

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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# Gendered housing matters: toward gender-responsive data and policy making

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# Executive summary

## Key points

- Well-established evidence suggests that housing opportunities, pathways, assistance and impacts are gendered, and that cultural and sociological understandings of gender are evolving rapidly.
- No comprehensive approach to understanding gender and its role in housing currently exists in Australia, nor internationally.
- Lack of systematic focus on gender in housing policy raises questions about whether the data informing housing and homelessness policies and programs adequately captures gendered housing experience, and in turn responds optimally to gendered assistance needs.
- Concepts such as sex, gender, household, sexual orientation and intersectionality are key to understanding gendered housing impacts.
- Australian housing policy is primarily gender-neutral. However the Australian Government has begun a process of adding a gender lens to Budget formulation and data collection.
- This research seeks to inform improved housing and homelessness responses to gendered housing experiences, and to explicitly broaden the ways we conceptualise and engage with gender in housing policy, research, and data collection and analysis.
- A *Gendered Housing Framework* developed in this research is designed to facilitate gender-responsive data, evidence building, policy making and practice in housing and homelessness fields.

## Key findings

Interest in the gendered nature of housing and homelessness experience has been significant and increasing since the year 2000, consistent with societal changes and a focus on inclusivity. However, significant knowledge gaps remain, including considerable unevenness across gendered housing and homelessness scholarship. Limitations in knowledge development relate in part to the adequacy of gendered data for housing and homelessness research and policy.

There is inadequate national data in Australia to sufficiently identify gender effects and associations within the suite of usual housing research and policy concerns, including tenure, affordability, assistance needs or appropriateness. Gender-aware and gender-inclusive data is limited to data (i) that is not designed specifically for housing research, or (ii) that is bespoke and not of sufficient size or coverage to inform national analyses.

An analysis of policy and programs in housing and homelessness sectors shows that housing policy is largely 'gender-neutral' in design (for example in eligibility criteria). However, housing and homelessness services are gendered in the extent of provision due to intersectional effects (such as provision of Commonwealth Rent Assistance to single parent headed households). Service delivery programs responding directly to housing assistance and homelessness support needs are increasingly providing gender-related tailored assistance.

Important examples of how to respond to gendered needs for housing and homelessness support are emerging within specialist services. These initiatives indicate it is important to involve people with lived experiences of diverse gendered housing and homelessness support needs in the design of programs. Having well-trained practitioners and culturally safe processes, practices and spaces in which gendered support work can be conducted facilitate the success of these programs.

It is critically important that publicly available data about housing and homelessness services can be interrogated to understand gendered and intersectional effects. Currently, binary data and inadequate, limited non-binary data restrict investigation of intersectional gendered effects. This impairs the ability of research communities, service providers, policy makers and governments to fully understand the relationship between gender, housing, and housing and homelessness assistance models and their implementation, and how these might be improved for more equitable housing futures.

## Policy development options

The research presented in this report indicates that future steps toward gender-responsive housing and homelessness data and policy, include the following.

### Gender-transformative service provision and data collection

Lessons can be learned from the gender-transformative approaches undertaken within housing and homelessness services that seek to employ housing interventions either to mitigate external inequalities or harms, and/or to shape a raft of positive non-shelter outcomes for people using services. These provide examples of how gender-transformative and responsive work can be conducted.

An important aspect of this work is compliance with inclusive frameworks such as the Rainbow Tick:

*The Rainbow Tick is a quality framework that helps health and human services organisations show that they are safe, inclusive and affirming services and employers for the LGBTIQ community. The Rainbow Tick standards, owned and developed by Rainbow Health Australia, are designed to build lasting LGBTIQ inclusion. (Rainbow Health Australia 2023)*

### **Safe, secure data collection and collation**

Apparent from the review of literature and the policy workshop conducted in this research are significant issues of trust, safety, and data security and protection. These will be critical for data collection and collation agencies, and researchers undertaking gendered housing and homelessness research, to carefully consider and respond to in the future.

