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Understanding the drivers and outcomes of public housing tenant relocation

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Acronyms and abbreviations used in this report

AHURI   Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited

DIR   Department initiated relocation

TIR   Tenant initiated relocation

RO   Relocation Officer

TO   Tenancy Officer

CHO   Community Housing Organisation

FACS   Family and Community Services, Department of (NSW)

PHRP   Public Housing Renewal Program

DHHS   Department of Health and Human Services (Victoria)

DHS   Department of Human Services (Victoria)

HUD   Housing and Urban Development, Department of (USA)

PPP   Public private partnership

Glossary

A list of definitions for terms commonly used by AHURI is available on the AHURI website ahuri.edu.au/glossary.

Executive summary

Key points

- The key factors driving the need for public housing tenant relocation are inadequacy of public housing stock and residualisation of the tenant base.

- Two modes of relocation have been examined: Department Initiated Relocation (DIR) due to estate renewal; and Tenant Initiated Relocation (TIR).

- Inadequacy and residualisation are often used to justify estate renewal, creating the need for DIR. They also lead to unsafe and unfit conditions for tenants, creating the need for TIR.

- Estate renewal severely constrains availability of stock and makes both DIR and TIR difficult.

- Very few studies have examined the actual practice of relocation and there is almost no existing evidence about tenant experiences of TIR.

- Relocation practices (DIR and TIR) are closely tied to allocation policy whether this be needs matched allocation, choice based letting, or right of return.

- Broad similarities exist in policy and practice norms with five stages of relocation process identifiable. Each contains specific challenges and tensions for practitioners.

- **Tenants experience relocation as displacement even when their housing outcome might eventually improve. Displacement brings a range of negative impacts that reverberate through a tenant's life long before and after a physical move.**

- **Tenants experience relocation policy, process and practice norms very differently from practitioner perceptions of the support available.**

- **The media plays an important role and can contribute to a further stigmatisation of tenants, as well as greater flow of information to the public about estate renewals.**

Key findings

This project investigated the drivers, practices and experiences of tenant relocation in New South Wales (NSW), Victoria and Tasmania. It aimed to understand what drives the need for tenant relocation in public housing and how such drivers mediate practices and tenant experiences. The project examined this from the perspective of tenants, housing relocation officers, and journalists who report on public housing estate renewal. The study provides insight into the nature of relocations practice, and the experiences and outcomes of relocation to create more informed policy and practice. This project investigated two types of relocation:

1. Department Initiated Relocation (DIR) – where government housing departments relocate tenants as part of an estate-renewal agenda

2. Tenant Initiated Relocation (TIR) – where a tenant requests to transfer to another public housing dwelling.

The study was conducted within the context of important administrative differences between Australian states in relation to public housing governance and management, declining government spending per capita, a widening gap between housing need and supply, underinvestment in existing stock, and policy shifts that are changing the way public housing is conceived and operated.

The study found that there are two primary drivers of public housing relocation: inadequacy of stock as a result of sustained disinvestment, and residualisation of the tenant base. This is evidenced by declining or stagnating dwelling numbers, maintenance backlogs, rapidly growing waitlists and increased churn, tightening eligibility and allocations, and the winding back of tenure for life. Public housing is structurally under resourced, and this negatively impacts maintenance schedules for existing public dwellings and delays repairs. Both contribute to the growing inadequacy of stock portfolios. The inadequacy of the housing stock is a significant driver of tenant relocation. High maintenance costs, stock redundancy and poor quality housing are often cited as part of the rationale for the demolition of public housing and DIR of tenants. Tenants experiencing poor housing conditions are pushed to initiate relocation when their housing is unfit or unsafe. The residualisation of the tenant base creates tenant cohorts that are experiencing more intense forms of intersecting disadvantage and physical and mental health challenges. This can feed the stigmatisation of public housing, further entrenching estate renewal as a driver of DIR and placing tenants in unsafe housing conditions, catalysing TIR.

A central factor impacting tenant experiences of TIR is the lack of available options that meet tenant needs. Given the pervasive lack of public housing in the Australian context, proportional stock decline since the 1960s and the growing uninhabitability of an ageing and undermaintained asset portfolio, tenant choice in housing options is extremely constrained. The unavailability of public housing options for tenants wishing to relocate has given rise to increasingly more common conditions of immobility and heightened risk of harm due to a reduced capacity to remove oneself from violent circumstances.

Relocation is a complex and time consuming process. DIR often involves lengthy delays, significant cost and multiple layers of complexity. These are strongly linked to specific estate renewal projects with their own internal logics, unique redevelopment requirements, geographically specific tenant profiles and histories, and diverse skills, knowledges and experiences of housing and relocation officers. TIR is a challenging process from the tenants' perspective, who often feel unheard and unable to access adequate alternatives to resolve housing problems.

Renewal projects and relocation practices have often been managed by different government departments, and yet they are inherently intertwined. While relocations teams work hard to coordinate with renewal development teams, there is often a disconnect in practice. Renewal timelines tend to drive relocation timelines and therefore practice, yet tenant relocation processes that mitigate harm take time.

Relocation teams need a degree of autonomy and flexibility to allow them to address the diverse needs of tenants. Having dedicated relocation teams separate from tenancy management teams that are responsible for day-to-day tenancy matters, such as rent arrears, is productive. Relocation officers draw on, and advocate for, discretionary budgets and other human resources and services to effectively do their job. These are seen as essential to the practice of relocation to address minor modifications or additional health or support services for tenants through the relocation process. The flexibility of relocation teams often operates as an informal process, where relocation officers engage with tenants on an ongoing basis and work beyond the constraints of formal policy and procedures. Informality and flexibility results in a more efficient process, and one that can create better outcomes for tenants.

While relocation teams have established strategies for contacting tenants, this process can be compromised when announcements are made by ministers, government departments or development partners before residents have been informed. This causes considerable anxiety for tenants and reduces trust in the process, making the work of relocation officers more difficult.

Tenants who were being relocated due to department initiated renewal programs constituted most of the tenant participants in this study, with a relatively smaller number of participants who had initiated their own relocation. In both DIR and TIR, relocation is experienced as a significant and sustained stress in tenant's lives. Even when the housing outcome is improved, the relocation can be a negative experience. Tenants experience relocation as an intense emotional stressor that affects their wellbeing prior to, during, and after the event of moving. Tenants experience relocation as displacement.

Department initiated renewal tenants know that there is little available and feel constrained and pressured. The experience of learning about relocation is a particularly stressful moment and can set the tone for all other interactions with department staff. This stress can be enhanced when there is an intense deadline or time pressure. Tenants' trust in the department is significantly corroded, and this has implications for communications, processes and practices.

The lack of emergent public housing supply results in a reliance on head leasing in private rentals in estate renewal DIR. For tenants, head leasing signals further disruption and less security, further compounding the negative effects of displacement.

The mainstream media plays an important role in shaping public understandings about public housing, and the media can be enlisted in attempts to shape public ideas about whether moving tenants out of their homes and estates is warranted. The way tenants and estate are portrayed in the media can have significant impacts on social housing tenants and how tenant relocations are managed.

This media analysis found tenants often learn about, or learn more about, their possible relocation through the media. This means it is important for the data that is included in media articles about public housing redevelopments and relocations to be accurate, complete and impartial. Journalists have found it difficult to get the data they need from departments to accurately, completely and impartially report on relocations.

Policy development options

Current policy settings in Australia normalise the role of public housing as an 'ambulance service'; public housing is seen as a burden on the public purse and as a deficit form of housing provision. This discourages appropriate investment in the upkeep and repair of existing public housing, and expansion of the stock. This means public housing fails to meet community expectations of adequacy and is simply insufficient in quantity to meet rising need in the community. Tightening eligibility criteria and growing waitlists due to chronic shortages has residualised the tenant base such that public housing now only serves those in most extreme need.

The policy responses to address the inadequacy of housing stock and the residualisation of the public housing tenancy base would be simple enough to address if there was political will to do so. A three part strategy involving the construction of new public housing stock, the maintenance and repair of existing stock, and the expansion of the allocations criteria for public housing would address the key structural factors driving public housing relocations. Furthermore, the policy language describing public housing and tenants is often organised around a deficit model. For example, housing assets and tenants are respectively described as 'assets beyond repair' and 'tenants as dysfunctional'. A more productive approach would be to develop policy responses that are framed around the repairability and prosocial benefits of public housing assets and tenants.

Estate renewal further exacerbates stock shortage and poor experiences of relocation by reducing the amount of stock available in the system and flooding the sector with tenants who need new homes. A system-wide monitoring and understanding of the impact of renewal on relocation process is needed. Addressing stock inadequacy through programs of sustained and significant maintenance investment, and repair and refurbishment would substantially address relocation pressures and the negative impacts of displacement. Renewal needs to be staged to maximise the availability of relocation options, and avoid head leasing.

Estate renewal and tenant relocation processes should be better connected. Estate renewal cannot commence until tenants are relocated and the actions of relocation teams are mediated by renewal timelines. Earlier, formal and clearer management and communication arrangements between renewal and relocation teams is needed. The time required to relocate tenants should inform the staging of the renewal process, not the other way around.

Dedicated relocation teams should be maintained in states where they already exist, while other jurisdictions could look to establish similar teams. Relocation teams need significant financial (including discretionary budgets), human and other resources to effectively do their job. These financial resources are needed to fund unforeseen costs such as minor modifications or additional health support services that are often required through the relocation process. In the context of increasingly constrained departmental budgets, such costs could be incorporated within the estate renewal budget, where part of the redevelopment budget is allocated to the relocations team.

A procedure around announcing tenant relocation and estate redevelopment should be established. The practice of announcing through media release from Ministerial offices should be avoided as it causes significant distress for tenants. Politicising media announcements makes it harder for journalists to report on the facts about specific redevelopments and relocations.

Appropriately trained and qualified Relocations Officers and Tenancy Officers are required for these specialist jobs. These roles should be classified appropriately and require specific skills and qualifications such as social work, community development and mental health. Substantial investment is needed to ensure staff in these roles continue to develop necessary skills and have the necessary support for managing complex situations. Departments might consider establishing TIR teams. Relationships with tenants need to be improved at all levels so that tenants can have agency and control over their own relocation.

The critical points at which to communicate information include, but are not limited to, the public announcement of a redevelopment and/or relocation process, the beginning of a community consultations process, or the start of a relocation process. In terms of data, the data journalists need often includes the number of tenants that will be moved, how, when and where social tenants will be moved, how many social housing dwellings will be sold off, and where (in precise geographical terms) the capital from any sales will be reinvested to build more social housing dwellings, and when this new social housing stock will be built. The data that is included in media articles shapes social housing tenants' and the general public's understanding of relocations and redevelopments. It is important state housing authorities provide journalists with relocation and redevelopment data in a timely manner and in a way that does not further stigmatise tenants or estates.

The study

This research addressed a set of inter-related questions about the drivers, practices and experiences of public housing relocation:

1. What drives the need for public housing tenant relocation in Australia?

2. What typologies of relocation practice are currently deployed by state housing authorities?

3. How do drivers and practices shape the lived experience of relocation and public perception?

4. What opportunities exist for policy change and innovation?

The research focused on the state jurisdictions of Victoria, NSW and Tasmania. The project proceeded in three stages.

Stage 1 analysed existing literature; policy and regulation; and media reporting of relocation due to estate renewal. The aim was to establish the context of public housing relocation internationally and in Australia, and examine to what extent expressed policy content governs the practice of relocating residents. The purpose of the media review was to understand how public housing relocation is reported to the public and what patterns can be discerned.

Stage 2 comprised a series of investigative panel discussions (focus groups) first with tenants and then with relocations practitioners in each of NSW, Victoria and Tasmania. An investigative panel discussion was also conducted with journalists reporting on estate renewal and relocation in national and local media outlets. The purpose of these discussions was to understand different experiences, practices and outcomes in their everyday lived experience.

Stage 3 included analysis of the data collected and a final investigative panel discussion (focus group) bringing relocations practitioners from Victoria, NSW and Tasmania together. This helped verify the practice and policy elements of the findings. Two additional investigative panels were held with experts who conduct research on public housing relocations in Australia, the United Kingdom (UK), Europe and the United States of America (USA).

The research activities were conducted from July 2022 to May 2023 and involved policy analysis, focus group discussions, and an analysis of print media articles.

1. Introduction

- **There is a growing need to understand tenant relocation in the context of increasing pressure on public housing and growing levels of need.**

- **This study investigated department Initiated Relocation (DIR) due to estate renewal, and Tenant Initiated Relocation (TIR).**

- **Estate renewals and stock transfer are changing the landscape of allocations and relocations.**

- **Tenants initiate relocation in a context of severe constraint and lack of options for alternative accommodation.**

1.1 Why this research was conducted

There is a growing need to better understand tenant relocation practices, including tenants' lived experiences. Relocations are accelerating due to increasing pressures on the public housing system, and there is greater scrutiny of relocations occurring due to estate renewal, with significant media and public interest in large-scale estate redevelopment projects (Kelly 2018; Mee 2004). This is occurring in the context of a shift in the role of public housing in Australia; large estate redevelopment programs combined with the transfer of stock and / or tenancy management to community housing providers are reconfiguring the way public housing is conceived, provided and managed. While once an alternative to private rental or ownership, in the modern context public housing is a scarce and rationed resource allocated only to those most in need (Berry 1988; Hayward 1996; Jacobs, Atkinson et al. 2010). Public housing supply has stagnated, as revealed in Productivity Commission (2022) Reports on Governments Services, and there is increased pressure on waiting lists, which are growing (AIHW 2022). This is effecting a 'residualisation' of public housing (AHURI 2019).

Concurrently, there has been a shift in focus towards rebuilding public housing estates, as a means of modernising and increasing stock. High profile cases, such as the Kensington and Carlton Estates in Melbourne, have seen 1960s-built estates redeveloped in partnership with the private sector (Levin, Arthurson et al. 2018). Likewise, the Ashwood-Chadstone Gateway Project saw public housing redeveloped with a Community Housing Organisation (CHO) (Davies and Engels 2021). The Victorian Government's housing department, Homes Victoria,[1] is currently overseeing redevelopment of multiple sites across Melbourne as part of the Big Housing Build with private and CHO partners (Porter and Kelly 2020). In NSW, the Department of Family and Community Services[2] (FACS) (and its predecessors) has initiated redevelopment in areas such as Ivanhoe, Minto, Bonnyrigg, Airds and Claymore, with estates rebuilt to higher densities, often in partnership with CHOs (Melo Zurita and Ruming 2019; Wynne and Rogers 2020). The NSW Government has also undertaken a large-scale sale of public housing in Millers Point (Levin et al. 2018; Melo Zurita and Ruming 2019; Morris 2017b; Morris 2019a) and there are plans to redevelop Waterloo (Wynne and Rogers 2020). In Tasmania, the housing department, Homes Tasmania,[3] has been renovating or redeveloping smaller complexes, including Windsor Court in North Hobart (Evans 2003), Stainforth Court in Hobart (Petrusma 2015) and Windsor Street in Glenorchy (Gutwein 2020). Recent redevelopments in Tasmania have occurred in partnership with CHOs (Petrusma 2015).

A combination of stagnating public housing levels, growing waiting lists, and increased reliance on estate redevelopment combine to create a policy challenge centred on tenant relocation. Waiting lists are increasing as growth in demand for public housing outpaces growth of stock (AIHW 2022; Productivity Commission 2022). This places greater pressure on existing stock levels, increasing waiting times (AIHW 2022; Productivity Commission 2022). Limited stock availability affects capacity for existing tenants to initiate a transfer. Simultaneously, redevelopment of estates reduces the supply of public housing in the short-term as dwellings are demolished and, possibly, in the long-term, as developments projects fail to replace sufficient number of public housing dwellings. While estate renewal is often justified on the basis that it will result in a small percentage uplift of social housing dwellings overall, recent research has demonstrated that this has to be very substantial to have any positive impact on the availability of low-income housing (Nygaard, van den Nouwelant et al. 2022). Thus, estate renewal increases demand for existing stock. In this context, departments face challenges in enabling both TIR and DIR. In both cases, tenants often have little control and choice is heavily constrained.

There is a need therefore to understand what drives tenant relocation, how it works in practice, and how it is experienced.

1.1.1 Clarification of terms

A set of terms is used in this report to refer to specific actors, steps and dynamics in public housing relocation. These include:

- *Public housing* refers to housing that is owned and managed by a state housing department, often called a State Housing Authority.

- *Community housing* refers to housing that is owned or the tenancy managed by a Community Housing Organisation.

- *Social housing* is used to refer to the combined provision of non-market or subsidised low-income housing being both public and community housing.

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1   A statutory authority established in 2020 vested with the powers of the Director of Housing, previously the Office of Housing.
2   FACS was superseded by the Department of Communities and Justice in 2019.
3   A statutory authority established in 2022, assuming the roles of Housing Tasmania, along with a remit to drive development of further social and affordable supply.

- *Department* is used to refer to a statutory authority vested with the legal power to own and manage public housing for the purposes of low-income housing provision. Sometimes known as a State Housing Authority, this report uses 'department' in order to enable comparison. Each state jurisdiction in this study has a slightly different structure and machinery for the management of the housing portfolio. For the purposes of this study, it is the type of action that an authority is undertaking that is important for comparison and 'department' offers a sensible descriptor for that purpose. Department also serves as useful shorthand for DIR.

- *Relocation Officer* is used to refer to the staff within a department tasked with relocating residents as part of an estate renewal program. These are specifically-established teams for the purpose of DIR and can be differentiated from Tenancy Officers (below).

- *Tenancy Officer* refers to the staff within a department tasked with managing tenancies across the public housing portfolio. Such officers are typically the managers of a TIR in addition to a range of other tenancy management matters.

- *Tenant* is used to refer to a person living in public housing in a tenant relationship with a housing department as landlord. The study acknowledges a preference to refer to people who live in public housing as 'residents' as this offers a more generous representation of a full life lived, rather than being reduced to a tenure status. However, this study has focused on the experiences of residents within the tenant-landlord relationship, where relocation experience and impact arises from the very fact of being a tenant. Further, the study acknowledges that many people live in, and are reliant on, public housing but for various reasons are not in a formal tenancy relationship with a housing department.

1.2 Understanding relocation

This project has investigated two modes of relocation. Department Initiated Relocation (DIR) occurs when the department who owns the dwelling and manages the tenancy requires a tenant to move. This study focuses on relocation required due to estate renewal. Tenant Initiated Relocation (TIR) occurs when the tenant requests a relocation within the public housing system. This is usually called a transfer. For the purposes of this research, we call this TIR to sustain analytical focus on the different drivers, experiences, practices and outcomes of relocations. Tenants initiate a request for relocation for many reasons, such as changes in household composition and push factors related to the household or neighbourhood. Even though the tenant has initiated relocation, that is often mediated by experiences and conditions that will not feel like choice to the tenant.

There are important administrative differences between states in relation to public housing governance and management that have a bearing on this study. Victoria and NSW are the only states in Australia that have a formal separation of asset management and development functions of public housing and tenancy management functions which are usually organised through local housing offices. In all other states, including Tasmania, both functions of asset management and tenancy management sit within the same departmental branch or team. The implication for this study is that in Victoria and NSW teams managing relocations due to estate renewal are institutionally separate from local housing offices who manage tenant initiated requests for transfer. In Tasmania, these two functions are undertaken by the same team. A key factor in this important difference is that large-scale estate renewal has been a very significant part of the public housing story in Victoria and NSW, whereas in Tasmania renewal is much smaller in scale. Policies of renewal thus significantly shape the administrative organisation and governance of public housing.

Relocation of public housing tenants cannot be understood separately from the context of severe resource constraint within which they are occurring (Muir, Powell et al. 2020). This is characterised by declining government spending per capita (Productivity Commission 2022), a widening gap between need and supply (Lawson, Pawson et al. 2018; Levin, Tually et al. 2023), serious underinvestment in existing stock resulting in a paradoxical patchwork of paucity of supply and vacancy; and a series of significant policy shifts that is changing the way public housing is conceived and operated (Jacobs et al. 2010). These constraints place state housing authorities under increased pressure and scrutiny in relation to tenancy and stock management. Consequently, allocation and stock matching becomes a central concern of state housing departments.

The practice and experience of relocation is also intimately entangled with the wider context of growing housing need and severe impacts on households in relation to affordability, safety and security. Public housing tenants are more likely to have experienced significant stigma due to a range of intersecting disadvantages (Jacobs, Arthurson et al. 2011) including periods of homelessness, mental health issues or family violence. As a direct result of lack of availability, public housing is only available to those with the most urgent and complex needs (Levin et al. 2023; Morris, Clarke et al. 2022). This provides vital context for understanding relocations as a process of displacement that reverberates through time and across the lives of tenants in geographically and temporally diverse ways. There is clear evidence that relocation has impacts of a lasting nature for people (Brackertz, Borrowman et al. 2020), including being more vulnerable to homelessness (Burt 2001; Curtis, Corman et al. 2013).

In practice, relocations within public housing are heavily mediated by allocations policy and eligibility criteria. Allocation is a form of rationing access to public housing, a direct result of the widening gap between need and supply (Levin et al. 2023). This rationing is however underpinned by market pressures that have their own geographies, such that in some cases a tenant might be allocated to the top of the list and provided a good housing outcome, whereas in other cases a tenant might be displaced from the urban area altogether. Allocation entails a distinct set of practices, assumptions and policy rationalisations that enable 'matching', or the process of attempting to fit the requirements of a household with key attributes of the available stock (Muir et al. 2020). The primary matching dimension is between household size and number of bedrooms (Levin et al. 2023). In today's context, where there is not enough stock to meet demand, the presumption that allocation processes help distribute based on need is now defunct. It is now widely accepted that many people who apply for public housing will simply never be housed.

1.3 Existing research

There is a broad body of research that investigates displacement generally, dating back to the mid-1960s. Within this literature, the studies of public housing focus almost exclusively on displacement due to estate renewal. Most studies demonstrate that relocation experienced as displacement has serious negative effects on individual health and wellbeing, housing outcomes and social cohesion (Atkinson 2004; Fried 1966; Hartman, Keating et al. 1982; Lees, Slater et al. 2010; LeGates and Hartman 1986; Marcuse 1986; Slater 2013a).

Very few previous studies have examined the processes of relocation in detail. This has been identified as a significant gap in existing evidence (Melo Zurita and Ruming 2019; Morris 2019b; Ruming and Melo Zurita 2020). Those studies that do examine the relocation process have focused almost exclusively on NSW and Victoria. Melo Zurita and Ruming (2019) investigated the choice based letting approach used as part of the regeneration of estates at Millers Point and Ivanhoe in Sydney. That study found that the success of choice based letting in a forced relocation context was questionable; only 39 per cent of properties offered were accepted, and 40 per cent of properties included in the process were returned to the general allocation list. Morris (2017b) also examined the removal process at Millers Point, describing high levels of stress reported by residents and a confusing and overwhelming process. Distressing experiences are widely reported despite the establishment of what Ruming and Melo Zurita (2020) refer to as 'institutional spaces of care' that aim to facilitate relocation.

In Victoria, a small number of studies have examined the forced relocation of residents to facilitate estate renewal at Carlton (Arthurson, Levin et al. 2016; Levin et al. 2018) and also at Kensington (Shaw, Raisbeck et al. 2013). While none of these studies focused on the relocation practice in detail, their findings suggest important lines of inquiry for understanding relocation experience. Levin et al. (2018) found that public consultation and engagement of tenants was minimal. As a result, tenants felt relatively powerless and without influence in the redevelopment and relocation process, a finding supported by the study conducted by Arthurson et al. (2016).

1.4 Research methods

This project investigated the drivers, practices and experiences of public housing relocations. Using a mixture of review, media analysis and investigative panels, the project aimed to answer the following research questions:

- What drives the need for public housing tenant relocation in Australia?
- What typologies of relocation practice are currently deployed by state housing authorities?
- How do drivers and practices shape the lived experience of relocation and public perception?
- What opportunities exist for policy change and innovation?

The research was carried out in two phases. In the first phase, the team reviewed existing academic evidence, policy documentation and media coverage related to relocation. From there, themes and topics were formulated that were put to a series of investigative panels for further elaboration.

Human research ethics approval was sought and received (HREC #2022-25318-17105) from RMIT University and ratified by the other relevant research institutions on 7 April 2022.

1.4.1 Phase one: Reviews

Academic literature

As indicated above, there is an existing body of Australian and international literature related to tenant relocation. This research sits within a broader body of literature on displacement. This study reviewed literature identified from the research team's own in-depth knowledge of the field, augmented by a literature search. This generated 38 relevant sources that specifically discussed public housing tenant relocation practices or impacts. The majority of sources had an Australian focus. The international articles covered the USA, Canada, the Netherlands, the UK and Sweden. Qualitative theme analysis was conducted across the literature to generate a typology of public housing relocation practice.

Policy and practice guidelines

The research reviewed recent and current policies and associated documentation for tenant relocation in NSW, Tasmania and Victoria, comparing and contrasting approaches and policies in each jurisdiction. However, written policies exist only in NSW and Victoria. In Tasmania, relocations teams follow practice norms developed over time, but nothing is documented. This review is presented in Chapter 3.

Media coverage

This review covered only written material in print media. Articles were identified through the Factiva database using the search words 'public housing', along with keywords such as 'relocation', 'eviction', 'displacement' and 'removal'. To ensure media coverage relevant to NSW, Tasmania and Victoria was captured, searches were also conducted on specific projects and programs known to have involved tenant relocation: Minto, Bonnyrigg, Millers Point, Waterloo, Ivanhoe, Carlton, North Melbourne, Brighton, South Yarra, Prahran, Port Melbourne, and Public Housing Renewal Program. To maintain a focus on current and recent relocation practices, the search was restricted to January 2000 onwards.

In total, the study identified 1,967 articles from January 2000 to August 2022. Through manual sifting, duplicates and non-relevant material was removed, producing a database of 443 articles. These were coded according to key topics emerging from the analysis: displacement, redevelopment, relocation, right of return and sale, as well as by year and location. The findings of this review are presented in Chapter 5.

1.4.2 Phase two: Panels

Four sets of investigative panels were held in each of NSW, Victoria and Tasmania, reflecting the range of perspectives required for this study:

- Practitioners working as Relocation Officers (RO) and Tenancy Officers (TO) working in state housing departments

- Public housing tenants currently being, or who had previously been, relocated
- Journalists who have reported on public housing relocations and/or estate redevelopments
- Australian and international research experts on public housing relocation.

A total of 10 investigative panels were held between November 2022 and February 2023 (see Table 1). Four panels with practitioners (ROs and TOs in state housing departments) were held, one with participants from each specific state (NSW, Victoria and Tasmania) and one joint panel bringing together practitioners from all three states. Recruitment of practitioners occurred through researcher networks, direct representation to the relevant housing departments, and through AHURI networks. Challenges were experienced in recruitment of practitioners due to the work pressures being experienced by teams within housing departments.

Three tenant panels were conducted, one with tenants in NSW and two with tenants in Victoria. There were challenges in recruiting tenants, particularly in Tasmania where a tenant panel was ultimately not possible despite multiple recruitment strategies and efforts over 12 months. The lack of an organised tenants' association in Tasmania was a further inhibiting factor in that state, and efforts to recruit via different organisations within the social housing sector were ultimately unsuccessful. An informal conversation with Tenants Union in Tasmania provided some insights that are drawn upon in the analysis.

Difficulties in recruiting participants has been long observed in displacement studies due to the sheer difficulty in locating people who have been displaced. In addition, public housing tenants often feel they are in a vulnerable position in relation to their landlord, a state housing department, which creates further barriers to participation. For this reason, tenant recruitment was conducted directly through researcher networks, tenant organisations and grassroots groups—not through housing departments. This strategy avoided some of the ethical considerations about the landlord-tenant relationship, but also limited the scope for recruitment. This challenge was compounded by the winding back of resourcing and democratic participation in tenant representative bodies. The initial intention in the study design was to conduct a final panel bringing tenants and practitioners together to share experiences and perspectives. However, while conducting the specific group panels, it became clear that to do so may compromise tenant anonymity and confidentiality.

The tenants who participated in this study were all English speaking, as the study was not resourced to provide recruitment information or panel discussions in other languages. Given that a significant proportion of public housing tenants in Australia are born overseas and speak languages other than English, the tenant profile of this study represents an important limitation. Tenant recruitment was skewed towards those who had experienced negative impacts of relocation. This is likely a function of self-selection for the study, where some tenants who have had a negative experience may be more willing to participate in order to share their story than someone who had a less visceral experience.

One panel was conducted with journalists who report on public housing and specifically renewal programs that result in tenant relocation. Recruitment occurred via the initial print media review which helped identify a database of names and sources for recruitment. This was combined with existing networks and relationships among the research team with journalists reporting on public housing. Recruiting journalists was also more difficult than anticipated due to their need to prioritise current stories in a tight news cycle.

Two panels were conducted with international and Australian research experts whose work focuses on public housing relocations, public housing policy and displacement studies. Experts were drawn from the UK, Europe and the USA. These were recruited from a combination of research team networks and standing in the field, augmented by key authors identified through the literature review.

Table 1: Composition of nested investigative panels

Perspective	Jurisdiction	Number of attendees
Practitioners	NSW	6
	Victoria	5
	Tasmania	4
	Joint panel	8
Tenants	NSW	3
	Victoria	8
Journalists	All	4
Research experts	N/A	10
Total		48

Source: Authors

Analysis

With participants' consent, all focus groups were digitally recorded and transcribed for data analysis. In each group, one researcher took responsibility for the collection of data. There were researchers in each of the three states, and this formed three teams. Data analysis for each state was led by the team from that state, coded against a framework developed by the team. Research based across all states was analysed by all researchers collaboratively. These analytical approaches allowed the local knowledge of each researcher to be incorporated into the analysis.

Project findings are presented according to the themes organically emerging from the fieldwork and informed also by the results of the reviews. This means that generally the results are presented in an aggregated way, reflecting jurisdictional differences where relevant.

Confidentiality and anonymity

All participants in this research were assured of both the confidential treatment and anonymity of the information and perspectives provided. This approach was adopted for both ethical reasons and based on our extensive past experiences in talking with people, especially tenants, about their perspectives on the housing and system they occupy (see, for example, Flanagan, Levin et al. 2020). Accordingly, all direct quotes from participants are attributed only to the broad category of participant (public housing tenant, relocation officer, journalist) and any other identifying information, including contextual information, has been removed where it potentially identifies someone or their role. As per best practice in qualitative research, we have also edited direct quotes from participants to maximise their readability and flow, taking extreme care to preserve meaning and intention.

2. Drivers of public housing tenant relocation in Australia

- There are two key factors driving relocation: inadequacy of stock and the residualisation of the tenant base.

- Across all three states there has been a marked increase in the inadequacy of public housing stock in the last decade.

- There is evidence of declining numbers of dwellings, a growing repair backlog, stock transfer to CHOs, and a number of estates marked for renewal due to lack of maintenance.

- Residualisation of the tenant base in public housing is perpetuating a policy rationale for forced relocation, through intersecting factors of infrastructural decline and intensifying socio-economic inequality.

- There is evidence of a shift towards public housing as an 'ambulance service', the tightening of eligibility criteria and the use of allocations policy to manage the increasing gap between availability and need.

- Policy settings and discourses that entrench a view of public housing as being at the bottom of the housing ladder contribute to the stigmatisation of public housing communities.

2.1 Introduction

The need for tenants of public housing to move around the system is the result of an intersecting suite of macro-scale policy settings that focus on the extraction of equity from urban land combined with normative assumptions about the role public housing plays in the housing system. In Australia, like other wealthy nations with a normalised presumption towards private homeownership, the housing system is conceived as a ladder. This conception exists both in accepted social norms and policy settings that create and sustain housing systems. Private ownership sits at the top of this ladder, representing a prescriptive peak of housing achievement, closely tied to the capacity for wealth extraction. Public housing sits very near the bottom, often thought about as a safety net or welfare service. For example, in its recent discussion paper informing the development of a 10-year social and affordable housing strategy, Homes Victoria articulated this as a 'housing continuum' with social housing (incorporating public housing) represented as two steps removed from homelessness (see Figure 1). This continuum model of the housing system, with public housing unfavourably situated as only a marginal improvement on homelessness, is the normative representation used across Australian housing policy (Flanagan et al. 2020).

Figure 1: The housing continuum

Figure 1: The Housing Continuum

| Homeless | Crisis accommodation | Social housing | Affordable rental housing | Private rental | Shared equity | Home ownership |

Source: Homes Victoria (2021)

This helps create a broad social impression of public housing estates and their residents as declining or deficient—a common negative stereotype perpetuated through media, policy logics and social norms. These stereotypes are used to justify urban renewal, where the need to continually extract equity from urban land underwrites policy. Urban land is a central component driving urban growth, continuously shifting the fortunes of urban and regional economies and their spatial expressions in local neighbourhoods. Changing urban land values creates geographically-specific expressions of potential equity in land, shaping the geography of attention to new opportunities for redevelopment where urban land is seen to be underutilised or in decline.

This chapter examines the how these broad dynamics create two central features of contemporary public housing: inadequacy of stock, and the residualisation of the tenant base. Together, these drive public housing relocation and fundamentally shape how relocation policy is practiced (Chapter 3) and then how relocation is experienced by tenants through a variety of impacts (Chapter 4).

2.2 Existing research on this theme

In the past 20 years, argue Pawson and Pinnegar (2018), public housing policy has operated on a 'consensus approach' that problematises the physical and social condition of estates and seeks to unlock equity in publicly held land. Urban land dynamics are thus foundationally important for public housing and its changing provision and scope. The presence and changing size of urban rent gaps drives shifting land values and thus patterns of redevelopment and urban change (Slater 2018; Smith 2008), triggering processes of gentrification and displacement. Public housing plays a particular role in these larger urban change processes due to the public nature of the land ownership and the interlocking discursive processes of urban boosterism and poverty stigmatisation.

The international evidence demonstrates a close interlocking relationship between poverty stigmatisation and urban land dynamics, resulting in the systematic dismantling of public housing globally (see Goetz 2013c; Li 2018; Rolnik 2013; Rolnik 2019; Slater 2013a). The mechanisms by which this dismantling is occurring are varied, most importantly including regeneration and renewal programs; privatisation and financialisation often through stock transfer; and the individualisation of responsibility for poverty and disadvantage.

Regeneration and renewal programs are a key mechanism through which this dismantling occurs. International examples include HOPE VI in the USA (Fennell 2015; Goetz 2013a; Popkin, Levy et al. 2004); the Big Cities Policy in the Netherlands (Bolt and van Kempen 2010); and the New Deal for Communities Programme in the UK (Colomb 2007; Lees 2003). The HOPE VI program was an express response to poverty concentration, seen as a ghettoisation, on inner urban public housing estates in US cities. HOPE VI had the express goal of deconcentrating poverty and promoting home ownership, by displacing poor communities and replacing them with middle-income residents through demolition of the estates and redevelopment. This demonstrates that policy logics are sometimes geared towards displacement as a goal in itself, with renewal as the mechanism for achieving that goal.

In Australia the processes are similar though with local inflections. Large-scale public housing renewal programs have been undertaken in the past two decades, particularly in NSW and Victoria, and are now increasingly in other states. The systematic stigmatisation of public housing is a central feature of renewal. Partly, this is achieved by normalising the idea of the housing 'ladder' in commonplace understandings of housing careers. Housing policy settings help create and sustain this notion, leading to policy has been central in developing 'a system of binary opposites which positions ownership as the natural and correct tenure, and public housing as abnormal and, hence, inferior' (Ruming, Mee et al. 2004: 235). Sisson's study (2021) of the justification of redevelopment at Millers Point in Sydney found that a central component was representations of tenants as poor and undeserving.

