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Social housing pathways by policy co-design: opportunities for tenant participation in system innovation in Australia

From the AHURI Inquiry: Inquiry into supporting pathways in a social housing system

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- Australian Government Department of Social Services
- Homes Tasmania
- National Shelter

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Acronyms and abbreviations used in this report

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
AHA	Australian Housing Aspirations Survey
AHURI	Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited
AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
SHS	Specialist Homelessness Services

Executive summary

Key points

- The Australian housing policy context is changing in response to rental and ownership crises, and growing waiting lists for access to social housing. Questions emerge about how, and to what extent, participatory methods can form part of the effective responses in a new policy landscape.
- Participatory policy methods are widely recognised as beneficial for effective policy design and development across a wide range of public policy realms internationally and, to a lesser extent, in Australia.
- The use of tenant participation in national housing policy is scant. However, some states and territories have created guidelines or suggestions for tenant participation in social housing or implemented their own programs in public housing and community housing.
- Challenges for tenant participation programs include resource investment of workforce and tenant capabilities for engagement in co-design processes, structural power issues, understanding reasons why tenants may not participate, and disagreement between tenants and housing providers on the purpose and extent of programs.
- Original analysis of data presented in this report suggests that participatory methods that engage with a wide range of potential housing assistance recipients, including but not limited to social housing sectors, will be most effective in future policy development decisions.
- The field of participatory approaches to policy development is changing rapidly across states and territories in Australia. Public reporting and evaluation of agency and departmental initiatives is not keeping pace with current changes. This is a challenge for sharing of best practices across jurisdictions and sectors.

- **Establishment of a new Australian Housing Clearinghouse could facilitate lived experience participation in housing and homelessness policy development. This could enable information-sharing within and across organisations and sectors to support best practice nationally.**
- **Development and ongoing improvement of a National Housing and Homelessness Plan provides a significant opportunity for embedding a commitment to participatory methods in housing policy nationally, including social housing sector development.**
- **This project is part of the 'Inquiry into supporting pathways in a social housing system', which aims to identify opportunities for aligning assistance with people's housing aspirations, managing access for greater responsiveness, improving support within and out of social housing, and providing all stakeholders in the system – applicants, tenants, landlords, funders and the wider Australian public – with appropriate expectations and assurances about its outcomes.**

Key findings

Internationally, a shift toward inclusive policy design and decision making processes has emerged in response to increasingly complex public policy challenges and the dominance of systems thinking to address these. There is a relatively well-established understanding that system complexity requires viewpoints of multiple stakeholders (Blomkamp 2022).

- The inclusion of diverse voices within participatory methods to respond to complex problems is highly consistent with a systems thinking approach to public policy.
- The United Kingdom (UK) Government Policy Innovation Lab suggests that inclusion of lived experience and views of diverse stakeholders is important, as without wide understanding, policy may be less effective or well-targeted (Norman 2020).
- Transformative and actionable evidence-oriented policy approaches draw intensively on a range of expertise and inputs, including from professionally trained sectors as well as from wider publics (Loorbach 2010; van Kerkhoff and Lebel 2015).

Overall, the international literature on tenant participation finds mixed success regardless of the structure of the program or length of time such programs have been implemented. Four key observations can be summarised.

1. Having tenant participation as a key component of government regulation on social housing can be beneficial, as it mandates a standard of tenant participation programs. However, legislating tenant participation alone is not a guarantee of success.
2. Multiple studies found tenants and housing providers and officials had different ideas of what tenant participation should look like and what it should achieve (Foroughi 2017; Chaskin, Khare and Joseph 2012; Redmond and Norris 2007). This can lead to conflict between tenants and housing providers.
3. Tenant participation programs can be compromised by structural power issues between tenants and housing providers, which can limit tenant autonomy and also lead to conflict (Kruythoff 2008; Lee 2010).

4. Even when programs are successfully implemented, there is a need to consider the factors that motivate tenant participation and reasons why some tenants may not participate (Preece 2019; Lambourne and Jenkins 2020; McKee 2009).

In social housing contexts, tenant or resident participation in policy processes is the major form of participation. International literature demonstrates that tenant participation can cover a range of programs and levels of tenant involvement.

There is no current systematic evidence about the extent to which participatory policy methods are used in the Australian context. Findings from this research indicate there is high variability across state and territory jurisdictions, with only few states currently moving toward a commitment of in-depth policy co-design approaches as part of their policy processes. Some states and territories have current tenant participation programs or initiatives. Both New South Wales (NSW) and the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) appear to have ongoing programs in their public housing, while South Australia (SA) and Tasmania held one-off consultation exercises to shape future housing policy (with the potential for Tasmania to include lived experience on an ongoing basis). In Victoria a raft of participatory methods are used with current social housing tenants. Advocacy and not for profit organisations also use participatory methods in variable ways across jurisdictions and sectors of the housing and homelessness system. However, tenant participation or broader lived experience consultation are not a key part of national housing policy and limited public information is available about such approaches.

