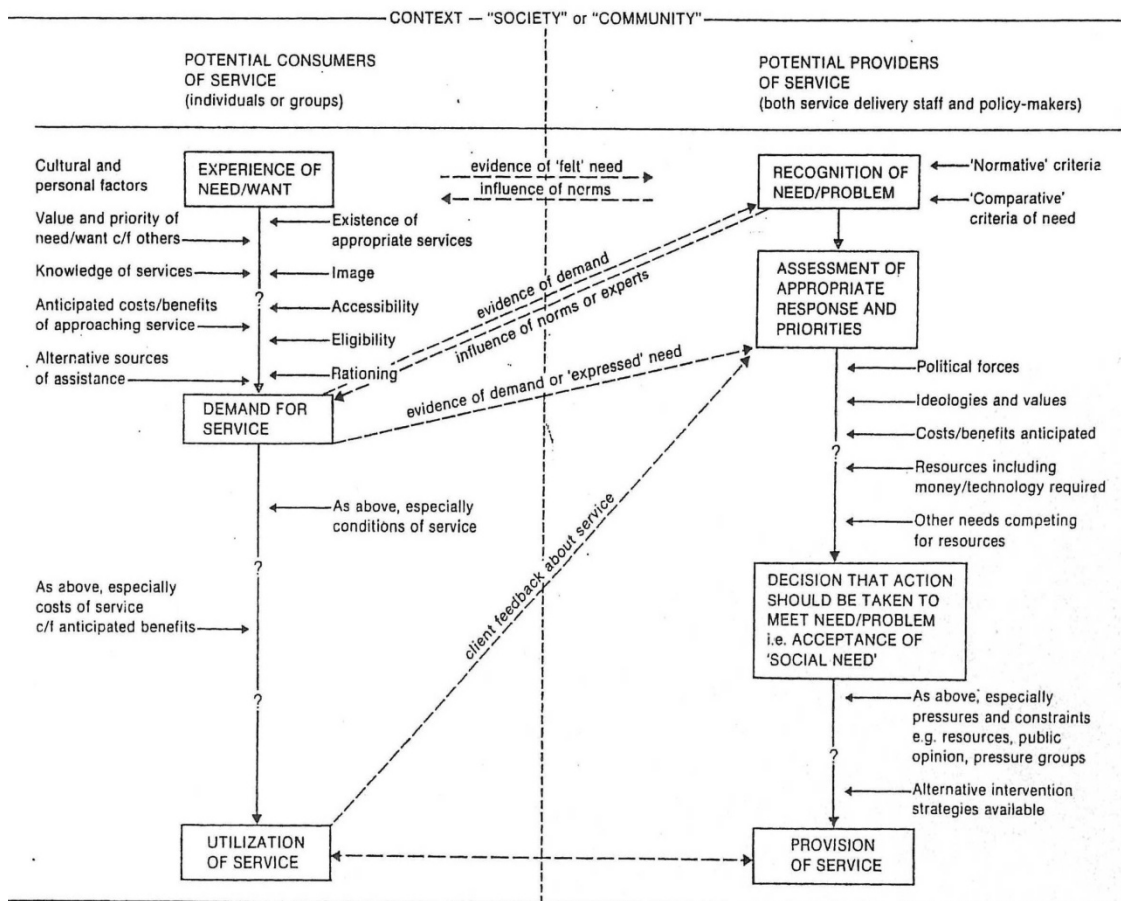
- Felt need – these are needs which people feel (although commonly described as concerning ‘wants’ and ‘desires’, it is more subtle than that. While subjective, felt need is about a psychological situation of personal perception and recognition of one’s own need). Felt needs exist regardless of whether they are expressed or normatively acknowledged.
- Expressed need – needs which people then do something about (i.e. they seek assistance). These are normally associated with Felt Needs, but do not have to be based on them (i.e. it is theoretically possible to ‘demand’ assistance but not feel as if there is a need for that).
- Normative need – these are typically identified according to a standard or norm usually determined bureaucratically or by ‘experts’. Normative needs are often intended to be ‘objective’, although they are usually also associated with rationing and targeting (of assistance), and so their immediate claim to impartiality is disputed. Their articulation can be found in eligibility criteria for housing and social programs as well as assessments and studies which seek to enumerate need.
- Comparative need – needs examined with respect to others in similar or differing circumstances. This can be used to assess relativities between groups, and rates or hierarchies of need.

The scenario that Bradshaw originally used to illustrate how these different types of need were contrasted, and how they could be used to prioritise responses to need, was based on a housing-related situation: community care and accommodation for

the elderly. However, another classic example in the housing field is the design of waitlist systems for social housing. These can, and indeed have, operated under varying combinations of needs: 'expressed' needs, which implicitly and largely are also felt needs (i.e. need is primarily identified by the applicant); 'normative' need-based criteria (i.e. the State Housing Authority or housing agency deciding on what needs are important); and 'comparative' needs, where the same providers choose whose needs will be addressed first, and in what order assistance will be provided to different groups.

Martin (1982: p191) provides a useful diagrammatic representation of how the components of Bradshaw's typology can be incorporated into an operational setting (see Figure 3.1). This highlights the interconnectedness of the different categories of need recognition, and how these are not intended to be standalone types, contrary to common reference.

**Figure 3.1: Schematic representation of the operationalisation of Bradshaw's needs typologies**



Source: Martin 1982: p191, Figure 1A

While much attention has been placed on the distinctions between felt, expressed, normative and comparative needs, the emphasis is normally on which single type is most important, or applied in practice. Bradshaw's own conclusion was that 'real need' was most evident when all the different types of need were present concurrently.

### 3.5.2 Critique of Bradshaw's typology of need

Reference to Bradshaw's typology permeates the literature on need conceptualisation. One of the typology's strong contributions to the needs debate is

that it draws attention to the idea that need is not one dimensional. The Bradshaw approach recognises that single indicators, whether data-based needs frameworks or consumer demand measures, do not allow us to fully understand and explain needs-related behaviour. Once again, a good example is the process of determining current and potential demand for public housing, where there has been a tendency to look in isolation at waiting lists ('expressed need') or housing needs assessments or affordability analyses ('normative need'). Bradshaw illustrates how, when seen alone, none of these are necessarily good measures of need. As Seelig and Phibbs (2006) have shown, in practice these two measures are clearly measuring different things, and neither may be very reliable indicators of potential or likely direct calls on housing assistance.

Despite its contribution, there have been a number of criticisms directed against the Bradshaw typology. Bradshaw subsequently has sought to play down the significance of his taxonomy, describing it as a relatively simplistic framework developed in the context of his broader topic of research on community care.<sup>8</sup> He has also readily acknowledged "flaws ... in the thinking", and notes that the community care context about which the taxonomy revolved is no longer of personal interest. In his own subsequent research, the taxonomy has not received any further attention or supplementary development (Bradshaw and Finch 2001: p2).

Doyal and Gough 1984: pp7-8) have joined the critique, arguing that, "...however useful such a taxonomy of need may be, it cannot reconcile the conflicts between these definitions, nor do any of them attain a rigorous form of objectivity...". In fact, Bradshaw himself tries to resolve this by suggesting that real need exists when all types of need coincide. Bradshaw also makes a point of not ruling out the possibility that normative needs might be informed by a range of inputs, including concepts of objective needs.

Perhaps more critically, it is worth highlighting that Bradshaw does not provide a practical framework in terms of the specifics of the form of needs to be examined, most significantly which needs can and should be measured. Early on, Bradshaw acknowledged that his typology was not intended to resolve the definition of need: "Such a taxonomy does not seek to define what is meant by 'need' but to indicate the elements that are included in the attempts of others to define need. The responsibility for using the taxonomy and in defining need is left to the policy maker..." (Bradshaw in Jones et al., cited in Ife 1980: p97). Nor does his work present any guidance for the motivations and intentions of responding or not to particular needs.

Ife (1980: p96), coming from a cultural relativist position, claimed Bradshaw's typology had become "conventional wisdom" mostly on the basis of its "intuitive appeal". He commented that Bradshaw's framework remained positivist in its approach, in that one only had a need if one of the four types of need existed, but one didn't have a need if none of the four types of need were present. That is, in the eyes of an external observer, someone still either had need or they didn't. Ife also suggested that the framework did not clearly distinguish the criteria on which the four types of need were based: methodology, measurement or 'decider'?

Clayton has used and reviewed Bradshaw's typology in a study of sheltered housing for older people and posits a number of criticisms of the typology as a result. Clayton (1983: pp225-29) identifies five broad limitations of Bradshaw's typology which in total reflect the difficulty in operationalising the model in a policy context. The first concerns

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<sup>8</sup> Indeed, it would appear that Bradshaw accepts the continuing focus on his taxonomy with some reluctance, especially when "as an external examiner I am forced to read it fed back in undergraduate scripts" (Bradshaw and Finch 2001: 2).

determining 'real' need by measuring the four categories, which could be difficult because data about each of the four categories may not be available to the same extent. Secondly, service based assessments are limiting, as there may be a range of other services that can meet the defined need.

The third point from Clayton (1983) is that the role played by the power of 'experts' in the needs assessment process has the potential to undermine absence of value judgements. Fourthly, and related to Ife's (1980) earlier point, the typology itself implies a clear definition of need as 'in need' or 'not in need'. Finally, Clayton claims that the typology fails to take into consideration 'society's needs' – the political, social and economic factors inherent in policy determination.

The debate here about the arbiters of need links to an interesting reflection on a common relativist (post-modern) critique of normative needs assessment: "the very idea that 'experts' might be mistaken in their assessments of claimants' needs would seem to rely on an objective standard of need-satisfaction" (Soper 2006: p363). Alternatively, it might be held that the consumer is always the best arbiter, which can also be problematic: "if 'experts' can get it wrong, then why not claimants too?" (Soper 2006: p363). In an earlier paper, Soper highlights how Doyal and Gough stress the same point:

"[they] make it clear that 'experts' and those they are speaking on behalf of can be equally fallible in this respect. Hence the weight they place on the participation of both [experts and subjects] in the discernment of needs." (Soper 1993: p117).

Spicker (1993: p10) questioned the 'definers' of need implicit in Bradshaw's typology by suggesting that a reliance on individuals to express their need "assumes that people know the service is available to them." In fact this may not be the case. Spicker (1993: p10) cites the example of social security benefits where many people entitled to means-tested benefits do not in fact receive benefits. Contrary to Bradshaw's (1994) comment that the typology was not intended as a prioritising tool, and in keeping with his view that suffering will result if needs are not met, Spicker (1993: p12) suggested that Bradshaw's typology "imply(ies) different approaches to the issue of prioritisation. A normative concept of need [is] one which depends on the definition of a norm, or a specific level at which negative effects begin".