The use of language and numerical proclamations about public housing estates as decaying and unfit for purpose, and their residents as undeserving and languishing in social dysfunction have been well established in international research as critical features of the new orthodoxy underpinning public housing policy (Atkinson and Kintrea 2001; Doney, McGuirk et al. 2013; Fennell 2015; Ferreri 2020; Goetz 2013b; Morris 2017b; Ruming et al. 2004; Slater 2018; Tach and Emory 2017; Wacquant, Slater et al. 2014; Watt 2017). State policy can also entrench stigma, fuelling a wider public narrative. Studies conducted in the UK (Slater 2018), France and the US (Wacquant 2008; Wacquant et al. 2014) on the use of stigmatising or deficit language demonstrate how policy language is used to create public justifications for displacement. Sustained stigmatisation through policy language has been particularly pronounced against public housing residents in cities all around the world over the past three decades (see Goetz 2013b; Slater 2013a).

One of the central 'consensus principles' (Pawson and Pinnegar 2018) that scaffolds the justification of renewal is poverty deconcentration. This principle is heavily influenced by the 'neighbourhood effects thesis' (Galster 2011) that argues that continued proximity to poverty further entrenches poverty and social dysfunction. Despite being repeatedly challenged in international literature (Slater 2013b) for ignoring the structural conditions that perpetuate poverty and the extent to which it is used to justify wide-spread community displacement (Manley, van Ham et al. 2012; Smets and Watt 2017; Tyler and Slater 2018), this idea remains highly influential in Australian housing policy. For example, the 2009 National Affordable Housing Agreement stated an aspiration to create 'mixed communities that promote social and economic opportunities by reducing concentrations of disadvantage that exist in some social housing estates' (COAG 2009).

A further mechanism used to deconcentrate poverty and divest responsibility for low-income housing is to transfer stock to non-profit Community Housing Organisations (Wiesel, Pawson et al. 2014). This echoes moves in other countries (Kearns and Mason 2013) where a systematic disinvestment and privatisation of public housing infrastructure is underway (Ferreri 2020; Goetz 2013b; Rolnik 2013; Rolnik 2019). Renewal programs such as the Big Housing Build in Victoria, and the estate renewals such as Bonnyrigg in NSW have seen governments partner with property developers and Community Housing Organisations (CHO) through complex profit-sharing arrangements and accountability structures often with little public transparency. The inclusion of private developers in estate renewal has seen large profits flow from public to private hands with land often being sold at a fraction of its market value and ambiguity around maintenance responsibility after the build (Morris 2019a; Shaw et al. 2013). The transfer of public housing to community housing providers continues to be the preferred method of tenancy and place management in the Australian context. This is likely to expand as the capacity of providers grows through government-driven incentives, subsidies and low-interest loans that are not available to the public housing sector (Pawson, Milligan et al. 2013).

Renewal programs are widely justified on the basis that redevelopment will provide a small percentage uplift in the number of social housing dwellings available overall. Amounts of projected uplift are often negligible particularly when placed in the context of the expressed need on growing waiting lists. In Victoria, where the waitlist now exceeds 100,000 people, the Big Housing Build initially promised to deliver 9,300 new social homes[4], a number that did not count the number of public housing properties that would be demolished through that process. However, as recent research has shown (Nygaard, Pinnegar et al. 2021), to increase housing supply as a 'filtering' mechanism has negligible and sometimes worsening effects on the availability of housing for people on low incomes.

Another key mechanism by which renewal, public private partnerships and stock transfer are justified is through the sustained and often strategic disinvestment in public housing infrastructure. Disinvestment enables severe deterioration of the physical buildings and infrastructure, thus creating deep inadequacy in physical housing stock. Sustained disinvestment as a strategy underlying the renewal agenda has been noticed in many estate renewal programs globally. For example, the abandonment of London's Heygate estate and its subsequent physical deterioration was understood as 'dirty tactics' in the effort to displace the residents and clear the estate for redevelopment (Ferreri 2020).

Redevelopment is therefore a primary driving policy objective of tenant relocation (Ruming and Melo Zurita 2020). Known as displacement, or forced relocation, this has been the main focus of academic studies on relocation in public housing internationally and in Australia. Indeed, the deep and concerning interconnection between public housing renewal and relocations leads Pawson and Pinnegar (2018: 317) to question 'whether contemporary Australian estate renewal practice is actively aimed at fostering the off-site displacement of disadvantaged people'.

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4   https://www.premier.vic.gov.au/victorias-big-housing-build

Displacement is defined in the literature as the relocation of residents under conditions not of their choosing, or more generally the denial of opportunity to people to make their own life geographies (Blomley and Delaney 2004). Displacement encapsulates 'what happens when forces outside the household make living there impossible, or hazardous, or unaffordable' (Hartman et al. 1982: 3). Displacement is neither an accident nor natural, but the product of interaction of an array of market forces, local urban development situations, policies and institutions that coalesce to create those forces outside a household's control. A core feature of displacement is the understanding that those being pushed out invariably do not benefit from the neighbourhood uplift underway and are displaced precisely in order to benefit more advantaged social classes.

All displacement is by definition forced, as it occurs through conditions outside a household's capacity or control. Marcuse's seminal work (1985) identified two broad typologies of direct and indirect displacement. The most obvious example of direct displacement in relation to public housing is when estate renewal requires the removal of existing residents to make way for redevelopment. This might be through the coercive displacement mechanisms of relocations practice, or by the application of state force through eviction (see, for example, Gray and Porter 2015). Indirect or exclusionary displacement occurs when a household has to relocate into a different social housing unit because of an unsafe or unfit housing situation or having to move because of rising rents, loss of neighbourhood or local services, or other changing conditions (Marcuse 1985).

The existing research evidence thus supports a conception of the key drivers of public housing relocation as sustained disinvestment creating inadequacy of stock; and a combination of individualisation of poverty and stigmatisation creating a residualisation of the tenant base.

2.3 Inadequacy of stock

In the context of public housing maintenance and repair, research has observed a global trend (in post-welfare contexts) of systematic and managed infrastructural decline (Porter and Kelly 2022). In the Australian context, the NSW Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal reported in 2017 that there is an under resourcing of maintenance schedules for existing public dwellings and deferred repairs that are contributing to the growing inadequacy of the stock.[5] Similarly, in 2017 the Victorian Auditor General's Office audit of public housing reported an under maintenance of current stock and a fast growing repair backlog.[6] Across all three states there has been a profound increase in the inadequacy of public stock in the last decade (see Table 2), with the biggest increase in Victoria (+10.1%), followed by NSW (+7.2%) and Tasmania (+0.9%).

Table 2: Dwelling condition of public housing, households with at least four working facilities* and not more than two major structural problems

	NSW	Victoria	Tasmania
2021	69.0%	73.6%	79.7%
2018	75.9%	82.0%	85.5%
2016	73.9%	82.4%	82.5%
2014	76.2%	83.7%	80.6%

Source: Productivity Commission (2023), Part G Section 18

*Defined as facilities for washing people, washing clothes/bedding, storing/preparing food, and removing sewerage

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[5] https://www.ipart.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/media-release-feedback-sought-to-reform-social-housing-funding-in-nsw.pdf

[6] https://www.audit.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/20170621-Public-Housing.pdf

This is in part driven by the ageing profile of the public housing stock portfolio nationally and across all states, as well as increased efforts to account for the condition of stock. This increasing inadequacy is also driven in part by a broad divestment trend by state governments away from public housing that includes stock transfer and sale to the private sector. This is evidenced by a decline in the total number of public housing dwellings across all jurisdictions examined, and in the growing rate of vacancy in Victoria and NSW (see Table 3). Inadequacy and vacancy are often linked: dwellings remain vacant due to inadequacy of condition.

Table 3: Number of dwellings, number of household and estimated vacancy rates

	NSW			Vic			Tas		
	Dwellings	Households	Vacancy	Dwellings	Households	Vacancy	Dwellings	Households	Vacancy
2022	96,712	92,613	4%	63,987	60,639	5%	4,999	4,897	4%
2021	96,728	93,131	4%	63,921	61,001	5%	7,031	6,904	4%
2020	96,939	93,107	4%	64,072	61,577	4%	7,050	6,961	4%
2019	100,623	96,695	4%	64,428	62,096	4%	7,037	6,931	4%
2018	111,341	106,895	4%	64,295	62,247	3%	7,005	6,856	4%
2017	110,221	108,125	2%	64,170	62,682	2%	7,065	6,880	4%
2016	110,174	108,637	1%	64,241	62,995	2%	7,166	7,038	4%
2015	110,214	108,732	1%	64,404	63,125	2%	7,234	7,109	4%
2014	110,805	109,370	1%	64,471	63,048	2%	8,413	8,250	4%
2013	111,216	110,074	1%	64,616	62,852	3%	11,139	10,819	4%

Source: Productivity Commission (2023), Part G Section 18

Data related to the maintenance of properties is contained within housing authority annual reports, and there remains no single source of aggregated reporting. Net recurrent expenditure (see Table 4) reported to the Productivity Commission shows a steady rate of low expenditure per dwelling, with exceptions in years where major redevelopment projects were initiated and expenditure per dwelling increased. It is apparent that increased funding is made available in redevelopment circumstances where housing authorities divest from public housing and reduce the overall stock portfolio.

Table 4: Government recurrent expenditure per public housing dwelling, 2021–22 dollars

	NSW	Vic	Tas
2021-22	$9,848	$10,179	$8,749
2020-21	$10,282	$9,701	$8,512
2019-20	$10,121	$8,015	$9,041
2018-19	$9,979	$7,801	$9,090
2017-18	$10,516	$6,909	$9,308
2016-17	$10,520	$7,053	$9,653
2015-16	$9,322	$7,119	$9,234
2014-15	$9,077	$7,610	$9,352
2013-14	$9,038	$6,338	$9,699
2012-13	$8,930	$6,968	$8,842

Source: Productivity Commission (2023), Part G Section 18 (Table 18A.48)

Experiences of stock inadequacy is a significant driver of tenant relocation. In redevelopment situations, high maintenance costs and stock redundancy (end of asset life) are often cited as part of the rationale for estate demolition and relocation of tenants (AHURI 2017). Tenants also initiate transfer requests under circumstances of inadequacy. One tenant describes four flooding events that forced his family to be temporarily housed in crisis motel accommodation:

> At 1:30 in the morning, I was just about to go to bed, we had water come down in the bathroom, in the hallway area, then we called the security to come out to look at the problem. The whole house was flooded and we were put into a motel for a month. [Over the year] we were flooded out four times (Victoria tenant panel online).

Other tenants with existing health issues describe being offered multiple public housing properties that did not meet their family's needs, and then settling for an inadequate dwelling until a healthier unit could be sourced years later:

> I had moved into public housing with my son with a swag of doctor's letters about our allergy problems. They offered me one place after another that was unsuitable. I moved into the last one, having been told that it would be easier to shift once I moved them. My son had had mild asthma two weeks after we moved in. I was calling an ambulance for him. We had severe health problems as a result of living in this particular unit. I was there for four and a half years battling the system to get out. It was actually very traumatic living in this place just because we were both of us so sick. They wouldn't even remove the carpets. I found out just about the time I left, another tenant said "that's why the last people let moved out". (Victoria tenant panel in person)

Among all tenant panel interviews there were strong narratives about the size of dwellings, with multiple reports that tenants were relocated to units that were too small and felt overcrowded. Tenants also reported considerable confusion about what is and isn't allowed or available through the process of relocation, resulting in a new dwelling being less hospitable and potentially harmful to their health:

> I moved into a brand new property, I was the first person in this unit, and I had an air conditioner to be relocated from the other place, and they said, we can't put it in for six months, because that's the law, you've got to wait six months to do anything to the property. I found out, a couple of months later, at another community meeting in another area, where a department of Housing staff turned around and said to me, that's not right, we can do it now. (NSW tenant panel)

When housing no longer meets the needs of tenants or if they have specific requirements due to disability, medical conditions, or accessibility issues, this can be a significant reason given for TIR. While some housing can be retrofitted to accommodate the changing needs of tenants, in many cases this is not possible and relocation to more suitable housing is required, such as units with wheelchair access or modifications for independent living. Tenants may also seek to relocate to neighbourhoods more proximate to work, education, family or community support networks, or areas that better meet their preferences. However, the extent to which this is possible is highly constrained by stock availability and the actual process tenants experience in transfer (see Chapter 4). Previous studies have also observed that housing inadequacy becomes a factor in DIR where tenants agree to an offer made simply to get out of an existing poor housing environment (Morris 2017b).

2.4 Residualisation of tenant base

Residualisation refers to a process where 'historic underinvestment and a chronic shortage of social housing has meant that Australia's limited social housing stock is now targeted at those in greatest need' (AHURI 2019). Over recent decades, a lack of supply, low exit rates and marked expansion of waitlists has meant that fewer applicants are actually allocated public housing. Consequently, those who are allocated public housing are more likely to have acute vulnerabilities and experience intense and intersecting forms of disadvantage alongside a growing stigmatisation of both the form of housing itself and tenants (Fitzpatrick and Pawson 2014).

To understand how residualisation occurs, it is important to consider different conceptualisations and typologies of public housing. As outlined by Stephens (2008), social housing provision can be seen in three typologies. Playing an 'affordability role' in many European countries such as the Netherlands, the proportion of social housing in the overall rental housing system is very high (currently 75% in the Netherlands[7]). Thus, social housing is a normalised part of the housing system, accessible to a wider number of people by virtue of its size and accessibility to those on low and modest incomes. Playing a 'safety net' role in countries like the UK, public housing is prioritised for access by those otherwise unable to secure appropriate housing in the private market, coordinated by a strong needs-based priority allocation system. In such a system, tenure was for life, there being no provision to re-test eligibility at any point after a household enters the public housing system. In an 'ambulance service role', the eligibility criteria to enter and stay in public housing is very tight. Public housing is provided only to those who meet the needs-based income criteria and who have additional vulnerability or needs. A key difference is that ambulance service style provision has a temporal limit – tenure is not for life, but only for the period of greatest need.

Public housing in Australia emerged in the post-war period as a direct response to significant problems experienced by low-income households in the private rental market (Atkinson and Jacobs 2008). It has always been a small proportion of overall housing with needs-based criteria for entry, although the nature of these criteria has varied over time. At its peak in the 1960s—when it most obviously played a role as 'safety net' housing— public housing constituted approximately nine per cent of the total national housing stock (Hayward 1996). Public housing was traditionally regarded as, and in practice operated as, permanent housing, meaning tenants had lifelong tenure provided they complied with the terms of their lease. However, state housing authorities are increasingly responding to supply pressures by introducing policies that encourage and, in some cases, enforce moving out once tenants are deemed to no longer be in 'need' (Flanagan et al. 2020). NSW introduced fixed term tenancies in public housing in 2006 (Fitzpatrick and Pawson 2014), with a system of reviewing expiring tenancies to determine whether a household was still eligible under income threshold tests. In Victoria, application for transfer requires an assessment of eligibility. Although residualisation means few tenants are in a position to successfully transition into the private housing market, where this does occur, it further entrenches the effects of residualisation for tenants who remain.

Declining investment in public housing combined with a series of policy design shifts since the 1970s have led Fitzpatrick and Pawson (2014) to argue that public housing in Australia is now more appropriately characterised as an 'ambulance service'. Multiple sources of evidence point to the appropriateness of this characterisation. One is increasing waitlists for public and social housing: where in NSW current applications (57,550 in 2022) are near its historical peak in 2016 (59,907); in Victoria where social housing applications are at an all-time high (67,985 in 2023); and in Tasmania, where applications remain high (4,564 in 2023) but steady. Increasing and high waitlists inevitably lead to a tightening in the practice of allocation. This is due to the simple fact that the number of people needing public housing far outstrips the number of actual dwellings available. Consequently, those managing allocations are aware that only those experiencing extreme and intersecting disadvantage with higher support needs will have any chance of securing housing (Levin et al. 2023).

While eligibility criteria for social housing have remained relatively constant over time and across all three states, a lack of housing options mean that allocations to households in greatest need have targeted especially complex applicants. Concurrently, households that are allocated public housing are becoming objectively poorer as social welfare payments have decreased (relatively) in recent decades and public tenants are ineligible to Commonwealth Rental Assistance (unlike Community Housing).

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7 https://www.government.nl/topics/housing/rented-housing

Approximately 83 per cent of public housing households nationally earn below the national average income of $1,750 per week. A high proportion, 74 per cent nationally, of households living in public housing have government benefits as their main income source and 85 per cent of public housing households receive some form of government benefit including 25 per cent receiving disability support pension (ABS 2021). The churn of applicants on state waitlists is further evidence of a residualised tenancy base and system. Research conducted at University of New South Wales (UNSW) City Futures Research Centre (Pawson and Lilley 2022) shows that in 2021, 13 per cent of applicants in NSW and 9 per cent of applicants in Tasmania exited the housing register without being housed (data not available for Victoria).

The residualisation of the tenancy base of public housing creates conditions that drive TIR. The residualisation of public housing means that tenant cohorts are generally more socio-economically disadvantaged, criminalised at higher rates and experience more mental and physical health challenges than public housing tenants of previous eras. While not unique to public housing, experiencing unsafe housing contexts such as violence from a neighbour, family violence or harassment are all common reasons given by tenants requesting relocation. In tenant focus groups one tenant described experiences of violence that resulted in a transfer request:

> What prompted me to apply for relocation was the experiences I was having and the impact that various other residents were having on my life. It was quite violent. It was very traumatic, and I had to move away, and sleep on people's couches for about four weeks at one period, because one resident was so violent, victimising me, picking on me, and it was a very difficult situation for me. (Victoria tenant panel in person)

Transferring to a different location or housing complex may provide a safer environment for tenants and their families. Another tenant who experienced violence at her home shared a similar experience with a male neighbour:

> I was terrified of him, everybody else was terrified of him, and he started picking on me for some reason. It wasn't until after I agreed to put in a report about his behaviour that he started paying attention to me, and his violence started, verbal violence, really disgusting behaviour started escalating, and it was just day, after day, after day. I had to black out my windows at the back and the front, so he didn't know I was living there. I was too scared to go to the laundry, I was too scared to move anywhere because he trained his dog to [defecate] on my doormat. (Victoria tenant panel online)

Proximity and relocation to catchment zones for specialist medical facilities or support services can be a crucial factor for those with chronic illnesses or disabilities. Many tenants also request transfers to upgrade from older or poorly maintained properties to newer and/or better-maintained properties. A lack of maintenance in public housing properties has direct relation to the health and wellbeing of tenants and can be a significant driving factor in TIR:

> I'd gone to my Mum's, because the mould was making me really sick. My Mum had taken my daughter a month beforehand, because [daughter] was just not going to be subjected to that, and then I put in the priority transfer form...(Victoria tenant panel in person)

The intensifying residualisation of the tenant base in public housing produces situations where communities are increasingly exposed to poverty and a range of associated social conflicts. Importantly, these contexts are shaped by structural socio-economic inequality and a lack of resources in public housing communities.

2.5 Policy implications

Public housing sits at the unfavourable end of the policy-formulated 'housing continuum'. This continuum constructs a deficit framing that facilitates the conception of urban public housing as sites for extractive urban growth. The housing continuum philosophy and deficit framing coupled with the under-resourcing of public housing sustains two core conditions in the contemporary public housing system: inadequacy of stock, and the residualisation of the tenant base.

The policy implications related to these processes compel an urgent need to address the growing rates of dwelling inadequacy and vacancy, which together suggest a sustained under-maintenance of existing public housing stock. A single source of aggregated reporting on indicators of stock adequacy, especially expenditure per dwelling on maintenance, and monitoring maintenance work orders completed and those in pipeline is urgently needed. The contraction and retrenchment of public housing as a proportion of the stock is a further significant driver of relocation. This retrenchment has changed the role of public housing in Australia to an 'ambulance service', where tenants are relatively poorer and have essentially zero exit options out of public housing. Residualisation has resulted in the production of public housing contexts that are harmful to tenants, which include experiences of violence and abuse. A significant public housing expansion effort is required to address these conditions.

This chapter demonstrates that policy language and a deficit approach use of statistics contributes to the stigmatisation of public housing communities as dysfunctional and burdensome. These findings have implications for policy settings that further stigmatise and residualise the tenant base via shifts to stricter eligibility criteria, changing of allocations procedures and a lack of public housing growth. Residualisation is a driver of relocation because of the intensification of situations where people housed in public housing are those experiencing intersecting disadvantage.

Public housing policy in Australia, particularly in the context of estate renewal, consistently espouses the contested neighbourhood effects thesis, which contends that concentrations of poverty compounds its social and economic effects. Instead, this study finds that structural conditions are responsible for the social production of impoverished geographical areas, conditions that are usually compounded through area-based renewal. An implication is that policy settings require rethinking and adoption of a more sound evidence base about the relationship between poverty and housing.

3. Typologies and practices of relocating public housing tenants

- NSW, Tasmania and Victoria each practice needs based matching of tenants with dwellings, sometimes alongside other allocation methods, such as choice based letting.

- The relocation process typically includes five stages: initiation, screening, assessment, offering and refusal.

- A lack of clear documentation and opaque processes make procedures for relocations opaque. Clear communication with tenants is essential to address fears and anxiety related to relocation, particularly DIR.

- Managing tenant relocation is a complex and time consuming task for relocation officers.

- The procedures for TIR and DIR vary in two important ways: tenants who refuse to be relocated during DIR can face eviction; housing authorities that decline transfer requests force tenants to remain in conditions not fit for their purpose.

- Specific relocation policies are sometimes implemented for renewal projects. Relocation Officers find ways to create flexibility within the system, such as negotiating informal offers with tenants.

- Developing a positive relationship with tenants is vital.

- Identifying and securing appropriate dwellings for relocating tenants is the most significant challenge facing relocation officers.

- **Relocation officers identified six main challenges to DIR: time pressures; lack of available stock for relocation; deterioration of the estate during relocation process; presence of non-relocation staff creating anxiety for tenants; creating trust after negative tenant experiences; and decisions are made without RO team input.**

3.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the policies and practices governing TIR and DIR. Analysis of policy documents, practice norms and tenant feedback has identified five stages in any relocation process: initiation, screening, assessment, offering and refusal. Under DIR, the tenant is forced to relocate and has no control of the process. Under TIR, the tenant has little control over the process and simultaneously very little choice due to lack of adequate and suitable housing stock.

Victoria and NSW each have written policy and guidelines governing relocation practices, whereas in Tasmania there is no written guidance. Further, in NSW and Victoria relocation required by estate renewal (DIR) is undertaken by specific and dedicated teams established to manage those processes. These dedicated teams are institutionally separate from the local Tenancy Officers teams that negotiate a tenant request for relocation. In Tasmania, one team undertakes both relocations and transfers, as well as tenancy management, regardless of whether these are DIR or TIR.

3.2 Existing research on this theme

Existing evidence demonstrates that both the particular context of public housing and the distinction between who initiates the move (tenant or department) are important (Baker, Leishman et al. 2020; Muir et al. 2020). Departments initiate tenant relocations to manage asset portfolios and specific tenancies. Tenants initiate relocations for reasons similar to households in other tenures (Baker et al. 2020) but also experience push factors in their living environment that are often a function deriving from the public housing context, such as inadequacy or safety (Muir et al. 2020).

Virtually all existing studies that concern DIR are focused on relocation as a function of estate renewal and redevelopment. A very large literature base exists internationally and in Australia about displacement from public housing due to estate renewal. Most of these studies focus on the structural context and policy discourse of renewal (see Section 2.2) or the experiences and impacts on residents (see Section 4.2). Very few studies examine in any detail the policy and practice of decanting – the 'slow and fraught process of rehousing residents' (Ferreri 2020: 1008) to create a vacant estate, indicating a key gap in the literature.

The most significant study in Australia that has examined the practices of Relocations Officers is that of Ruming and Melo Zurita (2020) on the redevelopment of the Ivanhoe estate in Sydney. Their findings observe the intricate everyday practices of ROs throughout the process. These practices included: going 'above and beyond' to secure tenants a new home; informal offers to ensure tenants did not exhaust their two formal offers too quickly; and the high use of discretion as ROs built relationships with tenants through the process (Ruming and Melo Zurita 2020). Such levels of discretion and nuance in the practice are far greater than any policy document or relocation manual might suggest. Other services provided to tenants such as financial support for removal costs, bills and aspects such as new school uniforms for children who needed to change schools were found to be important aspects of relocation practice (Ruming and Melo Zurita 2020).

A significant theme in existing research is the very great disparity between what policy makers and relocations practitioners think they are providing to tenants, and what tenants actually experience. In this regard, policies are profoundly disconnected from the lived experience of movement into and through the system (Muir et al. 2020). In a study of relocation practice at Glen Innes in Auckland, New Zealand practitioners were found to express considerable pride in the extent of consultation and engagement with tenants and their efforts to locate properties and make offers to tenants. However, tenants often experience these interactions as harmful and the offer process as extremely stressful, patronising and as a practice of duress (Gordon, Collins et al. 2017). In a study of displacement of residents at Millers Point in Sydney, Morris (2017b) found that while the policy guidelines stipulate consultation and engagement with tenants, tenants at Millers Point did not receive letters about their relocation until the very same day a major media announcement was made about the project. On a related point, while relocations policy and practitioners might contend that eviction or the threat of it is a last resort, tenants experience the potential of eviction as a very real threat. This was the case at Millers Point, where tenants were required to take one of two offers or risk losing their public housing status (Morris 2017b). This was a similar finding in the Ivanhoe Study (Ruming and Melo Zurita 2020).

Previous AHURI research has examined social housing pathways which touch on factors that influence movement into, out of and through the public housing system (Flanagan et al. 2020; Muir et al. 2020). These studies found that a tenant's decision to apply for relocation are heavily influenced by perceptions of waiting time, availability of stock, past experiences and therefore trust in their housing officer or the system more generally (Muir et al. 2020). Due to the serious constraint posed by the sheer unavailability of public housing, allocations are often suboptimal meaning tenants experience their housing environment as challenging, unsafe or unhealthy. An increasingly constrained system means that the proportion of tenants with 'significant and complex problems is steadily increasing' (Flanagan et al. 2020: 4). Consequently, tenants find themselves forced to request relocation as a result of neighbour conflict or behaviour or from housing that fundamentally cannot meet a household's needs (Flanagan et al. 2020; Wiesel et al. 2014).

The existing research also points clearly to the broader policy logics governing public housing as key to understanding pathways in and through the system. The shift from provision of a permanent safety net to an ambulance service (Fitzpatrick and Pawson 2014) places allocation managers and relocations officers in a context of increased demand and fewer resources. The renewal logic driving much public housing policy today, combined with privatisation through stock transfer to CHOs and the intensification of stigmatising discourses further corrodes the assumption of public housing as a secure, lifelong tenure (Martin 2021). This becomes part of an internalised logic within allocations and relocations practice. Housing managers are concerned about underutilisation such as shrinking household size or mis-utilisation such as continued occupancy by households whose circumstances have substantially improved (Flanagan et al. 2020). Renewal alongside changing eligibility and allocations policy become mechanisms to tighten access and further residualise the sector.

The set of practices involved in matching has been studied by Hulse and Burke (2005) who found that the rationing process entails five key dimensions: defining eligibility; assessing housing need; managing the waitlist through administrative categories; dwelling allocation decisions; and relocations. In practice, allocations occur through both formal and informal means (Hulse and Burke 2005), with formal allocation policy laid out in statutory regulations, policy and written guidelines, or intergovernmental agreements. Informal allocations refers to the discretion and everyday practice by housing officers, organised through their everyday interactions with tenants and their knowledge and understanding of available stock, and how the system works (Hulse and Burke 2005).

Policy mechanisms such as eligibility review and allocations form an integral part of relocations policy and practice (Muir et al. 2020). Allocation systems can be categorised into four broad groups: needs matched allocation; choice based letting; vouchers; and retention and right of return.

3.2.1 Needs matched allocation

Needs matched allocation refers to a system where housing officers attempt to match tenant needs to the characteristics of available stock, such as number of bedrooms and location. Tenants are then offered properties that are considered to meet these (or most of) these needs (see Boxes 1, 3, 4). However, it is important to understand that 'need' is a policy construct defined by policy makers, not lived experience. The 'need' identified is extremely limited in scope and serves more as a mechanism for managing allocation in a severely constrained system than actually providing for real-world needs. Thus, needs matched allocation is a system of determining what a household might be eligible for, managed through a set of standardised mechanisms for defining 'need'. In most Australian jurisdictions, this is the process used for an initial allocation of public housing. Tenants are usually able to refuse one offer, but refusal of a second can end their tenancy agreement. Needs matched allocation is also the central organising principle of policy and practice approaches to relocations, whether department or tenant initiated, in Victoria, NSW and Tasmania. The literature provides evidence that due to the shortage of public housing dwellings, compromises are often made by tenants with regard to location, accessibility or the dwelling itself. This is both widespread in Australia and internationally (Goetz 2013b; Martin 2021; Posthumus and Kleinhans 2014). For example, in Ferryden Park, South Australia in part of a large regeneration project, dwellings were set aside by the public housing provider for tenant relocation. However, few households were given their first location of choice due to lack of availability (Baker and Arthurson 2007; Levin et al. 2018).

In Australia, tenants generally have their circumstances reassessed after a period of time and may be allocated a dwelling that more closely matches their eligibility, based on occupancy and bedrooms. For example, single people may be moved from a two- or three-bedroom dwelling to a one-bed dwelling. This is often experienced negatively by tenants (Levin et al. 2018) particularly where legislation, such as in NSW, proscribes that rejecting offers of alternative premises is grounds for tenancy termination (Martin 2021).

Box 1: Public Housing Renewal Program: Northcote, North Melbourne and Preston

Regeneration Program: The Public Housing Renewal Program (PHRP) emerged from several years of planning and a 2009 investigation by the Department of Human Services into ways of redeveloping 22 ageing walk-up estates 'with a real estate development model'. This has been formulated into a program that aims to achieve: a 10 per cent increase in social housing units; modernising, greening and improving access in buildings; implementing a social mix or 'tenure blind' approach; providing equal access to common spaces; and, improving public space. Phase one of the PHRP was funded by $185 million of 'seed funding' by the DHHS and involves relocation of residents and demolition of nine inner-city estates, while two further estates are also being advanced for redevelopment under a separate funding package, using the same model. The objectives publicly advanced by the Victorian State Government are to upgrade and modernise 'ageing public housing estates into vibrant well-connected neighbourhoods with homes that are comfortable, modern and energy efficient' (Victorian Health and Human Services Building Authority 2019) in addition to delivering more social housing units overall. In March 2019, the Minister for Housing announced the signing of contracts between private developers and community housing associations. This tranche of renewal encompasses two of the stage one PHRP estates, and a third amalgam of three sites in the City of Darebin (Lucas 2019). A total of 225 households were relocated from these sites, although an additional 45 units at the Preston site had been demolished in 2011 and lay vacant at the time of the PHRP inception (Davies and Engels 2021). The Government and DHHS have made assurances to residents on estates that they will have the 'right to return'.

Tenant relocation practices: Relocation teams were set up to manage decanting of the sites, comprised of seconded TOs and other DHHS staff. Tenants were notified of the renewal and offered three choices of dwelling. Results varied in the geographical distribution of tenants, with some reports of urban-to-regional relocation, relocation to fringe suburbs and some cases of relocation to similarly serviced inner-city suburbs. Many tenants were relocated to private rentals that were head leased by the department for a period of five years. The redevelopment was scheduled to take seven years from the time of relocation, however given significant delays, this is likely to be longer. Given the term of head leasing arrangements, it is probable that relocated tenants will have to relocate a minimum of two times before the project is completed, and a minimum of three times if they execute their right to return.

3.2.2 Choice based letting

In choice based letting, tenants participate in a quasi-market, by 'bidding' on dwellings that are placed on offer by the housing authority. This model goes by several names, My Property Choice in NSW (Levin et al. 2018; Melo Zurita and Ruming 2019; Morris 2017b), Homesearch at Heygate (London, UK) (Ferreri 2020), while in the Netherlands it is called the 'Delft model' (Posthumus and Kleinhans 2014). Choice based letting is not widely used in Australia. However, it was used in a single pilot program in Whyalla (Melo Zurita and Ruming 2019) and as one component of the relocation approach to redevelop Millers Point and Ivanhoe estates in Sydney (Levin et al. 2018; Melo Zurita and Ruming 2019; Morris 2017b) (Box 2). Tenants must meet eligibility requirements to bid, based on dwelling characteristics, and often the successful bidder is whoever is highest on the waiting list or, in the case of Ivanhoe estate renewal, whoever won the draw (Melo Zurita and Ruming 2019; Morris 2019b). There are limits on how many offers a tenant can decline, and how long tenants can wait before bidding. Often dwellings are placed into this quasi-market sequentially, meaning that tenants have incomplete information and may hold off on bidding in the hope that something better may be available in later rounds. In research on the choice based letting approach applied at Millers Point in Sydney, the approach of providing informal and formal offers created 'a good deal of confusion' (Morris 2019b), and was stressful and divisive among tenants who described the process as a 'housing lotto' (Morris 2019b).

Choice based letting is only successful where a large number of dwellings already exist in the social housing system available for tenants to choose from, and where these dwellings are listed in blocks (i.e. many at a time). Indeed, there is evidence demonstrating that the choices tenants are offered during relocation are highly constrained because of lack of available stock, and this has an impact on tenant experience and outcome (Levin et al. 2018). This is true internationally, even where there is a far greater proportion of social housing stock within the housing system enabling a greater degree of tenant choice (see Posthumus and Kleinhans 2014).

The context is also highly significant. For example, in Heygate (London, UK), the estate had been significantly disinvested over time and the promised early housing sites from the redevelopment were not going to be delivered. This meant that by the time residents began bidding for properties, residents were already living in decaying conditions and had experienced considerable stress (Ferreri 2020). The bidding system pitted 315 households against each other for bids on just 35 available properties on the Council's Homesearch system. The relocated homes that tenants were offered were often of lower quality and at considerable distance from their existing homes and workplaces (Ferreri 2020).

Box 2: Regeneration and relocation in Millers Point and Ivanhoe Estates, New South Wales

Millers Point sale: In 2016, the NSW Government released a new housing strategy, Future Directions for Social Housing. A central directive of Future Directions was to realise the value of landholdings by either selling social housing stock to the private sector or redeveloping existing public housing sites. The most significant sales program occurred in Millers Point, located adjacent to Sydney's Central Business District (CBD). The area is made up of terrace houses built for dock workers at the beginning of the 1900s, as well as apartment blocks developed in the 1970s, including the famous Sirius building. Prior to the NSW Government's sell-off process, around 600 social housing tenants resided in Millers Point (Morris 2017a; Morris 2017b). The NSW Government claimed that proceeds from the sale would be used to fund new dwellings (FACS 2014; 2016a). However, the sales were (and remain) controversial. Relocation of tenants from Millers Point commenced in March 2014, with most resident relocated by mid-2016.

Ivanhoe Estate regeneration: The Ivanhoe social housing estate was located 15 kilometres northwest of the Sydney CBD in the Macquarie Park corridor. Built between 1986 and 1990, Ivanhoe was the last large-scale new public estate development project in NSW. Built around a cul-de-sac street design with a single road entrance, Ivanhoe had 260 dwellings, including a mixture of apartments and townhouses, and was home to approximately 600 residents. The Ivanhoe estate sat within a larger centre that has been the subject of wider strategic planning efforts from state and local government (NSW Department of Planning 2015). As a result, the site has been rezoned, allowing a significant increase in the permissible density. Ivanhoe was the first regeneration project undertaken under the Communities Plus Program, which was a core pillar of Future Directions. The Ivanhoe project was put out to tender in 2016, with the successful development consortium announced in 2017. Demolition began in early 2018, following tenant relocation. The approved master plan included a significant increase in density, with approximately 3,000 units, including at least 950 social housing units and 128 affordable units (NSW Government 2017). Ivanhoe estate is considered Australia's biggest social and affordable housing development led by Aspire consortium. At Ivanhoe, while construction would be staged, the costs and extent of demolishing the existing dwellings meant that the estate was demolished in its entirety. As with earlier regeneration projects (such as Minto) tenants were offered a right-of-return.

Tenant relocation practices: The relocation process in both Millers Point and Ivanhoe was coordinated by the NSW Department of Family and Community Services (FACS), with a relocation team assigned to each site. With an office established on site, the sole task of the relocation team was to move tenants. Two strategies were mobilised. First, following an interview that outlined tenant needs, relocation officers identified properties from the current vacant list and offered these directly to the tenants (needs matched allocation). Residents were entitled to two property offers that matched their needs. If the resident chose to decline their second offer, they were required to pursue a formal appeal process via the Tenancy Tribunal. In many cases the process of offering residents potential new homes was more flexible and informal, with relocation officers discussing potential properties with residents and their advocates before issuing a formal offer (Melo Zurita and Ruming 2019).