Hence, regarding how we might understand levels of tenant participation in relation to aims and methods currently used in Australian social housing policy, we can conclude that most forms of participation are those which are "light touch": involving information sharing or once-off consultation only. There is limited current commitment nationally toward more in-depth participatory policy making methods.

Table 1: Levels, aims and implementation methods of tenant participation

Levels of tenant participation	Aims	Typical methods and structures
Information	Information is provided to tenants on the housing service and the receipt of feedback from them.	Newsletters; meetings; leaflets; tenant handbooks.
Consultation and dialogue	The views of tenants are sought and are taken into account in the making of decisions and the provision of services.	Open meetings; questionnaires; tenant surveys; estate boards and forums.
Shared decision making or devolution	Tenants have voting rights or specific agreements over service provision which means that local authorities must act on their views.	Estate agreements; delegation orders, estate boards; service agreements; estate action plans.
Tenant management	Tenants have full control and are thus autonomous in making decisions on the housing service.	Estate management boards; Tenant management.

Source: Redmond and Norris 2007: 189

The analysis of the Australian Housing Aspirations (AHA) survey, while not initially designed for policy co-design, bears importance in comprehending the housing aspirations of not only social housing tenants but also individuals within very low and low-income households. This holds critical value, given that current approaches predominantly focus on measuring the satisfaction of social housing tenants. This approach fails to provide insights into the desired housing outcomes for individuals in both the short and long-term, essential for fostering feelings of safety, security and control within their homes. This gap is further bridged by encompassing other potentially vulnerable groups beyond social housing, enabling a more holistic examination of the housing system. This approach has the potential to offer assistance to those who may eventually find themselves on social housing wait lists. Notably, the qualitative aspect of this research underscores the existence of a similar inclusive approach focused on vulnerable groups in the Tasmanian Housing Strategy Lived Experience Consultation, which aimed to hear from people with experience of social housing, homelessness and housing stress.

Policy development options

Findings of this research were supported by a 'stress testing' approach within a policy workshop. In this forum, it was clear that there is considerable awareness in the Australian context of the potential value for increased participation in policy design processes by social housing tenants and other recipients of housing assistance. However, consistent with the desk-based review, there was also recognition that the extent to which participatory methods are used in housing policy and social housing policy is highly variable, tending towards very limited use beyond social housing satisfaction surveys. It was recognised that there is potential value in looking to homelessness and other supported housing sectors, as well as other fields of public policy, and international experience, for lessons about how participatory methods could be taken up in the Australian context.

Importantly, the Australian National Housing and Homelessness Plan, under development at the time of writing this research, presents a potentially new policy landscape in which participatory methods may become more embedded within policy making processes. For example, as part of the preliminary consultation process for the development of the national plan, there is a deep commitment to engagement with communities and individuals and population cohorts with lived experience of housing assistance and homelessness services. International best practice, as well as the recent development of a lived experience perspective of housing in the Tasmanian context, and our original analysis of Australian Housing Aspirations survey data presented in this research, indicate that ongoing commitment to wide-ranging engagement with the diversity of lived experience stakeholders across the housing system (including, but not limited to, social housing) may form a worthwhile feature of any national plan. This would require genuine commitment, resourcing, funding, workforce development and—most importantly—a commitment to ensuring the dignity and safety of participants within policy making processes.

Establishment of an Australian Housing Clearinghouse to facilitate national and international information sharing and best-practice development of practice and guidelines related to participatory policy methods is recommended based on findings of this research.

The study

The overarching question addressed by this project is:

Can tenant participation and policy co-design help transform Australia's straitened social housing sector into a system for socially supported housing pathways?

This question is addressed via three sub-questions, focused on development of an actionable evidenced-based pathway for policy innovation and development:

1. What is best practice participatory and policy co-design, and how can this inform housing policy design and innovation practice?

2. What are the housing outcome aspirations of social housing tenants, and very low and low-income households, what supports do they need to attain these, and what is their access to such supports?
3. What are the policy and practice implications of the research findings and how can these be actively developed within Australian social housing and housing assistance systems?

The project has been undertaken using a mixed method approach:

Conceptualisation and international and national review

The field of participatory policy-design methodologies is growing rapidly in response to recognising the value and outcomes of such approaches. The project includes a review of main approaches in participatory and co-design methods, and how these align with components of social housing and housing assistance, including but not limited to design, delivery, assessment and innovation. The review considers, for example, how various forms of participatory policy making align with social housing and housing assistance access, design and support types, and outcomes and outcomes frameworks.

Development of a social housing tenant housing aspirations evidence-base

Participatory policy making literature identifies well-targeted population surveys as a foundational component within inclusive policy making methodologies (Hyysalo and Hyysalo 2018).