Spicker (1993: pp12-13) asserts that needs are really analysed on the basis of importance and strength, claiming that:

"...not all needs are equally important, and the claims which they represent are not necessarily of the same strength. People are not simply said to be 'poor' or 'not poor'; they may be destitute (almost totally without resources), poor, deprived, or disadvantaged. Within these categories, there are further gradations – like 'very poor', 'poor', 'fairly' poor. These are not precise terms with a universally agreed meaning, and they may overlap with the other categories; there is no clear distinction, for example, between 'fairly poor' and 'deprived.' ... The 'greater' need, though, is the one which implies a lower standard of existence, or a greater degree of suffering."

The issues raised in this section will be considered in the more practical contexts of needs measures and assessment in Chapter 4, but the issue of who recognises need also raises further theoretical questions about the basis upon which to respond to need. Despite its limitations, one of the significant contributions that Bradshaw's work does make is to focus attention in part on the question of who performs the needs identification, and who ultimately gets to decide on needs. Traditionally, following Bradshaw, the distinction is made between the consumer (felt and expressed need),



and the provider (normative). This fairly crude distinction does not expose the processes through which the normative definition is operationalised.

### **3.6 Moving forward in conceptualising needs**

In summary, needs have been theoretically viewed in several ways — and not just in debates and dichotomies between opposing perspectives on the same issues. The conceptualisation of need is connected to multiple levels and questions. The most substantive components of the theoretical literature have concerned the identification of basic and other human (and housing) needs, the nature of these in terms of their level of generalisation and applicability, and their extent and scope.

On the issue of links between basic human need and the more specific question of 'housing need' – the common link appears to be that housing needs are often central to how needs are thought of in practice, but are arguably more instrumentalist in nature. That is, they are the means (facilitator) of achieving human needs, rather than being ends in themselves. This seems to be either implicit or explicit in much of the analysis of needs from Maslow onwards, although it might be argued that at the very basic level, the distinction between human need and base housing need is debateable.

While most of the theoretical analysis has focussed on what needs might be normative, there is other conceptual work (e.g. Bradshaw) which examines the issue of needs from a different angle, namely who can legitimately identify such needs, and whether needs felt and expressed subjectively by the person are no less authentic than those recognised externally. The clear limitation of this as an approach to conceptualise need is that it is less about needs per se, and really more about the demand for services or assistance. The positive flipside of this, however, lies in its utility in assessing demand for assistance, and in conceptualising frameworks for responding to need.

Clayton (1983: p216) argues that despite its limitations, the notion of need "... should not be abandoned, for the concept has an important part to play in planning and distributing welfare services as an alternative to other principles such as merit or market forces". This is an important point. While the more abstract levels of discourse over needs are foundational, there is an obvious gap between clarifying theory and concepts, and linking theory to a more practical operational domain. As Soper (1993: p113) concludes with reference to the more theoretical discourses on need:

"The higher the level of abstraction at which any argument for universal needs is cast, the less controversial it is likely to prove, but the more open it becomes to the charge of being vacuously uninformative as a guide to specific welfare provision.... The more, then, a theory of universal needs confines itself to stating the basic goals to be attained the less it will offend the relativists, but the further removed it must be from any pretension to assist in policy-making."

Abstractions coincide with practice at the point of needs assessment methodologies, needs measurement approaches, and the frameworks used to either calibrate or prioritise housing assistance. As Chapter 4 will indicate however, the practical end of needs conceptualisation can be equally as divorced from clear theoretical principles as the more theoretical work can be from practicalities.

Two additional albeit minor observations about the body of conceptual literature on needs are worth making at this juncture. Firstly, with the possible exception of Maslow's initial foundational work, it is apparent that discussions and debates about needs have taken place over clearly defined periods or clusters over time. The early 1970s to early 1980s was one wave; the early to mid-1990s was a second period, and

the late 1990s to the post-2000 era is a third. Academic analysis and interest has clearly waxed and waned on this topic, perhaps reflecting trends in policy imperatives and political discourses.

The second general observation is that, although not all the needs literature is focused on housing issues, most of it in fact refers to housing in the context of need, either in the sense of housing as basic shelter, or as an example or case study for illustrating theoretical points. In its own way, this underlines the social policy importance of housing, and the value of further exploring the idea of housing needs conceptually and practically.

## **4 CONCEPTUALISING HOUSING NEEDS – THE POLICY AND PRACTICE CONSIDERATIONS**

The previous chapter considered the more theoretical aspects of conceptualising needs. It focused on the issues of what needs are, who decides on them, and on what basis it might be decided to address them. This present chapter takes the question of conceptualising needs into the realms of housing policy and practice, by focusing on the contexts of the assessment of need, and how needs is used discursively in policy and practical situations in ways that might connect or indeed disconnect the word from any conceptual meaning. In so doing, this chapter acknowledges the presence of a range of difficulties, tensions and debates that are apparent when considering how needs can be conceptualised in a more operational context.

The chapter commences with an inventory of the ways in which needs have been articulated in housing and related social policy documents. As has been highlighted already in this paper, reference to various forms of housing need has been included in Commonwealth SHAs — although, so far, such enunciation has not been analysed critically. However, there are many other examples where the idea of housing needs has formed part of, or has been the basis for, important policy frameworks and practice approaches.

The chapter then considers how housing needs have actually been measured and assessed, and other aspects of operationalising the concepts of housing need, such as the matching of needs with specific forms of assistance.

As will become apparent, while the terminology is of ‘housing need’, the meanings of this conceptually are at best implied, and commonly without any theoretical underpinning. Perhaps more confusingly, ‘need’ is frequently used in the policy and practice discourse to mean quite different things from the ‘needs’ which have been discussed in chapter 3, and are often about housing supply, assessment processes and broad responses and outcomes, rather than basic human or housing need.

### **4.1 The changing articulation of ‘needs’ in housing policy development: the Commonwealth State Housing Agreement**

#### *4.1.1 Needs in the early Agreements*

The Commonwealth State Housing Agreement (CSHA) is the main intergovernmental agreement that has framed the provision of housing assistance in Australia since 1945<sup>9</sup>. Successive agreements<sup>10</sup> have set out the policy objectives and the administrative and funding arrangements for programs of assistance for home purchase and renting that are funded by the Australian Government and by contributions from state and territory governments. Reviews of past CSHAs and of contemporaneous political debates and policy documents provide a source of the views of housing need proffered by politicians and policy-makers (see, for example, Jones 1972 and 1983, Pugh 1976, Howe 1988, Hayward 1996, Monro 1998, Milligan 2003, Jones et al. 2007). This literature has been drawn on in the following discussion to provide a brief overview of the ways housing need has been characterised in

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<sup>9</sup> Before 1945 programs of housing assistance were generally small and state based.

<sup>10</sup> The CSHA is renegotiated periodically, usually between 3 and 5 years. There have been 12 agreements across the period 1945/46 to 2007/08 in Australia. There was no agreement in the fiscal years of 1971 and 1972.

Australia's main housing policy instruments, and to identify some of the factors that may have influenced that trajectory.

The first CSHA arose out of a report by the Commonwealth Housing Commission (CHC), which was established in 1943 to consider Australia's housing position and post war housing needs. The Commission recognised two significant forms of housing need that they argued required government attention at a national level:

- a 'need' to overcome an acute shortage of housing, which was projected to be 300,000 dwellings by 1945; and
- the need of low income earners for adequate and hygienic housing that was not being met through the private market (CHC 1944).

Under that inaugural 1945 Agreement, funding was directed to the supply of rental housing to add to the housing stock and to replace substandard dwellings. According to the parliamentary record of the time, the provision of rental dwellings was required to provide 'good standard houses to be let at rents, within their capacity to pay, to families who could not afford, or are not ready to or on account of their occupations do not desire to, purchase houses' (Minister Dedman, cited in Monro, 1998: ch3 p4).<sup>11</sup>

The first CSHA did not formally define housing need. Instead, it listed population groups who were deemed to be in 'need of housing'. These included current or former service personal (for whom a minimum allocation of dwellings was set), those inadequately housed, and those on lower incomes. The rationale for assisting servicemen and ex-servicemen was not made on the basis of need but as reward for service (Monro 1998). The agreement did refer to giving priority of assistance to those in most need, but need was not related to low income alone because of the overall shortage of housing at any price. Thus, while not clearly articulated as such, the housing assistance response (i.e. supply) was designed to respond to needs that were grounded in the absence of housing and risk of homelessness, and also poor housing standards and conditions incurred as a result. Both of these factors had obvious health and well-being implications, and can be framed as a response to more 'basic' housing need.

#### *4.1.2 Shifts in thinking about needs in 1970s – the emergence of more explicit targeting*

The first major shift of national housing policy direction emerged under the Menzies Liberal Government in the agreement of 1956, which emphasised home ownership rather than renting. This direction, which was supported by state governments, dominated successive agreements until 1973. However, providing subsidised housing for home purchase was not justified on the basis of need but on the moral, economic and social values of home ownership. Accordingly, anyone could be assisted to be a home owner (Monro 1998). At the same time, government rental housing in this period was expected to be used by families of low and moderate means<sup>12</sup>.

A major change in the delineation of 'need for housing assistance'<sup>13</sup> occurred in the 1973 agreement, negotiated by the Whitlam Labor government. Under this agreement

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<sup>11</sup> In justifying the provision of rental housing, the existence of Commonwealth assistance for home purchase through the war service home loan scheme was also noted.

<sup>12</sup> From the end of the 1960s, in the context of demographic and social changes in Australia, the Commonwealth Government introduced new programs outside the CSHA to provide rental housing to aged and later disabled pensioners and to Indigenous people (for more detail on these so called 'special purpose programs' see Jones et al. 2007, table 2).

<sup>13</sup> The expression of 'need for housing assistance' is acknowledged as one which is potentially highly problematic in theoretical terms, suggesting as it does a level of essentiality regarding assistance per se, but it is being used here in the context of its common discursive application in Australian housing policy.

there was a return to the pre-1956 emphasis on providing rental housing (and limiting home ownership assistance), but this was accompanied by a new requirement that this be allocated mainly to households who satisfied a means test<sup>14</sup>. Thus, after nearly two decades of a large proportion of assistance going to home buyers, the 1973 CSHA sought to redirect assistance to the neediest. According to Monro, however, this change cannot be linked directly to changes in the need for housing assistance. It was not until later in the 1970s and in the 1980s that new groups with a need for independent housing (such as people with disabilities, unemployed people and single parents) emerged in significant numbers, in the context of the end of the long post war economic boom, increasing rates of family breakdown, and state policies to close institutional facilities housing people with disabilities (Monro 1998, Milligan 2003). With the benefit of hindsight, the 1973 agreement can be seen as marking the beginning of the enduring notion that housing assistance should be targeted to specific needs.