Second, a choice based letting approach, called My Property Choice (MPC), was established. Millers Point was the first project in NSW to use a choice based letting approach, with the model copied at Ivanhoe. Unlike choice based letting approaches mobilised internationally, the Ivanhoe and Millers Point projects used choice based letting in the context of forced tenant relocation, rather than as part of a wider asset management strategy that sought to better align tenants and stock. In seeking to overcome tenant preferences for their local area, MPC tended to offer properties outside the tenants' geographical zone. Following a series of information sessions in each location, residents could bid on properties. Where more than one tenant bid on a property, a ballot was held where an independent community representative (such as local service provider or tenant advocate) would anonymously draw a name from the ballot. At Millers Point, 122 properties were made available through MPC, with 51 (42%) properties receiving no bids, and just 46 (38%) properties being allocated through the bidding process. MPC was more modest in Ivanhoe, with just 14 properties offered, seven (50%) of which were accepted through the bidding process (Melo Zurita and Ruming 2019). Despite MCP being viewed as innovative by ROs, resident support quickly faded, with MCP being characterised as a 'housing lotto' that created a set of 'winners and losers' across the estate (Melo Zurita and Ruming 2019).

3.2.3 Vouchers

Vouchers are a system of housing subsidy where tenants purchase their own housing in the private system, supported with a rental subsidy through the voucher. The use of vouchers is widespread in the USA under the HOPE VI program which was instrumental in the development of vouchers. In the USA, these are known as Section 8 Vouchers. Waiting lists for Section 8 Vouchers in the USA can be very long because they are both needs based and rationed. Brooks, Lewinson et al. (2012) found that relocated tenants were contacted by mail and asked if they wanted to return to public housing after redevelopment. Thirty per cent indicated they did and were accepted and moved back, 10 per cent preferred to move back but were not accepted; around one quarter thought about moving back but did not apply; the remainder did not want to move back. The voucher system relies on dwellings (and often whole buildings) being available for the application of vouchers. This is operated through the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), where building owners are contracted by HUD to offer Section 8 voucher housing. However, there is significant rate of loss of federally subsidised buildings due to building owners opting out of the system, and this is particularly concentrated in areas where gentrification pressures are strong (Howell 2018).

Vouchers also present further risks in terms of ongoing relocations where some tenants are moving multiple times in a space of just two or three years (Neary 2011). The use of vouchers as a mechanism for rehousing tenants is not an established practice in Australia. Where departments are unable to rehouse tenants in existing public (or sometimes CHO) housing stock, the private rental market is increasingly used. This is organised through head leasing arrangements where the department leases the property and pays the difference between the tenants' rental payment and the actual market cost. This cost, which can be significant and lengthy, is not counted in the cost of renewal programs in Australia.

3.2.4 Retention and right of return

Retention and right of return are specific arrangements on some renewal projects. Retention involves remaining on the same estate (or in a property nearby) while development is underway, and right of return refers to when a tenant is offered the option to return once redevelopment is complete. In both cases, the process for dwelling allocation on returning is organised through needs matched allocation and can involve a tighter matching of household to dwelling based on size (Levin et al. 2018). Even when residents remain in place and quite proximate to their original home, displacement can still be experienced. The sense of confusion and impact on tenants is particularly pronounced when there is a lack of publicly shared plans for how the relocation will work, generating significant uncertainty for residents (Wynne and Rogers 2020).

Retention during redevelopment requires a staged development approach and is only possible on estates of sufficient size and density that enable staged redevelopment in such a way that the existing residents can remain on the estate (Wynne and Rogers 2020). The redevelopment of the Bonnyrigg estate in Sydney is an example of a staged redevelopment process that allowed tenants to be relocated within the estate as redevelopment stages were completed (Box three). It is expected that tenant relocation required to enable the redevelopment of the Waterloo estate will follow a similar model.

However, it is more common for tenants to be relocated away from the estate to allow redevelopment. This often requires tenants to move twice (or more), and it is often several years before they can return (Levin et al. 2018). Thus, tenants often experience significant disruption, confirming the importance of seeing relocation as a process that reverberates through time rather than a singular event. The largest redevelopment of estates completed to date in Victoria were in Carlton and Kensington (Box four). In Carlton, approximately 40 per cent of residents returned to the estate (Levin et al. 2018) but were initially moved either to other estates, or spot purchased properties elsewhere (Levin et al. 2018). In Kensington, only 20 per cent of residents returned (Shaw et al. 2013).

Box 3: Regeneration and relocation in Bonnyrigg, New South Wales

Estate regeneration: A Radburn-style estate located in the Fairfield Local Government Area (LGA) in western Sydney, the redevelopment of Bonnyrigg was announced in 2004. Developed under the Living Communities scheme, Bonnyrigg was NSW's first public housing estate redevelopment delivered by a public private partnership. The consortium was later renamed Newleaf. The redevelopment increased the housing density of the site from around 1,000 dwellings to around 2,500 dwellings at completion. 700 social housing dwellings were developed, down from approximately 900 public housing dwellings on the original estate (Pawson and Pinnegar 2018). All aspects of the redevelopment and ongoing management of the tenancies were transferred to the private consortium. The CHO was responsible for managing tenancies for 30 years. The redevelopment was delivered over 18 stages, over a period of 13 years (Pawson and Pinnegar 2018).

Tenant relocation practices: The Bonnyrigg redevelopment resulted in an increase in the total number of dwellings on the site, underwriting the financial viability of the project for the private consortium. However, the redevelopment reduced the total number of social housing dwellings by approximately 200 dwellings. Nevertheless, the number of new social housing dwellings, along with the staged nature of development, allowed for social housing tenants to be relocated within Bonnyrigg, with residents given the opportunity to move into a new dwelling on the estate (built as part of an earlier stage of the redevelopment) when their home was scheduled for demolition. This approach allowed the development consortium to manage the on-site 'shuffle' (Pinnegar 2013) of residents around the estate rather than 'decant' all residents at once. The tenant relocation process was managed by the Project Company, in accordance with the Project Deed and Rehousing Service Plan (Department of Housing n.d.). Residents also had the opportunity to elect to be relocated away from Bonnyrigg to other available Housing NSW dwellings, with Housing NSW obliged to provide up to 210 vacant dwellings for Bonnyrigg residents. In some case, short-term head leases were secured in surrounding areas. While the majority of residents remained in Bonnyrigg, their new lease was managed by the CHP and, in many cases, were required to move into smaller properties. The process adopted needs matched allocation.

Box 4: Regeneration and relocation in Carlton and Kensington estates, Victoria

Carlton estate regeneration: The Carlton Housing Redevelopment project is the largest single-site public private partnership redevelopment project in Victoria. The redevelopment involved three sites on a 7.4 hectare parcel of public land. Work commenced in 2006 and was completed over nine stages. The project included the redevelopment of both public and private housing units, the construction of a retirement village and an aged care centre, the development of new public parks, gardens and landscaping, and the gradual renovation of the existing high-rise public units. Demolition took place between late 2006 and early in 2011. Prior to demolition, there were 192 units in the walk-ups, all with three bedrooms. The new units comprise a majority of one- and two-bedroom units. In total, there will be 246 new units, a 28 per cent increase in units. However, the number of bedrooms will decrease from 576 to 444. Using the department's baseline population data, Jama and Shaw (n.d.) estimate a total decline in public tenants on the estate at 146. The project incorporates a tenure blind approach, and the resultant social mix is projected at 73/27, with 663 new private units. On the remainder of the estate, outside the renewal site, 818 high-rise public housing dwellings were retained and progressively upgraded. The total cost of the project is estimated at $250 million, with a government investment of $50 million. The project was delivered by the Living Carlton Consortium, comprising Citta Property Group and Australand private developers.

Kensington estate regeneration: The Kensington estate is located in a small and affluent inner-city suburb of Melbourne. In the 1960s, the estate contained three high-rise towers and 18 walk-up buildings on a 6.04 hectare estate. However, after successive periods of government neglect, one of the towers was demolished in 1999, and in 2000 a redevelopment project was commenced, resulting in the demolition of all walk-ups and the refurbishment of the two remaining towers. The redevelopment model was a joint partnership between the Government of Victoria and the Becton Corporation. Becton was contracted by then Department of Human Services (DHS) to design and construct new public housing. The developer purchased two-thirds of the estate (4.18 hectares) below market rate for the construction of private housing, which was later sold at market rate. This public private partnership model was the first of its kind in Victoria with its emphasis on finance mix, housing mix and social mix. A significant component of this model is the place management of the renewed estate. Becton was responsible for on-site facilities management, owner's corporation management, community building and marketing private sales. As part of this, Becton set up the Kensington Management Company in 2003 to manage the estate, which was later transferred to a not-for-profit company, Urban Communities Ltd, in 2008.

Tenant relocation practices: In Kensington, up to 486 public tenant households relocated from the estate (the number is not certain as not all units were occupied prior to the redevelopment)—only 20 per cent returned. There are a number of reasons for this, including satisfaction with the alternative accommodation, desire to avoid the disruption of a second relocation, the time taken for new units to come available, and the reconfiguration of dwelling types on the redeveloped estate which meant that not all households were able to be re-accommodated. The process adopted was needs matched allocation.

3.3 Policies and processes governing department initiated relocation

This section examines the policies and practices governing DIR catalysed by estate renewal in NSW, Victoria and Tasmania. The research presented draws from an analysis of formal policies and procedures, and the practices of relocations teams charged with managing the complexity of the relocations required to clear an estate for renewal. Other types of DIR do exist, such as proceedings against individual tenants due to underoccupancy, overcrowding or other tenancy management (see for example Table 5 in Appendix 1 – NSW justifications of tenant relocations). These other mechanisms of DIR are not in the scope of this study.

NSW, Victoria and Tasmania have broadly similar policies, procedures or practice norms for managing tenant relocation for estate renewal. However, only NSW and Victoria have written policies and procedures in place to guide the process. These policy documents express the need for strategically relocating tenants to address mismatches between tenants and housing stock and achieve efficiency in the management of the asset portfolio.

In NSW, the process for DIRs as a result of strategic development or sale reasons are guided by the Strategic Tenant Relocations policy (NSW Land and Housing Corporation 2021) using a needs matched allocation process. Likewise, Victoria has operational guidelines for relocations due to the Public Housing Renewal Program (Department of Health and Human Services 2018), which operate parallel to a Relocation Manual (department of Health and Human Services 2017). Victoria also has the Public Housing Allocations operational guidelines, detailing all allocation procedures, including for transfers (Department of Families Fairness and Housing 2021). These three documents all outline various forms of needs matched allocation. A larger analysis of these documents is provided in Appendix 1. Tasmania does not have a set of written guidelines for DIRs caused by redevelopment, but rather practitioners operate by convention, again using a needs matched allocation process.

The relocation teams sit within a specific policy context, that sets the parameters for DIR, typically in response to large estate and property development programs.

> We work as part of housing statewide services, they are our policy group. So we try and follow that process as closely as possible. (NSW practitioner panel)

In Victoria (see Appendix 1), it was noted that the current relocation process (the service model) was developed in collaboration with TOs to ensure a level of consistency:

> [We worked] closely with the divisional housing office around how we actually develop a service model that can be applied across the state [to] ensure that the way we deal with renters and outcome is consistent across the board. …[Our] service model [is] a much more collaborative type of process than previously where we were actually just telling renters you need to move. (Victoria practitioner panel)

In some cases, ROs have been required to work within an evolving policy context:

> Our whole offers and appeals process has been reviewed and refined. It's more streamlined, it matches the Residential Tenancies Act. So because the way we were doing appeals and the way the section 149 and the Residential Tenancies Act, it didn't quite marry each other… policy has been revised, and even when it comes down to our letter and our fact sheets… actually trying to explain things and be more warm about how we approach the tenants in our letters. (NSW practitioner panel)

In Victoria, the need for flexibility in the allocation and relocation process was explicitly acknowledged as incorporated within the policy framework:

> The thing with the PHRP relocation policy [is] that there is wiggle room… We weren't going to be able to be successful doing what we were doing [if] we were so strict with policy and so we made it very clear [that]… we want it to be more of a guide… Not so much a directive now…(Victoria practitioner panel)

Relocation officers, therefore, work in a complex policy and practice landscape, as they are required to conform to policies, and are often scrutinised by external tenant advocacy groups:

> I'm very comfortable with our policies and our procedures… it actually went out [to] peak bodies and the tenants union and they reviewed our proposed changes to our offers and appeals process. …so we took on some of their recommendations (NSW practitioner panel)

For some relocation officers, transferring some of their relocation practices to wider tenancy management and amending policy would be beneficial:

> We would like to consolidate the work that we're doing in still more generic policy across the department and we have to start talking to [speak with] policy colleagues about that now. (NSW practitioner panel)

Thus, despite the presence of written policy frameworks directing tenant relocation in some states, there is an acknowledgement that tenant relocation is an inherently varied process, with no single strategy or approach working for all tenants. Relocation officers spoke about the need to be flexible, understanding and working with the context and needs of individual tenants:

> Each situation's going to be completely different… There's no hard and fast answer on that one because it depends on the person. (Tasmania practitioner panel)

> We adopt here a very individualized service that works directly with the household, the family. (Victoria practitioner panel)

In addition to relocation policy, relocation teams operate within the wider redevelopment activities of departments, ranging from the replacement of single buildings through to large estate redevelopment projects. The decision to initiate redevelopment, and therefore relocation, is made by other part of government. Relocation teams do not set the timeline for relocation. Relocation teams, especially senior managers, are in contact with staff of other sections and departments, often providing advice in the timing of the relocations process:

> One of our important stakeholders is Land and Housing Corporation… Whether a relocation project is going to commence or not, so I have a lot of meetings and a lot of discussions with the project directors, the senior development managers and the development managers… They're keeping me informed on upcoming projects. (NSW practitioner panel)

> So that's a bit of a juggling act, not only with the clients and their expectations, but with Land and Housing [Corporation]'s expectations as well. (NSW practitioner panel)

Analysis of relocation policies and investigative panels has revealed that while all jurisdictions studied have developed different policies and practices, they have underlying similarities. A generalised process of DIRs similar across all three jurisdictions in this study is shown in Figure 2. Note that in DIRs the screening step does not apply, although the audit process discussed below serves a resonant purpose. The formal written policies of NSW and Victoria set out what happens at each step of relocation including: how the offers work and what is expected of tenants in relation to offers; the criteria for matching and allocation; the costs of removal the department will meet; and provisions for moving back to estates after redevelopment. In Tasmania, there are no written policies, but the practice reported by practitioners broadly aligns.

Figure 2: Generalised process for department initiated relocations.
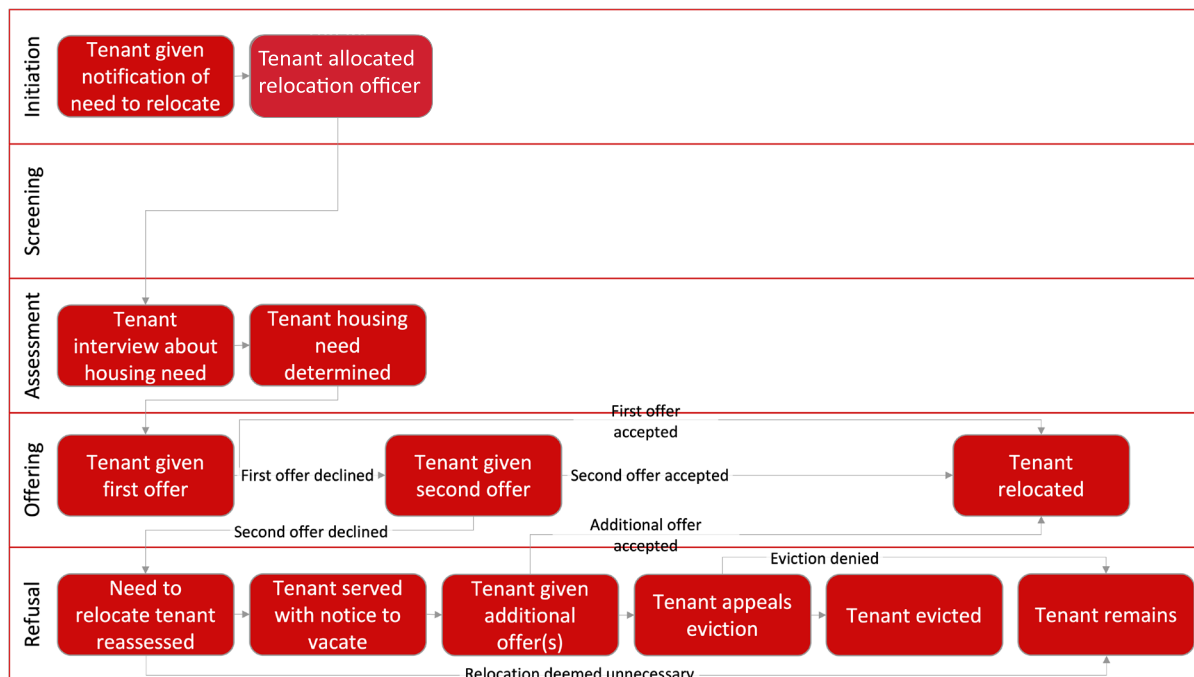
Source: Authors' own research

An early step in the initiation process, usually before contact is made with tenants, is an audit of tenants on the estate and their housing needs. The purpose of this audit is twofold. First, the audit helps allocate tenants to Relocation Officers. Second, the audit establishes an approximate order of relocation, with more challenging cases, typically those with access issues and dwelling modifications, often left to the later stages of the relocation. Practitioners acknowledged that it is difficult to establish a clear order of tenant relocation, as this rests on the ability to secure properties, and the willingness of tenants to accept offers made. Ultimately, Relocation Officers are responsible for relocation of all tenants from the estate or building meaning that, in practice:

> *Everybody is on the top of the list as far as we're concerned. It's just basically what we find that's suitable for you [that] determines how quickly you move. (Victoria practitioner panel)*

The audit provides Relocation Officers with information about tenants prior to their initiating contact:

> *I put notes into the spreadsheet… here's the basic profile done for all of your clients for this stage…So we've all got a bit of a basic background for when we go out to actually interview the client. (NSW practitioner panel)*

> *…we know that project is going to be announced, we sit down with the project team and relocations plan, have a look at how many renters that we have [and]…bedroom sizes that people are in at the moment and obviously that's a desktop exercise because we don't actually know until we go and knock somebody's door what they're actually going to require. (Victorian practitioner in joint panel)*

However, these audits and profiles are often incomplete, with Relocation Officers identifying additional (sometimes longstanding) issues and needs later in the relocation process.

3.4 Policies and processes governing tenant initiated relocation

This section provides an analysis of TIR, distinguishing experiences of forced mobility evident in DIR processes, from forced immobility or inadequacy in the experiences of tenants instigating transfer.

All three jurisdictions have policies or documentation for TIR, which are often called transfers by departments and staff. Tenant initiated relocations in NSW are covered by the *Matching and Offering a Property to a Client Policy* (Department of Communities and Justice 2021), which follows a needs matched allocation process. In Victoria the *Public Housing Allocations operational guidelines* details processes for tenant initiated transfers (Department of Families Fairness and Housing 2021) also follow a needs matched allocation process. Homes Tasmania has fact sheets for *Applying for Social Housing and Transferring to another Social Housing property* available on their website (Department of Communities Tasmania 2020; Department of Communities Tasmania 2021) governing TIR. A larger analysis of these documents is provided in Appendix 1.

Policies from all three jurisdictions are strikingly similar. A generalised process for TIR is shown in Figure 3. This is typified as a needs matched allocation process, where tenants' needs are assessed, and they are matched with a property deemed suitable by a Relocations Officer.

Figure 3: Generalised process for tenant initiated relocations.
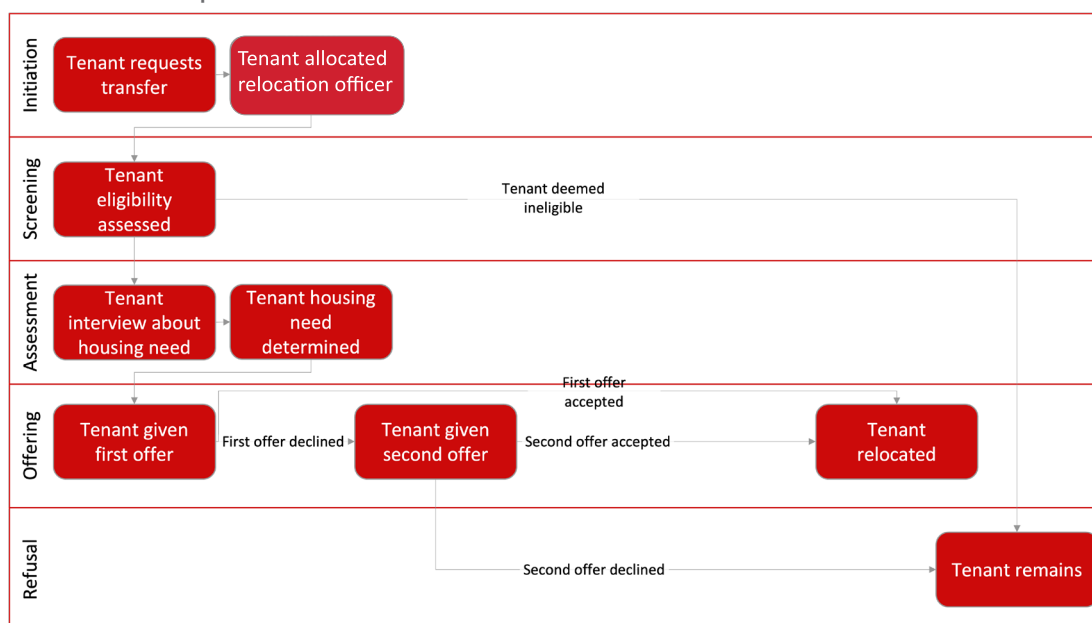
Source: Authors' own research

In the first stage, the tenant requests a transfer (or relocation) through a standard form or application document. The tenant's eligibility to remain in public housing is assessed, and if the tenant is deemed ineligible, can have their application declined. The procedure states that the tenant should be allocated an officer, and an interview held to determine housing need. Following this, a formal offer process commences. According to policy, tenants are offered two tenancies. If both tenancies are declined, their application is cancelled and they remain in their dwelling. There does not appear to be any policy to prevent a tenant from making another transfer request.

In contrast to DIR programs where officers have a limited delegation of authority, in TIR programs, the same delegation of authority is not granted to Tenancy Officers.

For Tenancy Officers responsible for managing tenant relocation requests, there is an inherent tension between advocating for tenants to realise optimal living standards and exercising their requirement and delegated authority to compel tenant compliance. Whilst advocacy and compliance are not mutually exclusive, advocacy for tenants requires significantly more labour and is significantly constrained by funding limitations around maintenance and modification of existing dwellings, and the unavailability of alternative better matching properties. Conversely, there are external systems such as law enforcement and civil tribunals that are legislated to enforce compliance. Tenancy Officers can transfer responsibility to these external systems and realise more immediate departmental outcomes.

Given the compliance focus of Tenancy Officers responsible for managing the TIR process, tenants often feel discouraged from requesting relocation or transfer, and often experience a denial or minimisation of issues by Tenancy Officers. This can lead to tenants not applying for transfers despite potential eligibility and manifest inadequacy, or a protracted and lengthy relocations process that impacts upon tenants' health and wellbeing (discussed in Section 4.4).

3.5 Analysis of practice in stages of relocation

This section provides an analysis of the actual practice reported by practitioners of how relocation works in both DIR and TIR. Figure 4 shows the combined stages of relocation as they occur in both DIR and TIR: initiation, screening and assessment, offering and refusal. In DIR, housing need is the first primary step in assessment and refusal catalyses a density of steps and processes, which can ultimately result in eviction. In TIR, eligibility is the primary early screening step and refusal results in simply the tenant remaining, unless they choose to leave the public housing system altogether. Both TIR and DIR processes in theory involve a tenant being made a series of offers, usually up to two with some discretionary offers, to consider as a potential new dwelling.

Figure 4: Generalised process of steps in both DIR and TIR.
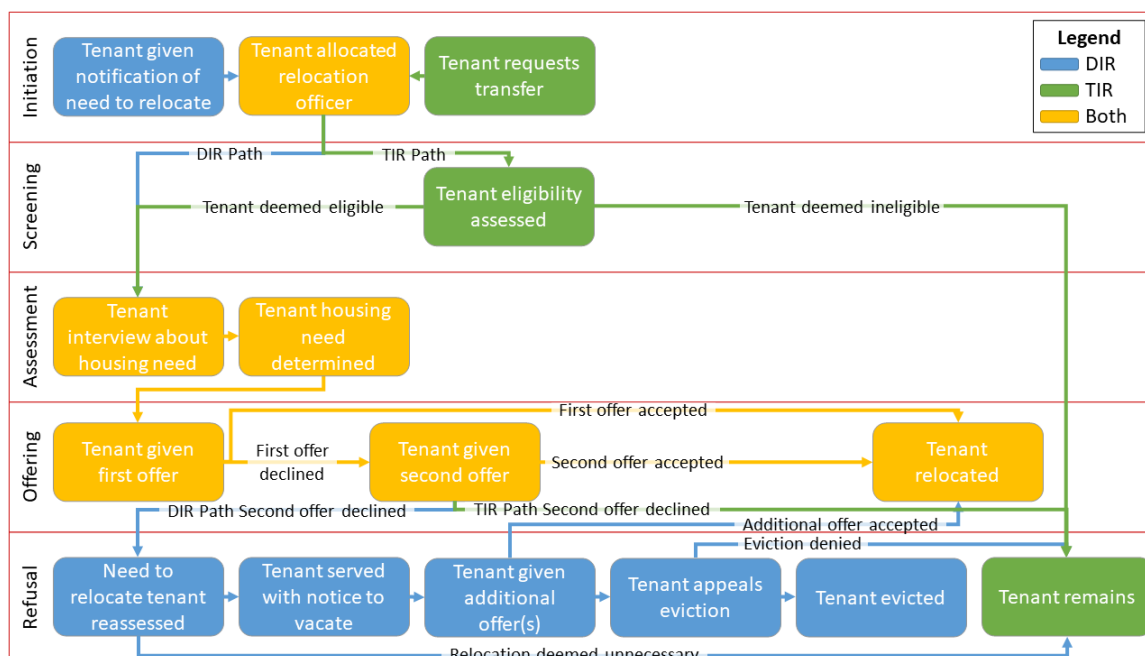
Source: Authors' own research

Both DIR and TIR processes have distinct relations of power between the tenant and the department as landlord. The department controls virtually all aspects of each process and configures the definitions, criteria and assessment tools at each step. Figure 4 also identifies some key differences in tenant choice and control. In DIR the tenant is being forced to move in a relocation they did not initiate. While a tenant has little control over that aspect, a degree of choice is available through the offer process, as will be shown in the following sections. However, after the offers process is exhausted, a tenant has a narrowing window of choice and even less control over the steps that eventuate. This power difference is experienced viscerally by tenants.

> *A lot of residents don't know their rights. They are terrified of Housing, and that if Housing says something, they've got to do it. (NSW tenant panel)*

In TIR, tenants have a higher degree of control at the initial step of the request. However, in reality, there is very little choice a tenant can exercise even through the offer process as will be shown in the following sections. In summary, in DIR a tenant has little control but more choice; in TIR a tenant has some control but little choice.

3.5.1 Initiation

In DIR, announcement of the estate redevelopment and tenant relocation process is a pivotal moment in the relocation process. It sets the context for resident perceptions and relationship with ROs. Practitioners spoke about their own perspectives on good and poor announcement practices. Poor announcement occurs when residents are informed via the media. Relocation officers in all states recounted examples where media announcements (often by government ministers) were either the first residents heard of the project or contained inaccurate information. Both were reported to lead to resident anxiety which, in turn, hindered relationship building with Relocation Officers and fostered mistrust in the process:

> *Just before the announcement was made…there was a lot of misinformation went out in the media, which caused an awful lot of concern for renters…it was just complete nonsense. We started off on the back foot from that and had to start try and build those relationships up. (Victoria practitioner panel)*

> *You got to remember that tenants are humans. And I mean, you and I wouldn't be happy if we found out through the media that are building was about be demolished…you got to get to those tenants before the media. (Tasmania practitioner panel)*

The preferred form of initial contact with tenants is in-person, with Relocation Officers door knocking properties. Relocations Officers spoke about their central message to tenants as being reassurance that they will be rehoused and that the relocation teams are there to support them through the process:

> *… the staff were there from the beginning to talk to tenants about how we were going to support them, what we were going to do, how we were going to try and make this situation…as easy as possible…   (Victoria practitioner panel)*

> *[We] basically want to do face-to-face to reassure them that they're not going to become homeless through this and we're going to work with them together. (Tasmania practitioner panel)*

> *…once it goes live, my team will go out [and] door knock, deliver the letters, and that's when we'll organize all the interviews. (NSW practitioner panel)*

One of the things that we do is when we're doing a relocation, which is a departmental relocation, we don't just send any documentation out. We actually go out and our first contact is face-to-face as well. So you know what we've done in the past is done a letterbox drop, saying we're gonna be out on this date, but don't elaborate on the reasons why… We do the face-to-face door knock everybody and sit down and have the general discussion first about what's gonna be happening. We don't at that point get into, I suppose the screening or assessment around their needs. You know we give people a bit of time to process and give it a bit of thought on what's gonna happen. And then we will come back again and so it's constant engagement with the clients. (Tasmanian practitioner in joint panel)

Initial contact with tenants is supported by further information, typically in the form of a letter including details about the timing of the relocation, the offer process, and how to contact Relocation Officers. However, actual practice varies between door knocking and face-to-face interaction or via letter:

…tenant information sheet and a letter as well. Just to explain the sites being identified for redevelopment. (Tasmania practitioner panel)

Their first initial contact is a letter [usually delivered in person]. And they might have one meeting or two maybe. (Victoria practitioner panel)

Practitioners see the initial letter, as well as ongoing interactions with Relocation Officers, as an attempt to ensure that tenants have an appropriate level of information about the relocation process, to address anxiety or concerns about the process:

It's about having that up front conversation with people, so no one here is ever caught surprised. (Victoria practitioner panel)

These initial interactions are acknowledged by Relocation Officers as vital in building a trusting and supportive relationship with tenants, which is essential in facilitating relocation. Staff making contact are those who will see a tenant through the relocation process, and development of relationships is key to this facilitation.

In TIR, initiation is made by the tenant requesting a transfer. Each state has an application form requiring the tenant to provide key information about the reason for their request to transfer and an indication of their household formation and housing needs including locational requests. Both NSW and Victoria have formal guidelines and documentation outlining policies of allocation and offers. In Tasmania, a tenant must have been in their dwelling for at least 12 months prior to an application for transfer to be considered. Homes Tasmania has a factsheet for tenants with very limited information for tenants initiating a request for relocation (see Appendix 1).

3.5.2 Screening and assessment

In both DIR and TIR processes, an assessment of need and eligibility must be undertaken. This can involve an interview between the tenants and their allocated officer. Technically, the purpose of the interview is to assess tenant needs. Considerations discussed in these interviews include preferred location, size and type of dwelling, and any other requirements such as dwelling modifications. Tenants are often encouraged to have a support person attend these meetings.

In terms of resident preferences, practitioners reported that in their experience most people want to move locally to ensure continued access to existing social and other essential service networks such as health services and schools. Practitioners were aware that many residents have spent many years in their current property, often experiencing significant life events, such as birth of children or death of a family member, and are reluctant to move from a property they considered to be their home:

And if you do have good networks and things like locally or neighbours and stuff, that's a big thing. People have networks and established networks that they're going to leave behind. (Tasmania practitioner panel)

Further, most tenants, especially those living in larger properties, want to be relocated to a property of a similar size. However, such preferences are mediated by departmental allocation policies (needs matched allocation), especially related to issues of under occupancy:

And you know you've got a single person in a three bedroom… a lot of them want to move to a two bedroom…although they're only eligible for a one [bedroom]. (Tasmania practitioner panel)

Eligibility and allocation policies are significantly changing both the provision of public housing stock and the allocation of residents into small homes. For example, in Victoria and NSW, estate renewal is causing the demolition of two- and three-bedroom public homes with redevelopments offering predominantly one-bedroom homes in their place. Bedroom policies stipulate that a single person or couple is eligible for only a one-bedroom dwelling. This means that at the screening and assessment steps, allocation policies become very material to the practice of relocations with smaller households experiencing significant pressure to relocate into one-bedroom dwellings. In practice, the push toward one-bedroom dwellings is widely accepted as a poor choice and outcome for tenants as it denies the need for occasional and important visits from children in the case of non-custodial parents, carers for older people or those with disability, or the storage of larger pieces of necessary equipment in a home. Thus, while the screening and assessment process is notionally needs based, allocation does not generally consider what a tenant actually needs, only what they are entitled to in a highly constrained system.

Practitioners reported that an essential part of their role is to work with tenants to temper or mediate expectations. Within the context of limited available stock, Relocation Officers and Tenancy Officers were required to encourage tenants to relocate into smaller properties or to locations away from their current neighbourhood. While most tenants in DIR are unhappy with the decision to move from their home, Relocation Officers emphasise the possibilities of the relocation:

If you want us to look at trying to move you closer to your kids or your grandkids, then as long as we have properties in those areas, then we can try and do that for them. (NSW practitioner panel)

[We] encourage people to kind of maybe think a wee bit out-of-the-box. (Victoria practitioner panel)

Relocation Officers in all states emphasised the need to be honest in their interactions with residents, both about the relocation process and about possible future dwellings. These interactions were about managing expectations:

You're not going to…build expectations that are unrealistic and wasting everybody's time. We've always tried to be honest with people. (Victoria practitioner panel)

While the purpose of the interviews was to establish what type of dwelling tenants were eligible for or preferred, these interviews emerged as essential in the development of relationships between Relocation Officers and tenants. Relocation Officers reported that such relationships were essential for facilitating timely relocation.

Despite resident preferences, identifying and securing appropriate properties emerges as one of the most significant challenges for Relocation Officers. In short, the low number of public housing dwellings available means that matching residents to an appropriate property is difficult. Dwelling numbers are shrinking due to inadequacy of management and stock transfer to CHOs. Before offering properties to tenants, these properties needed to be identified and secured:

We just do not have the properties to do what we need to do and we're relocating tenants to a different property…Our portfolio is getting smaller, but the demand is huge. (Tasmanian practitioner panel)

The challenge is finding properties to match the clients' needs. (NSW practitioner panel)

Securing properties is a challenge on two fronts. First, there is a limited supply of certain types of properties, such as four-bedroom homes, and when they do become available, there is significant demand. This results in competition for properties between relocation teams and Tenancy Officers within the system. Similar issues were raised about properties suitable for people with disabilities, such as wheelchair accessibility or ground floor properties for tenants with mobility issues.

Second, and related, properties are also being sought by the local housing teams facilitating the entrance of new tenants into public housing and through the transfer system.

We've now got to house them in competition with people on the waitlist… (Tasmania practitioner panel)

Due to lack of available and suitable stock, Relocation Officers reported that there is significant competition with the waitlist and with the transfer components of the public housing tenancy management system. Relocation Officers spoke about the practice of negotiating access to available properties with local tenancy management teams who are also looking to secure dwellings to house those on the waiting list or tenants who have initiated a relocation (TIR):

We also have to communicate with our colleagues in the division because they manage the properties that we that we use. So we have to work closely with them to get the properties that we need to meet the renters requirements…building those relationships with our colleagues as well has helped us to negotiate with them because they have competing priorities too…we don't have carte blanche with every vacant property and we need their local knowledge… (Victoria practitioner panel)

In Tasmania, practitioners reflected on the fragmentation arising from stock transfer to CHOs which exacerbates the problem of competition and requires significant negotiation with other non-state housing providers:

You're relying on being able to contact the organisation directly rather than go through the Housing Connect system…it's just local networking. (Tasmania practitioner panel)

In Victoria and NSW, where the scale of estate renewal has meant the administrative separation of DIR relocations teams from Tenancy Officers, early negotiation was reported as essential. Relocation teams engage with local housing offices early in the process, both to inform them of the relocation process and the future need to access vacant properties in the area, but also to get assistance in understanding the tenant profile of the area. There is a recognition by Relocation Officers that Tenancy Officers are also facing challenges related to the need to find properties. The relationship between designated relocation teams and tenancy management teams has changed through time. For example, in NSW, when relocating tenants from Millers Point, Relocation Officers had priority access to vacant dwellings. This is no longer the case in NSW.