In this research, data from the 2018 AHA Survey (N=7,343) (Stone, Rowley et al. 2020b) is analysed to develop an evidence-base of social housing tenants' and housing assistance recipients' housing aspirations, their self-identified support and housing assistance needs, and their access to such support. This nationwide secondary data analysis concentrates on short-term and long-term housing aspirations of social housing residents and respondents with very low and low incomes. The AHA Survey included multiple facets of housing and support needs and an aspirational housing pathways approach, including a dedicated focus on low-income Australians and Aboriginal perspectives (Stone, Rowley et al. 2020b).

For current social housing tenants and low and very low-income households with a range of demographic and identified eligibility characteristics, the analysis is designed around the key areas of housing aspirations outcomes, support, and assistance needed to attain these outcomes, and access to such supports, including impacts of support gaps:

- current, short and longer term housing aspirations (tenure, dwelling type, location, and similar)
- types of housing assistance and supports self-identified by survey participants as facilitating short and long-term housing aspirations
- impacts of support and non-support, and the nature and impact of support and assistance gaps.

Policy and practice workshop

Focusing on policy implications of the research, an online workshop was conducted in which preliminary findings of the research were presented to key policy and practice stakeholders, to support identification of actionable policy and practice development implications of the research. Preliminary findings of the research were provided prior to the workshop. Policy and practice participants' expertise assists to 'stress-test' policy design scenarios in which tenant and resident participation in policy co-design can be enhanced.

1. Introduction

- **The Australian housing policy context is changing in response to rental and ownership crises, and growing waiting lists for access to social housing. Questions emerge about how, and to what extent, participatory methods can form part of a new policy landscape.**
- **Internationally, participatory policy methods are routinely used in a wide range of policy fields, including—with varying degrees and approaches—in social housing sectors.**
- **There is little public information about the extent to which participatory policy making features in Australian social housing policy processes.**
- **This mixed method project is designed to examine how participatory methods, including social housing tenant participation, can and do feature in social housing policy making, including strategic and operational processes.**
- **This report is the first of four, within the 'Inquiry into supporting pathways in a social housing system' focusing on improvements in social housing access, assistance models, and tenant outcomes, being conducted in a collaboration between the University of New South Wales (UNSW), Swinburne University of Technology, RMIT University and the University of Tasmania.**

Across all Australian jurisdictions, social housing systems are under significant strain with growing demand, long waitlists, ageing stock and significant uncertainly about optimal reform pathways (Marston 2004; Groenhart and Burke 2016; Muir, Powell et al. 2020). It is well known that tenant and client needs and aspirations are changing, with social housing clients increasingly presenting with more complex health, housing and social care needs, as well as significant histories of trauma and disadvantage (AIWH 2023; Morris 2013). Neither the provision of social housing stock, nor the delivery of dedicated social housing supports, has kept pace with these changing demands, suggesting the need for urgent focus on reform models for a social housing and housing assistance system that optimally supports tenants and eligible applicants.

While 84 per cent of social housing residents indicate that social housing meets current needs, just 57 per cent indicate that the same housing and living arrangements will do so longer-term (five to 10 years or more), with a small minority identifying social housing as their aspiration (Stone, Rowley et al. 2020a). Critical questions emerge of whether and how social housing and housing support systems could be more effective in meeting needs of tenants via tenant involvement in programmatic and policy design. And, while waiting lists for access to public housing have grown in recent years, it is not clear that social housing is a preferred option, or what other preferences and best-fit housing solutions could be for low and very low-income households living in private rental homes or with mortgage stress.

Internationally, increased uptake of participatory policy making methods, including policy co-design and coproduction, are acting to improve housing provision and associated essential social services (Hyra, Moulden et al. 2019; Fabian, Alexandrova et al. 2021; Alexandrova and Fabian 2022). Nationally, policy thinking that recognises lived experiences of client and consumer groups as valuable within policy making processes has been implemented within health, urban planning and private industry (Evans and Terrey 2016), but less so within housing policy spheres at system-scale.

Drawing on lessons from other complex fields of policy (Fabian, Alexandrova et al. 2021), potential benefits of inclusive policy co-design within policy realms such as social housing and housing assistance provision include achieving an optimal fit between the housing and housing assistance being designed and developed, the ability of systems to support aspirational housing pathways over the life course, and support of optimal housing and life outcomes. Efficient best-fit assistance scenarios could potentially reduce inefficient matching of stock to tenant households, and/or act to support positive diversions from social housing in favour of other assistance and support types, where relevant.

While Australian housing research has often interviewed or surveyed people with lived experience about their housing problems (for example, Curry 2019; Choice, National Shelter and NATO 2017), less research has invited participants' perspectives on solutions and potential policy reform or included participants within policy making practices. Indeed, the extent to which participatory methods are utilised in housing and related fields is unknown, rendering it difficult to evaluate inclusive policy making for optimal housing outcomes at system-wide levels. A current lack of documentation and evaluation of the application of co-design approaches to policy making limits knowledge-sharing and evidence-building (Blomkamp 2018), while lessons can be learned from related fields of healthcare, urban planning and private sector experimentation. Part of the problem to date has been ambiguous usage of terms, ranging from 'human-centred design thinking' to 'coproduction' (Fabian, Alexandrova et al. 2021) and 'community-based participatory action' (Hyra, Moulden et al. 2019).