In 1976, the influential final report of a Commission of Inquiry into Poverty in Australia chaired by Professor Ronald Henderson was, among other matters, critical of the failure of public housing to house the most disadvantaged. The Inquiry found that 72 per cent of people in public housing had incomes 120 per cent or more above the 'poverty line'<sup>15</sup> and observed that more people 'in poverty' lived outside the public housing system, mostly in the private rental market, than in it (Milligan 2003: p103; see also Jones 1972). This finding, coupled to emerging demand pressures discussed above and government expenditure constraints, provided significant impetus to the directions already laid down in 1973 to target housing assistance to the poor. By the 1978 CSHA, under the first of the Fraser Coalition governments, the philosophy that public housing should be 'welfare housing' was well established. In addition to maintaining means testing for entry to public housing that was introduced in the preceding agreement, the 1978 agreement introduced a mechanism for testing ongoing need for housing by benchmarking public housing rents to the market<sup>16</sup>.

#### *4.1.3 Revolving and evolving needs focus in the 1980s*

The first Hawke Labor Government reversed that philosophy in the 1984 agreement by declaring public housing once again to be tenure of choice for all who desired it and by advocating cost rent setting. However, in circumstances where applications for housing far exceeded the availability of housing and the resources allocated by the Commonwealth Government, those intentions were not achieved. In this period the concentration of low income tenants in public housing deepened. It was around this time that states and territories began shifting their allocation policies to offer a greater share of the available public housing on the basis of an assessment of priority of need rather than date order of application. One measure of the outcomes of this change is given by the proportion of tenants in receipt of a rental rebate, which ensures that the rent they pay does not exceed a set proportion of their household income (typically 18 per cent to 20 per cent at the time). This proportion rose from 20 per cent in 1976 to 65 per cent in 1985. Moreover, in 1985 an estimated 90 per cent of new tenants were

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<sup>14</sup> The means test provided for 85 per cent of allocations to families where the breadwinner earned less than 85 per cent of average weekly earnings (Pugh, 1976: pp71-72).

<sup>15</sup> As defined by the 'poverty line' adopted by the Commission and maintained until today at the Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research, University of Melbourne (<http://melbourneinstitute.com/labour/inequality/poverty/default.html>).

<sup>16</sup> There were proposals in this period from the Henderson Poverty Inquiry, the Commonwealth Government and others to provide low income tenants with an explicit subsidy (in the form of a housing benefit or voucher) to assist them to pay for their housing. However, these were not adopted, leaving the states and territories to have to provide rental rebates to more households as targeting of public housing intensified.

receiving rebates (Milligan 2003: p104). In effect, this indicates the proportion of tenants who could not afford to pay market rent.

In the 1989 agreement, the Hawke Government returned to the concept of rental housing or home purchase assistance being for those 'in need' in a more formal sense of targeting, but adopted a broad definition of need as 'those unable to obtain or maintain affordable finance for home ownership' (Milligan and Persson 1989). Thus, the test of need under the 1989 CSHA was whether a household could afford home ownership without assistance.

Ideas that housing assistance and public housing in particular should cater for households with 'support needs' also came into the housing policy discourse in the 1980s. Until this time it had been accepted practice generally that public housing was appropriate for people who could live independently without support. This idea was made manifest in eligibility criteria and in the types of housing and services that were provided by public housing authorities. However, factors like the strengthening of anti-discrimination policies, the impact that deinstitutionalisation was having on homelessness and homeless services, and the emergence of community housing agencies demonstrating successful models of housing linked to support combined to bring about a change in official attitudes. Initially, this change of view resulted in the abandonment of policies that directly or indirectly excluded households with support needs. Later this was underpinned by a range of more proactive strategies for delivering housing and support on a coordinated basis at a larger scale. Today, people with support needs are recognised as one of the highest categories of need by social housing providers (Burke and Hulse 2003).

Another low income group whose need for social housing was not recognised until the 1980s in most jurisdictions was non aged single people. Policies that excluded this group were changed in this decade in response to stronger anti discrimination laws and advocacy from agencies assisting growing numbers of homeless youth, and single men and women. However, while the needs of non aged single people were acknowledged in eligibility rules, resource allocations were not adjusted commensurately, and so a suitable housing supply was only procured very slowly. In other words, a program response did not follow directly from the identification of the need.

#### *4.1.4 Needs and the CSHA – 1990s to the present*

In the three agreements negotiated by the Howard Coalition government since 1996, the notion of need for housing assistance has been narrowed again. The 1996 CSHA and subsequent agreements have adopted the principle that assistance under the CSHA should go to households who cannot access private rental housing. The view that renting long term in the private rental market where security of tenure is not offered is a suitable housing arrangement for low income households had not been explicit in public policy before this period. In other indications of whose specific needs should be met, the Howard Government has expected Indigenous households to be given greater access to mainstream housing services, so that special purpose funds earmarked for this group could be redirected to rural and remote areas, and has argued for people exiting homeless services to have precedence in accessing long term housing. In the context of a significant decline in government funding provided under the CSHA, these shifts have led to the idea of 'the greatest need' coming to the fore in policy discourse and practice. While infrequently acknowledged, this expression implies that 'greatest need' is a subset of a larger pool of need, where others in need are deemed to be of a lower order of importance.

Application of this relative concept of greatest need has required recognition and assessment of elements other than income, and in particular low income, to help decide who is to be allocated housing and when. It has also marked the shift from relying mainly on client-expressed need within a broad target group (the waiting list) to administrative assessment of individual needs (case by case). Adoption of a concept of 'complex need' also highlights the distinction between basic needs which are recognised for the purposes of eligibility, and those more complex needs – be they additional to affordability (e.g. children at risk), of a different order of severity or urgency, or simply of 'particularity' such that a housing response must include certain physical or locational characteristics.

## **4.2 Needs based planning and assessment: methodologies and indicators**

Over the last twenty-five years in housing practice in Australia, housing needs approaches have been used in three main planning contexts. The first has been as tools to help the allocation of resources. The main policy application of these models at the time was to inform decisions about the share of new housing supply (or other funding) that should be allocated to each sub-region or target group with the aim of achieving equity of responses in relation to the distribution and profile of unmet needs. The second context is in the area of assessment of applicants. SHAs in Australia now tightly ration entry into public housing and use a housing need approach to help select public housing tenants. This issue is examined in detail in Section 4.4. The third and most recent context is in the generation of local housing needs studies.

Before examining the development of Australian models, it is useful to examine some key international applications of housing need approaches that influenced the development of housing need models in Australia: the needs-based planning model of the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC), and needs-based planning in the UK. Other international approaches to measuring housing need, such as those adopted by the World Bank and the OECD (King 1994: pp23-26), have received very little attention in Australian housing policy.

### *4.2.1 Needs based planning in Canada*

The major work in Canada was undertaken by the CMHC. Housing needs indicators used by the CMHC identify where housing conditions fall below norms, as measured by specific standards established for housing adequacy, suitability and affordability. When integrated into the Core Housing Need Model, those indicators identify households that are unable to obtain market housing in adequate condition, of suitable size, and, at the same time, affordable (CMHC 1991: p1).

Two data sources are used: the Census of Canada and a Shelter Cost Survey (which is a supplement to the National Labor Force Survey). The Shelter Cost Survey provides more timely and complete housing needs information, but for larger geographic regions than used in the census.

### **Adequacy**

Previously in Canada, adequacy was measured by whether or not a dwelling possessed basic plumbing facilities, but by 1982 the percentage of dwellings lacking basic plumbing was minimal. In line with changing community expectations, the focus is now on the general physical condition of dwellings. Dwellings requiring major repairs (e.g. damp walls and ceilings, crumbling foundations, rotting porches and steps or corroded pipes) are considered inadequate. The new requirement, that a dwelling should require only regular maintenance or, at most, minor repairs, has been

added to the standard that it must possess all basic plumbing facilities to be considered in adequate condition.

Data are collected by asking occupants to assess the need for repairs. In general, building inspectors have validated respondents' assessments.

### **Suitability**

Suitability previously was measured simply by calculating the number of persons per room. A crowded dwelling was defined as one with more than one person per room. The limitations of this approach.—it took no account of the types of rooms or the relationships of individuals living in the dwelling — prompted development of a more precise measure. The resulting Canadian National Occupancy Standard is sensitive to both household size and composition. The measure assesses the bedroom requirements of a household by specifying that:

- there should be no more than two persons per bedroom;
- children less than five years of age of different sexes may reasonably share a bedroom;
- children five years of age and older of opposite sex should not share a bedroom;
- children aged less than 18 years of the same sex may reasonably share a bedroom; and
- single household members aged 18 years or over should have a separate bedroom, as should parents and couples.

Households living in dwellings where this standard cannot be met are said to be overcrowded.

### **Affordability**

In Canada, determining affordability is based on a proportion of gross income. While it was originally 25 per cent, in 1986 it was raised to 30 per cent. However, note that in Canada, shelter costs are defined broadly as mortgage payments, rents, property taxes as well as utility payments (water, heating fuel and electricity).

### **Core housing need**

To assess whether a household is experiencing adequacy, suitability or affordability problems through choice or necessity, the concept of core housing need has been developed. The model incorporates the three indicators into one measure. After assessing the housing conditions of households using the three indicators, a means test is applied to determine whether those households with housing below the designated normative standards have the necessary income to acquire rental housing that meets the adequacy, suitability and affordability criteria. Those households that do not have the necessary income are considered to be in core housing need.

#### *4.2.2 Needs based planning in the United Kingdom*

Measures of housing need have been used for many years in the United Kingdom (UK). For example, the Housing Needs Index (HNI) and the Generalised Needs Index (GNI) have been used since the late seventies to allocate funds between local authorities and regions in the UK.

These indices measure a number of separate, quantifiable housing problems, which are weighted and combined to produce a relative measure of the needs of each local authority or region, compared to others. The weights applied to each need indicator varied considerably. For example, in the 1994-95 GNI, the indicator with the largest weight was the average cost of repairing and maintaining current authority stock,



which constituted 55 per cent of the total GNI (Department of Environment, 1993). The second most significant indicator was the level of family homelessness constituting 20 per cent of the total index. Overcrowding levels, and a range of other indicators, had only very small weights (two per cent).

Funding allocations are made to regions on the basis of their GNI score. Regional GNI shares are modified using cost compensation factors, which aim to take into account inter-regional differences in land and construction costs. Finally, in order to limit year-to-year changes in GNI shares, a 'dampening' rule is applied which limits such changes to 15 per cent. The methodology proposed for identifying need in the GNI is based on expressed need with few measures used to identify other target groups or levels of homelessness not recorded by an authority, with the exception of the elderly and disabled.

There has been constant criticism of the GNI from local authorities, researchers and community housing groups. These criticisms are summarised by the Economic Planning and Impact Consultants (EPIC 1985a) and relate mainly to issues of data quality, the arbitrary use of weights and the lack of consideration of wider housing market variables. Although there have been changes to the index variables and the weights used, the initial approach has continued. Barnett and Lowe (1990: p185) are among the most vocal critics of the approach:

“It is clear to us that the weighted indices used ... were not, and are not, an objective measure of regional and local housing need. They have been constantly amended, not least by the so called 'stress area enhancement' and by 'cost compensation' to arrive at what is effectively a negotiated (and politically acceptable) distribution of public funds.”