In Tasmania, the context is different again. While Tenancy Officers are also responsible for managing DIR for renewal, the gateway for housing assistance in Tasmania is no longer controlled by the housing department. Housing Connect is the 'front door' in Tasmania for all housing and homelessness assistance, managing the housing register and first contact with people seeking housing support. Yet, Housing Connect is contracted out to non-government organisations, adding a further layer of complexity and fragmentation to the practice of relocation.

Identifying a suitable property for a tenant is a manual and time consuming process, requiring relocation officers to regularly (sometimes daily) check department property databases. Once a suitable property is identified, Relocation Officers are required to submit a manual request for the property that would remove the dwelling from the list of available properties:

> What I do is match properties every day. In the morning I check the [database], [if there is a match] we also submit a manual allocation form…and then the lettings team leader looks at the priorities and then makes the decision as to who gets that property. (NSW practitioner panel)

When the housing department does not have oversight of all aspects of the system, as is the case in each state in this study, this adds further complexity and information gaps. In Tasmania, for example, local housing support officers can only check departmental property databases, not the property databases of other providers. Although Tasmania has an overall social housing supply of approximately 14,000 dwellings, the relocation team in Homes Tasmania can only see vacancies for less than 7,000 dwellings. More than half the social housing system is invisible for the purposes of allocating or relocating tenants.

In NSW and Victoria, where the relocation teams are separate from local tenancy management teams managing TIR, there is some degree of internal departmental competition for properties. In some case Relocation Officers 'lost' properties, especially those with modifications for tenants with mobility or access needs:

> They have competing match, which might match another client [to the property], so I'll tend to lose the property…when it's declined I have to cross check why is it declined and whether the district has given [it] to a client which is more [of a] priority than our client. (NSW practitioner panel)

Once a property has been identified and negotiated that a Relocation Officer feels is appropriate, they proceeded to make an offer to the tenant.

3.5.3 Offering

Offering properties to tenants being forced to relocate due to estate renewal is a complex and time consuming process, compounded by the limited amount of stock available across any state department asset portfolio. This is exacerbated by the geography of estates being renewed, which are often in established suburbs or inner-city locations, themselves experiencing strong uplift in surrounding property values and limited supply of stock. To facilitate negotiation, Relocation Officers are afforded a degree of flexibility in the allocations process, sometimes not strictly adhering to departmental policy regarding offers:

> [We] make assessments based on the renters needs rather than just going off stock standard policy like… this is your first offer, second offer, take it or you're off the list… (Victoria practitioner panel)

> We had a lot of flexibility that way, which was really good, which was part of the success of the [Public Housing Renewal] program. (Victoria practitioner panel)

Flexibility around relocation offers takes several forms. First, in some instances, Relocation Officers have the capacity to offer larger properties to tenants than allowed in allocation policy. Eligibility in terms of number of bedrooms was a key criterion for identifying possible properties, meaning most tenants were relocated to properties aligned with their eligibility. This often means a tenant moved into a smaller dwelling. In some case tenants were offered larger properties to entice them to accept an offer. Relocation Officers called this 'under occupancy':

> Sometimes we will actually under occupy because of the competing demands on the available properties where we need to move people. So sometimes that's also dangling a little bit of a carrot. (Tasmania practitioner panel)

> *…if somebody's moving from maybe a two-bedroom and they're only…eligible now for one, we would negotiate…we would offer them one [bedroom] at the start and then we would offer them are two-bedroom property probably in their second offer. (Victorian practitioner in joint panel)*

Second, flexibility is exercised in the number of properties offered to tenants. Typically, policy and convention provide for two formal offers to tenants, similarly for those on the waiting list. Relocation teams routinely work around this policy by providing a series of informal offers to tenants to avoid rejection and provide more flexibility and discretion within the policy. Tenants might receive several informal offers before their first formal offer. There can also be elements of coercion, where tenants feel little choice but to accept an offer. These informal offers, made possible via ongoing relationships between Relocation Officers and tenants, take the form of discussion about available properties that might meet the needs of the tenant. Only when the tenant agrees that the property is acceptable does the Relocation Officer proceed to a formal offer:

> *We had authority and authorised the environment where we can be more flexible because it's not in anyone's interest to actually invalidate people's offers because they said no to two properties. (Victoria practitioner panel)*

An important part of the offer process, used in all states to varying degrees, was the ability for Relocation Officers to take tenants on a tour of the property being offered. Relocation Officers were seen to act akin to real estate agents in the private sector. Taking tenants on a tour of potential properties is practiced as a strategy to overcome tenant reluctance and entice tenants to accept offers. Relocation Officers would usually drive tenants to view the property:

> *… taking them actually to a property, walking them through like a real estate agent…giving them time to think about it…Come out and have a look at it again. (Victoria practitioner panel)*

Viewing a property was typically part of the informal offer process, where Relocation Officers gauged whether the tenant would accept the property, before proceeding to the formal offer:

> *So we would take them out…get them out there and get them actually talking, you know, and getting to feel where the property is…It would be an informal offer, like I said, because we had the flexibility and we were really wanting that engagement with [what] the renter wanted. (Victoria practitioner panel)*

Importantly, the use of informal offers has changed through time and relates to the timing of the larger redevelopment or asset sales program in which the relocation team are operating. The NSW case is illustrative here. NSW Relocation Officers often used informal offers for tenants being relocated form early renewal projects, such as Millers Point and Ivanhoe estates. The political nature of the decision to relocate tenants from Millers Point was identified as an important factor framing the informal offer process. In Ivanhoe, the tenant relocation process took almost two years. In contrast, more recent estate redevelopment projects, such as those at Airds and Claymore, have a much shorter redevelopment, and therefore relocation timeline. This means Relocation Officers are unable to use informal offers as they have in previous locations and are more likely to adhere more strictly to the two offer policy:

> *…we've got a couple of accelerated stages…So instead of having say a two and a half year period to relocate all the clients, we have 12 months or we have 18 months. So we can't afford the informal process, it has to go through the formal process and we have to go through the appeals and the accelerated appeals just so that we can meet those. (NSW practitioner in joint panel)*

Third, flexibility is exercised through the capacity to relocate groups of tenants out of estates targeted for redevelopment. This co-relocation is an attempt by Relocation Officers to maintain support networks established between neighbours, while also acting as a mechanism to encourage more reluctant residents to move:

> *The two families grew up together…we were able to…find two properties in a new development, which is literally around the corner from them, they're right next to each other. (Tasmania practitioner panel)*

Relocations Officers reported that these forms of flexibility are important in allowing them to negotiate directly with tenants and enhance a sense of choice:

> *It's a real negotiation and having those sort of conversations and making them feel like we're not just shoving them to one side… (Tasmania practitioner panel)*

> *So if we have a renter who has asked for certain specifics and we've met and matched most of those specific requirements and it may be just be the next suburb back, it might not be the area that they're particularly wanting, but it meets everything else then we would still use that as an informal offer. (Victorian practitioner in joint panel)*

In both TIR and DIR, negotiating with tenants could be a time consuming process, with Relocation Officers required to work with tenants and their support networks (such as health practitioners) to convince tenants that a property was suitable:

> *Those conversations went not just once or twice, so maybe it went through the duration of the program…we would check in with renters and talk to them and then see them with family or see them with their supports or even with their children and have those conversations and over time they would come to say "OK, you're right [about the property being offered]". (Tasmania practitioner panel)*

Practitioners also engage other specialist teams across the department to assist with reluctant tenants or help meet specific needs and service providers and support services external to the department to support tenants through the relocation process. These specialised services proved to be especially helpful during the moving processes. In some cases, staff from supporting agencies will be brought in from drug and alcohol and other health related services to provide support.

In all states the cost of DIR is covered by the department, with boxes, removalists, and costs associated with transferring utilities included. This was seen by Relocation Officers as important:

> *…they don't need to be out of pocket just because we need them to move. (Tasmania practitioner panel)*

Relocation Officers regularly attended moving day, providing both physical and emotional support for residents moving from their home (Ruming and Melo Zurita 2022):

> *I go to all of my moves and it just for me that makes the client feel a little bit more at ease knowing that it's not just them. (NSW practitioner panel)*

The ability for Relocation Officers to negotiate with tenants, offer flexible (and sometimes informal) offers, and work with tenants and support agencies to facilitate relocation, rests upon structure of the relocation team and the set of resources available to them (see Section 3.6).

Processes around offers in TIR are significantly more opaque. The written policy in both NSW and Victoria specifies that tenants will be made up to two offers, with a specified period of time in each for the tenant to consider an offer.

3.5.4 Refusal

Expressed policies and guidelines in each state are rather silent on the implications for tenants of refusing offers as part of either DIR or TIR relocation processes. The NSW Strategic Tenant Relocations policy does not contain any information about procedures and practice if a tenant refuses an offer, how many offers they can refuse, and what happens if they exceed that number. In practice, however, NSW Relocation Officers reported that the practice is to make two offers:

> *Our policies have one or two offers…if they reject an offer, [we]'ll do the review and let the note let the tenant know whether there's a reasonable or unreasonable rejection…They can appeal it. And that's an internal appeal…The second offer is under the Section 149 under the Residential Tenancies Act, so that tenant will get a letter saying this is your second offer and if you reject it, there's a possibility you'll get a notice of termination. (NSW practitioner panel)*

The Relocation Manual governing DIR practice in Victoria stipulates that tenants will be made two offers. If a tenant declines both then a set of specific procedures is applied, which can result in a Notice to Vacate being issued. Additional offers may be made during the Notice to Vacate period (60 days). If the tenant refuses, an Order of Possession request will be submitted to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT). If VCAT grant that Order, the tenant will be evicted.

Where a tenant rejects two formal offers, Relocation Officers are reluctant to proceed with formal eviction procedures, instead continuing to work with the tenant to find a property and facilitate relocation:

> *We were very clear that if we had to take it to legal action, it will be the last option. (Victoria practitioner panel)*

> *[Eviction is] an absolute last resort. (Tasmania practitioner panel)*

While practitioners reported it was rare to proceed to actual eviction, the use of Notices to Vacate was rather more common. In some instances, Relocation Officers pursue formal eviction mechanisms against tenants who refuse to accept offers:

> *You might have one or two [tenants who] dig their heels in and will take us to task because they simply don't want to move no matter what we offer them…at the end of the day, they're not going to move unless we have to force them to move through the Residential Tenancies Act. (NSW practitioner panel)*

> *We went as far as issuing Notices to people, but we continue the conversation and negotiations throughout the whole process….We only ended up, you know, going through VCAT maybe twice. (Victoria practitioner panel)*

> *They realise "wait a minute, they're actually serious. They actually want me gone". And then then they'll come to the party and start negotiating. (Tasmania practitioner panel)*

In some states, the nature of the tenant's lease mediates the ability for relocation officers to issue eviction or relocation notices:

> *Our tenants are on two [types of] leases…if they're on the lease of no fixed term, we can actually issue them [a notification] to vacate…If they're on a lease of fixed term, then really, they can sit tight until the end of that lease period. (Tasmania practitioner panel)*

The TIR process, as outlined in the policy manuals for NSW and Victoria, indicates that a tenant will only be made up to two offers. In NSW, the policy is ambiguous on the implication when both offers are refused by the tenant. Victoria has a much stricter approach, stipulating that if two offers are refused, the tenant is removed from the Priority Access Category and placed on the Register of Interest. Where two offers are refused by a tenant on the Register of Interest, the tenant is removed entirely from the Victorian Housing Register.

3.6 Resources, tensions and challenges in relocation practice

To enable tenant relocation, especially DIR, additional resources are often made available to relocation teams. These resources emerge as vital in making relocation happen. Nevertheless, a series of tensions and challenges also arise, that must be overcome.

3.6.1 Departmental budgets and funds for relocations

None of the jurisdictions in this study stipulate that tenants who initiate a relocation application (TIR) are eligible for any departmental financial support for their actual relocation. Tenants are generally required to meet their own costs. One exception is in Victoria, where if a tenant is found to be transferring because the property is 'deemed to be uninhabitable through no fault of the Household' (Department of Families Fairness and Housing 2021), the costs will be paid by the department. However, as shown in Chapters 2 and 4, tenants face significant challenges in gaining recognition of unfit conditions by housing departments.

Tenants being relocated due to DIR have many of their costs paid by the department. Different jurisdictions take differing approaches to budgeting for relocation cost. NSW allocated $5,000 per client for urban areas, with slightly more allocated in regional areas. While there can be minor variations in what costs are covered, the following types of cost were mentioned in documentation and panels:

- removalists
- utility disconnection and reconnection (such as electricity, water, gas, internet)
- three- to six-month mail redirection
- school uniforms (one set per child where they change schools)
- in some cases, the department may also provide rent and water credits at new location.

In cases where the tenant has a right-to-return following redevelopment, departments pay these return moving costs too.

In some cases, relocation teams have additional budgetary resources that can be used to fund alterations to dwellings, to make the dwelling more suitable for the tenant, or to bring the dwelling's level of amenity to that of the previous dwelling. This can include:

- repainting
- recarpeting
- heating upgrades
- vertical blinds
- alterations and installations of garden sheds, ceiling fans, air conditioners or similar, where such an alteration had been made by the tenant at their previous dwelling and they had had prior written approval for it
- assistance with decluttering.

Where modifications are required, Relocation Officers work directly with property managers or relevant agencies:

> *I also advise Land and Housing [Corporation] that this property has been identified for a certain client [with particular dwelling] needs…and once Land and Housing has released the property maintenance [we can make an offer to the tenant]. (NSW practitioner panel)*

However, not all maintenance work or requested modifications are undertaken. Relocation Officers may have to mediate between tenants and other maintenance or property divisions to find a mutually acceptable position that meets budget constraints and the needs or preferences of the tenant.

> *[We] negotiate with Land and Housing [Corporation] to see whether they'll do further work to suit the client and to make the client accept. (NSW practitioner panel)*

Practitioners observed that this was a highly contingent aspect of DIR for estate renewal. Sometimes additional budget was made available, while in other instances little additional resources would be available.

Across our three study jurisdictions, Victoria was the only state that engaged in significant head lease or spot purchase programs, although head leasing has been undertaken periodically in other states. The catalyst for head leasing or spot purchase programs was a need to secure a property, usually in a specific geographic location, to meet the needs of a tenant household. Spot purchases were undertaken as part of wider department initiatives to acquire new properties. Thus, these properties were not specifically aligned with the relocation process, however, relocation teams were, in some cases, able to work with other sections of the department to secure a new property for their tenants:

> *From an acquisition perspective, there was no budget attached to the project to buy properties. However, we did work with the acquisition team that have the, you know, the general yearly purchase targets to see if we can tap into some of those. (Victorian practitioner panel)*

Head leasing was more common, with a budget tied to the relocation process:

> *We did have a budget for leasing… Using the lease option [occurs] when we run into difficulties that we just can't fulfill with our own stock profile… It's always a secondary or third option when necessary. (Victoria practitioner panel)*

An advantage of head leasing was that it did not remove properties that would be available to the general waiting list, however:

> *at the end of the day [leasing] also causes its own problems…leasing properties is not a permanent solution. It's a temporary solution. (Victoria practitioner panel)*

Thus, head leasing is primarily a short-term option, used when properties are being renovated, that allows tenants to continue to live in an area they are familiar with and to return to their original location (although not necessarily dwellings) once work is completed. A further problem with head leasing was the fact that tenants are required to move multiple times during an estate renewal, with relocation officers suggesting that most tenants choose to relocate to a more permanent dwelling somewhere else, rather than staying local in a head lease and being required to move several times.

3.6.2 Staff skills and team structure

Tenant relocation for estate renewal is complex and practitioners recognise that this requires specific skills. Relocation Officers require a knowledge of the social housing system. A long employment history within a state housing department was considered a benefit as this allowed Relocation Officers to navigate the sometimes complex set of institutional structures that mediate the process. These include knowledge of department systems and databases, as well as understanding the roles and responsibilities of different teams with the department. Further, the ability to work with tenants was identified as an important skill for staff working in relocations teams, especially the ability to build relationships with tenants and communicate with them about the relocation process while being honest and compassionate:

> *When we're looking for relocation coordinators, we need to find people who can develop those relationships [because] some of them are very difficult relationships. (NSW practitioner panel)*

As noted earlier, there is a significant administrative difference in the organisation of roles between the three jurisdictions in this study. In Tasmania relocations for estate renewal and tenant initiated relocations are managed by the same team. NSW and Victoria have dedicated relocation teams whose sole responsibility is to move tenants for estate renewal, who operate separately from Tenancy Officers who manage tenancies and transfer applications. Separation of these duties was regarded as essential to success by relocations teams in NSW and Victoria:

> *And there needs to be an acknowledgement that relocation is its own thing. And if you're going do relocation, you needed the time and effort to do it. It shouldn't be taken as part of some other duty. (Victorian practitioner panel)*

Local area Tenancy Officers have many tenancies that they manage, usually more than 300 per Officer. In comparison, dedicated Relocations Officers manage less than 100 tenancies per Officer and only manage these tenants during the relocation process. As part of their duties, Tenancy Officers perform a compliance role in the management of tenants, which includes punitive responses to tenant issues. Tenancy Officer roles can be limited in their capacity to provide support for tenants during a relocation process, primarily due to their role as enforcers of departmental standards. There is an inherent conflict between ensuring that tenants comply with the terms of their residential tenancy agreement, through actions that are punitive in nature, and with facilitating the relocation of tenants via negotiation and support:

> *It's difficult for local housing office staff to wear two hats. You can't be an authoritative staff member talking to tenants about arrears, and then want to support them in the next minute with relocation. (Victoria practitioner panel)*

> *You can't be breaching somebody for the condition of their property whilst trying to negotiate with them to move to another property, you can't go down a compliance route whilst doing that, it needs to be separate. (Victoria practitioner panel)*

However, as noted earlier, there is often considerable competition between relocations teams managing complex estate renewals and the local housing officers managing individual tenancies and requests to transfer.

Each jurisdiction had a similar structure of relocations teams. Typically, relocation teams consist of a manager/ team leader, supported by one or two senior Relocation Officers. The manager/team leader oversees the whole relocation process and liaises with stakeholders across the department or in other departments. Senior Relocation Officers are responsible for supervising small teams of Relocation Officers and for allocating tenants to individual officers. Senior staff (managers and senior relocation officers) also provide support to relocation officers in addressing complex or difficult tenants:

I try and support the team the best I can by jumping in when there's difficult clients or aggressive clients. (NSW practitioner panel)

This intervention often comes after an extended period where Relocation Officers have been attempting to facilitate relocation, and where project timelines necessitate a fast resolution:

There are times when I've had to jump in and just make sure that the job is done because at the end of the day, we'd like keys in our hands so that we can pass the property on to Land and Housing Corporation. (NSW practitioner panel)

Individual Relocation Officers adopt a case management approach and are responsible for working with individual tenants all the way through relocation. Across all jurisdictions, teamwork and a degree of collegiality across the relocation team was identified as a positive, both for the staff working in a sometimes stressful environment, but also as a vital component of the relocation process:

[The ROs are] great communicators…these three [ROs] all communicate together, they don't work in a silo. (Tasmania practitioner panel)

Further, the fact that many in the relocation team have been in their roles for several years is identified as valuable, as staff learn the complex processes, relationships and negotiations that are required to facilitate relocation across projects:

We've been here…five years…it's probably fair to say that our skills and abilities to negotiate and deal with people in this situation has grown in that period of time. (Victoria practitioner panel)

The practitioners engaged in this study across all three states expressed feelings of fulfillment and job satisfaction. They enjoy their work and value supporting tenants through a difficult process:

We wouldn't be here today…if we didn't feel, you know, fulfillment and actually engaging with these renters and you know and guiding them to providing them with a better home that suits their family…I found the job very rewarding. Very much so. (Victoria practitioner panel)

This level of job satisfaction, as suggested in the above quotation, rests primarily on the relationships built with tenants and a belief that they are working with tenants to secure a positive housing outcome, albeit one driven by estate renewal or property sales that force tenants from their current dwelling.

3.6.3 Relocation officer-tenant relationships

For those working in tenant relocation, the need to develop relationships with tenants was acknowledged as vital. This is reflected in the staff allocation and resourcing differentials across teams. Relocations officers facilitating estate renewal acknowledged they had a smaller client base than a local TOs might offering greater opportunity for a deeper relationship:

It's very different to a client service team where a client service officer is managing 400 tenancies, they don't have the time to really have an in-depth relationship, but that's the big difference. (NSW practitioner panel)

The development of new relationships by relocations teams can often be shadowed by a tenant's previous experiences:

> *[A] challenge for us is the tenants experience because many, over the years coming through the housing system, they don't get that type of client service delivery. It's not a hit on any of the client service teams. It's just the nature of the business…they just don't have the time to focus on an individual tenant in a positive way. (NSW practitioner panel)*

Indeed, Relocation Officers work to differentiate themselves from Tenancy Officers. Specifically, Relocation Officers emphasised that their goal was to support tenants through the relocation process and that other tenancy related matters, such as rent arrears or maintenance issues, was not their concern and would not influence the relocation process:

> *I think having that time as well allowed us to build up good relationships with the renters, good relationships with family members, support workers…not to deal with…rent arrears or anything like that…it's sort of removed us from the tenancy workers. (NSW practitioner panel)*

> *We're solely focused on this and we weren't worried about arrears or, you know, all these other tenancy stuff that the local offers had to deal with. (Victoria practitioner panel)*

The unique nature of DIR, where tenants are being forced from their home, was acknowledged as requiring a higher level of involvement by Relocation Officers, whose roles and relationships with tenants is characterised as going 'above and beyond' what would be expected in more traditional client service office/tenant relationships:

> *[From] helping them pack and driving them to view the properties and all those sorts of things, we go above and beyond what just general a tenant transfer will do. We do everything from A-Z for their relocation because they're being asked to move. It's not their choice. So because we're asking them to move, we should be doing everything that we can so that they're not out of pocket or they're not made to feel that they're just being shoved out of their home. (NSW practitioner panel)*

The importance of relationships with tenants is recognised at two scales. First, relationships with the wider community are acknowledged as vital by Relocation Officers. These wider relationships are seen to address issues of misinformation, while providing support to the community during a stressful period:

> *The community engagement's really important and we work very strongly and very closely with our community out in Campbelltown. (NSW practitioner panel)*

In some projects, Relocation Officers will be members of community reference or information groups.

Second, Relocation Officers across all states emphasised the importance of developing positive relationships with individual tenants, with issues of trust and rapport identified as vital in facilitating tenant relocation:

> *…the most important thing is to try and build up that rapport…with that tenant trying and trying to suss out what the situation is. (Tasmania practitioner panel)*

> *It's about building rapport, so if we can build the rapport with the client right from the start and if we follow through on what we say, we're going to do, that builds trust, especially in those clients that are a little bit more negative about the process. (NSW practitioner panel)*

It is through these relationships that Relocation Officers are better able to identify tenants' needs and allocate appropriate properties:

> *[It's] very difficult to have a holistic approach if you're…trying to match [on] a computer…You have to know the person to match the property as well. (Victoria practitioner panel)*

Further, while relationships with tenants are considered vital to the relocation process, so too are relationships with their extended support networks, be they friends, family or professional health or social services. The relationship between Relocation Officers and tenants can be long-term and take place over several different stages of the relocation process. In seeking to build relationships with tenants, relocation teams acknowledge the need of a consistent point of contact; it is important that each tenant is allocated a Relocation Officer who manages the whole relocation process:

> It needs to be the same person where possible doing that whole role…it's really important the client relationship that we develop. (NSW practitioner panel)

> … because staff were directly assigned to each of sites, so they were there for the whole the whole time. (Victoria practitioner panel)

While initial contact with tenants typically takes the form of an in-person conversation initiated by Relocation Officers who knock on tenants' door, Relocation Officers emphasise the need for ongoing communication and interaction throughout the relocation process:

> It's just not the one [meeting], it's the initial one. And then you go back and meet with them again and have further conversations…you're constantly in contact with them. (Tasmania practitioner panel)

> It goes back to building relationships and just taking the time maintaining the communication being open and transparent. (NSW practitioner panel)

Importantly, this communication need not be in-person, with Relocation Officers often providing tenants with a mobile contact number, allowing tenants to contact them directly at any time to discuss the relocation process:

> They have our mobile phone number so they can contact us direct. (NSW practitioner panel)

The ability for tenants to contact Relocation Officers directly by phone sits in stark contrast to most public housing tenants who are unable to directly contact their tenant managers, including those in TIR.

Across the states, Relocation Officers emphasised the need to be honest and trustworthy in their dealings with tenants. Being honest in these interactions, specifically about the timing of relocation, as well as size and location of new property, were seen as vital in facilitating relocation:

> I think with those conversations we've always been honest…Actually being very transparent and honest and bringing all the information out. (Victoria practitioner panel)

While the intention of Relocation Officers was to establish an open and honest relationships with tenants, not all tenants experiencing relocation felt as though this was the case (see Chapter 4).

A core component of the relocation process is monitoring tenants after they have moved into their new property. In all state, Relocation Officers contact tenants in the months after relocation:

> I'm there on the day that they move, we keep contact with them for any up to three months after as a post move visit to make sure that everything is OK and everything is settled. (NSW practitioner panel)

> A couple of months after they had moved on, just to double check that you know that everything was OK… that they had settled into their property, they had got in touch with the local housing office. (Victoria practitioner panel)

In some instances, the relationship between Relocation Officers and tenants extends well beyond the relocations, with some tenants contacting staff years after. This contact is primarily social, with tenants reaching out to Relocation Officers to inform them of changes in their lives or simply to talk with someone they had developed a relationship with:

> *I actually get phone calls quite frequently from renters. I relocated four years ago just for that very reason. Just calling to say hi. (Victoria practitioner panel)*

While establishing a relationship is vital in enabling relocation, it was also acknowledged that in some cases tenants continue to contact Relocation Officers after the relocation in relation to other tenancy or dwelling matters, requiring Relocation Officers to 'break away from that relationship':

> *Sometimes they don't want to let go. You know they continue to call the relocation officer because they think that's who I'm going to get things done with from now on…Then we have to…slowly break away from that relationship over time. (NSW practitioner panel)*

3.6.4 Practitioner reflections on challenges of tenant relocation

Practitioners indicated six main challenges to tenant relocation. First, while time is identified as a valuable resource to establish rapport and trust, so too is time identified as a major challenge. Specifically, the redevelopment timeline, established by other government agencies or politicians, sets the parameters for the relocation process. In short, relocation teams are given a deadline by which all tenants are to be relocated:

> *You've got decisions made by, you know, cabinet or state government and the department of Planning and Environment. They're like "look, we need you to move within 12 to 18 months so we can start demolition start building". (NSW practitioner panel)*

> *I think the biggest thing is timing. Having the people that make the decisions about the stages or the areas, the timeframes can be exceedingly unrealistic of how quickly they want you to relocate. (NSW practitioner panel)*

Second, arguably the biggest challenge facing relocation officers is securing new properties. Limited availability places DIR in direction competition with local housing management teams responsible for managing allocations of new and existing tenancies, including TIR. The availability and variability amongst department stock, in terms of location, size, built form and upkeep or maintenance, is identified as a major challenge:

> *And of course we have very varying levels in the level of amenity. The stock that we have, we have really old stock. [Tenants] want to hold out for something, not so old and that has, you know, all the bells and whistles. So that can present as a challenge. (Tasmania practitioner panel)*

> *…it's like a game of chess at the minute of trying to see where the stock is, where the availability is. (Victorian practitioner in joint panel)*

Thus, there can be considerable variation in the time taken to relocate tenants. There was some frustration within the relocation teams that, while they had successfully relocated tenants, new properties delivered through large regeneration schemes were not being delivered fast enough, thereby providing new stock:

> *They want us to move tenants into places that we don't have anymore because a lot has been sold off. It'd be good if they actually built places. (NSW practitioner panel)*

Third, and also related to the issue of time, Relocation Officers raised concerns about the nature of the estate environment during the relocation process, specifically the growing number of vacant properties. As residents relocated, issues related to increased opportunities for criminal behaviour were identified, as were concerns about isolation for residents who remained on the estate until the final stages of relocation:

> One of the other challenges we had came about later on, after we've moved a lot of people is…you will have what we call Swiss cheese…where you've got people living in one building, other people living in other buildings…site security becomes an issue because people tend to want to break in. [So relocation officers end up] being the estate managers too, constantly on the ground checking for break-ins and stuff. (Victoria practitioner panel)

Fourth, the presence of other (non-relocation) department staff and contractors entering the estate to undertake works related to the redevelopment process (such as design decision making or soil testing) was identified as a challenge. The presence of other staff or contractors on the estate was seen to cause anxiety for some tenants, especially related to the timing of the relocation process.

A fifth challenge identified by some Relocation Officers, especially during initial interactions, was the inability of tenants to differentiate them from their tenancy managers. As noted above, Relocation Officers recognise that tenants have often negative experiences with their local tenancy managers, primarily due to the large numbers of tenants managed by these staff. Residents often were critical of past actions (or inactions) of the department:

> So when we come in, we're like "hey, I'm you're relocation officer, I'm going to help you move" and "they're like, right, why didn't you help me fix my guttering? Why, you know, every time I call housing this, these are the issues I raised". (NSW practitioner panel)

These past interactions with the department were a barrier for Relocation Officers developing relationships with tenants and required time to clarify their role and establish a degree of trust.

Sixth, in some states the wider organisational structure of the departments responsible for managing properties and tenancies was identified as a challenge. For example, in NSW the fragmentation induced by having tenancy management within the Department of Communities and Justice and property management by NSW Land and Housing Corporation within the Department of Planning was identified as a key challenge in coordinating stock and tenancy issues:

> They [Land and Housing staff] don't understand our social housing clients. They come from a private [property/development] background. (NSW practitioner panel)

> We used to be one organisation. We were like Department of Housing and I thought that worked really well. We used to focus on housing. Now we've been broken up and they're part of [the Department of] Planning. We're part of a big organisation, [Department of] Communities and Justice and I just think we've lost focus on the housing part. (NSW practitioner panel)

3.7 Policy implications

Tenant relocation, especially DIR, is a complex and time consuming process. Yet, tenant relocation is also context specific; it is mediated by the unique redevelopment process, tenant characteristics and histories, and the skills and experiences of relocation officers. Building on the reflections of practitioners in NSW, Victoria, and Tasmania, five key policy implications emerge.

3.7.1 Tenant needs should inform relocation processes and timelines

There is scope to better connect estate renewal and tenant relocation processes. While historically these two processes have been managed by different government departments, or different sections of departments, they are inherently intertwined – estate renewal cannot commence until tenants are relocated, while the actions of relocation teams are mediated by renewal timelines. While there is some communication between these teams, there is scope for earlier and clearer management and more formalised communication arrangements. Such structures would help inform Relocation Officers of changes to renewal timelines, but also offer a mechanism for the needs of tenants to inform the wider renewal project. Typically, the renewal timeline is the driving factor. However, there is a need to acknowledge that for tenant relocation to be done well, it takes time. The time required to relocate tenants should be the defining factor that shapes the early stages of the renewal process, not imposed development timelines.

3.7.2 Autonomy, flexibility and resourcing of relocations teams

Second, while there is a need for relocations teams to be better incorporated in the renewal process (at least in its early stage governance), there is also a need to maintain the autonomy of relocation teams. The capacity of relocations teams to be flexible and responsive is vital to tenant relocation. In NSW and Victoria, the autonomy of individual Relocation Officers and the team itself, managed by a senior manager, is regarded as vital in navigating the diverse challenges experienced by tenants. This suggests that it is important to retain stand-alone relocation teams where they already exist. Jurisdictions with other arrangements might consider the lessons for their own structures. Having dedicated relocation teams can help separate DIR from everyday tenancy matters, such as rent arrears. This allows Relocation Officers to focus on supporting tenant relocation, which can assist in overcoming tenant animosity that might exist based on previous interactions with the department.

Related to this, relocation teams need access to significant resources, primarily financial. Having a discretionary budget, possibly based on a per capita rate as in NSW, allows relocation teams to work more effectively to address tenants needs. This may include resources for minor modifications, and additional support through what is inevitably a challenging time for tenants. Making these types of minor changes or providing additional support has been identified as vital in supporting tenants to relocate. In the context of increasingly constrained departmental budgets, these costs could be incorporated within the estate renewal budget, with part of the redevelopment budget allocated to the relocations team. Such a cost can be justified in terms of development feasibility, as supporting effective relocation can help redevelopment timelines. It is possible for these costs to be covered by the private sector as part of PPP development arrangements.

The scope of discretion and flexibility exercised by relocation teams in relation to department policy should be maintained. This flexibility often manifests through the informal offer processes, where Relocation Officers engage with tenants on an ongoing basis, potentially suggesting multiple potential properties. While technically operating outside the two offer policy, informal offers are more efficient, helping to avoid lengthy appeals processes that might delay relocation. However, tenants should be informed of the two offer policy and be aware of the likely outcomes of declining two offers.

3.7.3 More appropriate announcement procedures

A procedure around announcing tenant relocation and estate redevelopment should be established. While relocation teams have established strategies for contacting tenants, this process can be compromised when announcements are made by ministers, government departments or development partners before residents have been informed. This causes considerable anxiety for tenants and reduces trust in the process, making the work of Relocation Officers more difficult. A commitment should be made that for all redevelopment and relocation processes, the tenants themselves are the first to be notified. This notification should be undertaken in sufficient time for the news to reach all tenants before it becomes public.

3.7.4 Establish dedicated teams to manage TIRs

Many of the benefits of a dedicated relocations team responsible for DIR also hold true for TIR. Departments should look to establish teams to manage TIRs. The benefits of such a team are twofold. First, having staff responsible for transfers will allow them to better understand the needs of tenants, potentially leading to better and faster transfer processes. Second, establishing such a team working across the whole state will remove this task from current tenancy officers who usually have a large tenancy caseload. Such a team might enable tenant movement, potentially allowing more efficient use of the existing public housing stock, while providing more choice and control for tenants requesting relocation.

3.7.5 Create capacity by investment in public housing and appropriate staging of renewal

The lack of available public housing to move tenants into is the biggest challenge for tenant relocation, be it DIR or TIR. A compounding factor is estate renewal that removes stock from the system and takes a long time for new dwellings to become available. This problem is ameliorated where redevelopment projects are staged, and tenants can move to new stages as they are completed. However, renewal projects typically reduce the number of available dwellings in the short-term making it difficult for Relocation Officers and Tenancy Officers to secure adequate alternative housing arrangements for tenants. There is a need to ensure that appropriate dwellings are available before commencing a renewal and relocations process. There should be some expectation that dwellings from previous renewal project are available before new projects are commenced. This would require coordination across an entire housing portfolio, thus staging across projects as well as staging within projects. A system-wide monitoring and understanding of the impact of renewal and relocations processes is needed. There is also a need to better coordinate with the community housing sector, especially with many of the new dwellings developed as part of estate renewal transferred to CHOs. It is possible that appropriate dwellings are managed by CHOs, however, relocation programs tend to focus on department managed stock as this is where they have most control and information. Head leasing approaches should be minimised. While head leasing in the private sector may address immediate relocation challenges, it presents many longer term problems for tenants and relocation and tenancy management teams.

4. Tenant experiences and impacts of relocation

- Relocation is situated in the context of inadequacy and residualisation.

- Tenants have lost trust in housing departments and this shapes relocation experiences and impacts.

