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Long-term social housing offers best chance for tenants who experience adversity: report

- The vast majority of people moving into social housing are eligible because they are in 'greatest need' for reasons including homelessness, health conditions and disability
- For these tenants, social housing should not be a pathway to private rental but rather a destination offering stable, secure and affordable housing
- Governments should also offer policies to support low incoming tenants in private rental such as brokerage programs, rental subsidies and support with maintaining tenancies
- The COVID-19 health and related economic crisis demonstrates the importance of safe and secure housing, particularly for the homeless

For tenants who experience a disability, poor health or complex needs and are reliant on income support, social housing offers their best chance of stable, secure and affordable housing, new AHURI research confirms.

The research, '**A pathway to where? Inquiry into understanding and reimagining social housing pathways**', undertaken for AHURI by researchers from UNSW Sydney, University of Tasmania, Swinburne University of Technology, University of South Australia and University of Adelaide examines the social housing pathways of tenants across Australia.

The idea of a social housing pathway describes not only how a person might move into or out of social housing but also how they might move to different properties within the system and how they interact with the organisations that provide and manage social housing.

'The data shows that the vast majority of people moving into social housing are eligible because they are in 'greatest need', that is they are homeless or at risk of homelessness, or at risk due to health conditions, disability, caring responsibilities, or being Indigenous, under 25 years or over 75 years old,' says lead researcher Professor Kristy Muir of UNSW Sydney.

'For these tenants social housing is not a stepping stone to being able to afford private rental housing, but is a legitimate destination, one that offers the best chance of stable, secure and affordable housing. In fact, we found that even where tenants wanted to move on from social housing, they did not see it as a genuine option because there were no affordable, stable alternatives in the private rental market.'

To provide a social housing system that offers positive outcomes for vulnerable tenants, policy makers need to move towards thinking 'How do we improve housing stability, security and safety of people who are tenants, on the waitlist, or homeless?'

This may include working towards providing social and affordable housing for low and very low income people who do not yet have complex needs (and would not yet be eligible for social housing under the current system); recognising that social housing provides an infrastructure of

care for tenants with long-term complex needs; and refocussing the social housing sector to achieve positive tenant housing outcomes.

In addition, while governments across Australia have introduced policies to encourage tenants to see social housing as a time limited housing option, providing policies to support low income tenants in private rental housing are also very important. Such policies can include:

- increasing the supply of affordable housing in the private rental market through private rental subsidies; rental brokerage/access supports; social impact investment
- ensuring appropriate, resourced supports are available for people who need them, to enable them to remain in private housing, including affordability and rental assistance schemes
- creating conditions for increased housing stability in the public and private markets
- providing and adequately resourcing supports when needed to assist people who require it to maintain tenancies and for the duration of need.

'While government policy levers to help people move out of social housing include the sale of dwellings to tenants, provision of private rental subsidies, rental transition programs, financial planning and client-based needs planning, the biggest factor by far that affect moves out of social housing is the availability, or lack thereof, of affordable housing alternatives,' says Professor Muir.

The report can be downloaded from the AHURI website at <http://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/332>

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