At best, the UK approach represents a set of indicators that generate comparative data on some elements of housing need, which assist in the allocation of housing resources and the development of appropriate program responses across regions.

#### *4.2.3 Needs based planning in Australian Housing Authorities*

Needs based approaches to allocating housing resources were introduced into housing administrations in Australia in the 1980s<sup>17</sup>. The intent of these 'needs based approaches' was broadly to inform the regional distribution of government funding for housing and related services, and to develop approaches for the allocation of services. The introduction of these models helped to broaden the thinking about who might have housing needs beyond processes which simply indicate who has applied for assistance (EPIC 1986). While there was a fair bit of consensus about the sorts of issues that should be considered – most models examined the dimensions of affordability and appropriateness – there was considerable debate about what data should be used to operationalise the models.

The first approach by a State Housing Authority was developed in Victoria, in the mid-1980s and is referred to as the 'Warranted Needs Distribution model'. It assesses the need for public rental stock across a number of household types. The motivation for the development of the model was a concern that the use of waiting list data as a sole indicator of need provided unreliable outputs. This concern was based on the results of a study where applicants for private market rent relief were asked whether they had applied for public housing and to nominate the reasons if they had not applied. Aarons, who undertook the study, comments:

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<sup>17</sup> Two of the authors of this report, Milligan and Pibbs, were among the first to develop and apply these approaches (see Milligan et al. 1985, EPIC 1986).

“The high proportion of non-applicant private renters living in dire financial circumstances, and the many reasons for non-application given by those persons, relating to belief in non-eligibility or the belief that the only form of available accommodation was high rise, reinforced the fact of insufficient information dissemination.” (Aarons, 1983: p58)

There are three major steps in the Victorian approach. Initially, an assessment of 'pure need' is carried out by the Local Government Area (LGA) using three indicators:

- number of low-income private renters with housing costs that place them below the poverty line or, more precisely, with housing costs that exceed the housing cost allowance implicit in the Henderson poverty line calculations;
- number of individuals renting privately and receiving Department of Social Security (DSS) rent assistance with housing costs that place them below the poverty line or again, more precisely, with housing costs that exceed the housing cost allowance implicit in the Henderson poverty line calculations; and
- number of applicants waiting for public housing.

Census data, DSS data and Office of Housing data respectively are used to generate the three indicators. There is some overlap between these populations so the indicators are combined through a process of weighting:

$$\text{Housing Need Distribution} = (\text{DSS \%} \times .3) + (\text{Census \%} \times .2) + (\text{Waiting List \%} \times .5)$$

The weights applied are varied over time to reflect the usefulness of census data that is only obtained every five years.

Following this, public housing opportunities are estimated by taking into account the expected annual stock additions and annual allocations made to vacancies in existing stock. Finally, the gap between the weighted need distribution and public housing opportunities for each area is identified and converted to a percentage distribution – the Warranted Needs Distribution.

Other states adopted similar frameworks but tended to use different indices. For example, Queensland used three main indices which were waiting list data, the number of people receiving rent assistance, and the number of low and moderate income earners in the private rental market (Queensland Department of Housing and Local Government, 1993). One of the most comprehensive approaches is that used by ACT Housing who commissioned AIHW to develop their model in 1995 (AIHW 1995b). The model is described in detail in Karmel (1997). The model has the advantage of being constructed at the end of the SHA's 'needs studies cycle', so it was able to select from a variety of attempts to measure housing needs in different states.

The ACT needs study used the following definition of housing need (AIHW 1995b: p30):

“People are in housing need if they cannot afford ‘adequate’ housing where ‘adequate’ housing is that which has sufficient rooms so that the household is not living in overcrowded conditions, is in reasonable repair, provides the basic amenities considered essential to the community, has adequate security of tenure and is in a suitable location.

Households are not considered to be in housing need if they have a medium to high income, and so can afford adequate housing but choose to live in an inadequate dwelling or to spend a large percentage of their income on housing.”

The ACT study operationalised this definition using a number of rules:

- the housing costs of low-income households should not place such households in poverty or exacerbate existing poverty;
- the housing costs of low income households should not exceed 30 per cent of net income; and
- the maximum amount a household can reasonably expect to spend on housing without experiencing housing need should increase steadily from 0 per cent of net income for households in poverty to at most 30 per cent of net income for households with incomes equivalent to the pre-determined low income benchmark.

The adequacy of the housing was measured using a crowding variable based on the Canadian occupancy standard (see below).

The ACT model differentiated households in extreme housing need as those with net incomes below the after-housing poverty line and assessed housing need by housing type (lone person, couple, one-parent family, two-parent family and group/multifamily).

The ACT study also contained a noteworthy section that outlined the applications of the needs results for the ACT. Based on the considerations in this section, the study recommended the adoption of a more flexible allocation and transfer policy to enable households to find dwelling/locations that met their individual needs. The study emphasised that a normative approach could not respond to felt need, and that administrative systems had to provide choice for households, if housing needs were to be addressed.

Under the 1989 CSHA, states and territories were required to develop housing plans for joint approval by the responsible State/Territory Minister and the Commonwealth Minister. These plans included a detailed analysis of housing needs and the outcomes of consultation with stakeholders, including prospective clients and their advocates. King (1994) provides a comparative summary of how each jurisdiction considered housing needs over the period 1990 to 1992. Common themes were to differentiate the need for public housing, private rental assistance and home ownership (consistent with the main programs of assistance being offered at that time) and to recognise a diversity of needs groups (such as single women and women with children, youth, aged Indigenous people, non-English-speaking background groups, elderly, large families, etc.). Under the 1996 and subsequent CSHAs, which require periodic bilateral agreements to be negotiated between the Commonwealth and each state/territory, targets for the provision of housing assistance have continued to be linked loosely to housing needs analyses. However, there has been little advancement in the methodology or quality and scope of data used from the early 1990s.

#### *4.2.4 Australian National Housing Strategy*

In the early 1990s, the National Housing Strategy (NHS) emphasised three important attributes of housing and households considered to be in housing need. It proposed (NHS 1992a: p31) that households should have access to housing which is affordable, appropriate and secure. The work of the NHS was important in establishing benchmarks around certain measures for housing needs in Australia, as discussed below.

##### **Affordability**

Drawing on the work of Fallis (1985), the NHS argued that:

“The term ‘affordable housing’ conveys the notion of reasonable housing costs in relation to income. Households can be said to afford their housing costs if those costs do not extract an unreasonable share of the household budget, leaving the household with sufficient income to meet other needs such as food, clothing, transport, medical care, education, etc.” (1991a: p3)

The NHS proposed an affordability benchmark – a specific ratio of housing costs to income - for housing consumers. It adopted a 30 per cent benchmark, with the qualification that low income households who were long term private renters should pay no more than 25 per cent of their before-tax income on housing.<sup>18</sup>

### **Appropriateness**

The housing attribute of appropriateness can be seen to consist of several parts:

- quality – the dwelling is in good repair and/or containing essential amenities;
- size – the dwelling consists of an adequate number of bedrooms;
- design – the dwelling design meets the requirements of occupants, for example, walk-up flats are not likely to be suitable for people with physical disabilities; and
- location – the dwelling permits ready access to suitable services, facilities and friends and family.

The NHS (1991a: 8) argued that “housing may be quite affordable, but inadequate and inappropriate with regard to size, quality and condition”. King (1994) elaborated on dimensions of housing quality and appropriateness.

### **Security**

The NHS (1992b: p36) stated that renters need to enjoy some of the attributes of home ownership including security of tenure – the right to continued occupation of a home.

In summary, the variety of needs models developed by SHAs in Australia were developed as a result of a growing awareness of the problems associated with allocating resources simply on the basis of the waiting list. The models grew in sophistication over time and used a variety of indicators. The main use of the model was to allocate resources within jurisdictions. The motivation for maintaining the models became less apparent as SHAs’ budgets declined in the 1990s and there was little or no capacity for growing the supply of housing, in particular. The focus of needs work in SHAs moved in the direction of determining how to allocate applicant households on waiting lists into a declining number of vacancies. The means they developed for doing this are considered in Section 4.3.

#### *4.2.5 King’s (1994) study of indicators of housing stress*

Following on from the work undertaken for the National Housing Strategy, the most comprehensive scholarly study of indicators of housing stress in Australia in the 1990s is found in the work of King (1994). This monograph reviews a range of Australian and international studies, focusing on issues of housing quality, the quality of location, and housing affordability measures. After his extensive review, King (1994: p110) comes to the following definition of housing stress:

“Unacceptable housing stress exists where the two following conditions are met:

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<sup>18</sup> While this approach to affordability measures is now widely used in a range of housing policy circles, the ratio for low income renters has seemingly changed from 25 per cent to 30 per cent

1a) Housing quality is below the minimum acceptable standard

OR

b) Housing costs amount to a proportion of income in excess of some specified figure,

AND

2. Income is below that level required to obtain housing of the minimum acceptable standard without spending more than the above specified proportion of income.”

This specification is very similar to the Canadian model and the approach of the AIHW in the ACT, described above.

#### *4.2.6 Local Housing Needs studies*

Many studies of local housing needs have been undertaken in Australia, often sponsored by Local Government. These studies attempt to describe local housing markets and to provide details of the housing needs in the area (see for example Cronau 1988, Richardson et al. 2005). These studies have used a variety of approaches, but have often been influenced by guides to the examination of housing need which have been developed by the SHA or sometimes by the Local Government Association (see, for example, EPIC 1985b, Burke and Ewing 1999, Epic Dot Gov 2006).

Similar guides have been developed in other jurisdictions, notably the UK. Receipt of funding or adoption of affordable housing targets in a local plan is likely to require completion of a housing needs study that conforms with government guidelines (see, for example, ODPM 2004).

An important characteristic of local housing studies in Australia is their use of a number of quantitative indicators of housing need to overcome the limitations inherent in any single measure. Typical indicators used include public housing waiting list data (expressed need) combined with normative measures, such as census data on low income households paying high housing costs, and administrative data on the concentration of households in receipt of income support and rent assistance in an area. Various approaches to combining and weighting these or similar indicators have been tried. In recognition of the growing diversity of needs (see above), indicators have also been sensitised to household type where possible (e.g. aged housing needs, singles housing needs, youth housing needs). These have been supplemented by qualitative indicators of housing need obtained through community consultation processes.