- Relocation through DIR is experienced as displacement, with attendant negative impacts: uncertainty and confusion, impacts on mental and physical health, dislocation from community, loneliness and loss of stability.

- Tenants' experience of relocation practice is very different from the level of support Relocation Officers believe they provide.

- Public housing tenants often strongly identify as part of a public housing community, have enormous pride and experience public housing as a source of collective support.

- Significant negative impacts can arise from TIR: loss of choice, becoming stuck in an unsafe or inadequate situation, and impacts on physical and mental health.

4.1 Introduction

This chapter describes how tenants experience relocation and the impacts that relocation has on their lives. Tenants who were being relocated due to department initiated renewal programs constituted most of the tenant participants in this study, with a relatively smaller number of participants (three) who had initiated their own relocation. These TIR participants were all located in Victoria. The sections in this chapter draw from tenant panels where participants shared their experience and story of relocation and the various impacts – positive and negative – that relocation has had on their lives.

4.2 Existing research on this theme

As established in Section 2.2, relocation occurring under conditions that a resident does not choose should be understood as displacement. Marcuse's (1985) typology of direct and indirect displacement provides a framework to understand these experiences. Direct displacement occurs when a tenant is forcibly relocated such as through a renewal program or eviction. Indirect displacement occurs when a resident is pushed to move because their housing situation is unhealthy, unsafe or unaffordable. All forms of relocation examined in this study can be categorised as displacement, whether that be direct such as through DIR due to renewal or TIR required because of the twinned drivers of housing inadequacy (see Section 2.3) or the residualised tenant base (see Section 2.4). Relocation is thus experienced as a displacement from homes, neighbourhoods and community.

Displacement studies are not straightforward because scholarly research design and structures are often incompatible with the force and timing of residential displacement. Displacees are often difficult for researchers to find and access, precisely because they have been displaced. Relatively few displacement studies have been undertaken in Australia. However, more than 50 years of research on the effects of displacement from gentrification and renewal in the US, the UK and Europe, as well as the work of key community-based networks and anti-displacement organisations and scholarly work on international displacement with refugees offers a significant evidence base.

That literature attests that displacement has negative impacts on health, wellbeing, livelihood and social connection. Displacement has been termed 'communicide' (Morris 2019a) or 'domicide' (Zhang 2018) to signal the significance of these negative impacts. Communicide refers to the killing of community, a reflection of the way that relocation processes can destroy networks of care between residents and wider social and community fabrics (Mee 2004; Ruming et al. 2004; Ruming and Melo Zurita 2020). In a key study of the impacts of displacement through renewal of Millers Point, Morris reported that '[i]nterviewees felt that in Millers Point they were part of a community. They had regular social contact and social connections they could rely on. Overnight these were stripped away' (Morris 2017a: 156). Domicide refers to the killing of a sense of home and place (Porteous and Smith 2001), a phenomenon expressed by displaced people as experiencing intense 'placelessness' (Liu 2013) and grief at the loss of home (Fried 1966).

Public housing tenants are much more likely to be experiencing significant disadvantage and stigma (Jacobs et al. 2011). There is clear evidence in the literature that relocation has impacts of a lasting nature for people under such circumstances, including being more vulnerable to experiencing homelessness (Burt 2001; Curtis et al. 2013). Those impacts are also always racialised (Neary 2011; Rodriguez 2021), meaning that people who experience racial marginalisation often bear the most significant burden of displacement impacts. Physical and mental health impacts have come under particular scrutiny as a consequence of renewal and tenant relocation programs (Crawford and Sainsbury 2016). These studies have found that while relocation through renewal should in theory improve health outcomes, the evidence is not clear that this necessarily eventuates (Gibson, Petticrew et al. 2011; Petticrew, Kearns et al. 2009; Thomson, Petticrew et al. 2003). Many studies have documented the health impacts of displacement as anxiety, depression, loneliness and intensified physical ill health (Ferreri 2020; Morris 2017a; Morris 2019a; Morris 2019b). There are documented instances of death, suicide and self-harm as a direct result of displacement from urban renewal (Fried 1966; Fullilove 2004; Marris 1961; Slater 2013a; Zhang 2018). These effects ripple out to family, friends and communities (Marcuse 1985) creating much wider impacts of harm and multiple 'hidden injuries' (Watt 2021).

The negative impacts of displacement are felt long before any actual physical relocation occurs (Watt 2021; Wynne and Rogers 2020). From the moment a resident hears the news, the experience of displacement is felt—stress, uncertainty and confusion begin. Indeed, displacement can be experienced without any physical relocation occurring. As renewal can drive gentrification of neighbourhoods, with particular impact on former public housing communities, class inequalities are magnified and indirect displacement is intensified (Watt 2021). This was found in a recent Swedish study where the neighbourhood change was so profound that people 'feel themselves displaced even when staying put' (Pull and Richard 2021: 547, original emphasis). Such 'emplaced displacement' (Wynne and Rogers 2020) has also been identified occurring in public housing renewal in Australia (Ruming and Melo Zurita 2020).

There is also considerable debate about the question of choice in the literature. Choice has been questioned in other human services contexts where there are so few genuine options that what results cannot be considered meaningful choice, such as NDIS (Smethurst, Bourke-Taylor et al. 2021; Wilson, Campain et al. 2022). Some studies find that residents choose to relocate when given the option (Kearns and Mason 2013) and that procedures for compensation or relocation assistance can ameliorate some of the negative effects of displacement (Kearns and Mason 2013). However, choice is a highly contested concept in the context of public housing relocation because tenants rarely—if ever—have meaningful choice and control over their housing circumstances. Indeed, the procedures in place that give the impression of choice or control have also been described as a mechanism that 'sustains and hides an undemocratic reality' (Baeton, Westin et al. 2017: 642).

In some countries such as the Netherlands, people forced to move due to renewal can choose their destination under the Delft model of housing allocation (see Section 3.2.2) and are given 'urgency status' to enhance their access to housing opportunities (Van Daalen and Van Der Land 2008). However, in other systems such as the UK, people forced to move because of renewal have little choice because of a lack of available stock, and the effect renewal has on flooding an already limited availability (Smith 2002). The evidence shows that attachment to place and neighbours strongly drives any choice that public housing tenants might have among relocation options presented (Clampet–Lundquist 2010; Kleit and Galvez 2011; Kleit and Manzo 2006; Manzo, Kleit et al. 2008; Posthumus and Kleinhans 2014).

Existing evidence demonstrates that the processes of relocation are experienced as stressful and distressing. In DIR due to renewal, the experience of the 'ticking clock' (Smith 2002) as eviction and demolition drew nearer caused a high level of stress for tenants. Qualitative studies from the Netherlands showed that several displaced tenants had accepted the first real option, fearing competition from other displaced tenants (Kleinhans 2003). Relocation Officer practice plays a significant role here. Many studies report 'evidence of pressure from relocation staff' (Posthumus and Kleinhans 2014: 109) to quickly choose an early available option. The way in which offers are made one-by-one also creates a significant dilemma for tenants who can't know if the next offer will be better or worse. Research undertaken in Glasgow found that residents had felt forced and under significant pressure to make a decision and take an offer immediately (GoWell 2011).

A further paradox of relocation is that a resident can move to a new dwelling that is more agreeable and an objective improvement on living standards and yet still maintain a negative view of the experience, particularly in relation to the loss of and impact on their sense of community (Goetz 2013c). This demonstrates that the experience of relocation is complex. Even when housing standards are ostensibly improved through relocation, the experience can be deeply negative and have lasting impacts.

Tenant experiences that catalyse self-initiated relocation processes can vary widely, depending upon personal circumstances, geographical and social context, and interactions with local area housing authorities. During the process of relocation, uncertainty and stress are the most common experiences expressed in the literature (Manzo 2014; Manzo et al. 2008), with ambiguous timelines and perceived lack of urgency being compounded by tenant situations that may require immediate relocation due to health and safety concerns. Whilst some tenants wish to relocate to be closer to social networks and friends or family, often they leave behind well-established communities that take time to rebuild (Clampet–Lundquist 2010). Adjustments to new neighbourhoods, dwellings and communities are protracted and their absence can bring significant difficulty to the process of relocation.

4.3 Experiences and impacts of department initiated relocation

For practitioners, facilitating relocation was a work task, one of many they would perform throughout their professional lives. For tenants, the experience was much more visceral. Relocation was an experience that took place over time and space and went to the heart of people's sense of home and community. The data from the tenant panels indicated that relocation was an intensely relational experience, that it was overlaid with many forms of small-scale violence, sometimes interwoven confusingly with care, and often intensely distressing. DIR is experienced by residents as displacement – relocation under conditions not chosen or controlled – with attendant outcomes of loss of community and sense of place, and often significant health and wellbeing impacts.

4.3.1 Notification

Tenants gave differing accounts of how they had first heard that they were to be relocated. For some, the guidelines were followed, in that they found out directly from a Relocation Officer as the process and policies outlined above indicate. Even when practice guidelines are followed, the experience of finding out is challenging.

> They came around a few times and I missed them. I had been out, and then they'd rung me and I didn't know who they were, so I didn't answer the call because it was an unknown number. And then finally I got them one day and they explained that they were the relocation team, that we had to move and what area did I want to move to so that they could find a property? (Victoria tenant panel online)

For other tenants, the system was significantly less effective.

> We were watching the news, and it was announced that we were going—no one knew anything. People were out in the streets. (NSW tenant panel)

Others had anticipated the news for some time, expecting, as other estates were redeveloped and tenants relocated, that it would be their turn at some point.

> So, we knew before being officially told that they would be moving into our area and back then, it was called renewal, doing up houses. (NSW tenant panel)

> Land and Housing turned up at the doorstep, literally in April, and relocations have already started. One of my neighbours moved out a couple of weeks ago. Yeah, I grilled them for about half an hour on my doorstep about the surveying of the property for possible redevelopment, and I said, oh, well, then it's definite, isn't it? I'm right near [new retail development], plus there's been obviously, other [location] estates that have gone. So, we kind of knew it was coming. (NSW tenant panel)

It was clear that for some, the news was unwelcome and distressing. Often tenants disputed the need for redevelopment, and suggested departmental communication strategies were manipulative.

> I mean, we've got people on our estate, yeah, we all have our delightful idiosyncrasies and eccentricities, but we all know each other. We all know each other. So, it was all – as far as I'm concerned, we didn't have any issues, the neighbours got on reasonably well together, and then Christmas of last year, a swarm of workers, two weeks before Christmas, a swarm of workers landed on the doorstep in the early hours, telling everybody the place is going to be demolished. (Victoria tenant panel in person)

> But just very boldly stated that you are to be relocated because your building is to be demolished. It's very--and then five pages of no information at all. Just sort of PR waffle. (Victoria tenant panel online)

The experience of displacement commences, for tenants, when they receive news or begin to learn of the possibility that they will be moved, long before any actual physical relocation. Tenants being relocated due to estate renewal often misunderstand the initial letter from the housing department as an eviction notice and feel immediately threatened and frightened. This experience is at odds with the focus of relocation teams, policies and procedures that are heavily focused on the physical move itself, often paying less attention to the practices prior to that point.

4.3.2 Understanding and engaging with the process

In this study, tenants' experience with the process ranged from willing engagement and even facilitation of the process in their communities to outright refusal or trepidation.

During the Tenant Panels, it became clear that people were also focussed upon the process as a whole. They had opinions on whether the redevelopment was appropriate, on what kind of redevelopment it should be, and on the interaction between the department and the community as a whole. These opinions were often sophisticated and frequently critical.

> *I started off thinking that I would wait until I understood the process better and the reasons better and 11 months down the track, I still don't understand anything. [I don't think] that it makes any sense at all to demolish these buildings because they're in good condition. (Victoria tenant panel in person)*

One tenant contrasted her current relocation experience with her experience of a previous relocation years before.

> *First off, when I was in [estate]…the process before the demolition took about 10 years. They did lots of community consultation, lots of meetings, architectural plans. We saw drawings, I was involved in all the meetings. Probably from the first conception to the demolition took about 10 years. So I knew what was coming up. I knew all the processes beforehand. So when it came time to leave, and they offered me here, I agreed and I came here. It was implied that when I came here, this could be my forever home. Until we got a letter last December saying that it was going to be demolished and that we had to be relocated. (Victoria tenant panel online)*

The contrast between the earlier relocation, where consultation took place over years and tenants were trusted with plans and drawings of what was to come, and this later relocation, where plans were sketchy if present at all, was stark. The inability of the departmental representatives to answer questions about the redevelopment or show residents any plans for what was to come corroded this tenant's trust in the process.

> *And we had an online consultation, and even then, they didn't know the answers because they have no architect drawings, they have no plans. I think the first plan was to get everybody out and then the second plan was to then work out what they were going to do with the land. Their first priority was to have everyone out, but they didn't have any answers after that. (Victoria tenant panel online)*

Tenants were cognisant of the pressure created when redevelopment timelines were short, not just for their own relocations but for the project itself. The sense of rush combined with the lack of strategy fed into a sense that their lives and the lives of their neighbours were not the priority.

> *So, it's a big rush job. They will have us all out, I'd say, sounds like by the end of this year [2022], even though I'm told now that they've got till the end of the 2023. (NSW tenant panel)*

You know, just the fact that I met four or five people here that had recently been relocated from other building projects. And you know, that just seems crazy…they could plan it. They could figure out somewhere where people could go as a group. So that at least they had the support of having the same name neighbours, you know. They could rationally plan it instead of going, oh yes it's Tuesday, let's pull down [estate]. (Victoria tenant panel in person)

Tenants demonstrated a clear understanding of the problems of inadequacy in the public housing stock and were often clear in their support of renewal as a form of investment and improvement in public housing quality. This turned to cynicism when the renewal that many welcome instead became the requirement to move.

In the beginning there was uncertainty, but I think there was an acceptance, well this estate needs to be done up, these houses need to be fixed up. Because when you get maintenance done, they're patch up jobs, and they're still patch up jobs. So, everyone thought it would be a good idea to renew the estate. But then it turned into relocations and then a lot of concerns came out. (NSW tenant panel)

4.3.3 Options and offers

The highly constricted supply of public housing as outlined in Chapter 2 significantly shapes tenants experience of DIR. Supply becomes more constricted as each new redevelopment removes stock from the system entirely, either permanently or at least for a period of time. This means that the work of relocation becomes less about finding a person a home, and more about finding a good enough match, mediated through eligibility guidelines, between household and property.

Although the process suggested tenants would be assigned a Relocation Officer who would work with them to find a satisfactory property, some tenants felt that instead, 'they just seem to just offer anything that came along' (Victoria tenant panel online).

Because my daughter has special needs, there are certain requirements which I told them [about]. They had a house that was in [suburb] and the house itself was fine, but the front door was literally right onto the street and had no front on it. And I said that wasn't suitable for my daughter because she could open the door and run straight onto the road. I said I need somewhere with an enclosed front, like it's enclosed to the gate like we have here so that I know that she can't run out. And then the other place that they showed me in [suburb], the entrance you had to go up a ramp and then up another ramp and then through a walkway and then through a gate. And my daughter at the moment gets off the bus from [special school] and comes straight into my gate and straight into my door. So I said no, that's too complicated for [her] to learn. She needs somewhere that she can go directly, get off and come straight inside. And they said to me, oh, can't you teach her to do that? I said not. (Victoria tenant panel in person)

I have a neighbour who is on dialysis three days a week. She can barely walk and she had to get a doctor's letter. The first place they offered her had stairs. And you know, she had to get a doctor's letter to say that she couldn't climb stairs. (Victoria tenant penal in person)

The lack of available public housing meant that some tenants were encouraged to take up properties in the private rental market under departmental head leases. This was not viewed as an adequate solution by tenants. The insecurity of tenure in the private rental market and the length of time taken to redevelop estates meant that people would be exposed to regular moves, with all the disruption that entailed. Tenants did not take seriously the promises from Relocation Officers that this would not happen.

I'm really concerned that some tenants have moved into places that have private rentals and been told that they can stay there as long as they like. And that, you know, if the building was sold, they [the department] would buy the building. (Victoria tenant panel in person)

They were asking me about a rental house and I said oh would that be only for one or two years? And they said oh yes, we can't guarantee that you could stay there. It'd only be for one or two years? And I said, well, I don't want to go to a rental property. I'd rather go to somewhere that I could stay longer, and they said, well there are no Department of Housing properties. You either go for a rental property or you get nothing. (Victoria tenant panel in person)

They coerced a lot of our residents into headleasing, which is private rentals. There's a man that lives just down the road here, who's Afghani, and I kept saying to him, please don't let them do that to you. Please don't let them do that to you. And he took their offer, and he's still moving about with his family. He's moved about seven times in the last six years…So, these tenants are out there, moving, moving, moving, moving, because you'll get a much better house if you go to head lease. (NSW tenant panel)

The lack of supply became even more challenging when tenants wanted to relocate together with their neighbours to maintain connections and enable caring commitments to continue.

I haven't been offered anything yet, but there was a discussion about a property in the same estate as my neighbour, who has been moved, because when I had the DCJ relocation interview, I expressed I want to either live in the same estate as my neighbour, or very close by because I help him out. I'm a community with quite a few people, but I help him out the most. So, he was moved three weeks ago now. (NSW tenant panel)

Later, this tenant continued her story:

He's quite upset that it hasn't happened. But I saw a vacant property in his building, like within days of him moving in, and I thought, oh, maybe they're going to offer me that? Anyway, I wish there was a better word than 'offer' because I don't think it's an offer. (NSW tenant panel)

For other tenants, however, moving with neighbours was supported by their Relocation Officer.

I had a friend who was also living in the estate, she asked to be moved into one of the new seniors' units, there's seniors and disability units, and she'd said to me, why don't you move in with me in this block of units? So, I went to our Relocation Officer, and said, look, can I move in there, and she said, yeah, no problem. (NSW tenant panel)

Another difficulty arose when tenants wanted to be relocated to a property of a similar size to the one they were leaving.

One of the things we argued really strongly with was the number of people to the number of bedrooms you were entitled to. If you were a single person, you could only get one or a two bedroom. I asked for the two bedrooms because of all the community stuff I did, and all the stuff like paperwork and everything else that I had from those groups, I needed somewhere to store them, but they still only gave me one bedroom. (NSW tenant panel)

For some of the tenants, their relocation was envisaged to be temporary. These were tenants who had been promised they could return to their estate once the redevelopment was complete. Yet despite the promise, there was lingering doubt and often significant cynicism. This was partly informed by the redevelopment plan itself, which are often designed with a predominance of one and two bedroom properties, justified by the characteristics of households as expressed on waiting lists (Kelly and Porter 2019; Levin et al. 2023).

> *They still bring up that the residents that were there can return to the properties if they like once they're built. But I do know that there are more one bedroom properties going to be built there than two or three bedroom properties. And they said that was because their information was that that's what the need would be for. (Victoria tenant panel in person)*

Bedroom numbers are a key sticking point from tenant perspectives as public housing renewal appears to be geared not towards existing residents needs but a future tenant population. Further, allocation and eligibility policies are experienced as additional evidence of a lack of care and understanding of the actual lived experience of tenants everyday lives where additional rooms are necessary for a whole variety of reasonable needs.

4.3.4 Communication

Given the stressful and often distressing nature of relocation, tenants expressed the importance of good communication from Relocation Officers. This communication needed to encompass not just the practicalities of finding a new home, but information about the redevelopment itself, its purpose and rationale, and what might be its outcome.

> *It's building sustainable, modern, accessible homes. That is the limit of information. We know from information that is on the different websites that they're planning to build—like there's 89 homes here at the moment. They're planning to build 350, approximately. And only about 100 of those will be social housing, and none of them will be public housing. And that's what I've gleaned from my research, but they certainly haven't told us. (Victoria tenant panel in person)*

Although relocation teams maintained a presence on site, tenants did not necessarily feel that this led to greater information provision.

> *The relocation team is on site here. It's actually right at the back of me. So it's very handy for them to just pop around and come to my door all the time—not that they do. They've only come a few times. Really they were put there so that people could come and talk to them. I've been there. They did have an open day like every Wednesday during October that people could come there and have a cup of tea and talk about relocation with a 'super friendly relocation team' that they put in their letter. (Victoria tenant panel in person)*

In the absence of clear information, tenants had to rely on other sources: rumour, the media, their own research on departmental websites, or connections with community groups and local advocates. These sources were not always able to fill the gaps in knowledge about what was to come. The resultant confusion and lack of information added to the distress:

> *But I know with [estate], it was way back in the beginning, and there was just so much confusion. No one knew anything. No one even knew if they were moving, it was just all that talk out there in the media. (NSW tenant panel)*

> *Individuals are finding out from doing their own research, and then they're telling other people. That's how we find things out. (Victoria tenant panel in person)*

Tenants particularly objected to attempts by Relocation Officers to gloss over the reality of what was happening. For many people, this was another episode in a long and difficult relationship with the department. This coloured their reception of the news and the way they regarded official justification attempts.

One of the things that was very clear to me, right from the start, the Land and Housing people, and the DCJ person, was that training that they've received. It was very, very, very clear to me that they knew exactly what they were doing, what they were going to say, and they were completely unprepared for what they got from me, because I even said to DCJ person, that – he kept going on with all this sort of sales language and I said, sorry, but can I just stop you right here? I said, I've lived here 30 years, and at the very least I've been neglected, at the maximum I've been abused by Land and Housing Corporation and DCJ. Nothing personal, I don't know you, but this is where I sit. (NSW tenant panel)

Although communication around the redevelopment was important, communication about re-housing options was critical. Often, particularly as Relocation Officers reached into the private market for alternatives, timing was critical. Yet, this did not fit with the reality of many tenants' lives and responsibilities.

They rang me up on a Tuesday morning. This is a while ago. And they said, oh, we have a rental property. Could you go and have a look at it today? It's open from 12 o'clock. And this was like 10 o'clock. And I said no. I said my daughter was home at the time. I said that's not enough notice. I said I can't just get her ready to go. I'd have to get her ready. I said if you gave me more notice, then I could go. Like, if it was the next week, then I could have her ready and go. And they said we'll let somebody else know then that the property is for rent, and they said you won't be able to get it. And I said OK, that's fine. Anyway, get a call an hour later. Oh, the person that we asked to view the property, they can't make it now. Can you go now? And this was at 11 o'clock and I said, well, no, I said it's too late notice. (Victoria tenant panel in person)

4.3.5 Experiences with relocations officers

Although the relocation model in all the jurisdictions studies depended on the experience and relationship building skills of Relocations Officers, some tenants spoke about relocations teams differently. They saw them as a collective, a team of people sent in to carry out a project regardless of the wishes of local residents, as a contingent of officials who could be deployed against their community.

So, when this relocation happened, the very first thing that I did was we were invited to contact these three workers, and I thought, oh, yeah, all right, okay. The letter, and it's oh, da-da-da, just contact these three. I thought, who are these guys here? I thought, who are these guys, and where have they been, and what are they like, right? I'm going to tell you now, some of my neighbours did recognise the names, and they described them as housing officers pit bulls. Now, that sounds terrible, I'm not saying that's correct, I'm simply quoting them. (Victoria tenant panel online)

Well, their first thing was a bus load of – what do they call them? Task force. Task force is coming, be ready…Then they started just wandering around the estate…take the stick to anyone, they were just standing outside people's homes, people would freak out because they didn't know who these people were. (NSW tenant panel)

Frontline workers in public housing, including relocation teams, are classified as clerical and administrative staff. Social work, community development and other associated qualifications are not mandatory. While people can of course accumulate experience within the job, one tenant in Victoria argued that the lack of qualifications meant many housing officers were poorly skilled and out of their depth.

They have absolutely no qualifications. They just happened to land in a job and they're dealing with people of, as you know, diverse background, diverse levels of health, diverse ages…And they're just shoddy. (Victoria tenant panel in person)

As noted above, Relocation Officers recognised that in some cases they were facing an uphill battle because they were working with tenants who no longer trusted the department due to negative past experiences. Tenants recognised this too, but their perspective was slightly different. They were the ones to whom the negative past experiences had happened, and their reaction—to no longer trust or even to fear the department—was a rational and reasonable one.

> *So, then, what happened was, I was home, a couple of people walked through my front gate…and I just had a feeling. I just had a feeling, and I'd heard things around because of all the meetings I go to, and I thought, oh, I wouldn't mind betting that's Land and Housing Corporation. I just had a feeling. I thought that's not DCJ, and anyway, so I came out, in my pyjamas, and normally I do not want to be seen in my pyjamas, and I thought, what the hell are they doing here without some kind of notice? For goodness' sake, why doesn't anybody respect tenants? Now, of course, I know the answer to that because I've lived here 30 years. Respect is just not part of their thing. So, I thought, well, I have to go out. I have to talk to these people. I knew it was important. So, we were talking, and one of the things that was said…when I expressed the lack of respect, and how tenants are treated generally, one of the things that was said…was, yes, we have heard that people have like negative experiences with Land and Housing, and DCJ blah blah blah, I'm trying to change that. My response was, very quickly, good luck with that. (NSW tenant panel)*

> *So, then they offered me the spot purchase, and even now, I am so distrustful of them…and we're coming up for Christmas, I'm so distrustful of them, that I've spoken to particular individuals in the community, and I said, listen, if they're trying to pull something on me just before Christmas, will you be there to support me? (Victoria tenant panel in person)*

In line with previous research (Flanagan et al. 2020), much depended on the individual officer assigned to the tenant. One tenant recalled the above-and-beyond efforts made by a Relocations Officer who had worked with her community:

> *She worked with residents, and made sure she heard residents, and residents knew that she was hearing what they said. (NSW tenant panel)*

Yet even the experience of a 'good' worker was shadowed by the knowledge that turnover within the department is high and that people are frequently moved around to respond to the needs of the department rather than those of tenants.

> *My relocation is not complete yet, so I made the point of asking the…very effective worker I've been working with at the moment—she's very impressive, I feel very confident in this woman. I said, [name], are you going to be around after Christmas? Because that's another little trick that they do…the people who ark up the most, oh, yeah, get a good team in there, get a good impressive team in there doing the job properly, and then at the earliest convenience, move that team, because the chances are, they need them somewhere else. (Victoria tenant panel online)*

4.3.6 Community, intermediaries and advocates

It was clear from the tenant panels that relocation was an intensely relational experience. People worked together to understand what was happening, to protect vulnerable neighbours, and to fight for better treatment, such as commitments to cover certain costs.

We as residents put together a checklist for moving, for if you were being relocated. It was about how to prepare yourself, how to ask questions, never, ever go to an interview or anywhere on your own, take someone with you that you trust. How to look at a property you've been allocated, and again, never go on your own, because it's an emotional time, and after you've accepted a property, have someone go through it with you and list all the problems that Housing has not fixed. We also put together a list of people you need to contact for change of address. (NSW tenant panel)

I have learnt so much since what happened, because we straight away, went into action mode, and we all got together straight away, and wanted an explanation….I would have to say at this precise moment…I'm actually reasonably happy with the way the department is treating each and every one of us…We're watching carefully to what happens to each and every one of our neighbours, because we expect them to be relocated and resettled happily and contentedly, and if that isn't so, well… (Victoria tenant panel online)

We had one man that spoke four Arabic languages, and he used to go to all the people that were having trouble with English and listen in so he could write down what they were being told. (NSW tenant panel)

The process of generating a community response was not without its challenges. One of the tenants on the NSW panel said that 'trying to get people to all talk together, and not be bogged down by the fear, is very, very difficult'. Nonetheless, it was seen as critical that residents came together to find strength in numbers, not just within their estates, but as part of a broader public housing community.

I think one of the most important things with all of this, is residents need to be connected. (NSW tenant panel)

It's important all residents across all areas should connect so that we can fight for the same things. If they do something in one area, then there's precedents, they need to do it in another area. (NSW tenant panel)

For one tenant, the power of community was so significant that they thought the entire process should have been handled on that level, rather than as a series of one-to-one negotiations between Relocation Officers and tenants.

Right, instead of landing on my doorstep the way they did, to me, a letter: dear [name], could you come in to the office on such and such to discuss? And [instead] they could've got all my neighbours into the office so that as a community, as a group we could have confronted this change. Housing is an issue, there is a lot of land here, perhaps we can discuss it as a community, and confront it as a community. Housing is a community problem. (Victoria tenant panel online)

The importance of advocacy in the process of relocation also suggests that those more able to advocate for themselves, or who have stronger advocacy networks, may be able to achieve more amenable outcomes, raising further questions of equality from tenants' perspectives.

4.3.7 Violence and trauma

Despite the intentions laid out in policy and procedure, many tenants' experience of redevelopment and relocation was an intensely negative one. This was not just because they did not want to move—it derived from the way they experienced the relationship between themselves and the department, both prior to relocation and during the process.

I guess I am quite traumatised by my previous experience with them and I really didn't realise that, but I literally have a panic reaction every time they call me or knock on my door or —. So I've asked them not to do that, just to e-mail me. (Victoria tenant panel in person)

Yeah, I think, what was probably such a shock to me in the beginning was the contempt. Their contempt towards public housing tenants. (Victoria tenant panel online)

Then there was the violence of the redevelopment process itself. Redevelopment at scale involves the demolition of properties and their replacement, often to an entirely different urban plan. It involves the abrupt rewriting of home and community, and with it, the loss of people and memories.

I got to move before others in my section of the estate when they came to do it, and they were knocking the houses down, and I was very surprised as to how quick they knocked the house I had, down. I'd moved in 15 December, I went away over New Year, I was only gone two weeks, the day I get back I get a call from another friend saying, your house has gone, where are you? So, they knocked it down straight away, basically, and I wasn't around which was good, because I may not have handled that emotionally, because I did have difficulty with emotions at that time (NSW tenant panel)

They moved away a lot of our old people, our seniors overnight. They were moved during the night, and they were told to never tell anybody where they were. You were instructed not to let anybody know where you were going when you moved. They had a lottery, where 10 tenants would go to one property, they'd roll the ball out of the thing, and whoever the number was got the property. So, everyone turned on each other. There were fights and arguments, people were just disappearing overnight. I still don't know where 60 per cent of our seniors went. I still can't find them. (NSW tenant panel)

For tenants living on the estate during a redevelopment—either because they had not yet been relocated or because relocation and return was proceeding in stages—the redevelopment itself was an extended series of stresses and disruptions, sometimes lasting over many, many years.

But then they've been building a lot of the new properties around me, I have had constant issues with my phone. It either won't connect, or it will drop out through the phone call, and when they started building, before they actually built the houses, we had a real dust issue. They'd dumped big piles of dirt, wind would blow, and our place has got caked in the dust. Now, they've promised us that they will come in with their pressure blower thing and clean that up. But they haven't done it yet. But we keep on them every meeting, with that. It's been every month, but we've just changed to every two months because we're getting to the end of the project…these issues are still going on, even though I've been here 12 years. (NSW tenant panel)

4.3.8 Feelings about public housing

Much of the complexity of tenants' reactions to what was happening arose from the fact that they identified as public housing tenants, and had strong feelings about public housing, as a safety net for the community, but also as a source of stability for themselves.

You know, you've lived all your life [here]. You've always understood public housing to be permanent housing. You know, it was there as a backstop so that everyone was housed. But you know that the social contract is fabulous. But public housing is always, is always promoted as permanent, not well it's permanent until inner urban real estate values reach a particular level and a particular government feels like selling off your block instead of renovating it or refurbishing it or making sure that maintenance is frequent and effective. So anyway, that's just my lifelong point, when public housing is no longer permanent housing, then what's public housing for? (Victoria tenant panel in person)

Tenants spoke passionately and with pride in their communities, as sources of collective support and as places filled with the familiar and comfortable.

We never had one social issue on [estate]. There were never any problems with anybody. We used to cook breakfast for everybody. We had 150 kilos of food delivered each week from OzHarvest which we would share amongst us. We did – there was no social issues. (NSW tenant panel)

This became our community… we've embraced it. And it's our community now. (Victoria tenant panel online)

Yet other tenants accepted that their sense of community was being eroded not just by relocation and dispersal, but by other stresses on the public housing system: underfunding, targeting and denigration in public discourse. One tenant grieved the changes that had occurred due to the residualisation of public housing and saw this as connected to the tendency of tenants to accept what was happening to them even when it was unjust.

I would put it down to that thing where public housing is [seen as] only for the most vulnerable and the most needy. I think the victimisation, the encouraging people to be as much of a victim as you could possibly be in order to get into public housing, and I would also say that there's some issues with some of our advocates. 'You need me to look after you, to speak for you' and it's all joined together to turn public housing tenants into people that should be grateful for everything they get, and must therefore not complain, and must therefore not have expectations. (Victoria tenant panel online)

Although public housing was home and public housing estates were valued communities and sources of neighbourliness and comfort, the public housing system itself was regarded very differently.

One of the things that happened right at the start when they were doing [previously redeveloped estate], and they came over to start talks here, they kept saying to us, but we've learnt from our mistakes at [previous estate]. We kept telling them, no, you haven't. (NSW tenant panel)

One of the things that has made me really angry is that suddenly they've got all this money when they want us out. They've got all this money to throw at private rentals and spot purchases. (Victoria tenant panel in person)

My last private landlord was a loud man who had fallen out with all of his children, so he wouldn't do any repairs because he said he wanted them to inherit a lot of problems. He was actually easier to deal with than this. You know, it's like a blind death machine that just rolls on. Somebody early on who had grown up in public housing said to me, oh yeah, they'll always give you plenty of what you don't want. (Victoria tenant panel in person)

4.3.9 Consequences

For tenants, relocation and the associated demolitions and redevelopments, had consequences that reverberated far beyond the stages of a formal procedure. The enormity of what was happening was expressed by one tenant who said of the announcement that redevelopment was happening, 'I think I was actually in shock for a couple of hours' [Tenant Panel 1, Victoria]. Another described the more mundane consequences of trying to fit the contents of a life into a home no longer big enough for them: 'going from eight rooms down to three, which, when you've raised a family, and you've got everything, it doesn't fit into three rooms' (NSW panel).

Another, responding to the story of a tenant who had a child, pointed out the scale of the process:

The thing is that they take so long to actually build the properties that—I mean, five years out of your life and goodness, five years out of the child's life. It is, you know, like a third of their childhood. (Victoria tenant panel in person)

Other tenants spoke of the impact of the loss of stability, particularly if they had previously experienced significant instability.

> *I have never lived anywhere, until I came here, for long. Because when I was a child, my father had to keep moving for his job. So probably four or five years is the longest I've ever lived in any location. So I had no idea how familiar you become with the place. If you're there for 23 years, everybody on the bus has a face that you know and you know the people at the checkout in the supermarket and you know, it was like a new experience for me. And I guess for me I'm mostly stuck at home, so all those little things make up my world. So moving from here would be very shocking. (Victoria tenant panel in person)*

> *It put me and my neighbours in a terrible position, and this is what I'm saying…because housing is so central to everyone's life, and this is how they destroy the community, because they put people up against each other. That was absolute – that is what happened on my stay. I can tell you now, we were quite a good crew, quite a good bunch, a higgledy-piggledy bunch no doubt. But to me the community feeling has just totally been destroyed. (Victoria tenant panel in person)*

Many tenants reported worsened mental health, on their own part or that of their family members or neighbours. Sometimes this was attributable to the uncertainty of not yet knowing where they would next be living. At other times, it was due to the process of relocation itself.

> *[My child asks], where are we going? And I have to keep on telling her, I can't tell you. So she gets very anxious because nothing is certain. She doesn't know how long we're going to stay here. She doesn't know where we're going to move to. (Victoria tenant panel in person)*

> *It really had a shocking impact on my mental and physical health. Sleeping, not being able to sleep. (Victoria tenant panel online)*

> *Then, they pushed me so hard, I tried to suicide, and it was a disaster and I have all the proof in the world. (NSW tenant panel)*

> *Now, I had a friend from [estate] which is the other side of [suburb] to me… She would stand up and have a go at Housing. Now, she passed away less than two weeks ago. She got to the point where she had just given up, unfortunately. (NSW tenant panel)*

Tenants were concerned about the potential fate of neighbours who, they perceived, had less capacity to advocate for themselves and assert their rights.