Tenant participation is defined as 'the involvement of social housing tenants in the housing services provided by their landlords' (Hickman 2006: 209). Optimal forms and methods for supporting increased tenant participation within social housing and housing assistance systems, or sub-sectors, remains relatively untested. Policy co-design of housing systems in Australia is comparatively limited. Key instances occur more within private development and supply models such as Nightingale Housing deliberative development (Sharam 2020) and/or specialised service contexts. Examples include housing design for Australian Aboriginal people (Penfold, Waitt et al. 2020), or improved private rental housing for older persons (TACSI 2017). Little is known, for example, about how the design, provision and targeting of social housing and other forms of housing assistance might benefit from increased tenant inputs—nor, importantly, how housing outcomes, support and access within social housing pathways could be improved if increased tenant participation were to be facilitated.

This project responds to this policy innovation opportunity gap, directly contributing to assessment of the need for—and approaches to—development of an evidence-based pathway for mainstreaming policy innovation. It does so in a way that acts to provide standalone analysis and evidence that assesses tenant participation in future Australian social housing and housing assistance policy development models and development processes.

The project is part of the 'Inquiry into supporting pathways in a social housing system', which aims to identify opportunities for aligning assistance with people's housing aspirations, managing access for greater responsiveness, improving support within and out of social housing, and providing all stakeholders in the system – applicants, tenants, landlords, funders and the wider Australian public – with appropriate expectations and assurances about its outcomes. Subsequent projects within the Inquiry focus respectively on 'outcomes', 'support', 'access' and overall system-wide innovation opportunity.

This report focuses on understanding best-practice opportunities for increased tenant participation in social housing and related housing assistance policies, and developing an evidence-based pathway to support participatory policy co-design innovation in the Australian context. It comprises:

1. an international and national review of policy co-design methodologies and best practice relevant to the social housing and housing assistance sectors
2. a national account of tenant access, support and aspirational outcomes in social housing and related support systems via original analysis of Australian Housing Aspirations (AHA) Survey data
3. a policy and practice informant workshop to 'stress-test' findings.

1.1 Policy context

There has been an international policy shift toward inclusive policy making processes that directly involve citizens and end-users of services in design, delivery and evaluation of strategic and operational aspects of public policy. At the same time, there has been a continuation of the residualisation of the Australian social housing sector. However, the policy landscape is changing in response to crises in both rental and ownership segments of the Australian housing system. Recent and current efforts by state and territory governments to boost social and affordable housing supply, as well as work being undertaken at the time of writing toward development of the first National Housing and Homelessness Plan since 1992, present opportunities to consider how participatory methods can feature more significantly in policy processes than they have done previously.

Participatory policy making within social housing sectors typically refers to the engagement of resident tenants, applicants, or former tenants, of social housing services. In some international contexts including the UK, participatory policy making approaches that involve resident tenants have advanced more rapidly than in the Australian context, although the uptake of participatory methods is variable across country contexts.

Pawson, Bright et al. (2012), in a report about participation in social housing processes in the UK and European countries from a decade ago, review the rationale and impetus for increased participation, and the various forms of participatory approaches taken across contexts, as well as identification of challenges and opportunities. The comparative review is helpful as a reference for considering how participation in policy making might occur in the Australian context, not least due to the emphasis in the 2012 review on the significance of organisational and governance structures in which any form of resident or tenant participation in policy processes takes place. The authors distinguish, for example, between inherent participatory models such as co-operative housing in Denmark, compared with other forms in which resident participation is not a foundational aspect of the legal and governance housing/housing provision structure, such as those more common in the UK—and in Australia.

The UK and Europe review sought to uncover: what models exist for resident empowerment, scrutiny and influence; how these are influenced by incentives and reward systems; how social landlords can facilitate participation by residents in decision making and service delivery; how hard-to-reach groups can be included well; and what can be learned from best-scenario case study resident forums of participatory approaches from across the UK and Europe (Pawson, Bright et al. 2012: 4).

In the Australian context, the most well-documented forms of resident or tenant participation in housing policy design processes relate to urban renewal processes. Within these, local residents and housing tenants may be involved in varying ways in planning, implementation and evaluation aspects of policy design and delivery decisions.

Close to 20 years ago in the Australian context, the extent of resident participation and engagement in public housing neighbourhood renewal programs was assessed and reviewed by Wood (2002). The research is significant in highlighting the reasons why housing authorities choose to engage in participatory policy methods, as well as why some community members become involved.

Rationales of housing authorities for implementing participatory policy design methods were identified as twofold. The first rationale relates to financial considerations. It was thought that by engaging residents in community groups and individuals within design processes that the outcomes of such processes would be most effective and achieve best outcomes within the constraints in resources available to any given renewal program. The second rationale is founded in inclusive notions of citizenship, linked to rights-based approaches to policy making, in which resident diversity, values, and voices are explicitly valued and understood as comprising inherent expertise that can effectively shape urban renewal design processes.