### **4.3 Contemporary Australian needs: frameworks, indicators and common measures**

While there is no official endorsement of measures of housing need in Australia, the practice of measuring this using a range of indices is well established. Table 4.1 provides an overview of the characteristics of the most widely used measures of aspects of housing need that have been developed and maintained in Australia, and the following subsections elaborate on some of these which have relevance in current debates. With the exception of the indicator of Indigenous needs and the count of the homeless, the indicators are heavily focused on the cost of housing. Little attention has been paid to assessing the appropriateness, decency and security of housing for the general population. This situation probably reflects the young age and modern standard of most housing in Australia, compared to many other developed countries.

However, failure to have adequate measures of adequacy and quality of housing may contribute to those dimensions of need being overlooked, and to problems in some circumstances being hidden.

In this context, it is worth noting that a reinvigorated approach to defining aspects of housing need for various purposes has emerged recently in an unprecedented step taken by all Australian Housing, Planning and Local Government Ministers. In 2005, these Ministers agreed to adopt a national approach to describing and analysing the need for affordable housing. The purposes of having this definition are described as: to assist planning for the provision of affordable housing by local or regional agencies (particularly planning agencies); to provide a consistent way of identifying housing need; and to inform the range of tenures, products, and price points necessary to deliver housing to meet those needs (Describing Affordable Housing: A National Approach, August 2006).

**Table 4.1: Main 'housing needs' indicators used in Australia**

<i>Name</i>	<i>Measure</i>	<i>Origin and source</i>	<i>Key examples of application</i>	<i>Comments</i>
Housing stress	Proportion of households in the lowest 40 per cent of the income distribution who are paying more than 30 per cent of their gross household income for housing.	National Housing Strategy 1991-1992 Maintained by ABS.	AHURI National Research Venture 3, Housing affordability for lower income Australians – see especially Gabriel et al. (2005) and Yates and Gabriel (2006). NATSEM's micro-simulation modelling of housing stress levels at different geographical scales (e.g.. Harding et al. 2004). AIHW's report on Australia's Welfare (AIHW various years between 1995-2003).	A broad brush indicator of households who have or are at risk of having housing affordability problems.
Housing related poverty	Measures the impact of typical housing costs on the living standards of low income Australians.	Commission of Inquiry into Poverty 1973-1975. Maintained by Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research.	Change in incidence of poverty before and after meeting housing costs over time (Bradbury et al. 1986; Manning and King 1988). Examination of consistency of assessment of need with housing stress measures (King 1994, Landt and Bray 1997, Karmel 1998). Assessment of affordability of public and private housing rents for low income households (Burke and Ralston 2003).	Useful for separating housing and income effects on incidence of poverty. Complementary measure to housing stress measure that uses total costs of living and not proportion of income as yardstick. Different measures of poverty to the income measure used originally have been developed – for example, living standards measures and deprivation measures.
Public housing waiting lists	Approved applicants for public housing.	State Housing Authorities administrative data. Housing Assistance Act Annual Reports (Australian Government various years).	Planning new supply programs (historically). No longer reported publicly in some jurisdictions.	Considered to underestimate the need for public housing because of factors like restrictive eligibility criteria, administrative cleaning of lists, long wait times that deter some applicants and a negative image of public housing.
Allocation of housing assistance by type of need	Counts allocation of housing assistance annually to low income, special and priority needs groups.	Productivity Commission through AIHW.	Measure of distribution of total assistance across designated groups in Annual Report on Government Services) (SCRCSSP various years).	Does not indicate levels of unmet need in the designated groups. Therefore provides no indication of whether assistance is proportionate to need.

<i>Name</i>	<i>Measure</i>	<i>Origin and source</i>	<i>Key examples of application</i>	<i>Comments</i>
Indigenous needs housing multi measure model	Covers seven main dimension of housing need among Indigenous households and communities: → homelessness; → overcrowding; → affordability; → dwelling conditions; → connections to essential services; → appropriateness; → security of tenure; and → emerging needs. (See Section 4.3.1 of this paper for more details.)	Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research. Further developed and quantified by AIHW.	Has been applied to the redistribution of existing Indigenous housing resources and allocation of additional resources. Comparison of housing need of Indigenous and non Indigenous households (AIHW 2005a).	A comprehensive set of measures. Attempts to develop a composite measure have been unsuccessful. Subject to selective use.
Other multi criteria approaches	Multi criteria approaches recognise measures of need additional to housing affordability standards. Coverage is similar to the Indigenous multi measure above, (See section 4.3.2 of this paper.)	King 1994, which focused on extending analysis of housing stress to cover various dimensions of quality and to suggest data sources. Purdon/Twyford (2000), which attempted to establish categories or priorities of need using multiple criteria.	Has been the basis of attempts to segment waiting lists by different classes or priorities of need.	
Homelessness	A count of primary, secondary and tertiary homelessness taken in conjunction with the national census. Complemented by annual collection on use of homelessness services and census of homeless school students.	Chamberlain and Mackenzie (1992, 2003). ABS at each census since 1996. AIHW (service usage).	AIHW biennial report on homelessness services (AIHW various years). ABS report on social trends (ABS various years).	A well defined and robust measure given the challenges of collecting data for this population.

Source: The authors.



#### *4.3.1 Multi-measure approaches to Indigenous housing needs*

Progressing previous research undertaken by Jones in the late 1980s and into the 1990s (Jones 1994, Jones et al. 1998, Jones 1998 and 1999 cited in Neutze et al. 2000) worked on the development of a 'multi-measure approach' for assessing the extent of Indigenous housing need. Neutze et al. (2000) proposed seven dimensions of Indigenous housing need, viz., overcrowding, homelessness, services in the house, housing condition, affordability, cultural appropriateness, and security of tenure.

Drawing on this model, the Housing Ministers Advisory Committee (HMAC) in 2002 endorsed a multi-measure approach to measuring Indigenous housing need comprising homelessness, overcrowding, affordability, dwelling conditions and connection to essential services. Since then, a number of Indigenous housing needs assessments have been undertaken using these 'endorsed' measures. The latest Indigenous housing needs assessment undertaken by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2005) incorporated a further three 'additional' dimensions of housing needs (previously identified by Neutze in 2000 but not endorsed by the HMAC), including appropriateness of housing, security of tenure and emerging housing needs.

It is obvious that there is an imperative to develop a multi-measure model which seeks to look beyond single measures to a model capable of acknowledging the importance of overlapping and inter-related needs. However, as indicated in Chapter 3, the limitations of adopting 'mainstream' needs assessment tools and measures that are not culturally specific, particularly in the case of 'crowding', is clearly accepted by those working in the area of Indigenous housing need (AIHW 2005a, Neutze 2000, Walker et al. 2003). The challenges remain to appropriately identify and take account of the culturally-relevant dimensions of any need measure, as well as to recognise the influence of culture.

#### *4.3.2 Additional housing needs*

Contemporaneous with the multi-measure approach to Indigenous needs proposed by Neutze et al. (2000) was one of the final research projects for the Australian Housing Research Fund. Undertaken jointly by Purdon and Twford consultants, this research was also based on a 'multi-criteria approach' but focused on the broad population, including Indigenous people.

Drawing on Maslow's theory of needs, Purdon/Twyford (2000: p27) developed a hierarchical needs framework, theoretical in nature, which "provided a means of determining which situations and personal characteristics indicated the highest level of housing need and hence a system for prioritising that need". The focus was on the "additional housing needs" of low income renters where 'additional' housing needs were defined as those over and above standard housing affordability related need. The framework (see Table 4.2 below) comprises five criteria, which are ranked in terms of need from highest to lowest with affordability being the lowest.

**Table 4.2: Identification of additional housing needs – criteria for prioritising housing needs**

<i>Criteria</i>	<i>Housing circumstances</i>
People whose life, health or safety is at risk.	At risk of domestic violence or child abuse. Medical condition which is being caused or aggravated by an applicant's existing housing.
People without housing.	Homeless, imminently homeless or housed in emergency accommodation.
People whose well-being and security are at risk.	Medical condition or disability which renders their current housing unsuitable. Breakdown of family relationships (priority rehousing). Inability to access private rental market as a result of discrimination.
People in inappropriate housing.	Living in inappropriate accommodation, for example severe overcrowding. Relocation due to employment (rehousing). Urgent need to have better access to support networks or to provide support to someone elsewhere (priority rehousing). People with high living costs as a result of a disability.
Affordability	No additional housing needs.

Source: Purdon/Twyford (2000: p64)

Purdon/Twyford went on to develop this theoretical framework into a “multi-criteria approach” or operational model for estimating the extent of additional housing needs among groups of low income renters and to allocate the categories of need to the population of low income renters. The model recognises housing need as a continuum of need ranging from no need to affordability-related need and onto additional housing need (Purdon/Twyford 2000: p177). Five categories of additional housing need were developed as follows:

- Category 1: People whose safety is at risk/without housing.
- Category 2(a): People whose condition is aggravated by their current housing.
- Category 2(b): People who have a need because of the condition of their housing and their housing costs.
- Category 3: People whose housing is inappropriate to their needs.
- Category 4: People with very high housing costs and/or overcrowding.

Source: Purdon/Twyford 2000: p13

While the idea of a continuum of need might be conceptually appealing, the weakness of the Purdon/Twyford model is that there is a large interaction between housing affordability and categories 2, 3 and 4. This makes it difficult to operationalise a continuum model with any degree of precision. Nevertheless, the issue of additional housing needs confronts SHAs when they attempt to allocate housing to applicants on their priority housing lists. The prioritisation of housing needs by SHAs is the subject of section 4.4.

### *4.3.3 Complex housing needs*

The issue of ‘complex needs’ is an emerging area of Australian housing assistance discourse, particularly in the context of reform of social housing systems across the

country (Seelig and Jones 2006). While the term 'complex needs' is beginning to be used with reference to certain groups in the population, and also in the context of more holistic forms of housing responses, there does not seem to be any consistent application of terminology at this point in time. Cooper et al. (2005) and Bleasdale (2006) make important contributions to this under-developed but emergent area of policy literature, and both point to the difficulties in arriving at common definitions or scope of the issues. While Bleasdale adopts a more 'medicalised' approach to defining people with complex needs, Cooper et al. (2005: p2) stress that this is not just about particular conditions or populations, it is more about a set of circumstances:

"Complex needs are the result of a dynamic interplay of personal characteristics, developmental disorders, psychopathology, co-morbidity, environmental factors, historical factors, inadequacies in the service delivery system, and interactions between people with complex needs and others within the social service system... 'Support' is much more than assistance to find a house or be 'housed'. It encompasses wide ranging and interrelated variables that can enable or constrain people in staying housed satisfactorily."

This suggests that a broad approach has to be taken. Thus 'complex need' might be associated with the presence of multiple needs, where a range of potential factors are at play. These may include: mental illness; significant intellectual, physical or psychiatric disabilities; drug or alcohol addiction; lack of living or financial management skills; or learning difficulties in children. The critical point, however, is that in circumstances of complex need, housing assistance requires a more comprehensive and supportive response which links housing with other services and assistance than might otherwise be the case. As Seelig and Jones (2006) suggest in addressing the needs of some clients at least, this may lead to embedding social housing within the broader human services system.