> *Because I'm constantly talking to my neighbours, and checking up on them, and saying, are you okay? What conversations have you had? Can I help…? Because unfortunately, none of my other neighbours are active in speaking up for themselves…and [another] is not sitting in a space where she's going to be able to effectively advocate for herself, and it's going to come down to, I think – I think, I'm not wrong, that they will straight evict her. She will not get placed… (NSW tenant panel)*

For some people, the loss of home had even greater significance.

> *I have a child that's estranged from me, and I thought, by moving, that person is not going to [be able to] find me. So, there was all of those issues with that. (NSW tenant panel)*

4.4 Experiences and impacts of tenant initiated relocation

This research identified the following key factors of TIR in the lived experience narratives of public housing tenants:

1. escaping violence or harassment from other neighbours or residents

2. inadequacy of dwelling to support health and wellbeing

3. failure of infrastructure due to poor maintenance, disrepair or defect

4. relocating closer to family, friends, community and social networks.

In this study, reporting about TIR or transfers were infrequent. Only three of the participants, who were all located in one state, reported that they had experienced relocation at their own application. Further research that specifically seeks to understand the lived experiences of TIR is needed.

The stories of these three residents were nonetheless rich and important. They offer insights that complement and juxtapose the experiences of DIR and raise a number of vital questions for relocation practice. Of particular importance is the divergence in departmental care, resourcing and practice from the perspective of tenants:

> There is a profound individual and social cost due to [department] mismanagement, maladministration and opaque housing allocation and contradictory relocation policies: [the department] will forcibly relocate renters to privatise public resources but won't forcibly relocate an individual violent high risk renter to preserve the wellbeing of the majority of peaceful renters and comply with the [residential tenancies legislation]. (personal correspondence, Victoria tenant after panel)

The tenants in this study who initiated their own relocation did so because of severe problems in their living conditions that required escape. These problems related to both inadequacies in public housing stock and maintenance, as well as the impacts of an increasingly residualised tenant cohort.

TIR processes include lengthy periods of waiting for suitable stock to become available and matched to tenant need, and in completing assessment processes to determine eligibility and need. Whilst tenants wait for requests to be actioned, they are often stuck in accommodation that may be unsafe or inadequate or otherwise does not meet their needs. Being stuck in place due to profound and structural inadequacy in the system is thus also experienced as displacement from adequate and safe housing.

Tenant control over the process is limited when compared to DIR. Transfer timelines are ambiguous and bureaucratic processes slow. A lack of clear communication pathways to and within departments, high turnover of Tenancy Officers, as well as diversion to other public services (such as police, Centrelink, and so on) all culminate in tenant experiences of churn between agencies and a lack of control over their housing situation. When transfers are approved, tenant choice (dwelling configuration, typology and location) is more limited when compared to the choice options in DIR. Generally, TIR responses by departments are under-resourced compared to DIR, with no dedicated teams whose sole directive is to respond to tenant requests for transfer. TIRs are part of already established work areas in the department, such as housing or client services. In contrast, DIR processes are well-resourced dedicated work programs that specialise in relocation.

TIR can be characterised as the direct inverse of DIR when considering the degree of tenant agency (control and choice) in determining housing future experiences. Drivers of TIR are, however, constitutive of DIR drivers. The residualisation of the tenant cohort in public housing, and a decline in stock quality, establish pre-conditions that catalyse TIR and provide the social policy justification for renewal-driven DIR. A set of tenant-identified reasons for initiating their household relocation emerge from these pre-conditions.

4.4.1 Residualisation as driver

Residualisation of the tenant base of public housing (as identified in Chapter 2) directly contributes to the need of tenants to apply for relocation. Increasing rates of poverty in the community catalyse other related psycho-social effects and criminalisation that results in incarceration or state intervention. Tenants initiating relocation reported safety and experiences of violence as catalysts:

> *What prompted me to apply for relocation was the experiences I was having and the impact that various other residents were having on my life. It was quite violent. It was very traumatic, and I had to move away, and sleep on people's couches for about four weeks at one period, because one resident was so violent, victimising me, picking on me, and it was a very difficult situation for me. I would wake up in the middle of the night and he'd be outside my door, swearing and threatening to slap people in the face, and he was going to do something. He'd come to my door and say, I'm going to get you. (Victoria tenant panel in person)*

One tenant reported that she eventually had to relocate herself by exiting public housing entirely due to a situation of violence:

> *After being on the housing waitlist for nearly three years, I was finally allocated a unit which was close to my family member in Melbourne. I was very happy to move there, however, within weeks of landing there, another tenant started harassing me. He had a history of violence. Within two or three months he assaulted another female resident, and another male resident threatened them. He was out of control with a lot of complaints against him. We discovered that he had been relocated from another block of units for exactly the same reason. Within 18 months I applied for relocation because I just wasn't safe there. He made threats against me. It was horrible living there. It was a lovely little unit, but I just couldn't live there because I'd have to check twice before I came and went. (Victoria tenant panel online)*

This had significant financial impacts as this tenant went from paying 25 per cent of income in public housing to now spending 45 per cent of income on a rental through a community housing organisation. Housing stress is commonly understood to begin at 30 per cent of income spent on housing costs for those on low incomes (bottom 40 per cent of Australia's income distribution).[8]

Another female tenant who experienced male violence at her home shared a similar experience.

> *The housing officer came to me and said could you put in a report about him, and I didn't want to, because I was terrified of him, and everybody else was terrified of him, and he started picking on me for some reason. Well, it wasn't until after I agreed to put in a report about his behaviour that he started paying attention to me, and his violence started, verbal violence, really disgusting behaviour started escalating, and it was just day, after day, after day. I had to black out my windows at the back and the front, so he didn't know I was living there. I was too scared to go to the laundry, I was too scared to move anywhere because he trained his dog to shit and wee on my doormat. I would put in email after email, can you please do something about this. I was just basically told to shut up. In one instance I actually, I tried to use the court system to get an intervention order, but that escalated the situation for me, it didn't go in my favour at all. (Victoria tenant panel in person)*

Initially, this tenant was not given any documents or forms that would assist in her relocation.

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8   https://www.ahuri.edu.au/analysis/brief/understanding-3040-indicator-housing-affordability-stress

Not until right at the very end, when I was a wreck [did I receive documents]. I have post-traumatic stress disorder. It wasn't until I was really bad, then they believed, finally, my housing officer involved co-health and I had some advocacy. That actually mobilised my application for relocation and took about nine months. That took nine months, and I still had to live in that situation…it was absolutely terrible. It was abominable, it was consistent, it was direct on me. (Victoria tenant panel in person)

4.4.2 Inadequacy of stock and maintenance as driver

Tenants were also forced to apply for transfer due to serious inadequacies or problems in the physical property. One tenant reported an experience of extreme mould in her home that required an application to relocate due to improper maintenance and upkeep of the property. Having arrived in public housing with some relief due to previous experiences of homelessness with a young child, she told the story of arriving:

It was the middle of the summer, so I couldn't see the mould. But I spoke to my neighbour underneath when I moved in, and she said it's so cold here and the mould is so bad. [She said] my place has been flooded from your place, but then laid new carpet, painted over. I was just really happy to have somewhere to live. As winter set in, the mould started to grow on the ceilings and I just got very depressed in there. (Victoria tenant panel in person)

Her young daughter had to be rehoused with her mother to avoid illness from the mould. This tenant spoke of the difficulties in the process of even getting an application form for relocation:

I spoke to a housing officer who was very good, but he was resigning because he was sick of them, and he told me that I need to ask for a priority application access transfer form and be able to do a register of interest as well. So they sent me out one form, I waited two months for the other one, it didn't happen. They gave me one, but not the one that I actually needed. So I waited two months, and I thought, this is ridiculous, so I asked again. Didn't get it. Then the mould started to get really bad, and I sent photos to my housing officer, trying to get them to do work. [Tenancy Officer] said 'I believe you caused that yourself through condensation'. (Victoria tenant panel in person)

Another tenant in the study reported that they had to apply for transfer after their apartment was flooded on several occasions across a period of 10 months. The flooding was caused by the actions of an upstairs neighbour and worsened by the poor condition of the building. This tenant experienced flooding on four separate occasions, with serious inundation to the bedroom, kitchen and bathroom that rendered their home uninhabitable and destroyed furniture and belongings. At no time during the process did the housing officer assist with an application to transfer out of the property. Instead, the tenants were put in a short-term motel stay or other temporary accommodation each time the flooding occurred. These tenants reported that the repair response was extremely challenging and also inadequate. The department undertook initial repairs including replacing carpet, only for this to be destroyed in the next flooding event. Another flooding event caused the kitchen to be destroyed, and the only maintenance and repair was new cupboards installed and the kitchen repainted. While the tenant reported significant mould, this was disputed by the Tenancy Officer initially, and then repaired by being covered with a coat of paint.

The impacted tenants were put up in a motel for a night as their bedroom was inundated with the flood, but were told 'you can let it dry out and sleep in it a few days later' (Vic tenant panel in person]. The tenants had to clean up themselves, either disposing of or placing into storage their furniture and belongings. They had to fight for costs of the storage unit to be covered and for removing the belongings with a lot of administrative hassling with the department.

The housing department undertook some initial repairs including replacing carpet, only for the flooding to occur again. The constant water damage resulted in mould and other damage, which was initially disputed by the housing officer. When a maintenance response was finally made, this was to cover the mould with fresh paint. At one point during this very difficult process, the tenants received a letter from the department stating that they would have to pay for all the repairs:

> *We were sitting there, we were reading through the letters…saying that we are going to have to pay for the repairs of the damages of the kitchen, the bathroom, and all that. I said, well, hang on, that's not right. We took [the letter] around to [the Minister's] office, and we're sitting there, and then they said, 'oh, sorry, we shouldn't have sent you that letter because it was an ultimatum letter'. So, we shouldn't have received it in the first place. (Victoria tenant panel in person)*

During the process, the tenants needed to store some of their salvageable furniture and belongings to avoid further flood damage and dispose of others. Getting assistance with paying these costs was a significant burden, the housing office initially disputing the need for it and then bungling the payment, leaving the tenants in some distress.

The stress of constantly needing to move, replace damaged belongings and experience the distress of flooding forced these tenants to apply for a transfer. They found the process to be very difficult and confusing:

> *We filled out the paperwork with the Minister's office [staff], because I couldn't understand it. Because we had four different booklets, and every booklet [was different] – even the Minister's officers who were there, they didn't even know what was going on. (Victoria tenant panel in person)*

Each of these tenants reported that their experiences caused significant physical and mental health impacts. Tenants felt that housing departments were showing 'contempt towards public housing tenants…It's shocking. They just don't do maintenance. It's like a slum'. (Victoria tenant panel in person)

4.4.3 Lived experience of process

While processes and procedures are in place for TIR (see Chapter 3) what tenants experience differs significantly from the process outlined. All of the tenants in this study reported difficulties just obtaining the correct form to apply for transfer, and long delays between initiating a request and receiving a response from the local housing office.

One tenant in the study had applied for a transfer 18 months prior to the study, catalysed by a neighbour's violent and threatening behaviour. At the time of the panel conducted in this study she had still not received a reply on that application, despite having the same phone number and email address listed on her transfer application. During that time she had to relocate herself, exiting public housing entirely, to remain safe. Another tenant stated:

> *My experience with [the] housing office was tedious, it took months to receive the one form I needed for the transfer. Every time I would approach my housing officer with a query, she would direct me online. It felt as if it was always a battle approaching the housing office. I found a lot of other people had the same experience as I did…certain officers were extremely defensive off the first step. (personal correspondence Victoria tenant after panel)*

Tenants feel discouraged from applying, and reported being met with denial, obfuscation or defensiveness by departmental housing officers.

The number of emails that I sent to my housing officer were very, very numerous. It was very traumatic having to deal with [violent] residents, but what impacted on me even more was the response I got from the housing officer. I was blamed for instigating and picking on this one person…I was blamed for picking on him, when I was just reporting his behaviour, and asking for some help. (Victoria tenant panel in person)

Another tenant stated that on reporting a violent neighbour to the housing office, the response from her Tenancy Officer was 'just keep the doors locked'. This tenant reported:

I felt basically isolated gaslighted and I was basically told to go away, we're not going to do anything about it. Keep your doors locked and if you get attacked, bad luck. (Victoria tenant panel online)

Tenants reported being actively discouraged from applying for relocation due to the delays:

One of them actually said to me look you're going to be waiting years. (Victoria tenant panel online)

These forms of obfuscation, denial and gaslighting were experienced as forms of violence by tenants with very significant impacts on health:

Some basic compassion would go a long way to helping residents feel hopeful instead of subhuman. No one should ever feel as if they have to self-harm (a common theme amongst residents) to be heard by that office. (personal correspondence Victoria tenant after panel)

Tenants also expressed a view that they felt they were only successful in being relocated when external pressure was placed on the department such as from intermediaries and other advocates or by constantly exerting pressure themselves.

The very disappointing part of my experience is that if I had not have gone to the corners of every bureaucrat possible nor advocated for myself to the point of it being detrimental to my mental health I would not have been moved. My neighbours are still in the position I was in. [The housing office] are well aware of the mould problems within the estate. I spoke to an elderly woman in the estate who said there was mould in her bathroom and she had no idea who her housing officer is. She doesn't know how to make an appointment because they never answer the phone nor the door of the office. (personal correspondence Victoria tenant after panel)

I had such mistrust of my housing officer that every email I sent I cc'd an advocate from the VPTA to hold her accountable. A lot of residents aren't aware of the services out there that can help them. (personal correspondence Victoria tenant after panel)

The lived experience of TIR processes contrasts starkly with those process identified in DIR processes. Tenants wait much longer under TIR processes, if they move at all. There are strong feelings among the panel participants that there is a significant imbalance between the resources deployed in DIR and TIR, and a lack of interest on behalf of officers responsible for understanding the lived experiences that drive TIR. Overall the process involves the simultaneous feeling of being stuck, whilst being immanently displaceable.

4.5 Policy implications

4.5.1 Address stock inadequacy

In both DIR and TIR, relocation is experienced as a significant and sustained stress in tenant's lives. Even when the housing outcome is improved, the relocation can be experienced very negatively. Tenants experience relocation as an intense emotional stressor that affects their wellbeing prior to, during, and after the event of moving. Existing research contends that relocation under conditions that the tenant did not choose should be understood as displacement, which often includes the death of community (communicide) or the loss of a sense of home (domicide). Policy makers need to grapple with the social and geographical reality of relocation as a form of displacement. This will require rethinking the policy settings that inform the drivers of relocation, to avoid its negative effects.

Inadequacy in housing stock severely exacerbates the negative impact of relocation. TIR tenants feel little hope in finding a suitable alternative. DIR tenants know that there is little available and feel constrained and pressured. Addressing stock inadequacy through programs of sustained and significant maintenance investment, repair and refurbishment would substantially address relocation pressures and the negative impacts of displacement.

Tenant choice in relocation processes is a contested reality given the lack of control over the circumstances that necessitate or rationalise relocation. One significant structural factor driving this is the lack of emergent public housing supply, which results in a reliance on head leasing in private rentals. For tenants, head leasing signals further disruption and less security, further compounding the negative effects of displacement. Flooding the sector with residents needing relocation puts enormous additional strain on an already inadequate stock and exacerbates the negative impacts on all tenants. Renewal needs to be staged to maximise the availability of relocation options.

4.5.2 Improve notification procedures and quality of information

While the harm caused by displacement cannot be ameliorated by 'doing displacement better', there are clear policy lessons for when relocation is undertaken. The experience of learning about relocation is a particularly stressful moment and can set the tone for all other interactions with Relocation Officers. The experience of displacement begins at the moment of learning about it, long before any physical relocation might occur. In DIR, when people are notified of impending relocation via a media announcement this is experienced very negatively. Even when the news comes through formal channels, finding out is very challenging—it immediately induces confusion, distress, uncertainty and anxiety. The notification of relocation is often abrupt, with little opportunity for tenants to make immediate inquiries. Tenant trust is eroded when no credible plans are presented for what will eventuate on a site that is being renewed. This is enhanced when there is an intense deadline or time pressure.

Negative past experiences of tenants can inhibit communication between ROs, TOs and tenants. Tenants' trust in departments is low, and this has implications for communications, processes and practices. Relationships with tenants need to be improved at all levels so that tenants can have agency and control over relocation. This relates also to community engagement processes in estate renewal. Providing information and negotiating individually particularly in the early stages does not meet the social realities and expectations of strong communities on estates. It can pit tenants against each other, further exacerbating harms. Negotiations about relocations should begin at the level of community.

4.5.3 Resource and support appropriately skilled officers

Tenants observed a lack of appropriate skills and qualifications among Relocations Officers and Tenancy Officers. These roles should be classified appropriately and require specific skills and qualifications such as social work, community development and mental health. Substantial investment is needed to ensure staff in these roles continue to develop necessary skills and have the necessary support for managing complex situations. TIR processes and funding support should be brought in line with DIR processes to ensure that a tenant needing to request relocation has similar options and support to find alternative accommodation.

4.5.4 Remove eligibility barriers

In the case of TIR, eligibility screening may have unintended consequences of leaving a tenant stuck in an inadequate dwelling. A positive policy change would be to provide a clause in the policy to state that where a dwelling is uninhabitable the tenant can be transferred regardless of eligibility. In addition, in the case of DIR, policy should state that a tenant should not be blocked from right of return to a renewed estate on the basis of eligibility.

5. Role of the media in relocation practice

- Media portrayal of public housing residents and estates has a significant impact on public understanding of relocation.

- Negative portrayal of public housing, either inadequacy of dwellings or stigmatising residents, is often used as justification for estate renewal.

- Most news reporting occurs early in a renewal project around announcement and then tails off. Tenants are often missing entirely from the narrative later in the renewal project.

- There is no evidence that media reporting attempts to capture the complex reality of relocation.

- Accurate media reporting is made very difficult because state housing Departments do not provide basic data and information.

5.1 Introduction

This section considers if and how media representations become embroiled in the politics and practice of relocating public housing tenants from their homes. The mainstream media plays an important role in shaping public understandings about public housing. As such, the media can be enlisted in attempts to shape public ideas about whether moving tenants out of their homes and estates is warranted. The way tenants and estate are portrayed in the media can have significant impacts on social housing tenants and how tenant relocations are managed. To explore these factors, this media analysis is organised around two types of media data.

The first data set considers the media portrayal of social housing tenant relocations within print media reporting from 2000 to 2022. This print media data shows the scale, scope and temporality of media coverage of public housing redevelopments and relocations in general terms. The aim is to provide a broad overview of the different cycles of media coverage in relation to different types of social housing redevelopments and relocations, and outline some broad trends and anomalies in the print media data.

The second data set considers qualitative material collected through the panel discussion with journalists who regularly report on social housing in NSW, Victoria and Tasmania. The aim of this detailed analysis is to determine how journalists cover different types of social housing redevelopments and relocations, and to outline some broad trends and anomalies in the journalist data. Combined, these data sets show how and why this group of journalists report on social housing redevelopments and relocations in particular ways.

5.2 Existing research on this theme

Public housing estates in Australian have been portrayed as 'sites of disorder and crime' (Arthurson 2011), which has shaped a representation of those who live there. This has been part of larger debates around social mix, concentration of disadvantage, and the stigma of social housing (Arthurson 2011; MacDonald 2017; Sisson 2021). Media representations can be varied, including print media, television news broadcasts, and fictional portrayals of those living in public housing (Arthurson 2011; MacDonald 2017; Sisson 2021). Arthurson (2011: 101) argues that:

> …the media has played an active role in supporting and embellishing pathological depictions of social housing estates as sites of disorder and crime, drawing on explanations that cite individual agency and behaviour as the problems.

This portrayal intersects with other forms of disadvantage, with 'young refugees… particularly stigmatised' through 'media reporting of Estates as the sites of crime and interethnic conflict' (MacDonald 2017: 1188).

These portrayals in popular media support narratives that justify redevelopment of housing estates. Sisson (2021: 415) argues that media representations perpetuate framings of public housing tenants in negative ways, which acted to legitimise 'displacement and privatization' in Millers Point. The media represented tenants in Millers Point as receiving a subsidy that placed 'so great a burden on the public housing system that it was preventing a substantial number of applicants from receiving support', and hence, supported privatisation (Sisson 2021: 415). Shamsuddin and Vale (2015) analysed media regarding the Land Lease Initiative, a New York City Housing Authority proposed redevelopment project. They found that the proposal initially 'garnered intense media attention as a provocative' (Shamsuddin and Vale 2015: 142). These initial reports focused on 'gentrification and displacement, which were framed as a process of being physically squeezed in and then economically squeezed out' (Shamsuddin and Vale 2015). However, they argue that the media coverage also had the effect of shifting debate away from if public housing land should be redeveloped towards how public housing land should be developed. In this regard, it solidified the justification for redevelopment.

Arthurson, Darcy et al. (2014: 1337) articulate two important viewpoints from the media representations: firstly, that the:

> …residents of stigmatised places bemoan the fact that others and the media, in particular news and current affairs programmes, stigmatise their neighbourhoods and occupants, often without even having visited there or knowing the people…

and secondly, that 'the media needs to be recruited to challenge negative perceptions of estates'. Kearns et al. (2013) similarly argue that residents are fully aware of the reputation of their neighbourhood and the types of press coverage that portray areas as disadvantaged.

5.3 Print media analysis: Media representations of renewal induced relocation

The search on Factiva revealed 443 articles that mentioned tenant relocation due to the sale or redevelopment of public housing across key sites, between January 2000 and June 2022. The number of articles per year is shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Articles mentioning public housing tenant relocation per year
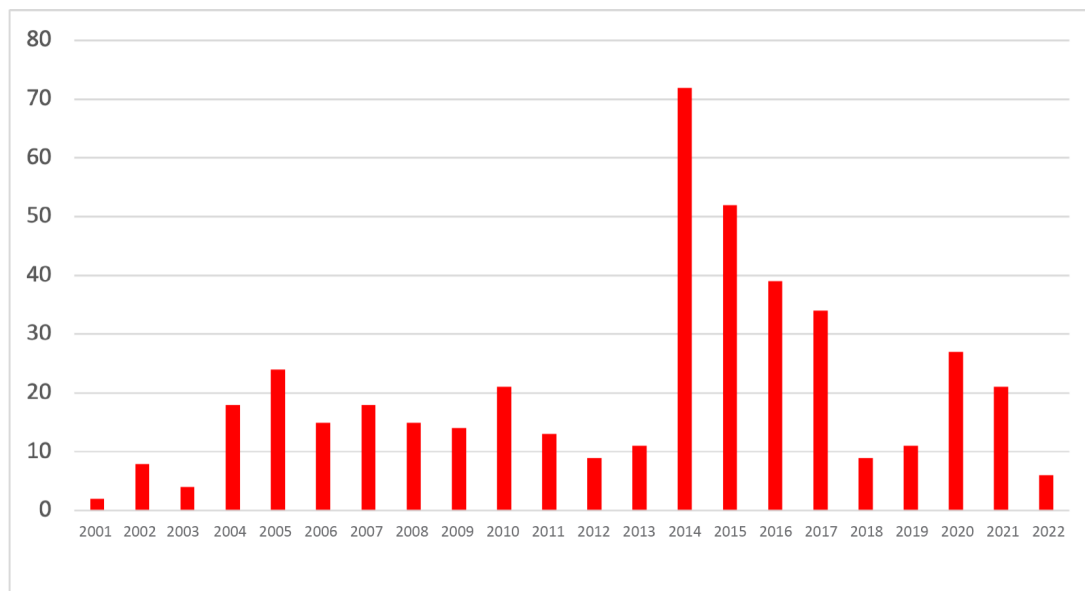
Source: Authors' own research

These articles mentioned aspects of redevelopment and relocation of NSW sites 512 times and Victorian sites 172 times. The large skew towards NSW sites is partly due to the significant media coverage of the Millers Point public housing sales. It should be noted that a single article may mention several sites, or it may mention several different topics related to the one site. For example, an article could discuss public housing redevelopment in Minto with reference to the relocation of tenants. In this example, both redevelopment and relocation would be included in the figures, although both mentions came from the same article.

There is a common pattern in representations of public housing relocations due to redevelopment or sales in the media. The density of reporting occurs in the early phases of a project, around the time of its announcement. Initial articles report the project as a redevelopment, often discussing the fact that tenants will be required to relocate, with this often framed as a displacement. The number of mentions then rises as the project progresses and tails off following commencement. As the number of mentions tails off, the articles tend to focus more on redevelopment rather than relocation. However, following completion, sometimes many years later, the site may be discussed again in an article about a subsequent redevelopment or sale that requires tenants to be relocated. There is no evidence that media reporting attempts to capture the complex reality of relocation.

There is also a key difference in media representation between outer suburban, and inner-city and middle ring suburb developments. Many of the articles discussing outer suburban redevelopments mentioned relocation and displacement, but there were no overt mentions of a right to return. In fact, many articles spoke of redevelopment in favourable terms, as an opportunity to 'fix' planning mistakes such as the development of 'Radburn style estates'. These portrayals were more consistent with what Arthurson et al. (2014) described as being present in television shows such as Housos. Conversely, inner-city redevelopments consistently mentioned the right to return, especially at the time of project announcement. This was more likely to portray tenants as risking social dislocation, as they could be forced out of the area, and lose connection to the neighbourhood. This representation was unlike that in outer suburban areas

The following provides a brief overview of these patterns among six sites: four in NSW and two in Victoria.

5.3.1 Media representation of estate redevelopments in NSW

Minto

Minto is a suburb in the western suburbs of Sydney, which saw a public housing estate development program announced in 2002, with redevelopment occurring from 2006 until 2016. This media review identified 58 article mentions related to Minto between 2002 and 2020, as shown in Figure 6. The first articles in 2002 mentioned redevelopment of the public housing estate with some articles also discussing the relocation of tenants. The following two years saw fewer articles, all of which focused on redevelopment alone. However, from 2005 just as redevelopment was about to occur and tenants were in the process of being relocated, articles began to include language around displacement of tenants, rather than just relocation. This continued for several years, until the project was nearing completion, when discussion shifted back towards redevelopment and relocation. Interestingly, there was renewed discussion in 2020 in articles that discussed redevelopment in Waterloo (covered in more detail below).

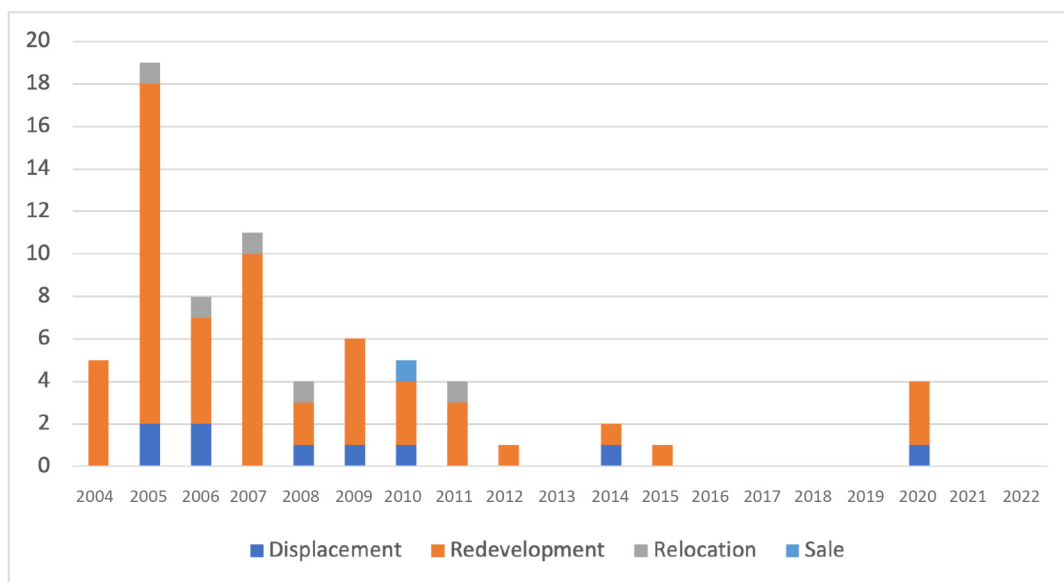**Figure 6: Media article mentions of redevelopment of public housing in Minto**
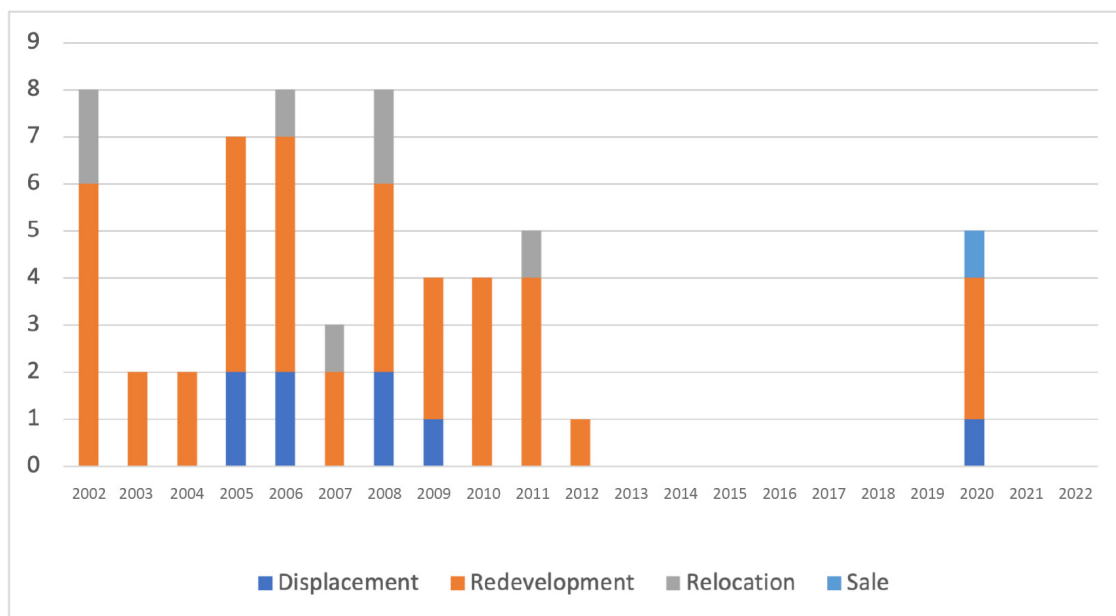
Source: Authors' own research

Bonnyrigg

Bonnyrigg is also a suburb in the western suburbs of Sydney, which has seen redevelopment of public housing. A public private partnership for the redevelopment of public housing in Bonnyrigg was announced in 2004. Construction commenced in 2007 and is still ongoing. This media review identified 70 article mentions related to Bonnyrigg between 2004 and 2020. The pattern of media representation is largely similar to Minto, with initial reports focused only on redevelopment. However, in 2005, articles started discussing tenant displacement— in line with when articles were published discussing displacement at the Minto redevelopment. The same gradual decrease in mentions was observed in Bonnyrigg as was observed at Minto, with the number of articles decreasing, and the focus shifting slightly away from displacement. Once again, Bonnyrigg was mentioned a number of times in 2020, in relation to Waterloo.

Figure 7: Media article mentions of redevelopment of public housing in Bonnyrigg
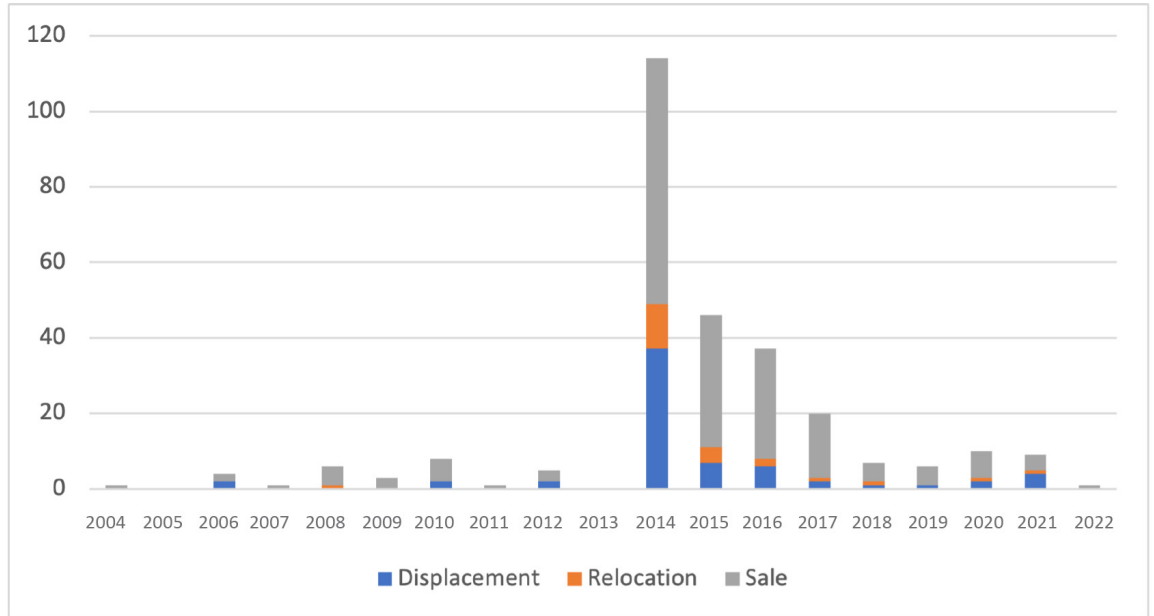

Source: Authors' own research

Waterloo

In recent years there has been media coverage of redevelopment of the Waterloo housing estate in the inner-west of Sydney. Between 2004 and 2022 there were 91 article mentions of redevelopment at Waterloo, as shown in Figure 9. These should be considered two distinct sets: there was discussion about potential redevelopment from 2004 to 2012, with an announcement of redevelopment made in 2015. In the initial articles, whilst little information was known about what redevelopment may entail, the discussion focused largely on redevelopment itself, with little reference to tenant relocation or displacement. This changed following announcement, with a greater number of articles being published, and a larger number of those articles discussing tenant relocation and displacement. Additionally, there was discussion around the right of tenants to return to estates following redevelopment, which was notably absent in media portrayal of Minto and Bonnyrigg. For most years since the announcement, the number of articles discussing tenants' displacement and relocation has remained high. This is noteworthy as the project has not yet started, and this is the same pattern observed in other estate redevelopments.

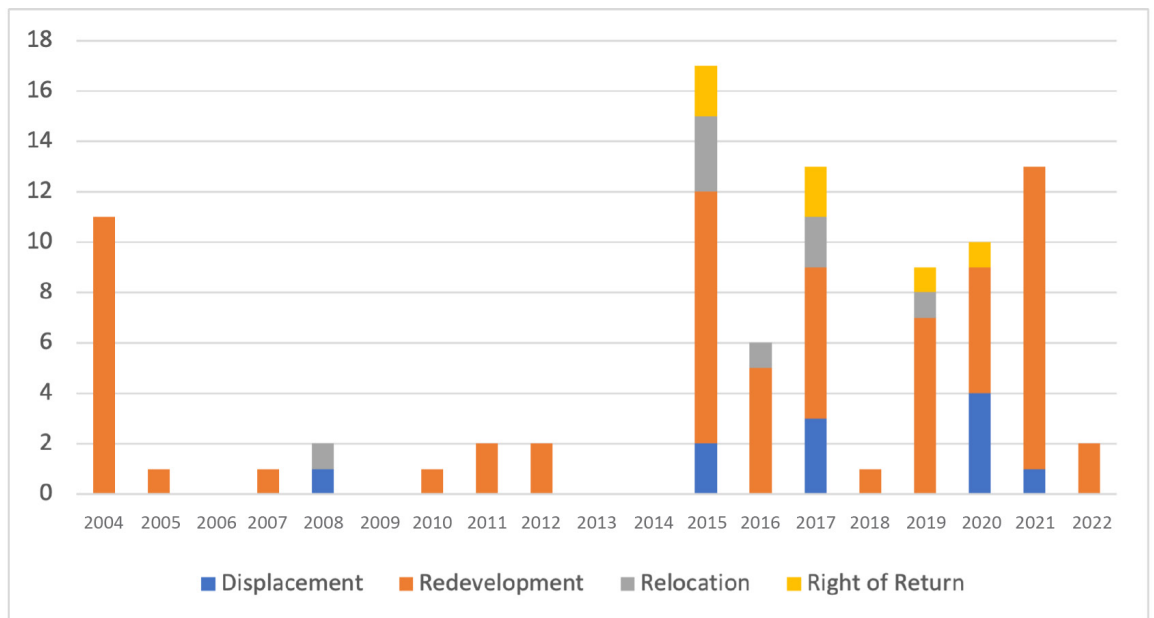### 5.3.2 Media representation of sales of public housing in NSW

Public housing has also been sold in NSW, being justified as necessary to generate sufficient funds to build more social housing. The most prominent example was in Millers Points, which had 279 article mentions between 2004 and 2022, as shown in Figure 8. Properties had been sold on long-term leaseholds in the early 21st century, with an announcement in 2014 that essentially all remaining dwellings would be sold as freehold. All properties were sold between 2016 and 2018. Interestingly, the leasehold sale failed to generate large amounts of media coverage, with only 42 mentions between 2004 and 2013. However, there were 114 mentions in 2014, the year of the announcement, with most mentions relating to the sale, followed by the displacement. The number of media article mentions remained high for the next several years, while reducing from this peak, indicating that as the process went on, levels of interest waned. Similarly, the proportion of article mentions relating to displacement and relocation shrank, with more articles focused on the sales themselves. Later in the sales process, and after all sales had been completed, the majority of articles failed to mention tenants at all.