The participatory methods in relation to plans and designs, used within the renewal programs included in the study, almost exclusively used a resident consultation forum approach. This method engaged residents within group settings, in which individual perspectives could be contributed. In contrast, with regards to social and community aspects of the renewal programs, a wider range of methodologies was used to engage residents in designing and implementing renewal programs. In select examples, resident forums were given decision making power of veto, such that plans would not go ahead without support of the resident forums. However, this approach was unusual, with a majority of methods seeking input that could then be considered and decided upon by renewal professionals.

Barriers and challenges to effective participation in the renewal programs were reported to include the complexity and capability of the lives of residents. In many cases, residents were managing complex trauma and daily demands that did not facilitate their engagement in the processes and could lead to apathy and antagonism. Other barriers included power differences, with residents reporting in some cases that they felt dominated by or ignored by renewal professionals. Another finding is that it was not always apparent to residents what the scope of their role was, nor what would come of the participation process.

Importantly, the renewal study includes key finding about best practice participation, and that good practice can facilitate best outcomes. Optimal practices were identified as including:

- Participatory processes must begin with the views of local people before any plans or decisions have been drawn up or confirmed, to enable genuine decision making engagement by residents within urban renewal processes.
- Establishing participation structures allows for a wide range of engagement forms within processes to facilitate inclusion of the widest possible range of residents.
- Participatory methods require investment of resources in the form of commitment, time and funding, to be effective and to produce best community outcomes. This can involve years of dedicated work, and include new forms of work roles and training, to be effective.
- Sharing of power, including giving local residents genuine decision making power in important aspects of all processes, is fundamental to achieving good outcomes (Wood 2002).

While more recent Australian housing research and policy has often interviewed or surveyed people with lived experience about their housing problems (such as Curry 2019; Choice, National Shelter and NATO 2017), less research has invited participants' perspectives on solutions and potential policy reform or included participants within policy making practices. Indeed, the extent to which participatory methods are utilised in housing and related fields is unknown, rendering evaluation of inclusive policy making for optimal housing outcomes at system-wide levels difficult. A current lack of documentation and evaluation of the application of co-design approaches to policy making limits knowledge-sharing and evidence-building (Blomkamp 2018). Lessons can be learned from related fields of healthcare, urban planning and private sector experimentation.

1.2 Research methods

The overarching question addressed by this project is:

Can tenant participation and policy co-design help transform Australia's straitened social housing sector into a system for socially supported housing pathways?

This question is addressed via three sub-questions, focused on development of an actionable evidenced-based pathway for policy innovation and development:

1. What is best practice participatory and policy co-design, and how can this inform housing policy design and innovation practice?
2. What are the housing outcome aspirations of social housing tenants, and very low/low-income households, what supports do they need to attain these, and what is their access to such supports?
3. What are the policy and practice implications of the research findings and how can these be actively developed within Australian social housing and housing assistance systems?

The project has been undertaken using a mixed method approach:

Conceptualisation and international and national review

The field of participatory policy and design methodologies is rapidly growing, in response to recognising the value of the outcomes of such approaches. The project includes four review components.

1. A review of main approaches in participatory and co-design methods, and how these align with components of social housing and housing assistance, including but not limited to design, delivery, assessment and innovation. The review considers, for example, how various forms of participatory policy making align with social housing and housing assistance access, design and support types, and outcomes and outcomes frameworks.
2. A brief overview of inclusive policy making in other fields outside social housing. This includes public health and planning sectors.
3. An international review of literature on tenant participation in social housing.
4. A desk-based review of tenant participation across Australian social housing sectors.

Development of a social housing tenant housing aspirations evidence-base

Participatory policy making literature identifies well-targeted population surveys as a foundational component within inclusive policy making methodologies (Hyysalo and Hyysalo 2018).

In this research, data from the 2018 AHA Survey (N=7,343) (Stone, Rowley et al. 2020b) is analysed to develop an evidence-base of social housing tenants' and housing assistance recipients' housing aspirations, their self-identified support and housing assistance needs, and their access to such support. This nation-wide secondary data analysis concentrates on short-term and long-term housing aspirations of social housing residents and respondents with very low and low incomes. The AHA Survey included multiple facets of housing and support needs and an aspirational housing pathways approach, including a dedicated focus on low-income Australians and Aboriginal perspectives (Stone, Rowley et al. 2020b).

For current social housing tenants and low and very low-income households with a range of demographic and identified eligibility characteristics, the analysis is designed around the key areas of housing aspirations outcomes, support, and assistance needed to attain these outcomes, and access to such supports, including impacts of support gaps:

- current, short- and longer-term housing aspirations (tenure, dwelling type, location, and similar)
- types of housing assistance and supports self-identified by survey participants as facilitating short and long-term housing aspirations
- impacts of support and non-support, and the nature and impact of support and assistance gaps.