It is critically important to the success of future national data collections that they can provide confidence to participants and end-users that gender-related data will be gathered respectfully, treated securely, stored securely, and used only for legitimate evidence and policy purposes. These are key challenges as national data collections seek to engage more widely with gender-diverse communities. These data safety and security measures are particularly important for ensuring development and maintenance of gender-aware longitudinal surveys and homelessness data, each of which has the potential to illuminate significant gender effects.

### **Data collection for community, by community**

One of the identified strategies for developing gender-inclusive data about housing and homelessness, or other fields of social policy, is to enable, fund, facilitate and support gender-diverse communities to conduct their own data collections about matters of importance to their communities. A possible way forward to understanding housing and gender diversity—and the challenges non-binary and gender-diverse people face in Australia's current housing system—is to support an exploratory community-owned data collection strategy. This could support future development within national data collections, as well as informed service provision and responsiveness.

### **Development and application of a Gendered Housing Framework**

The aims of this project have been to illuminate and progress gendered understandings of housing and homelessness, including assessing the adequacy of current housing and homelessness data for informing gender-responsive policy making, and how improved gender responsiveness can be progressed. The *Gendered Housing Framework* developed within this research provides a mechanism through which gender-responsiveness can be assessed in future housing and homelessness policy and practice, as well as within consideration of data adequacy within census, survey and administrative data collections and collations.

While this project has focused primarily on questions of housing occupancy and housing assistance, the *Gendered Housing Framework* has been explicitly developed for wide use across housing and homelessness in general. For example, it can be applied in relation to the design and production of housing supply, housing finance and real estate services.

## **The study**

This mixed-method research project responds to four critical research questions concerning how we understand gender in relation to housing and homelessness, and how policy and practice responses to existing gendered housing inequalities can be enhanced by improved future understandings:

1. How does gender intersect with housing opportunities, pathways, assistance and impacts across the lifecourse, for women, men and gender-diverse individuals, and generational cohorts?
2. How can housing (and related) data be improved to support gender-responsive housing policy development?
3. What are the policy and practice implications of the research findings and how can these be actively developed?
4. How can gendered housing be understood in a coherent, policy-oriented framework?

### **Review of existing evidence**

A semi-systematic review (Snyder 2019) of recent evidence was conducted to:

- identify life stage and intersectional gender effects that affect housing
- map the state of gender and housing knowledge
- identify critical knowledge gaps and emerging agendas.

### **Illustrative examples of gender data and data gaps**

Three data types often used in housing research were selected and analysed *for illustrative purposes*. These were selected to examine data adequacy and data gaps for gender and housing research. The analysis focus was on the adequacy of data for building evidence, as well as the identification of data gaps and limitations, rather than on developing an exhaustive account of gendered housing experience.

### **Consideration of the data-policy making nexus**

A desk-based review of current housing data and housing assistance eligibility, provision, and reporting practices in relation to gender was conducted to identify data development and policy and reporting opportunities in relation to gendered housing impacts. These observations were considered within an online policy workshop in which findings were presented to key policy and practice stakeholders, data service professionals and advocacy groups. Online policy workshop participants represented Australian Government policy and data agencies, and non-government service provider and advocacy agencies.

### **Development of a Gendered Housing Framework for research and policy development**

The final stage of the project develops a *Gendered Housing Framework* for analysing housing data and policy for future research, policy and practice use—and ongoing development. The focus of this research is primarily upon housing occupancy and consumption. However the Framework presented is intended to facilitate gender-responsive consideration across the housing system, more broadly, in future applications. The *Gendered Housing Framework* developed here is a starting point for increasingly gender-responsive approaches to data collection and collation and policy making in housing and homelessness fields. The Framework will ideally evolve and be improved as more gender-responsive housing and homelessness research is conducted.



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