Figure 8: Media article mentions of public housing sales in Millers Point

Source: Authors' own research

Figure 9: Media article mentions of the Waterloo estate redevelopment
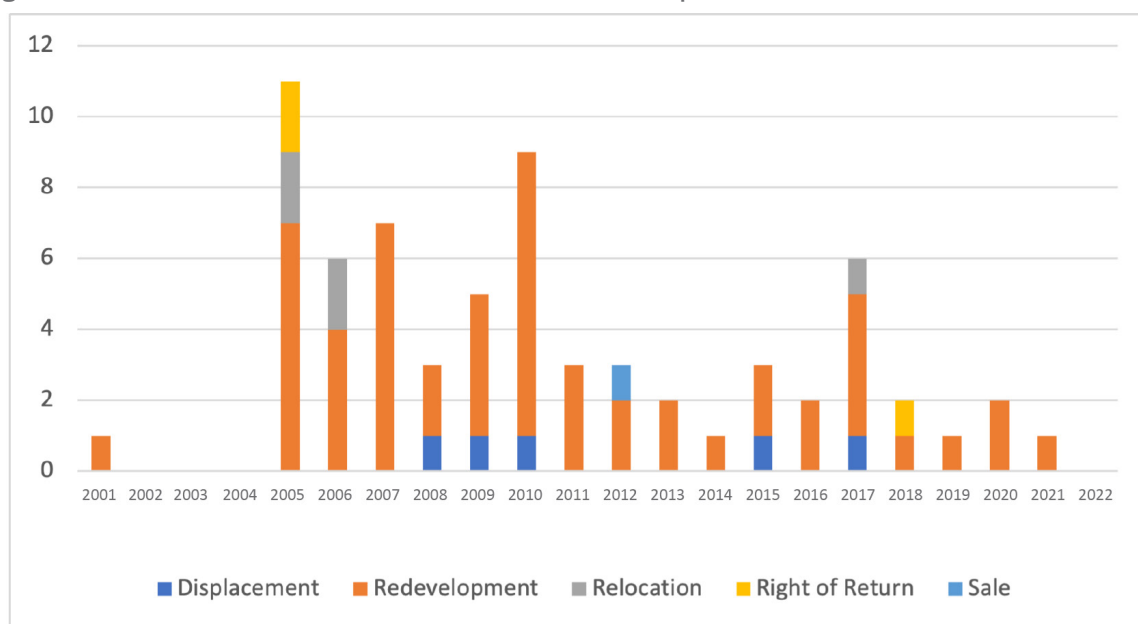

Source: Authors' own research

5.3.3 Media representation of public housing estate redevelopment in Victoria

Victoria's most publicised public housing renewals, which have involved tenant relocation, have been around inner-city public housing estates. The first was Kensington, but as this was announced over 25 years ago, it has been excluded from this analysis.

Carlton housing estate

The Carlton public housing estate, in the inner-north of Melbourne, has been mentioned 68 times in articles between 2001 and 2021, as shown in Figure 10. Redevelopment was announced in 2005, which saw a large number of articles discuss redevelopment and relocation of tenants. As was seen later in Waterloo, there were numerous mentions of the right of tenants to return following redevelopment. As the project continued, there were notably more mentions of displacement, rather than relocation. There was also a large number of articles published around 2009 and 2010, while commenced. However, the number of article mentions reduced significantly over the following years as construction progressed. There was then a small peak of article mentions in 2017, with the Carlton estate redevelopment discussed in articles focused on the Public Housing Renewal Program (discussed below).

**Figure 10: Media article mentions of the Carlton estate redevelopment**

Source: Authors' own research

Public Housing Renewal Program

The Victorian Government announced the Public Housing Renewal Program in 2017, which proposed to redevelop nine key sites around inner-city and middle band suburbs of Melbourne. There have been 48 article mentions of the Public Housing Renewal Program between 2017 and 2022, as shown in Figure 11. There was initially a higher number of articles that discussed redevelopment, alongside tenant relocation and displacement. Interestingly, there were also portrayals of the redeveloped sites as a sale of public land, which had not been seen to the same extent in Carlton media representation. The number of articles related to the Public Housing Renewal Program decreased in subsequent years, but continued to discuss a variety of elements, including the right of tenants to return. Like Waterloo in Sydney, this program has developed into the Big Housing Build. If it follows the pattern observed elsewhere, the project will continue to have articles published about it, which discuss a variety of elements related to the redevelopment until the program is nearing completion.

Figure 11: Media article mentions of the Public Housing Renewal Program
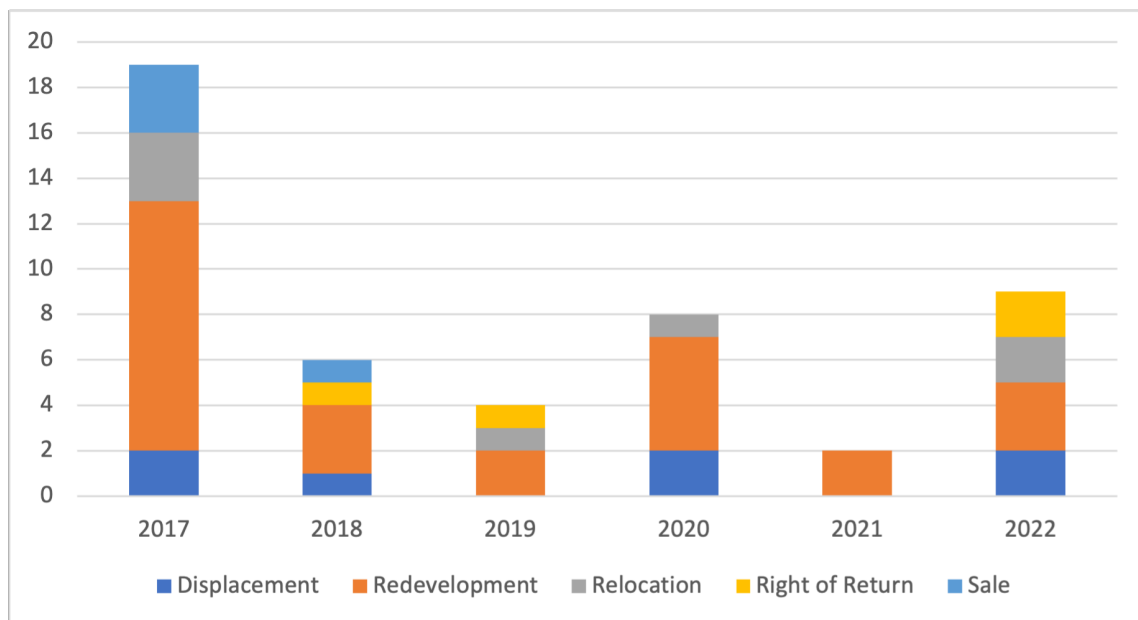
Source: Authors' own research

5.3.4 Journalist reflections: spectacle, denigration and re-storying

This section reports on qualitative data gleaned from a panel with journalists who regularly report on public and social housing in NSW, Victoria and Tasmania. These data provide a behind-the-scenes analysis of the way these journalists report on public and social housing, the decisions they make when developing stories, their discussions and 'pitches' with senior editors in their respective organisations, and their assessment of the wider public demand and reception of their reporting.

The analysis is divided into three key findings from the journalist panel:

1. the role of the media in presenting social housing reporting as a spectacle
2. social housing reporting as denigration
3. re-storying public and social housing.

5.3.5 Social housing reporting as spectacle

The announcement of large-scale public housing estate sell-offs and redevelopments in major cities was described as a newsworthy event by journalists. Yet, there is a general lack of information for residents about the relocation process in either the letters they receive or the media articles that follow. Existing research suggests government Departments are aware of newsworthiness of estate sell-offs and redevelopments. In some cases, Departments have prepared detailed media strategies in advance of estate sell-off and redevelopment announcements. In other cases, residents have used the media in attempts to advance their cause and interests.

Similar to observations in the academic literature, the panel reported that many residents of public housing estates that are set for redevelopment find out about the redevelopment plans by a letter in the mail from a Department. This is quickly followed, or in some cases it is preceded by, a mainstream media announcement about the redevelopment of their estate. One journalist, who has been covering the large-scale redevelopment of an estate in a major Australian city for several years, suggested:

Residents don't usually know a lot about what's gonna happen. A lot of them get sort of that letter in their letterbox, and they're quite confused [… residents can] be quite shocked about that. And that's kind of how a lot of them have found out about these kind of huge redevelopments. Because it's just this kind of very vague letter that appears in their little box that they've had no idea and it's always quite cold in its wording…it's just kind of scary, matter of fact. (Journalist panel).

The way the media reported on the Millers Point public housing evictions is illustrative of the way the media can be recruited for various political purposes at different points in time by different groups and organisations (Darcy and Rogers 2016). While tenants had tried to use the media in their political campaigns around estate redevelopments and tenant evictions in Sydney prior to the Millers Point announcement, rarely had they developed a high level of public support or wide mainstream media coverage for their cause. In March 2014, the NSW Government released a tightly scripted one-page media release to journalists, along with a longer 17-page media pack to a select group of media outlets and journalists. This media pack outlined the suggested benefits of selling-off the state housing assets and moving residents out of their homes. The media pack also included financial calculations that suggested the sell-off would directly result in the construction of new housing stock in other locations. Yet, despite some initial negative media coverage based on this media pack in Millers Point, tenants eventually garnered significant public support and wide mainstream coverage for their imminent eviction.

One of the journalists talked about the challenges of reporting in an environment that is framed by tightly-scripted media releases from government housing authorities:

[…] the housing authorities here in terms of numbers, you get this sort of very flimsy sort of 70/30 per cent [social mix ratio]. Then you get 'what that means is that 856 of this, and 2056 of that which is only 10 per cent more than what it was before'. But then I often call…academics and different sources to [ask] what numbers have you got and those kinds of things. And no one really knows… Yeah, it's very difficult to get clarity around the numbers in terms of how many properties is gonna be delivered. All of those kind of really nuts and bolts, things. It can be very difficult. [The housing authorities] definitely kind of do that on purpose, I think. (Journalist panel)

Several journalists spoke of their frustration with government housing authorities when they were trying to garner baseline information from authorities. In one case a journalist was directed from one part of the bureaucracy to another:

I remember having this ludicrous situation during the reporting that I did…I needed a detail on how many dwellings were in a particular state in a suburb…it was either that or…I needed the square meter edge of the entire estate and they just needed to find that factoid. And naturally, you'd think I'll just go to the landlord, which is the government. And then you go there and they're like, oh well, you can't contact the [name removed] management authority. You should be contacting us contact…But then you contact [name removed] and they won't have the stats…So then you're sort of thrown around like a pinball, trying to get basic facts…all of these different silos aren't talking to each other…I can only make the assumption that even the people that I'm speaking don't even know where to look because all of that sort of basic information is lost somewhere after all these sort of management transitions. (Journalist panel)

Indeed, trying to establish the baseline data on major estate redevelopments seemed to be a recurring issue for the journalists:

…just around the kind of numbers and trying to clarify some of those details is very difficult. (Journalist panel)

Beyond the difficulties of establishing the basic facts about a proposed public housing estate sell-off or redevelopment, the journalists talked about what makes public housing relocations newsworthy. A key publication hurdle for these journalists was pitching a proposed story to an editor at their media organisation. They talked about what works and what does not when pitching the story 'hook' to their editors. A hook is a description of the story that positions the story in a way that will generate interest from a particular audience. One journalist spoke about story hooks and how they are pitched:

> [A spectacle] it's not something that I look for, it's something I'm told to find by editors. But I think about this in the context of my reporting during the Victorian hard tower lockdowns…that was the ultimate expression of spectacle, right? It's like this thing where police are descending on a tower block. People are literally sort of fenced off, that was kind of…I know perhaps the exception to the rule here, but then it unlocked all these other supplementary stories, or it was like finally we've got your attention and we can talk about how the fact that [Australian state] is the laggard…I remember in one of the stories that I quoted [researcher] on, you said that [Australian state] was the biggest loser of all the losers or something and that was the kind of hook that got people thinking, which was ultimately a story about public housing policy, which isn't something that people want to click on at the top of a news website. (Journalist panel)

In this excerpt, the journalist used an initial sensational event—the lockdown of public housing towers in Melbourne during the initial COVID waves—as leverage to follow other stories about this estate.

Another journalist talked about the relationship between the spectacle of eviction that emerges around the announcement of public housing estate sell-offs and redevelopments, and the way this spectacle can be used to try to tell a more multilayered story about these projects.

> I think it's quite multilayered…you know, you have these sort of big planning decisions that are happening. In the moment of the announcement of the redevelopment, the announcement, the residents will be out, you know, the drop of the plans that they have. So there are those sort of decisions but then there are also the very human stories behind that. So I guess from a kind of news and story perspective we're kind of interested in in both and explaining both to people. So I think both [what] government are planning, maybe drier decisions, but then what that's gonna mean? You know, and it is a big kind of thing for us with, for example, Waterloo is always that idea of people's lives being in limbo, of not kind of knowing what's gonna happen or where they gonna live. And that's always quite compelling for us I think. (Journalist panel)

Announcements generate interest and are newsworthy because they are sensational spectacles that can be told through human interest stories. While government planning process were considered to be too 'dry' for a standalone story about public housing, the human stories from public housing estates, such as personal stories of eviction and displacement, at time provided an entry point into the technical policy issues. As one journalist said:

> It's about people. And like it or not, it may be a spectacle, but unless there is someone who can say this is the situation, this is how it affects my life. I think it really means you just need that level of interest…I guess it's people being able to put themselves in other people's shoes, maybe, but people are interested in the stories behind the policy, I think, and just to have a bunch of experts on, it's important, but it doesn't…get past the producers in terms of what they wanna see. And yeah, the photos of people. (Journalist panel)

This journalist suggested that a story that was expert-heavy would not 'get past' an editor. Another journalist agreed, and built on this argument to suggest that photographs add to the human-interest appeal:

> People, always people, they always want people photos. (Journalist panel)

Beyond the internal dynamics of large estate sell-offs and redevelopments, some journalists suggested that wider societal changes could be leveraged in their pitches to editors. An unaffordable housing landscape in many cities was often mentioned as a wider social dynamic that could be used to position public housing stories. One journalist suggested:

> …property being a hot button issue. I think even if you're not in that situation where you're waiting for public housing, I think a lot of people are interested in housing, full stop. So I think it's not as difficult a sell in terms of a story to producers…There are a lot of people now who have… been priced out of the market and so they can relate to a lot of these stories where people are in precarious situations with housing. Yeah, I think it's really not a difficult sell all these stories. (Journalist panel)

It appears that public housing reporting is of more editorial interest now that it has been in the past. There is more editorial appetite for public and affordable housing content within the context of housing stress more broadly in society.

> Some editors have…And maybe it's the cost of living stuff that's happening. Maybe it's the housing crisis being even worse. (Journalist panel)

One journalist suggested that the reporting around a lack of investment in social and affordable housing should have been happening long ago. The implication here was that investment in public and social housing is not newsworthy as a standalone issue, rather the redevelopment or sell-off provided the media hook for a story, which then exposes wider structural issues:

> Every time you do a story like this, there's always that sense that there's been this massive lag where there hasn't been investment in social and affordable housing. And so, sort of built up to this point where there's this crisis now. (Journalist panel)

The relationship between the individual spectacle and the broad structural drivers of housing redevelopments and crisis is an interesting one. Some journalists could not get stories about public housing up with their editors pre-COVID. Yet, after the pandemic hit and lock-downs were implemented on estates, public housing become a spectacle and was now newsworthy.

> Yeah, well, that's what happened before the hard lockdown. Like, I was trying to sell a story about public housing, particularly in [an Australian state]. Right…Then the hard lock down happens. Then everyone's like [journalist's name withheld], hey, do you still do you wanna do this now? Yeah. (Journalist panel)

Another factor that informs journalists and editors decision to follow and shape a story is the broader public and commercial media landscape, and the role of digital media and subscription media platformisation. One journalist talked about this subscriber and click-driven journalism as follows:

> I guess the [newspaper] is driven a lot now by subscribers and what our subscribers will want. I think it would be fair to say that public housing might not be their top interest for a lot of paying subscribers. So I think that's why we kind of hope to do things like the projects which go a bit more in depth, which is great for us, as journos, issues that we're passionate about. But also I think, goes more to what we will be giving subscribers. Then we'll be focusing on really great photography, more in depth stories, hopefully a bit more context. And so that's a big kind of discussion for us in terms of what they're going to click on, what it is that they want to read, what's important to them. So that does drive some, not all, but some of our decision making. (Journalist panel)

There was some reporting that explicitly positioned the interests of public housing tenants alongside the interests of the wider readership of their publications in relation to the sale at Millers Point and the Sirius building:

…very high profile was all of the relocation of the Millers Point residents in Sydney and also the Sirius building…This sort of shiny PR pictures and particularly the Sirius building…they moved all the tenants out, got bought by a kind of very shiny developer who is…redoing it into this kind of very glitzy harbourside apartment complex and there are a whole bunch of stories in Sydney when they started advertising for these new [homes]. You know, you could buy these apartments not quite off the plan, obviously, but… They have these birds eye views of the Sydney Opera House and, you know, amazing architectural finishes and rooftop gardens and everything. And there was kind of huge outrage in Sydney because everyone has a longer memory than that… a lot of people went well, that's in very poor taste…to have that kind of thing. So that was an interesting story that a lot of Sydney journos followed. (Journalist panel)

5.3.6 Social housing reporting as denigration

There is a solid body of literature looking at the role of the media in reinforcing negative stories of public housing tenants and estates. Surprisingly few of these studies talk to journalists directly. Therefore, the analysis that follows is specifically interested in how journalists understand and explain their profession's role in producing or reproducing negative stories about public housing tenants and estates. One journalists who works in television talked about the challenges of securing a 'piece-to-camera' from an affected tenant:

…about stigma, I think that's where it's hard as a journalist to try and get those people to talk about their experience because so many people I ring and talk to, and say, who have a really compelling story will, when I say, well, it's for TV. Which might, if I came out with a camera straight there, they're response is always usually no. Recently I spoke to a woman who's on the social housing waiting list, and I said, you know, would you be happy to talk to me about that on camera? And she was, I'd love to and I just couldn't believe it. Like, it's such a rare thing for someone to actually want to talk about their experience. So as much as it might seem like, ohh, here we go with another case study. You know, it might seem a bit… formulaic, almost…They're hard to get over the line and I think they are really important to really show that experience of people in public housing." (Journalist panel)

It is not unsurprising to hear that tenants are often unwilling to speak to the media, as they are often demonised when they do. Public housing estates and tenants are routinely stereotyped and stigmatised by housing Departments, the media and through social media. Thus, the journalist above talks about the challenges of telling the human stories about living in public housing within a context where tenants who do speak to journalists may be exposing themselves to negative forms of public commentary, stereotyping and stigmatisation. Another journalist stated this danger more directly and they had to turn the below-the-line public comments off on public housing stories to protect the tenants they had interviewed:

…public housing stories will still get set a pretty mixed response for us. Honestly, if you just kind of read the comments and everything. (Journalist panel)

Perpetuating stigma and providing a public medium, such as social media, through which tenants might be further ridiculed was a recurring theme. The following story is quoted at length because is encapsulates the issue:

> *I did a story a couple of years ago when the government was doing this scheme where they were putting. Like Granny Flats, basically in the backyards of people's public housing homes for, say, teenagers who had outgrown the house. But there were, you know, too many people in the house, basically, and I spoke to this family that had, like, I don't know, six or seven children and their teenagers had moved into the house at the back and it was a really nice story. They were really nice people and, you know, they agreed to do it because I think the government actually got involved and actually said, look, we really wanna showcase this thing that we're doing. Will you please do this story? So, we did it…they did this story with me and I felt it was a really nice story. But then we put it up on Facebook and there were people who just, absolutely slammed their choices. You know 'why have so many kids', you know, and I can kind of understand that [tenants don't want to talk with journalists] if they're on social media, people see how other people get treated when they're in the media. Why would you want to? (Journalist panel)*

In this case, the journalist was attempting to tell a good news story. Yet, as with all journalism it is not possible to control the narrative when a piece of journalism is put out into the world. This journalist reported being negatively affected by this experience. They felt like they had let this family down, and further suggested:

> *…next time I do something where I feel there's gonna be judgment, is just close the comments. Just speak to the social media producer and say don't allow comments on this one because it's not worth it. (Journalist panel)*

This suggests that some journalists are highly aware of the potential pitfalls of reporting on public housing tenants and, in some cases, they take steps to ameliorate any negative impacts. One journalist contextualised the potential pitfalls of involving tenants in media stories with the more general journalistic principle of informing the public about matters of social importance. This is an area of research that deserves more attention. The way digital journalism and social media are intersecting is opening new possibilities for stigmatisation and more blatant forms of direct abuse can be directed toward public housing tenants. The quote below provides a revealing insight into this new digital and social landscape of stigmatisation and the role of digital footprints in this process:

> *I came out of a digital newsroom, one thing that I'm that I've been conscious of working in that space is the digital footprint that you leave someone in public housing…This may not be the case for everyone who lives in public housing, but…if you Google that name, that article may be the one thing that comes up in SEO for a very long period of time [about that tenant], so it might …inflict whether they're looking for jobs, if invariably people are gonna Google or research who potential people might be. So, I guess I'm just conscious of that power imbalance. If you Google my name, obviously there's a swathe of like [media organisation] stuff and other stuff. So it's not just like this one particular thing that's coming to define my digital life…the imprint that you leave…just having the Google SEO results attach you to this one particular interview that you did in your life. (Journalist panel)*

There are many reasons why tenants might not be willing to be interviewed by journalists. Some of them are based on the experience of others, such as seeing other have negative experiences with the media. For other, a simple distrust of journalists and housing Departments might sit behind their fears:

> *I know tons of times when I speak to residents and they're like, they think that if they do this story the government is gonna do something to them, like because these are very vulnerable people. Sometimes people who've migrated from countries where that very much could be the thing that happens, right, so I also think making sure to put them are ease and things like that because that won't happen. (Journalist panel)*

One journalist who had expertise in urban design, found it necessary to challenge the negative stereotyping of estates and tenants both within and outside his media organisation. This journalist talked about their frustration with having to repeatedly engage with and refute the material and social design ideas that underwrite public housing:

> …it's always been my frustration when, you know, going about my research and reporting is coming up against stereotype…Thinking with my design brain, I guess, design history, nerd brain, you know the spectacle of these huge towers being plonked in the middle of urban areas. I feel like from my experience and history and reading about this kind of stuff does lend itself to a particular kind of perception of what is contained within that built form. (Journalist panel)

In this case the material form, a set of public housing towers or a public housing estate, are evocative of a broader story about what type of society this material and social form represents, and the challenges of reporting on these more abstract ideas:

> …if you were to run a photo of low-rise houses, you know, undulating over hills I would argue that it would probably conjure a very different type of perception compared to sort of inner city, huge [public housing] towers clustered around a huge plot of land…it's just the way that the built environment and the images of the built environment and the form of a particular…type of public housing engenders a particular stereotype about the people in them. (Journalist panel)

5.3.7 Re-storying social housing

The journalists talked about the difficulty of getting the data and information they need from state housing Departments to allow them to accurately report on estate redevelopment that involved relocations. Some suggested that ideology rather than evidence-based research seems to drive the redevelopment and relocation data they are given. This makes reporting on the 'hard facts' of each relocation case challenging because the data they are provided by state Departments is mediated by the ideological positions of these agencies.

> It's a very kind of ideological debate on a lot of levels, which is hard in terms of making sure you're getting different views and everything. But then there is that kind of nuts and bolts element of understanding the difference between all the different types of housing…I've had so many problems with…the housing authorities here in terms of numbers, you get this very flimsy sort of [data]. (Journalist panel)

Another journalist agreed it can be hard to accurately report on relocations within a governmental landscape where basic information is hard to secure:

> Basically trying to communicate what this is, what was the promise, what actually ended up happening with it. (Journalist panel)

As another journalist insightfully noted; if it is hard for journalists to understand these large and complex redevelopments and relocation process, it makes it hard for them to communicate these complex projects to the public.

> …because if you [researchers] find it challenging [to follow the policy changes etc], we find it really challenging because we're not coming from the same sort of high end level of research that you guys do, which is why we do rely on people like you to help navigate some of the issues and some of the policies. And it is really hard…I did a story recently about the government down here's plan to build 10,000 new social and affordable houses. You know just even knowing…the difference between social and affordable and trying to put that out as part of the story to make it clear. (Journalist panel)

Getting the facts right was important to these journalists for two reasons. The first was about ensuring their stories were 'balanced', and by this they mean the story is factual and covers the different sides of each issue. The second was about communication, and ensuring those affected by redevelopments and relocations understand what is happening to them. As one journalist put it:

> *Bring that balance, but also like really point out how badly these things have been communicated to the people. They need to be communicated to. I mean, that's the most important thing. People are genuinely confused and don't know what's happening. So I think that's a really big point to put across. (Journalist panel)*

The issue of availability of data was a recurring theme in the journalist panel. And the journalist quoted above went on to suggest that if it were not for journalists asking for specific data sets, and writing about them in their publications, some data would simply not be available to tenants or the public. This, they argued, was a matter of transparency and accountability.

> *If I don't ask the government how many people registered interest or how many people ended up being moved…how many things were actually offered, then they [the state housing authorities] will never be publishing any of that information. So it's another thing where…you have to know what you're looking for, again, because that's just not gonna be readily available. (Journalist panel)*

Another issue with state and territory government data availability and transparency is the way it shapes the stories journalists are capable of telling.

> *…just going back to those issues about trying to unpack some of those policies and the private public partnership issue that is really hard to do in terms of that transparency issue. I mean, it's hard enough, just getting numbers on certain things, but really unpacking some of those policies… Governments, you know, they are seen by the public as being the drivers of these builds and these enterprises, and yet it's not, it's the Community Housing organisations behind it. It's various other people who are running the show really. So I think those sort of issues are much harder to put across and to attract an audience and to make it interesting and also just simply finding the information is very, very difficult. But I think they're really worthy stories, but just really hard to do. (Journalist panel)*

Journalists in this study often cover different types of public housing redevelopments and relocations, and are more expert at covering the broader structural issues of these stories than perhaps other journalists. In some cases, journalists wanted to re-story the standard narrative about public housing as a site of criminality, or run-down estates, or dysfunctional communities. Yet, when they tried to disrupt the standard narrative, they confronted several challenges. A major hurdle was their own editor, as the following panellist outlines:

> *There's the stories that I wanna write and the stories that get past editors and there's a difference in that. And one of the things that I'm careful or conscious of is the role that spectacle has to play in some of these stories…We know that public housing has been in a state of crisis for decades in terms of divestment and cutting of funding, but also the…very long decline of government even being seen as someone who directly manages public housing stock. You know, we've seen this shift. So in this context of crisis, I find…you know, for a long time, I was a freelancer and was trying to pitch certain stories, and I just sort of struggled to…Every year you're trying to convince people this is a big issue, but you have to move the story on from 'there are a lot of people waiting for housing'…responding to the fact that perhaps some editors might want spectacle in order to convince them to commission a story…for years, the story has always been crisis…so you're constantly having to sort of drum up the gravity of the situation to get it passed and editor's attention. (Journalist panel)*

Another issue for journalists was working with colleagues with less understanding of the complex issues (both structural and individual) that frame debates about public housing. In this case below, the journalist had to explain the policy context and history of public housing to a colleague who was writing a story about public housing from a deficit position:

> I had an experience this year where I was…managing someone else who just wanted to do a story about public housing…It was one of those architects who doesn't really design public housing, made it look like public housing. And it's always framing this deficit model of, 'well, it's not that kind of public housing…It's gonna be better. There's gonna be other people other than public tenants in the mix.' (Journalist panel)

For another journalist, the publication medium (digital, print, radio or television) partly determines what the story is and how it is framed.

> If it's a TV story, just pictures, pictures, pictures, like you can't do it without it. With digital you can be more sparse with the kinds of photos that you use…But…particularly for TV, if you don't have pictures of the thing then [the story] just not gonna happen. (Journalist panel)

This led into a conversation about some of the complexities of telling stories with public housing tenants, and who speaks for public housing tenants, and why. The specific requirements of each medium shape who journalists speak to.

> When I've been talking to a lot of residents at the estates, you know, there are a lot of people who still feel a lot of shame around living in public housing and maybe, you know, they're not in a great place in their life. They're not doing too well. You know, they might be unwell, they might… be struggling with addiction. All those kinds of things. And unfortunately, they're not generally, the people who will chat to us…But also there's that kind of cohort of people who feel a real sense of pride about living in public housing and we found that they were really proud of their homes. They were really proud of the lives that they've created or sometimes recreated, you know, public housing has given them the opportunity to rebuild their lives. And they were really proud of that. And so, you know, they were the people who were more willing to be in a photo or be in a video to talk about what public housing had actually given to them. And, you know, I guess some of that is in the context of when they're fighting to be able to stay in their homes or really wanting to advocate for their community and articulate why it was important that we kept this community intact and kept these buildings intact. (Journalist panel)

The journalists reflected on the inherent tension in journalistic practice around balancing the need of the individual (in this case public housing tenants) with their broader objective to keep the public informed about issue of public concern. Several journalists were conscious that they might not be 'doing very much' for public tenants:

> I think we ask a lot. We ask a lot and provide little in return…You know, if people speak to us, it does highlight an issue and it really brings to life a story for us. But what's it doing for them is probably not that much. I mean, there are some good stories…where people have been on waiting lists and they've suddenly been given a home because, you know, this is how sometimes governments work. So in some cases it's helpful, in lots of cases it's not providing them with very much. I don't wanna talk down our profession because it is important for the overall picture that we put these stories out there, but the individuals who are doing these stories with us, I think it's a big call and a generous thing that they do for us. (Journalist panel)

Even in the cases where public tenants were engaging with the media with a clear purpose and politics, the journalists were still cautious about overstating the utility of their reporting for tenants.

There are very active resident groups there who often pore over all the plans and will do this work. There are other…external kind of community groups who help tenants to understand everything. So they will often do a lot of that work…there's a young architect who has his own architecture firm but grew up in [estate] and he's very committed just on a volunteer basis. He runs workshops and does all these figures and everything for the residents, but I'll often call them and kind of say…'what does this mean for how many new properties or properties?' And he'll just be like, well, we don't really know. So sometimes at the end of the day, I kind of have to say…this is what the government is saying, this is kind of what we figured out. This is what they're saying. And you know, sometimes it's just that. (Journalist panel)

5.4 Policy implications

While there is a solid body of literature looking at the role of the media in reinforcing negative stories of public housing tenants and estates, there have been surprisingly few studies that engage with journalists in the research process. Therefore, this study provides revealing insights into the reasons why journalists report on public housing redevelopments and relocations in the ways they do and helps explain the production and reproduction of negative stories about social housing tenants and estates. This section concludes with two key policy recommendations for housing Departments, which are based on the key findings from this media analysis.

Tenants often learn about or learn more about their possible relocation through the media. This means it is important that the data included in media articles about public housing redevelopments and relocations is accurate, complete and impartial. Journalists have found it difficult to get the data they need from Departments to accurately, completely, and impartially report on relocations. Furthermore, the data that is included in media articles shapes social housing tenants' and the general public's understanding of relocations and redevelopments. It is important that Departments provide journalists with relocation and redevelopment data in a timely manner and in a way that does not further stigmatise tenants or estates. Some of the journalists in our panel reported that state Departments selectively release data, and that this might even be a strategy to misdirect journalists—and the public they report to—about these relocations and redevelopments. Considering these study findings, the two policy implications are:

5.4.1 Release appropriate information to media

Provide journalists with up-to-date data at critical points in the redevelopment and relocations process. There is a 'timing' and a 'data' component to this recommendation.

a. In terms of timing, the critical points at which to communicate information include, but are not limited to: the public announcement of a redevelopment and/or relocation process; the beginning of a community consultations process; and the start of a relocation process.

b. In terms of data, journalists need information about: the number of tenants that will be moved; how, when and where public tenants will be moved; how many public housing dwellings will be sold off; where (in precise geographical terms) the capital from any sales will be reinvested to build more dwellings; and when this new housing stock will be built.

5.4.2 Refrain from using media as a promotional vehicle

The second policy recommendation is to refrain from using the media as a vehicle to promote Ministerial portfolio perspectives or specific redevelopment decisions. Politicising media announcements makes it harder for journalists to report on the facts about specific redevelopments and relocations.

6. Policy development options

- The combination of stagnating public housing levels, growing waiting lists, and increased reliance on estate redevelopment creates a significant policy challenge in relocating tenants.

- Relocating tenants within public housing is often harmful for tenants, resource intensive, and time consuming. The negative effects of displacement are considerable and well evidenced. These impacts extend over time and ripple out through social networks and communities.

- The extended costs of relocation are likely being borne by other government and non-government services, but are currently invisible and unmeasured.

- The drivers of tenant relocation are stock inadequacy and residualisation of the tenant base. Together, these create conditions in public housing that precipitate either DIR through estate renewal, or TIR due to inadequate or unsafe housing situations.

- Inadequacy of stock and residualisation of the tenant base are the result of chosen policy settings. Other policy settings are available including:

  - substantial and direct investment in repair and maintenance of existing public housing stock and a program of substantial investment in new public housing dwellings

  - shift policy settings away from public housing as an 'ambulance service' toward public housing as a significant and valued component of the housing system

  - widen eligibility criteria for public housing to address residualisation

- enhance capacity of housing Departments to manage the system and stock portfolio sustainability including through the development of aggregated sector-wide data in a single source to support an understanding of stock adequacy including maintenance backlogs, tenant reports and complaints, vacancy and utilisation.

- **Tenants' experiences of relocation are shaped by relocation practices that are not sufficiently tenant-centred and frequently cause harm.**

- **Policymakers and practitioners need to grapple with the lived experience of relocation as a harm and account for that harm by understanding the costs and benefits of particular policy settings especially estate renewal programs. Where relocation is required, policy and practice should consider the following:**

  - tenants who initiate relocation requests should have access to similar resources and support as those relocated through at the initiative of the Department

  - renewal projects should be carefully staged to minimise the harmful effects of displacement and provide sufficient time to ensure the least harmful possible effects of relocation upon tenants

  - dedicated Relocation Officers should maintain independence from tenancy management teams and need to be sufficiently qualified and skilled, supported and resourced, including with discretionary funding

  - Relocation Officers and Tenancy Officers need access to sector-wide data on social housing stock availability and adequacy to support the best outcomes in relocation.