Policy and practice workshop

Focusing on policy implications of the research, an online workshop was conducted in which preliminary findings of the research were presented to key policy and practice stakeholders, to support identification of actionable policy and practice development implications of the research. Preliminary findings of the project including review of literature and analysis of AHA data, were provided to participants prior to the workshop, with guiding questions for the workshop discussion. A total of four participants were able to attend, with two additional participants able to provide links to relevant references and responses via email. The participants' combined experience in current and recent roles included national and state level community housing organisations and housing policy agencies, public housing offices, and international and national contexts. Policy and practice participants' expertise assisted to 'stress-test' policy design scenarios in which tenant and resident participation in policy co-design can be enhanced in a one hour online workshop that was recorded with permission, transcribed and thematically coded.

1.3 Report structure

Following this introduction, the report is structured by the three research questions, and includes:

- Section 2 presents an international and national literature review of participatory policy making concepts related to social housing contexts, an overview of inclusive policy making in related fields, and an international review of literature on tenant participation specifically. The section also identifies a framework for conceptualising participatory approaches in housing contexts.
- Section 3 presents an overview of how participatory policy making and tenant participation feature in current Australian approaches to social housing design and delivery, including select case study examples, and is informed by a dedicated policy and practice development workshop in which research findings are 'stress tested'.
- Section 4 presents a foundational analysis of the housing aspirations of social tenants and low and very low-income households living in private rental and mortgaged homes, consistent with a population approach to preliminary stages of policy co-design.
- Implications and future directions of this research are considered in Section 5.

2. Policy co-design and tenant participation: review and conceptualisation

- **Participatory methods of policy making are widely recognised as beneficial for effective policy design and development, across a wide range of public policy realms internationally and, to a lesser extent, in Australia.**
- **To date, there is limited assessment of the efficacy or application of policy co-design and participatory methods in Australian housing policy.**
- **Tenant participation has been practiced for decades in many countries, either as a formal component of policy, or as an individual organisational initiative.**
- **Challenges for tenant participation programs include resource investment of workforce and tenant capabilities for engagement in co-design processes, structural power issues, understanding reasons why tenants may not participate, and disagreement between tenants and housing providers on the purpose and extent of programs.**
- **Tenant participation can encompass a variety of programs, from low tenant autonomy to higher tenant autonomy.**

In this chapter we review international and national literature that considers participatory policy methods in social housing contexts to identify key themes, challenges and approaches. We identify elements of policy co-design approaches relevant for housing policy making, with a focus on housing assistance and social housing policy development.

2.1 Inclusive policy making as a response to complex policy challenges

Internationally, a shift toward inclusive policy design and decision making processes has emerged in response to increasingly complex public policy challenges and the dominance of systems thinking to address these. There is a relatively well-established understanding that system complexity requires viewpoints of multiple stakeholders (Blomkamp 2022). Edwards and Evans (n.d.) argue that evidence-based policy making is supported by inclusion of diverse voices such as lived experience experts and advocates.

The inclusion of diverse voices within participatory methods to respond to complex problems is highly consistent with a systems-thinking approach to public policy. The UK Government Policy Innovation Lab suggests that inclusion of lived experience and views of diverse stakeholders is important, as without wide understanding, policy may be less effective or well-targeted (Norman 2020). Transformative and actionable evidence-oriented policy approaches draw intensively on a range of expertise and inputs, including from professionally trained sectors as well as from wider publics (Loorbach 2010; van Kerkhoff and Lebel 2015). De Smit and Borsh (2021) argue that in contemporary policy making, unprecedented technological and social challenges require not only a focus on sustainable transitions and transformations, but system innovation approaches underpinned by sustained participatory methods. Such an approach requires an increasing level of organised and routine stakeholder engagement and participation in policy processes, to ensure that a diverse range of stakeholder perspectives are included in policy design—and are listened to as part of standard practice.

Underpinning participatory policy making and design methods are different rationales for engaging with participants in policy making co-design and collaborative methods (Mayer, van Daalen and Bots 2018). The drivers of participation can be top-down (from governments or organisation) or bottom-up (from end-users or communities of interest) (De Smit and Borsh 2021). Philosophical underpinnings for participatory methods range from consumer-oriented approaches that focus primarily on fiscal considerations and questions of what end-users of products or services want, and how they can be satisfied, to wider approaches based on citizenship. Citizenship approaches to participatory policy methods are founded on notions of rights, responsibilities and democratic action (Evans and Terrey 2016; Blomkamp 2018 Blomkamp 2022). The two underpinnings are not mutually exclusive, and often co-exist within the rationale for policy and practice co-design across policy and other realms.