The issues of multiple needs, additional needs and complex needs will be examined further in the subsequent stages of this study.

#### **4.4 The assessment of housing needs: access to social housing and the 'prioritisation of need'**

The assessment of need in practice occurs in two quite discrete ways. The first type of assessment is concerned with how needs of individual households are recognised and placed into some priority order. This section of Chapter 4 is primarily concerned with these processes. A second area of assessment occurs at the point of allocating households to specific dwellings or other forms of assistance. This latter form is concerned with 'goodness-of-fit' between recognised need and response. By implication, this may not be solely based on need considerations: the availability of particular dwellings, for example, may delay allocations to households otherwise deemed to be in urgent or greatest need of assistance. However, this second set of processes will not be analysed further here. (For further analysis of these issues, see Hulse and Burke 2005, Hulse et al. 2007.)

##### **4.4.1 Needs and access to contemporary social housing**

Overall, the type of needs assessment policies that operate today under the CSHA reflect political and practical requirements to find ways of rationing the limited places available in social housing in the context of declining supply and large numbers of applicants with diverse needs. In 2007, most SHAs were involved in restructuring their policy frameworks for accessing social housing. These changes have their own parochial features, but are commonly based around wait list management, common access systems across providers, and intensifying the move from wait-turn systems to

either segmented wait lists or more clearly structured priority streams (see Hulse and Burke 2005, Hulse et al. 2007).

While the specific processes vary between jurisdictions, procedures for granting access to social housing typically involve an eligible applicant for housing assistance being required to demonstrate to a housing officer that they meet additional specified criteria. Following an administrative assessment, an applicant who is considered to have a higher priority of need may be placed on the waiting list in a way which will, theoretically at least, result in them being offered a housing vacancy that is matched to their housing need ahead of other eligible applicants who may have applied before them. In some states (e.g. Victoria South Australia), this is managed via a clearly defined and tiered segment; in others (e.g. New South Wales and Queensland), the key distinction is between priority and non-priority listings.<sup>19</sup>

In high demand areas in some jurisdictions where the rate of early allocations may regularly exceed available housing, there is no guarantee that those eligible households who are placed in lower ranked segments of the waiting list will be offered housing. This is because their turn to be made an offer may repeatedly be overtaken by someone assessed as having a higher category of need. The impact of this shift in approach is indicated by data from the annual report of government services published by the Productivity Commission. In 2004/05, the share of new tenancies in public housing that was allocated to those with special needs was 58 per cent (up from 46 per cent in 2000/01) and the share allocated as priority access to those in greatest need was 38 per cent (an increase of nearly two per cent since 2000/01) (reported in Jones et al. 2007, Table 3).

One well developed example of the multiple factors that may be considered in making an assessment of priority or urgent need is given by current policy in NSW (see Table 4.1). This example illustrates the extent of information that can be required and the complex set of judgements that may need to be made for each needs based assessment. A client service officer in New South Wales described the challenge of his job to make client assessments to a journalist recently as follows:

“There are policies and there are individuals and somehow you have to merge the two.” (Horin 2007: n.pag.)

Recently, in the context of wide disparities in the local availability of social housing, administrative considerations of ‘locational need’ have emerged. Where previously, households eligible for social housing could express several preferences for the locations that they wished to be offered housing, they may be required now to demonstrate a locational need, such as having links to an area or, more strictly, the need to access services in a particular location. In other words, a household may be deemed in need, and thereby be eligible for assistance per se, but to be recognised as being in need of a specific form of assistance, such as a locationally-specific response (i.e. a dwelling in a particular location), that household is required to show other needs that link to such a response. New South Wales was the first to introduce and codify a ‘locational needs’ test. This is applied when an approved priority housing applicant seeks housing in a high demand area. Specifically, to be eligible for housing in a high demand area, the applicant, or a member of their household, must have:

- an ongoing medical condition, or
- a disability, and

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<sup>19</sup> It is widely anticipated that the Queensland One Social Housing System reforms will lead to the introduction of a segmented wait list system in that state.

→ a need to access services at least once a week on an ongoing basis in the requested area.<sup>20</sup>

#### 4.4.2 *Recognised needs not being addressed in social housing*

The most recent phase in the changing conceptualisation of housing need evident in policy development and policy-making in Australia can be found in the emerging recognition of a need for 'affordable housing' among low and moderate income households who are unable to access social housing or to obtain affordable housing in the private market<sup>21</sup>. This type of need is considered to reflect a 'gap in the market' that indicates a possible requirement for some form of intermediate assistance other than social housing. In some senses, this need is not a new one, given there are existing private rental assistance programs operating at Commonwealth and state levels. However, these are either concerned with access to housing (as in the case of state private rental support programs) or with cash assistance through Rent Assistance (only available to income support recipients). What is new in terms of need is the linking of a form of assistance, namely a supply response, to lower income, working or potentially working households. It should also be noted that all CSHAs until the 1996 Agreement allowed for this area of need to some extent, based around the idea of offering an amount of assistance proportionate to need and by including programs of home ownership assistance. Post-1996, all subsidies were intended to be fully targeted to the 'most needy', which implicitly excluded those low and moderate income households in need of affordable housing responses, but unable to access social housing or to obtain affordable housing in the private market.

Recognition of a place for housing assistance further along the income scale has been accompanied by the re-emergence of ideas about developing a continuum of housing responses that have varying levels of government subsidy<sup>22</sup>. Over the last decade, several jurisdictions have introduced new affordable housing options funded outside the CSHA that are directed to meeting the housing needs of this broader target group.<sup>23</sup> Typically these strategies use government seed funding to leverage private and community resources at a lower cost to government than supplying social housing directly.

At this stage, the recognition of a broader band of housing need sits awkwardly alongside continuing efforts to restrict access to public housing to those most in need and unfolding policies that aim to limit the tenure of public tenants.<sup>24</sup> Introducing new forms of assistance can be characterised as an attempt to provide more options and pathways for those with unmet housing needs, or those whose circumstances improve in public housing but have ongoing housing needs, at a lower cost to government than public housing.

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<sup>20</sup> <http://www.housing.nsw.gov.au/Policies+and+Fact+Sheets/Policies/Locational+Need+--+ALL0140A.htm>

<sup>21</sup> In government policy documents, low and moderate income households encompass those with incomes up to 120 per cent of the (area) median household income (Milligan et al. 2007).

<sup>22</sup> A depiction of a continuum of housing assistance options can be found in Milligan et al. 2007, figure 3.1.

<sup>23</sup> See Milligan et al. (2007, table 3.2) for a summary of state initiatives. As well some jurisdictions, notably South Australia and Western Australia, have maintained programs begun in earlier decades that offer financial assistance for home ownership to a wider group of households than those being assisted in their public housing programs.

<sup>24</sup> New South Wales and Queensland have recently introduced fixed term tenancies for new tenants of public housing and some other jurisdictions are considering a similar policy. These policies are focused on reviewing the 'need for continued housing assistance' and contradict the 'need for security of tenure', discussed earlier.

#### 4.4.3 Example: Needs based allocation of housing in New South Wales

As discussed above, the current approach to considering the need for an allocation of public housing in New South Wales provides an example of the complexity of assessment that is now required to establish whether individual applicants have a sufficient need for public housing. In New South Wales, in addition to meeting standard public housing eligibility criteria<sup>25</sup>, three additional criteria that can apply separately or together are used to determine whether there is a need to provide access to public housing on a priority basis. As well, before priority status can be granted, the applicant's ability to resolve their housing need in the private rental market is assessed by looking at whether there are indications that they may have difficulty renting privately. Guidance to assessment officers about factors to consider in the assessment process are summarised in Table 4.3 below. It is interesting to note how these share many common features to the 'base and intermediate needs' proposed by Doyal and Gough (1991), demonstrating how the abstract concepts of housing need can be translated into the practice of needs recognition and prioritisation.

**Table 4.3: Assessing urgent housing need in New South Wales**

<i>Assessment criteria</i>	<i>Indications</i>
<b>Having unstable housing circumstances</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Homelessness.</li> <li>→ Imminent homelessness.</li> <li>→ Living in crisis or emergency accommodation.</li> <li>→ Living with family or friends who are unable to provide longer term accommodation.</li> <li>→ Living apart from immediate family members because of a lack of appropriate housing alternatives.</li> </ul>
<b>'At risk' factors</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Domestic violence.</li> <li>→ Sexual assault.</li> <li>→ Child abuse.</li> <li>→ Threatening behaviour by one or more household members against another occupant.</li> <li>→ Torture and trauma.</li> </ul>
<b>Existing accommodation is inappropriate for basic housing requirements</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Severe overcrowding.</li> <li>→ Substandard property conditions (extreme damp, dangerous or unhealthy conditions).</li> <li>→ Lack of essential facilities (water, electricity, bathroom, kitchen).</li> <li>→ Needing secure accommodation to take a child out of care.</li> <li>→ Severe and ongoing medical condition.</li> <li>→ Disability.</li> </ul>

<sup>25</sup> These cover income, age (normally at least 18 years), no ownership of residential property, citizenship and/or residency, agreements to pay outstanding rent debts and capacity to live independently with and without support.

<i>Assessment criteria</i>	<i>Indications</i>
<b>Applicant's ability to resolve housing situation in the private rental market</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Any assets or savings they could use.</li> <li>→ The applicant's housing requirements, such as the number of bedrooms, their size household requires or need for disability modifications.</li> <li>→ The appropriateness of alternative housing options, such as crisis or emergency accommodation, supported accommodation, or Rentstart.<sup>26</sup></li> <li>→ The availability and cost of private rental accommodation that matches their housing requirements in their preferred area as well as other suitable areas. Rent is considered affordable if it does not exceed 50 per cent of the household's total gross weekly income from all sources.</li> <li>→ The inability of the applicant to obtain private rental accommodation due to any personal circumstance or characteristic which is likely, or has been shown, to reduce their access to private rental.</li> <li>→ Whether the applicant has a psychiatric, developmental, or intellectual disability or mental illness which makes it difficult for them to rent in the private market.</li> </ul>

Sources: <http://www.housing.nsw.gov.au/Policies+and+Fact+Sheets/Policies/Eligibility+for+Public+Housing++ALL0030A.htm>; and <http://www.housing.nsw.gov.au/Policies+and+Fact+Sheets/Policies/Priority+Housing+ALL0040A.htm>

## 4.5 Summary

This brief review of public policy approaches to describing a need for housing assistance shows that there has been little consistency in approaches to conceptualising or defining need in over 60 years of housing policy settings. Across the period there is no single conceptualisation that can be associated with particular political regimes. Ideas have focused on issues about who should be assisted, and attention here has shifted from broader to narrower notions of need, and have then been reversed. Sometimes the shift in defining needs has had clear relationships to housing circumstances of the time. On other occasions this has not been so apparent.