- **Clear, honest, early and ongoing information is critical, including:**

  - information release about estate renewal should be to tenants first and must be tenant-centred

- information should include details on how many residents are affected, what tenant relocation mechanisms and timelines will be, the plans for the future redevelopment, and clear and accurate timelines for redevelopment. If these plans are not yet available, consider that the redevelopment is not sufficiently advanced to enable appropriate relocation

- tenants initiating relocation should have access to clear and accurate information about the process, supports available, the availability and location of possible alternatives housing, and a dedicated qualified staff member to support their relocation application

- media has an important role to play in providing clear and accurate information to the public. To do this, media outlets require up-to-date and accurate data about renewal programs, relocations processes, the numbers of tenants affected, the numbers of public housing units being demolished, and where the capital generated from renewal will be invested.

- **There is a lack of tenant-centred research and policy development due to the retrenchment of support and funding for genuinely representative tenant bodies. This can be addressed by re-establishing tenant-member associations and organisations with sufficient support and funding to ensure representation of tenants' voices, concerns and experiences. This will also help ensure future research on public housing is appropriately tenant-centred.**

6.1 Contributions of this research to understanding tenant relocation practice and experience

6.1.1 What drives public housing tenant relocation?

The view that public housing is a safety net, rather than a vital component of a just housing system, underpins a range of settings in Australian housing policy. These settings normalise a 'ladder' perspective that treats housing as a source of wealth extraction and sustains a view that private homeownership is the pinnacle of individual success in housing aspirations. Public housing is therefore viewed as housing of 'last resort' and a burden on state and territory government budgets and the public purse. Consequently, policy settings encourage disinvestment in public housing, either by the failure to appropriately maintain and repair existing stock (meaning it fails to meet community expectations of adequacy), or divestment in the sector resulting in privatisation and stock and/or tenancy transfer. The consequence of sustained disinvestment over decades is a near universal inadequacy of housing stock, leading to problems of poor thermal comfort, damp and mould, structural defects, outdated facilities, and faulty infrastructure such as lifts, bathrooms and laundries. Tightening eligibility criteria in a time of growing wait lists and chronic shortages due to the long-term funding shortfalls has residualised the tenant base such that public housing now only services those in greatest need.

Chronic underfunding and disinvestment in public housing has become a seemingly immutable law in contemporary state housing policy settings. Any prospect for significantly enlarged and sustained funding that would secure far greater numbers of public housing dwellings and adequately maintain and repair existing homes in State housing portfolios has disappeared entirely from the consensus in public housing policy. Consequently, housing managers in state Departments become sensitive to underoccupancy and underutilisation and rising maintenance costs, and practices narrow to accommodate the need for greater and greater degrees of rationing. The lack of available housing necessarily bundles together in proximity people experiencing complex situations of compounding disadvantage and often with traumatic life experiences. The combination of physical deterioration of public housing creating inadequacy in the stock and the residualisation of the tenant base exacerbates the stigmatisation of public housing in public discourse and policy mindsets where public housing communities are negatively stereotyped. Yet waitlists are significant and growing, with long waiting times.

The study finds that these two factors of inadequacy of stock and residualisation of the tenant base are the two underlying drivers of public housing relocation. These are often intertwined in complex ways to create the conditions for tenant relocation, either through Department initiated estate renewal programs or tenant initiated transfer requests. The policy implications of this finding are significant and compel an urgent need to address growing inadequacy and disinvestment in public housing, to repair and maintain existing homes and substantially expand the provision of public housing to address expressed and latent need (Lawson et al. 2018). This requires moving away from an ambulance service logic in the provision of public housing; removing and avoiding the use of data and language that contributes to the stigmatisation of public housing; scrutinising the extent to which policy settings lean inappropriately on the contested neighbourhood effects thesis; and examining the link between allocations and eligibility policies and residualisation.

The study finds that there is a lack of available data in a single source to understand the scope and scale of inadequacy in state public housing systems. Such an aggregated single source of publicly available data about maintenance requests, backlogs, tenant reports and complaints, vacancy and underutilisation would enable greater understanding and therefore planning for and management of existing housing portfolios. This would also improve information to Relocation Officers and Tenancy Officers, enabling better practice and outcomes for tenants.

6.1.2 What policies and practices shape tenant relocation?

In NSW and Victoria there are formal written policy frameworks and guidance notes to practitioners about tenant relocation processes. Tasmania does not have formally written policy or guidance. However, the practices of tenant relocation share broad similarity across all three states. While this study was unable to test the impact on tenants in Tasmania of the lack of formal policy guidance it is likely that greater formal documentation would help support greater information and transparency around the process, particularly for tenants.

Tenant relocation is a time consuming and resource-intensive process that can be highly specific to each community and household context even as it is mediated by broader structural conditions. Tenants who are forced to move due to estate renewal under DIR have little control over the process but are able to exercise some limited choice in terms of the alternative properties offered, informally and formally, to them. Tenants forced to move due to inadequacy in their housing situation and requesting transfer (TIR) have elected to move and therefore have a higher level of agency about that decision, but experience virtually no choice or control beyond that moment. Yet tenants are often seeking TIR due to circumstances outside their control. Consequently, there is a need to provide parity in the processes, resources and support available to tenants who initiate relocation through a transfer request, ensuring they are comparable to that existing in larger estate renewal DIR processes. This should include allocation of a dedicated and skilled relocation support officer separate from the Tenancy Officer, financial and other in-kind support for a move, and access to more transparent information about options.

The lack of available stock seriously hinders appropriate alternatives in either DIR or TIR. Estate renewal programs exacerbate lack of stock because they simultaneously remove stock from the system by demolishing dwellings and flood the system with people needing alternative accommodation. Estate renewal, where required, should be staged to eliminate entirely or at least minimise displacement and enable sufficient new stock to come online to manage the complexity and scale of movement. Estate renewal in Australia needs to become tenant-centred and deliver meaningful renewal of living environments and conditions to tenants, rather than being development-centred and focused on the timelines and imperatives of redevelopment. Much greater effort and transparent information is required across the social housing sector. This would minimise the use of head-leasing which is not tenant-centred and creates further cost and longer-term issues for tenants. The discretionary capacity of relocations teams is vital and should be sustained or established where it does not exist. Relocations teams working in both DIR and TIR need access to dedicated financial resources to support the process across a range of tenant needs. Barriers to delivering modifications or other supports to enable tenants to relocate with minimal harm need to be understood and removed.

6.1.3 How do tenants experience relocation and what are the impacts?

Relocation is widely experienced by tenants as displacement – defined as a need to move under conditions, or driven by circumstances, that are outside a person's control. This inevitably brings significant stress, uncertainty, anxiety and fear into tenant's lives and this is experienced from the very first moments of learning about or considering the need to relocate. Tenants experience relocation with intense emotions and it is a stressor that affects wellbeing prior to, during and after relocation. Even where tenants obtain objectively superior housing outcomes as a result of relocation, the process itself is experienced as harmful. This finding is supported by the extensive literature on the experiences and impacts of displacement. Policy makers and practitioners need to grapple with the lived experience of relocation as a harm and account for that harm by understanding the costs and benefits of particular policy settings especially estate renewal programs. Policy settings that can avoid relocation, by substantially improving and expanding stock and widening access to public housing, are vitally important as they address the drivers of relocation. Avoiding the need for relocation in the first place would be an important tenant-centred principle for future policy considerations.

Learning about an impending relocation as a result of estate renewal is a pivotal moment in a tenant's experience. This moment can either establish or corrode tenants' trust in the Department and therefore the relocations teams with whom they will ultimately have to build a relationship. Tenants should be the first to hear about an impending estate renewal and the practice of announcing through media from Ministerial offices needs to be understood as causing significant harm to tenants and creating considerable difficulties for ROs. Information about relocation processes, options, timelines and the future of any redevelopment should be made available to tenants with much greater timeliness and accuracy. Given the importance and strength of public housing communities on estates, there is scope for much greater attention to and support for community-wide and meaningful engagement about estate renewal projects.

The retrenchment of tenant-member bodies and organisations further exacerbates poor tenant experience of relocation. Member-based tenant representative bodies are vital for providing access to the voices, experiences and perspectives of tenants both in relation to relocation and more generally. The implication of this finding is the need for an appropriately supported tenant-member organisation at local and regional levels that can support tenant-centred policy and research about public housing.

6.1.4 What is the role of media in estate renewal and tenant relocation?

The greatest amount of media attention is paid early in the life of a renewal project, around the time of announcement. But as there is little information, these discussions focus largely on the redevelopment. As more becomes known about a project, media representations shift towards the impact on tenants, particularly around themes of displacement. As the project progresses, the amount of media coverage decreases, as does the focus on tenant relocation and impact. However, even years after the completion of the project, it may still be mentioned in media articles that are discussing subsequent redevelopments. These articles often point to the effects previous redevelopments had on tenants and demonstrate the long-lasting impact poor tenant relocations can have in public understanding about relocations.

Understanding the role of media in public housing estate renewal and relocation practice is essential, given that a key driver of relocation is the stigmatisation of public housing communities. Surprisingly few studies have engaged with journalists themselves in understanding why they report on public housing and what shapes their areas of interest. This study found that tenants feel they learn more through the media about renewal and location than from Departments or relocations teams. Yet journalists report difficulties in getting access to comprehensive and precise information to ensure accurate reporting to the public. Given that this media reporting is actively shaping both tenant and public awareness of the practice of relocations, public housing policy and the impact of estate renewal programs, transparent and accurate sources of information is vital. This includes attention to the timeliness of information about renewal programs. However, the media should not be used as a vehicle to announce estate renewal where the tenants themselves have not already been fully engaged and informed.

6.2 Final remarks

This study has examined the drivers, practices and impacts of public housing tenant relocation, a matter of growing public and policy concern. Given the current housing crisis in Australia, and the urgent need to address the structural marginalisation of hundreds of thousands of households nationally who are unable to secure appropriate housing at a cost they can afford, this research offers an important contribution. Relocation is the result of a complex combination of policy settings that together create structural inadequacy and deep injustice. As such, relocation cannot be understood separately from the context of severe resource constraint in which it occurs. As waitlists grow, the provision of public housing declines alongside decay in housing adequacy through systematic failure to invest appropriately. The public grows increasingly concerned both about policy settings, the changing way that public housing is conceived, and the resultant ensnaring of public housing residents within forces of relocation over which they have little control.

Relocation is experienced as displacement from homes, neighbourhoods and community. It is a complex and context-specific process that has rippling effects through the lives of residents and their families and social networks and has a lasting legacy. The evidence points clearly to displacement as a harmful process that creates costs likely borne in other government and non-government services but which are rarely considered or measured. This study is one of very few to examine the practice of and experience of relocation. While the study offers suggestions for how to improve practice and procedures to minimise harm, as a society there is a need to grapple with the fact that relocation is harmful. Therefore, the most urgent attention needs to be given to the underlying drivers of relocation to avoid it occurring at all.

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Appendix 1: State relocation policy review

Department initiated relocations

NSW department initiated relocations

Relocations initiated by the department are guided by the are guided by the Strategic Tenant Relocations policy (NSW Land and Housing Corporation 2021). This policy states that there is a need to balance the needs of tenants with the requirements of managing the portfolio of public housing dwellings.

This policy sits within a broader strategic management framework which recognises the need to divest in housing for a variety of reasons, including reducing maintenance costs and ensuring the stock is fit for purpose, whilst also balancing development needs and reducing 'under occupancy' (NSW Land and Housing Corporation 2021). The policy highlights that around 15 per cent of homes under-occupied, by two or more bedrooms, and that relocations can be justified to 'create opportunities to "right-size" who lives where' by moving one or two person households out of housing with three or more bedrooms and into smaller dwellings (NSW Land and Housing Corporation 2021).

In total, the Strategic Tenant Relocations policy outlines eight situations where a tenant can be relocated, which area shown in Table 5.

Table 5: NSW justifications for tenant relocations

| Portfolio management	• LAHC intends to:
	• sell a property or group of properties
	• demolish a property or group of properties
	• redevelop the land the property is on to provide a greater number and/or more appropriate housing.
	• The property has been designated for occupation by a particular client group, such as older people, and the tenant/tenant's household does not belong to this client group.
	• Any other compelling reason relating to the management of LAHC's property portfolio.
Tenancy management	• LAHC intends to carry out substantial upgrading work on the property and the property needs to be vacant so that this work can happen.
	• Under-occupancy – the property is too large for the tenant's household, for example, due to changing circumstances such as children leaving home.
	• Overcrowding – too many people are living at the property (which can increase wear and tear on the property).
	• The property has features, such as modifications for people with a disability, which are no longer needed by the people living in the property.
	• Any other compelling reason relating to the management of a particular tenancy.

Source: NSW Land and Housing Corporation (2021)

Rather than having a procedure for relocating tenants, there are two sets of principles, core principles and principles that guide the relocation process. Core principles are overarching, stating that *'LAHC recognises Aboriginal people's and families' and communities'* connections to land and Country' (NSW Land and Housing Corporation 2021). That tenants should be communicated with and consulted. That this communication should be timely, and culturally and linguistically appropriate. That tenants should be relocated as few times as possible, but also offered a right to return. And that relocations should be timely.

Principles that guide relocation process have some more concrete elements. They state that tenants will be provided notice of relocation. Following this, tenants will be allocated a relocation officer to help identify their housing needs and find them a suitable dwelling. This may require tenants to move into dwellings which are smaller than what they currently reside in. Tenants will be supported in their move, with costs covered by DJC or the CHP (in circumstances where the tenant is relocating from public housing to community housing). Tenants can nominate an area, and a dwelling will be sought there. If a dwelling is not available head leasing can sometimes be used, for example as temporary relocation due to redevelopment. However, this will not always be the case, and in circumstances tenants must nominate another area.

The policy does not contain any information about procedures for if a tenant refuses an offer, how many offers they can refuse, and what happens if they exceed that number.

The sequential processes of this relocation process are shown in Figure 12. Note that only steps one three and four, of those outlined above occur are included in this policy.

Figure 12: Department initiated strategic tenant relocations in NSW
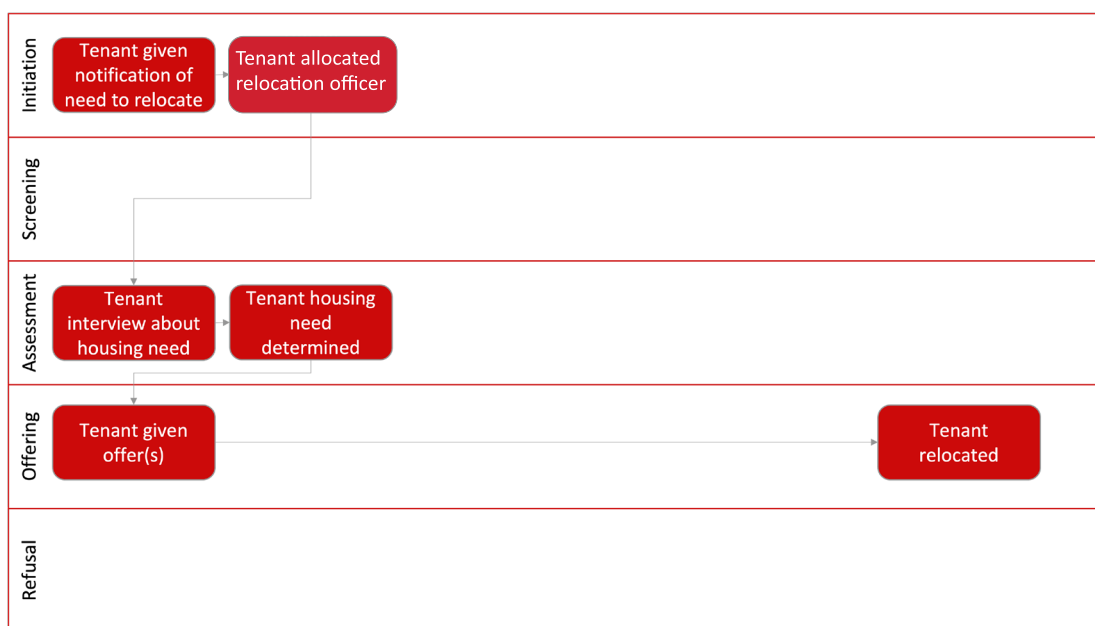
Source: Authors' own research

The Matching and Offering a Property to a Client Policy (discussed above) also has a section outlining procedures for relocations required for property management reasons, which are therefore considered department initiated (Department of Communities and Justice 2021). These procedures are similar to those outlined above, except refusal of a second offer results in a notice to vacate. The policy here is essentially the same as was used in Bonnyrigg, and is classified as needs based matching. The sequential processes of this relocation process are shown in Figure 13.

Figure 13: NSW tenant initiated matching and offering a property to a client
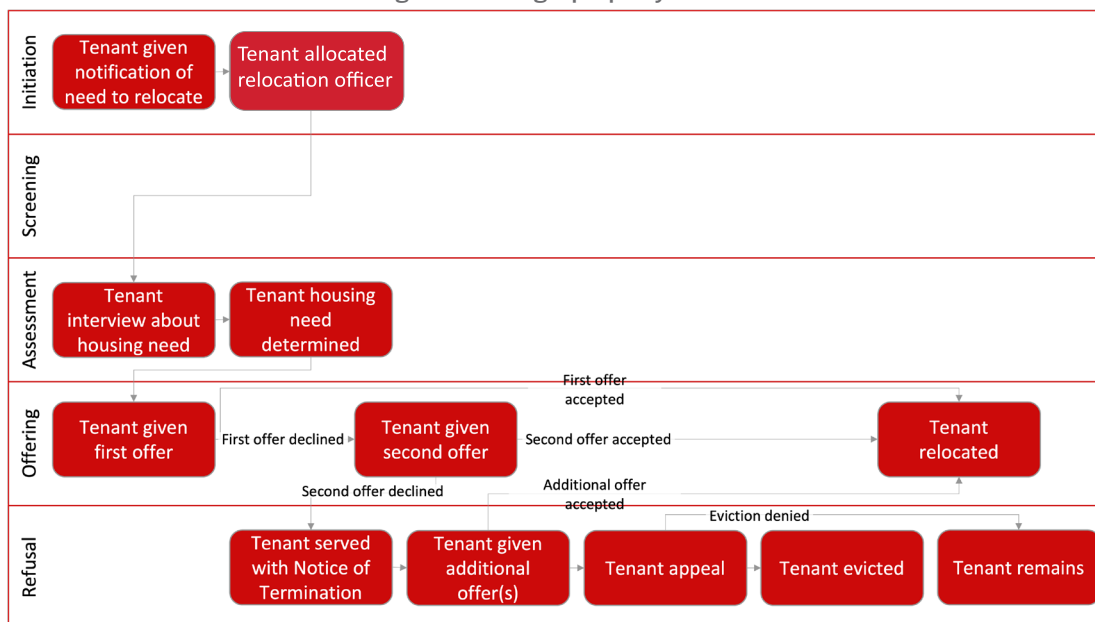
Source: Authors' own research

Victoria department initiated relocations

There are two documents outlining policies for department initiated tenant relocations. *The Relocation Manual* is the prime guideline (Department of Health and Human Services 2017), while the Public Housing Renewal Program has its own guidelines (Department of Health and Human Services 2018).

The Relocation Manual lays out the policy requirements and steps of relocating tenants in cases where the housing authority is initiating the relocation (Department of Health and Human Services 2017). This manual is detailed, outlining steps that are to be taken when relocating tenants. Tenants and community groups are to be informed and consulted through the process. The manual stipulates that residents are to be provided with a letter and information about the project, why it is occurring, and how it will affect them.

Housing relocation officers are to interview tenants facing relocation to explain what is happening, and determine their housing needs and locations they are willing to be relocated to. Tenants are also reassessed for their eligibility for public housing, tenants which would not be eligible may still be relocated, but will not be permitted to move back to a redevelopment site following completion (i.e., exercise a right of return). If tenants have existing transfer applications lodged, they are given the choice of continuing that application, or starting a new one.

Following assessment of housing needs, tenants are offered properties. Properties must meet the tenants needs, being of an appropriate size and in an acceptable location. Tenants are offered a first property and given the opportunity to inspect if before making a decision. If the tenant accepts the offer, a tenancy agreement is formed, and they are moved in. If they decline, a second offer will be made. If a tenant declines two offers, a special set of procedures are followed.

The need for relocation is reassessed. If the redevelopment can occur without the tenant being relocated, or there are no other operational justifications, then the tenant is allowed to remain. However, if the relocation is need essential, the tenant is issued with a 60 day notice to vacate. They are also reinterviewed to reassess housing need. During the 60 day period, additional offers may be made to the tenant, and if they accept, they will be relocated. If no further offers are accepted in the following 60 days, the eviction will be submitted to Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) to an Order of Possession. If VCAT grand the Order, the tenant will be evicted.

Relocating tenants have many expenses paid by the department. These expenses include connection fees for utilities, mail redirection, moving costs, and compensation for any alterations made to the dwelling. The department pays these costs, and does not require the tenant to pay and then seek reimbursement. Tenants also have the right to return to redeveloped estates following completion. Tenants may exercise this right at completion, meaning they do not have to choose until the right of return is possible. This right is not dependent on a tenant remaining in social housing. For example, a household may be forced to relocate from an estate and choose to stay with friends or family, they will then be give the right to return upon completion. The manual also sets out how to manage right of return when there are insufficient dwellings on the redeveloped estate. The manual (Department of Health and Human Services 2017) stipulates that:

'The Department offers housing to eligible relocated tenants in the following order:

- firstly - tenants who must return to the redeveloped site because of [Special Housing Requirements]. For example a tenant may need to be close to a medical facility and there is no alternative public housing near the facility

- secondly - length of tenancy in the original housing or on the housing estate. This recognises that tenants who have lived in the original properties or surrounding housing estate for a significant period of time are more likely to have developed a social or empathetic bond or relationship with the area.

The Tenancy and Property manager or equivalent approves the order in which the relocated tenants are to be housed based on the above circumstances.'

The policy here is similar to what is used in NSW, and is classified as needs based matching. The sequential processes of this relocation process are shown in Figure 14.

**Figure 14: Victoria – Relocations Manual – Department initiated**
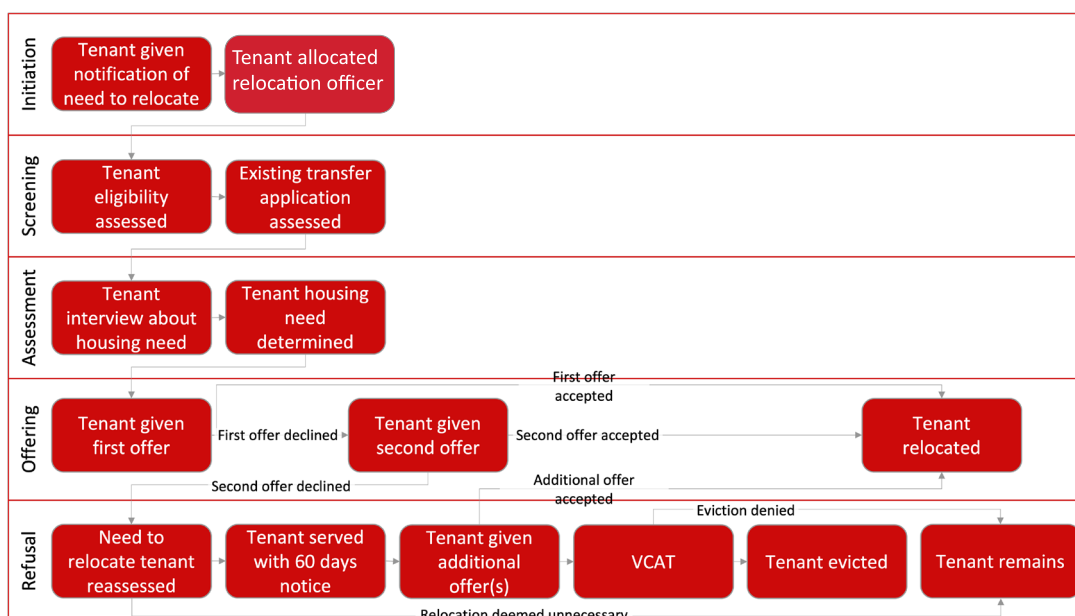
Source: Authors' own research

There are also the *Relocations for the Public Housing Renewal Program Operational Guidelines specifically* tailored for the Public Housing Renewal Program (Department of Health and Human Services 2018). These guidelines are very similar to those in the *Relocations Manual* with some small but meaningful differences. There is less emphasis on the need to reassess tenant eligibility during relocations. The guidelines are also more specific on how housing size is determined, for example, the guidelines specifically mention that households who intend to start a family will be allocated a dwelling of that size. This means that pregnant people, or those intending to try to fall pregnant soon, will have their soon to be born child included in the head count of the dwelling, which the *Relocation Manual* does not address.

The guidelines contain more detail on managing refusals, including the requirement to have additional interviews and 'establish their barriers or concerns about moving to try and find a resolution' (Department of Health and Human Services 2018). This also includes several steps to be taken to avoid legal action, including exploring other housing options and informing tenants that they will still be offered properties even after a 60 day notice is issued. Lastly, it appears that the right of return in a legally binding Deed Poll for all tenancies agreements, meaning those assessed as no longer eligible for public housing are still given a right to return. The sequential processes of this relocation process are shown in Figure 15.

Figure 15: Department initiated relocations for the Public Housing Renewal Program Operational Guidelines in Victoria
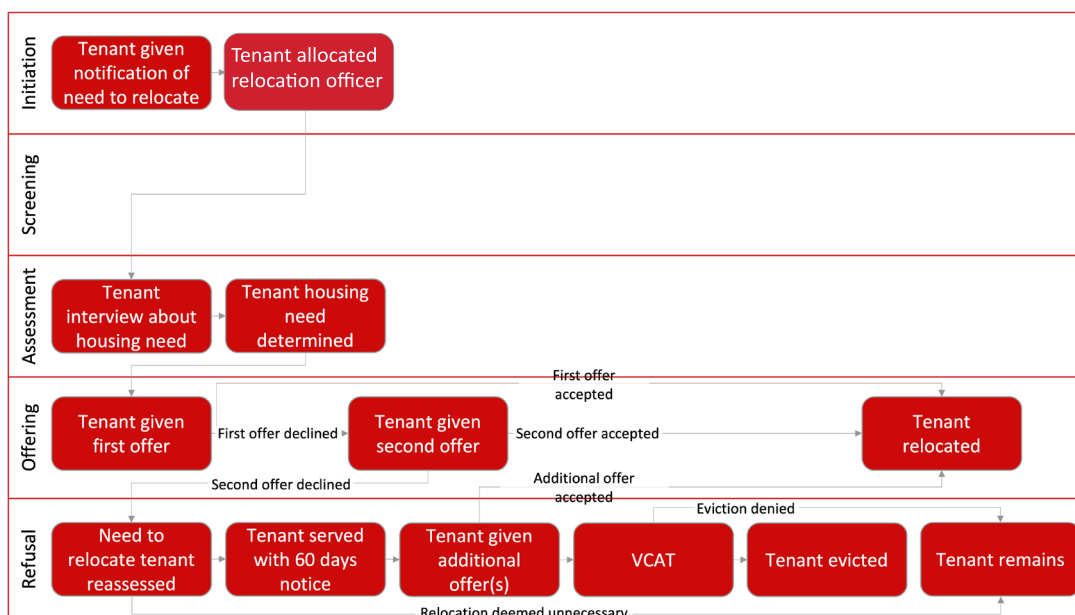
Source: Authors' own research

Tenant initiated relocations

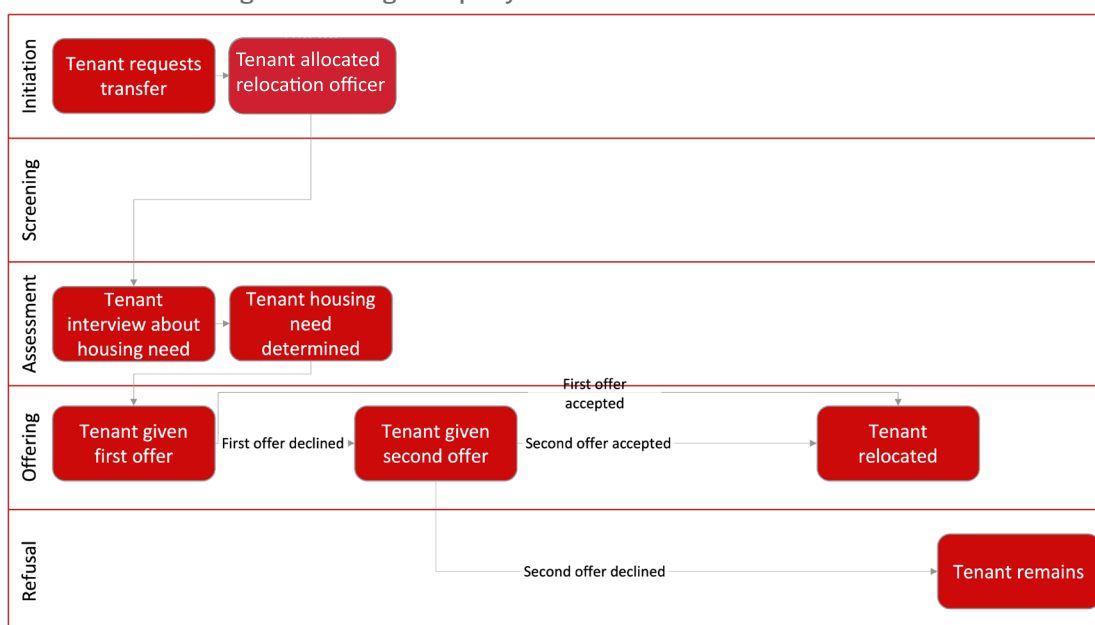## NSW tenant initiated relocations

The NSW for allocating dwellings is called *Matching and Offering a Property to a Client Policy* (Department of Communities and Justice 2021). This policy discusses allocation, including touching on relocations for property management reasons. It is assumed that the same policies guides transfers.

The policy states that 'social housing sector aims to promote a successful and sustainable tenancy when matching a client to a social housing property'. This means the property must be large enough for needs of the household, and meet any special needs of the household, for example, accessibility for elderly people or people with disabilities. The policy states that clients will generally receive up to two reasonable offers. A reasonable offer is defined as a property which matches

- 'the number of bedrooms the household requires;

- the allocation zone requested (the property may be in any suburb within the allocation zone);

- any other property features the client has been assessed as needing, for example: requirements relating to level access, stairs or steps; distance from services or facilities' (Department of Communities and Justice 2021).

The policy is clear that tenants will only be made one housing offer at a time. They then have between two and 14 days to respond to the offer. If the first offer is refused, tenants will be made a second offer. The sequential processes of this relocation process are shown in Figure 16.

Figure 16: NSW – Matching and Offering a Property to a Client – Tenant initiated

Source: Authors' own research

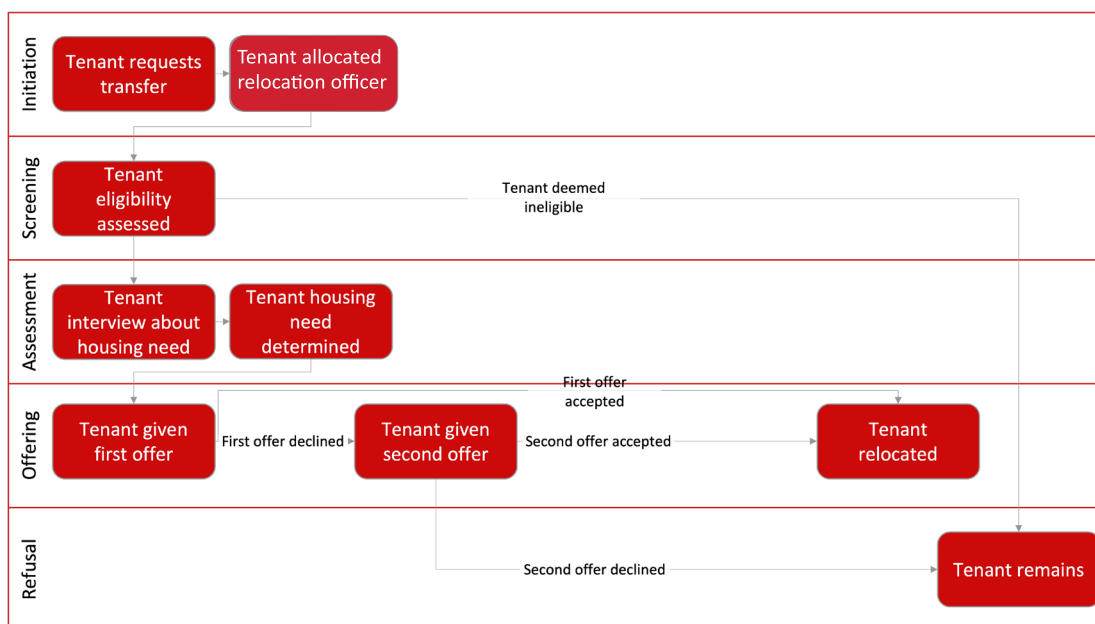## Victoria tenant initiated relocations

The Victorian *Public Housing Allocations operational guidelines* outlines the process for allocating tenants to dwellings (Department of Families Fairness and Housing 2021). The guidelines also discuss tenant requested transfers, albeit in less detail. The following is an overview of the allocation process as it appears to relate to transfers.

When tenants apply for a relocation, they are added to the Victorian Housing Register, and placed on the register based on their priority status. The guidelines that the *'eligibility criteria for the Victorian Housing Register applies to both new applicants and existing social housing tenants seeking a transfer to a different social housing property'* (Department of Families Fairness and Housing 2021). A strict reading of this would mean that tenants have their eligibility assessed as part of a transfer application, and are denied transfer if they are no longer eligible for listing on the register.

Successful applicants are then allocated dwellings based on their priority, and availability of dwellings. Priority is determined based on the tenant's circumstances, and the necessity to vacate the dwelling (for example, *'manifestly unsuitable housing'* or *'uninhabitable housing'*) (Department of Families Fairness and Housing 2021). The *Victorian Housing Register Priority Transfer Operational Guidelines* have more details about prioritisation (Victorian Housing Register 2021). From these documents it appears that where an application for transfer due to an inappropriate dwelling is received from a tenant no longer eligible for social housing, they are transferred due to the Charter of Rights applies and the guidelines provisions for discretion (Department of Families Fairness and Housing 2021; Victorian Housing Register 2021). Where tenants are transferring because the property *'the property is deemed to be uninhabitable through no fault of the Household'*, costs will be paid by the department (Department of Families Fairness and Housing 2021).

The allocation guidelines state that two reasonable offers of housing will be made (Department of Families Fairness and Housing 2021). Where an applicant declines both offers of housing, they are removed from the Priority Access Category, and place on the Register of Interest. Where an applicant declines two reasonable offers from the Register of Interest, they are removed from the Victorian Housing Register. Neither the Allocation Guidelines or the Priority transfer Guidelines state what happens if two offers are made and both refused. However, assuming that the allocation guidelines are applied, the application would be exhausted. It is possible that an additional application could be made though. These procedures are classified as needs based matching. The sequential processes of this are shown in Figure 17.

Figure 17: Tenant initiated relocation in Victoria

Source: Authors' own research

Tasmania tenant initiated relocations

Homes Tasmania has a fact sheet for tenants wishing to transfer to another social housing dwelling (Department of Communities Tasmania 2020). The fact sheet states that tenants who have been in their dwelling for 12 months or more are able to apply for a transfer. Those who can demonstrate and urgent need to move, may be prioritised for transfer, but this may require in interim short term solution. The fact sheet states who wish to transfer applications should enquire with their current provider (noting that Tasmania has a sizable community housing sector) before lodging a request with Housing Connect. The fact sheet does not provide information beyond this. There is a paucity of information about what the transfer processes.

The fact sheet for applications has some level of detail (Department of Communities Tasmania 2021). This fact sheet lays out the eligibility requirements (which also must be meet for a transfer (Department of Communities Tasmania 2020)) (Department of Communities Tasmania 2021). The fact sheet states that tenants will be assessed for their housing need, and be able to nominate and area where they would like to live. The need for dwellings with special needs (such as accessibility requirements) is included in this assessment (Department of Communities Tasmania 2021). This allocation process appears to be a needs based allocation process. While there are so few details, a policy process figure cannot be provided, it can be assumed to be similar to that shown in Figure 16 or Figure 17.