Exploring citizenship approaches (and tenant participation) requires considering Arnstein's (1969) influential work, 'A ladder of citizen participation', which provides a structured framework illustrating the diverse levels of citizen involvement. The ladder consists of eight levels arranged in a hierarchical pattern:

- Manipulation (1) and Therapy (2): These levels do not truly engage citizens in decision making but rather aim to educate or "cure" citizens according to the preferences of those in authority.
- Informing (3) and Consultation (4): At these levels, citizens are provided information or given a platform to express their views, but without the assurance that their input will be seriously considered or acted upon.
- Placation (5): This level is considered a higher form of tokenism, allowing citizens to advise, but ultimate decision making authority remains with those in power.
- Partnership (6): Citizens at this level can negotiate and engage in trade-offs with traditional power holders, having some degree of influence in decision making processes.
- Delegated Power (7): Have-not citizens gain a significant number of decision making seats or partial managerial authority within the established system.
- Citizen Control (8): This represents the highest level where have-not citizens obtain the majority of decision making power or full managerial control over the processes and outcomes (Arnstein 1969: 217).

Arnstein's ladder (1969) highlights that true citizen participation involves more than just token gestures or symbolic involvement. It emphasises the importance of meaningful power redistribution, enabling citizens to have a substantial say in shaping policies, resource allocation and societal reforms. Understanding these gradations helps in distinguishing genuine participation from superficial engagements and clarifies the demands for participation by marginalized groups, as well as the responses from those in power (Arnstein 1969).

While interest in collaborative and participatory policy making has been increasing in recent decades, there is no single definitional consensus about what policy co-design (or associated terms and practices) is and how it can be defined. In the context of public policy, Blomkamp (2018; 2020) defines policy co-design as *'a distinct set of principles and practices for understanding problems and generating solutions. It signifies the active involvement of a diverse range of participants in exploring, developing and testing responses to shared challenges'*. Blomkamp suggests co-design comprises three core elements: co-design processes, co-design values and principles, and practical aspects of co-design implementation. Each element can be understood as follows:

- Process: iterative stages of design thinking, oriented toward innovation.
- Principles: people are creative; people are experts in their own lives; policy should be designed by people with relevant lived experience.
- Practical tools: creative and tangible methods for telling, enacting and making (Blomkamp 2018: 732).

A focus on participation by citizens and end-users of services within strategic and operational realms of public policy internationally has seen the rise of many participatory methods, guidelines and evaluations, and has established some common approaches. Co-design differs from related concepts associated with design thinking, user perspectives and various forms of participation in design and evaluation processes by those most affected by them. Part of the problem in evaluating participatory methods to date has been ambiguous usage of terms, ranging from 'human-centred design thinking' to 'coproduction' (Fabian, Alexandrova et al. 2021), and 'community-based participatory action' (Hyra, Moulden et al. 2019). At its core, participatory methods stem from the principle that those most affected by a policy decision, or other forms of organisational process and decision making, ought to be involved in the decision making process itself.

Participatory methods of policy making can take multiple forms, from wide-ranging foundational evidence about the types of systems and assistance clients want and need (such as via population survey methods), to niche co-design and development projects (via highly participatory policy making methodologies). Examples are found within sub-sectors of social housing or housing assistance models, as well as at local area, neighbourhood, or dwelling scales (Hyra, Moulden et al. 2019). Examples include Hyra, Moulden et al.'s (2019) community-based participatory action research that investigated health impacts of gentrification in two similar-sized communities in the US. In such approaches, the *'method presumes information acquired in partnership with community participation is more likely to result in direct actions necessary to address important social determinants of health in the context of gentrification'* (Hyra, Moulden et al. 2019: 425). In the UK in particular, co-production has been strongly taken up in social research by organisations that work with people living with socioeconomic disadvantage as well as housing precarity specifically. For example, the Glasgow Homelessness Network (2018) undertook sustained consultation with people who had experienced homelessness to inform recommendations to government. Other UK organisations have also published guidelines and principles for co-production, building on their experiences and helping other organisations to undertake best practice (such as Homeless Link 2017; Welford, Milner and Moreton 2022).

Similarities between participatory policy making and participatory research methods can readily be drawn. In each practice, a continuum of engagement can be conceptualised that ranges from 'light' participation at one end, involving limited input from participants, to middle-ground engagement, to 'deep' or highly involved participation and engagement at the other end of the continuum (Brown 2022).

Blomkamp (2018) presents a useful overview of types of approaches to participatory policy making methods, including those ranging from 'light' to 'in depth' and genuinely collaborative approaches. With regards to public policy development, Blomkamp identifies co-design as among the most highly engaged and challenging, and yet most able to develop effective outcomes if processes are sufficiently supported, well-resourced, and embedded within organisational and cultural structures and processes. Co-design contrasts with other less-intensive approaches, including consultation and very 'light' consultation with affected persons of any given policy or program.