Nevertheless, the narrowing of ideas about housing need has been in the ascendancy over the last few CSHAs, in the context of dominant neo-liberal thinking about reducing the role of governments in housing, persistent demand for housing assistance, and a shrinking supply of public housing. This situation has produced a major shift towards the administrative assessment of the relative need of individual households away from an approach that relied on consumer expression of need within a broadly defined target group (i.e. those eligible according to a limited number of criteria, centred on income). Under these tightly prescribed administrative models of assessment, consumers have less power to determine when and how their housing needs will be met, or for how long.

Through the analysis of the policy and practice aspects of housing need, emergence of relativities can be seen around terms such as 'greatest need', 'highest need', 'most urgent need' and so on, to form the de facto definitions of need and assistance responses. While rarely made explicit, the implications of these terms are that the overall volume of need is necessarily bigger – potentially considerably so – than the needs actually being responded to, or those being prioritised. The significance of this lies in the implied recognition within policy that there are needs that are not being met,

<sup>26</sup> Rentstart is cash assistance that is provided to help meet the costs of establishing a private tenancy, such as payment of a bond and rent in advance.

either because they are not regarded as being of sufficient importance or because the necessary responses are not available.

The changing treatment of people with support needs over the history of the CSHA demonstrates the latter point well. This needs group was unrecognised and largely excluded from assistance under the CSHA for nearly forty years because support services were either not available or not linked to the public housing tenure. Today, this group, often described as having complex needs, enjoys the status of being one of the highest priority groups to be assisted, underpinned by a multiplicity of 'whole of government' arrangements and other government/non-government partnerships that aim to, and increasingly are formally contracted to, deliver support services to them in their public housing residence (see Jones et al. forthcoming).

The influence of particular ideologies is also apparent, especially in periods where the emphasis has been placed on providing assistance for home purchase. When this policy has been to the fore, there has been less concern with targeting to the poor, because home ownership was seen as inherently desirable. The exclusion of non aged single people until the 1980s could also be seen as a reflection of an ideology that was grounded in the needs of families being paramount.

Finally, at a much deeper theoretical level, it is quite apparent that when need is applied as a term in housing assistance and housing policy terms, it is rarely clearly linked conceptually to the ideas of need discussed in chapter 3. In some cases, the conflation of housing need as a theoretical tool of recognising situations of basic survival and other essentials of life on the one hand, with the enumeration of dwelling requirements overall or within specific types or locations, is both enlightening and bewildering! At some point in time or at some level, the connections must have been made, but these are now hidden, forgotten or no longer relevant. The policy and practice use of housing need in other instances is implicitly associated with the idea of basic human needs, but more often than not, it is more concerned with the forms of housing assistance and responses, and how these can be married with housing circumstances in an administrative context. This issue will be examined further in the next and final chapter, as a vehicle for concluding this Positioning Paper, and laying out the subsequent stages of this research.



## **5 SUMMARISING THE THEORETICAL AND OPERATIONAL ASPECTS OF HOUSING NEED**

### **5.1 Linking ideas of need with approaches for responding to need**

Chapter 3 of this paper concluded by stressing a critical tension between the theoretical literature and debates concerning needs on the one hand, and the practical application of needs approaches, particularly in the context of some philosophical positions regarding the universality of basic needs, and the discursive and utility gulf which is created between these and the 'real world' of housing assistance provision, which also seemingly seeks to base itself on 'needs'. Part of this tension lies in the fact that the theorists are largely removed from the practical imperatives of prioritising or allocating services, while, as Chapter 4 suggests, the service providers and their allied policy developers are largely oblivious to or intellectually disconnected from the field of ideas about need. Another issue muddying the waters further is that much analysis and assessment of 'housing needs' at the broad community level is actually not about the needs of people so much as it is about enumerating the supply of housing.

Scholars, policy practitioners, analysts and service providers thus might all speak of 'housing need', but as these two previous chapters have illustrated, they are clearly not speaking the same language! This is an interesting point in itself, particularly as housing assistance agencies are constantly seeking to develop coherent, robust and transparent approaches to responding to housing need, but seemingly in an atheoretical way. However, it also presents an immediate and serious challenge to the present study, which seeks not only to examine how needs have been conceptualised and applied, but also to consider the case for rethinking our approaches to housing needs.

There are other issues which arise from how housing need is seemingly defined and applied in different contexts. For example, it is not clear how needs are to be considered over time, nor what the purpose or intended outcomes are of housing assistance vis-à-vis need. Are needs something that can be satisfied, but remain, or are they something to be 'resolved' and addressed? This in part takes us back to the discussion of ongoing inherent needs and whether the point of identifying needs is to focus on ensuring that universal need is met in an enduring sense, or whether the argument is more that needs are temporal in nature and contingent on capacity and opportunity, and thus where the focus is on 'unmet' need. How people deemed to be 'in need' are viewed matters not just in an individual sense, but also socially in terms of the effects of targeting, stigmatisation and residualisation.

### **5.2 Bridging tools and frameworks for the conceptualisation of housing need**

In discourses concerned with articulating what sorts of needs are of primary importance, and the enumeration of such needs, it is often assumed that the traditional approach to 'normative needs' identification is the only practical approach or means available. But an outstanding issue is how such normatively (expert) defined benchmarks are arrived at. This is not as straightforward as it may seem, and Chapters 3 and 4 have highlighted several different approaches. It is also apparent, reflecting on Chapter 2 and the politics of need (and for housing assistance), that normative needs may not be the only approach to administrative decisions about needs responses and commitments. This section seeks to draw these disparate but

important strings together into a more cohesive set of ideas about the conceptualisation of housing need, and the basis on which they might be responded to.

### *5.2.1 Traditional normative needs approaches*

#### **Basic human need framework**

As Chapter 3 has highlighted, one theoretical but nevertheless quite explicit approach to need is structured around the idea of basic human needs, which then have varying potential connections with basic housing needs. Largely, this is an intellectual framework, although it can and does have empirical as well as intuitive underpinnings. Here the issue is how 'normative need' could be framed around basic human necessities, on the basis of an absolute, universal approach to need, where everyone is assessed as being in basic need, and where unmet basic needs are the main focus of assistance. But, it is only one possible approach to linking ideas of need with approaches for responding to need.

#### **Relative needs**

A second approach involves normative need being recognised and defined in relative terms, using various approaches to determine who has unmet needs vis-à-vis various social standards and norms. These may be based on a hierarchy of priorities, factoring in considerations of urgency, complexity and longevity of need. In practice, it may be possible to combine both this and the previous positions, in a way that acknowledges the basic needs of people, but that also embraces a more relativist approach as a way of prioritising need.

#### **Residual need**

Alternatively, Karmel (1998) provides a good contemporary example of normative statements about what housing needs are, based on the idea of residual needs, where market-based responses are seen as first order solutions, and hence an inability to meet needs this way becomes a filter for conceptualising and measuring need:

“People have housing needs if they cannot afford their current housing, or their current housing is not appropriate and adequate and they cannot afford to rent appropriate and adequate housing; or, despite being able to afford it, they cannot obtain appropriate and adequate housing due to environmental conditions such as discrimination or lack of suitable accommodation.”

In practice, there are various permutations of such need embedded in this example, but the important criterion is about the potential for market responses. Karmel, following Landt and Bray (1997), goes on to say that: “People are not considered to have housing needs if they can afford appropriate and adequate housing, but choose to live in an inadequate dwelling, or choose to spend a large amount on housing”. In practice, this is probably how needs are conceptualised by State Housing Authorities in Australia, given that social housing is itself a residualised tenure, representing only some five per cent of all housing occupancies. It also obviously resonates with a market-liberal philosophy about public and private provision.

All these traditional notions of normative need have in common an implicit sense of open-endedness towards need. Experts develop the measures and assessment approaches based on the concept of externally-identified need, and those needs are then responded to through assistance programs, using entitlement or application-based access mechanisms. However, this is a very pure, simplistic and de-politicised view of how normative needs are conceived and derived. In practice, there are all

sorts of constraints based on resources, capacities and opportunities, which are factored into 'real-world' conceptions of need and how they ought theoretically to be responded to.

Cowan et al. (1999), for example, argue that when it comes to assistance and responses, the notion of housing need is not only problematic, but effectively redundant in the face of housing public housing providers (in the UK at least) who seem to prioritise and allocate assistance on the basis of risk — specifically, the minimisation and management of risk associated with the tenant or prospective tenant.

Sheppard and Woodcock (1999: p97) see less of a distinction between need and being 'at risk', regarding the two as conceptually discrete but effectively overlapping. They have instead called for a more 'operating concept' of need, and propose a way of developing one. They distinguish between what they describe, firstly, as a 'deficit concept of need', which is essentially the type proposed by Doyal and Gough and others, based on minimum universal standards below which harm or other outcomes will arise. Their second, preferred, "differentiated approach" to need comprises "(i) a problem identifier, (ii) a support statement, and (iii) a resource statement" (Sheppard and Woodcock 1999: p70).

In other words, the concept of need is rooted in there being a situation or set of circumstances that create the need, but also a response or outcome to secure, and options for intervention or service provision. "Within a differentiated model of need, support is not external to the overall concept of need but is an integral aspect of need itself" (Sheppard and Woodcock 1999: p72). Sheppard and Woodcock (1999: p70) argue that this indicates a shift "from a descriptive to a dynamic, action orientation" approach to need, where a key focus is on "two distinct questions: what kind of support is required, and who or what should provide it".

### *5.2.2 'Alternative normative' needs approaches*

There are other, quite different ways in which the definers of needs might decide how to define who is in need, and how to address unmet need. These may still involve 'normative' assessments of who is in need, but might apply radically different bases for decision-making.

#### **Capacity to assist**

In the first example, need could be linked more to the capacity or scope to provide assistance. This may be linked to situations where there can only be a limited range of responses that can potentially be created (in terms of practical intervention), or where services have limitations placed on them reducing the availability of assistance in some areas. Such limitations may be driven by higher level policy, budgetary and service considerations, or at a more operational level by agencies and practitioners where interpretation of legislation or policy, and 'on the ground' judgements, have to be made (see Sheppard and Woodcock 1999: pp68-9 for this important difference). The defining characteristic of this approach is that, by formal decision, or perhaps by specific circumstances, the availability of responses is incapable of meeting all potential need, and so rationing occurs on the basis of this. Of course, this could be used in a wait-turn system context, but is more likely to incur processes of needs assessment and prioritisation where the objective is essentially to manage and reduce demand to match the availability of responses.

Highlighting examples where social workers are required to make such assessments, Sheppard and Woodcock suggest that, "This is clearly a far from desirable situation, in which individuals are likely to be treated in widely different ways. What is needed, this

suggests, is an approach to need which provides practitioners with clearer and more consistent ways of defining and identifying need in the immediate circumstances of practice” (Sheppard and Woodcock 1999: p69).

### **Costs/consequences of not responding to need**

The second example of alternative allocation decisions is where the questions about needs are framed in terms of the costs/consequences of not meeting need. Shortage or inability to comprehensively respond to all need may still be the case, but here, need may be defined and prioritised with reference to what would happen in the absence of a response, which is potentially different from a simple waiting or rationing system. It is essentially about preventing or avoiding poor effects or outcomes from a failure to assist, and using this as the basis for making decisions on need. Examples might be where the longer term impacts on children, or a whole-of-government perspective regarding (potential) service usage, are taken into account

### **Achievement of specific outcomes from assistance**

Under a different rubric again, need might be linked conceptually to the capacity to benefit from assistance, where those likely to benefit most in terms of specific outcomes are those who are regarded as having the highest need. This is a more positive approach, where attention is focused on a more utilitarian or instrumentalist approach to need and responses. There are examples in Australia of housing, homeless, and other social service organisations that have developed a ‘capacity to benefit’ needs framework, particularly for the allocation of direct financial support for accommodation, debts and rental access. The crude principle is one of ‘best bang (outcome) for the buck’, where the short and medium term likely impacts of assistance are weighed up against the opportunity costs and risks of not providing assistance. Timing and sustainability are also important considerations, in a way which distinguishes this approach to one of ‘urgency of need’.

### **The mix-and-match approach**

Finally, it may be that none of these distinct approaches can be seen alone, and that some combination of these conceptual frameworks could be applied. These might involve mixing person (felt and expressed) and traditional normatively-determined need, as essentially suggested by Bradshaw.

On the other hand, it might be an approach based around the medical model of triage, where needs (or decisions to assist) are effectively based on an assessment of the ability to offer assistance (the treatments or responses are available) and on the capacities of recipients to benefit in terms of their future prospects and likely responsiveness to the treatment or assistance.

Finally, need might be acknowledged and responded to purely on the basis of the theoretical case for them. This may well be subsequently connected to the development of specific rights and entitlements, but conceptually need not automatically be so.

There may in truth be a wide range of permutations for blending or staging these different approaches to identifying need.

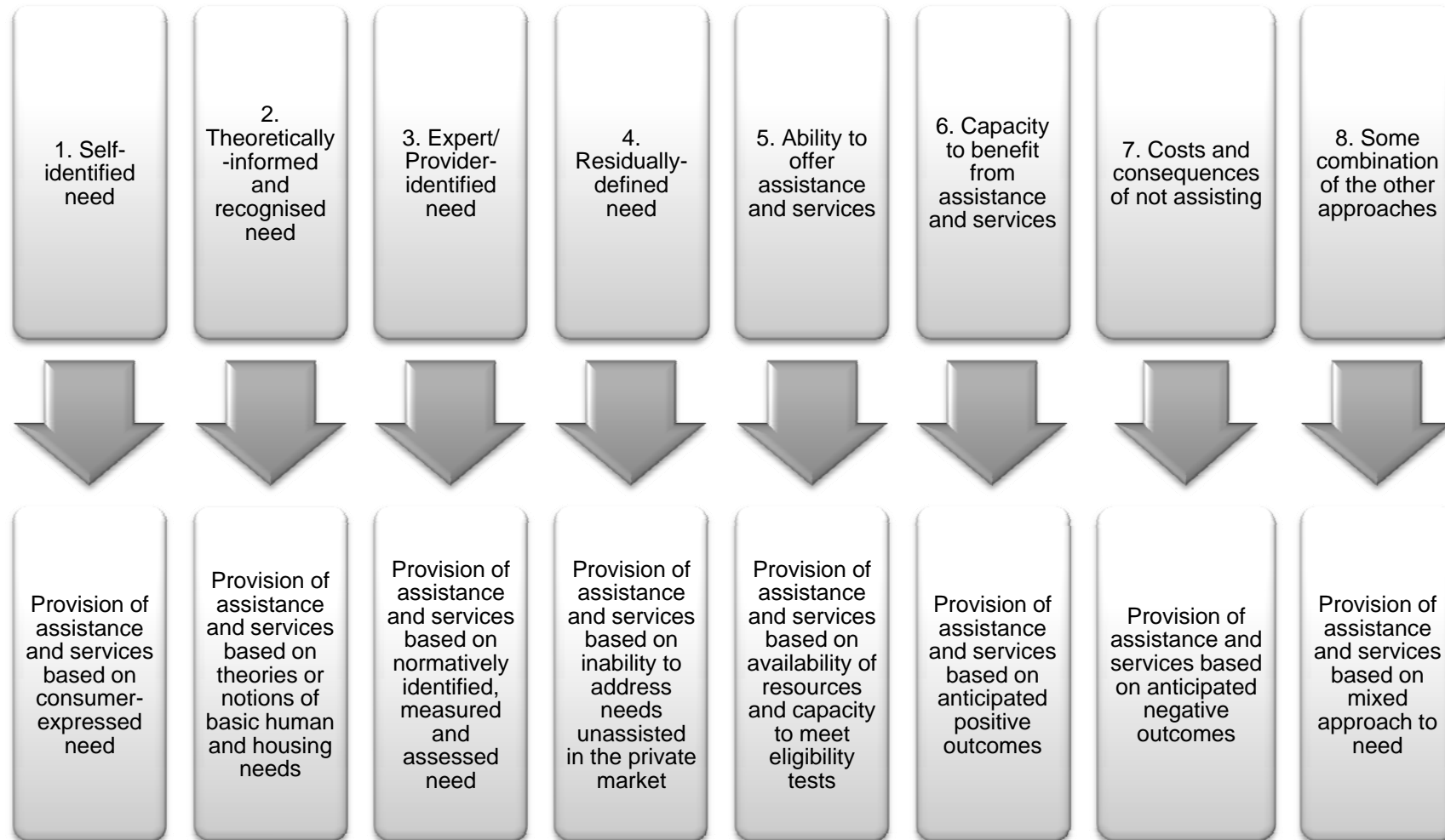
### ***5.2.3 Eight approaches of conceptualising the linking of needs recognition and responses***

In summary, as shown in Figure 5.1, it is possible to identify (or hypothesise) at least seven different and discrete ways, and one additional combination option, of conceptualising the relationships between needs and responses. These vary in terms

of providers and the contexts in which needs are recognised, who decides on them, and the basis on which services/assistance might be provided.

Some of these approaches, along with the 'triage' and Sheppard and Woodcock models, can be critiqued for being overly concerned with the capacity to respond to need, and less concerned with the existence of need in forms independent of where options exist to address that need. However, it does perhaps help take the discussion into a place where conceptualising degrees of housing need can be brought closer in a practical way to different forms of response systems.

**Figure 5.1: Eight ways of conceptualising identifiers of need and drivers of responses**



Source: Seelig for this paper.

## 5.3 Mapping out the research approach

This research is being conducted in two stages. Stage 1 is essentially contained in this Positioning Paper, and entails a critical review of the Australian and international theoretical and conceptual literature on social and individual needs. In Stage 2, a small fieldwork component comprising workshops and interviews will be undertaken with senior officials, political advisors and politicians as a means of informing the project about the changing nature of need.

### 5.3.1 Stage 1: Literature review

Stage 1 comprises a critical review of Australian and international literature on social and individual needs. This has focused in Chapter 3 on needs as they have been debated in the broad arena of social policy, and in Chapter 4 on how needs have been interpreted as they relate to Australian social housing policy in practice. The work undertaken in Chapters 3 and 4, comprising a thorough review of both theoretical and practical aspects of housing needs analysis and housing policy application, establish the basis for the fieldwork component to be undertaken in Stage 2 – that of reconceptualising housing needs in an operational sense.

### 5.3.2 Stage 2: Workshops and interviews

Stage 2 involves a small fieldwork component using workshops and interviews. Workshop and interview participants will be recruited with the assistance and advice of SHA central offices in Brisbane and Sydney. It will comprise those involved in both the development of housing policy, e.g. central office Policy Officers, and in the assessment of housing need in a practical sense, e.g. regional area office Client Service Managers.

The workshops aim to help clarify the views of SHA policy and program practitioners about the (changing) nature of housing need. Further, they aim to identify how the concept of housing needs is utilised in a policy and practice sense.

The interviews will examine the views of a different group of policy-makers, namely those at the ministerial or senior bureaucratic level in various jurisdictions. Interviews with a small number of past or current housing ministers will also be sought to assist in tracing the evolution of housing needs in the political arena.

The workshop and interview framework has been developed drawing on the analysis of the literature in Chapters 2 and 3. As Chapter 2 showed, several key questions are evoked when thinking about needs conceptualisation, which can be used to think about how need is operationalised in practice. These questions and a number of realistic scenarios provide the basis of the workshop and interview schedule (see following page).

Four workshops will be conducted: two each in Sydney and Brisbane, comprising a group of 6-10 Client Service Managers and another group of 4-6 Policy Officers. Up to six face-to-face interviews will also be conducted, three each in Sydney and Brisbane. Both interviews and workshops will be digitally recorded. The workshops and interviews will be transcribed and summarised. Analysis of the information gathered from the interviews and workshops will involve:

- examining the degree of consensus or otherwise about how housing need can be measured by testing a range of scenarios;
- investigating whether participants see any problems or inconsistencies with the way 'housing needs' is currently utilised; and

- investigating the reaction of participants to other conceptualisations of need identified in other disciplines or contexts.

Based on Stage 1 and 2 findings, the research team will critically review the issues and consider the case and options for developing a framework for reconceptualising needs.

Preliminary discussions have already taken place with academics and the AIHW with regard to the conceptualisation of Indigenous housing needs. However, to ensure appropriate consideration of the issues, this study will seek to consult further with a range of specialist informants on the substantive issues of how Indigenous housing needs are conceived theoretically and in a more practical context. These will include academics and other acknowledged experts, SHA staff involved in Indigenous needs articulation and measurement, and others such as the AIHW and the Housing Ministers' Advisory Committee Standing Committee on Indigenous Housing (SCIH).

### **Reconceptualising Housing Need workshop and interview plan**

In the workshops and interviews, participants will be asked to study a number of scenarios and consider their responses to a series of questions about the scenarios. These will be based on the 'Six ways of conceptualising the identifiers of need and drivers of responses' identified in Chapter 3. Participants will also be asked to rank the housing need of the fictional households outlined in the scenarios.

The questions guiding discussion of the scenarios are:

- Who should get assistance?
- What form should that assistance take?
- How quickly should they be assisted?
- For how long should they be able to receive assistance?
- What other options are there for providing assistance?
- How will assistance be funded?

The fundamental issues of concern are about the rationale for responding in certain ways (on what basis are needs responded to), and the methodologies and assessment tools that might be employed.



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Level 1 114 Flinders Street, Melbourne Victoria 3000  
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