Table 2: Approaches to participatory policy making and definitions

Approach	Definition	Co-design/Differences relative to policy co-design
Co-design	It signifies the active involvement of a diverse range of participants in exploring, developing, and testing responses to shared challenges (Blomkamp 2018).	Co-design is a distinct set of collaborative principles and practices for understanding problems and generating solutions.
Community engagement	Proactively seeking community values, concerns, and aspirations, to incorporate them into decision making (Moore et al. 2016).	Does not necessarily follow a design led process, lead to innovation, or involve creative methods.
Co-production	A partnership approach to the delivery of public services, sometimes encompassing the whole policy process (from design to implementation) (Bracci et al. 2016:7).	Not necessarily involving a design or development process, or creative methods and may focus solely on implementation.
Participatory democracy	A form of democratic government in which citizens have ample opportunity to make decisions about public policy (Bevir 2009:130).	Stronger emphasis on ideals of self-rule and self-determination; not necessarily involving a design led process or creative methods.
Deliberative democracy	A form of democratic government based on the unconstrained exchange of arguments and reasoned discussion (Cooke 2000:947–948).	Emphasis on rational dialogue and practical reasoning, rather than design thinking, creativity, and abductive reasoning.
Human-centred design	A contextualised design-led methodology that incorporates end users' needs and aspirations, and that involves citizens and other stakeholders in the design process in different ways (van der Bijl-Brouwer 2016).	Users, citizens, or stakeholders may be minimally or passively involved in the design process, and do not necessarily contribute to the development of solutions.

Source: Author modification based on Blomkamp (2018) Table 2.

Importantly, for participatory policy making approaches involving vulnerable populations, where power imbalances are significant between, for example, clients or customers of services, and people employed to design or deliver such services, additional concerns warrant consideration. Moll, Wyndham-West et al. (2020) raise questions about whether co-design concepts and nomenclature have been co-opted and altered, in the context of a proliferation of use across multiple realms of policy and service provision internationally. Moll, Wyndham-West et al. (2020) suggest that risks and outcomes must be carefully considered in all stages of participatory processes, including developing an understanding of the starting point for co-design processes, as this forms a critical foundation for efficacy and ethical practice.

Challenges within co-design and other participatory policy making approaches include:

- workforce skills and commitment to participatory methods
- capabilities of participants engaging in co-design and other participatory processes
- necessary resources including training, funding, and time allocated to undertake in-depth, co-design policy making.

Representation of people affected by processes, and ensuring adequate perspectives of hard-to-reach and non-participating individuals, should be undertaken as far as possible (see for example Mintrom and Luetjens 2016; Brandsen, Steen et al. 2018; Howlett 2019; Blomkamp 2021).

A further challenge in implementing meaningful participatory methods within policy design processes relates to engaged and responsive 'listening'. The Grenfell Tower tragedy in which residents died in government housing due to defective building cladding serves as a salutary case study in point. In this case, residents of Grenfell Tower had provided information about their concerns related to building quality and perceived risks via systematic consultation and representation approaches prior to the building fire that led to resident deaths. Critical analysis of the event and engagement with tenants prior highlights the significance of appropriate responses to tenant voice and concerns (MacLeod 2018).

2.1.1 Lessons for policy and practice from other fields

Before we turn to consider participatory approaches to policy and service design considerations in the social housing sector in Australia, it is worth briefly reflecting on the lessons that might be drawn from policy and practice experiences in cognate fields like community mental health, substance use treatment and disability support services.

Across these fields, scholars, practitioners and policy makers have long debated the benefits that deeper engagement with 'consumers', 'peers' and 'service users' provide. These benefits include opportunities to improve or enhance the design of service responses to health and social care challenges associated with, for example, mental distress or substance use problems, and improvements to the ways existing services might be more effectively evaluated or monitored to drive ongoing service enhancements (see Happell and Roper 2007; Ritter et al. 2017; Tambuyzer et al. 2014 for reviews). One key feature of these debates, reflected in Blomkamp's (2018) typology noted above (see Figure 2), has been discussion of the varying forms or models of consumer involvement in policy and service design processes. Participation forms range from consultative approaches consistent with 'community engagement' and 'co-design' approaches, through to more sustained and structured involvement akin to Blomkamp's discussion of 'democratic' approaches to participatory policy making and/or service provision. Of course, experience in practice contexts has varied widely across these fields, generating what has become a very extensive empirical literature on the forms, benefits, and shortcomings of participatory models of policy making, service design and program delivery across the mental health and substance use treatment fields (see Bennetts, Cross and Bloomer 2011; Happell and Roper 2007; Ritter et al. 2017; Stewart, Watson et al. 2008; Tambuyzer et al. 2014 for reviews).

These discussions have been especially vibrant in the field of mental health service design and delivery internationally (Shalaby and Agyapong 2020). Some of the most significant contributions have taken place in the context of debates about the provision of formal mental health care services and supports, where greater involvement of 'consumer-survivors' (Frese and Davis 1997) has been championed in many countries as a potent means of overcoming longstanding problems of poor service performance, and poor client engagement. Starting in the 1970s and accelerating throughout the 1980s, social movements of mental health service users and their families and carers emerged throughout North America (Frese and Davis 1997; Cye, O'Hagan et al. 2016), Europe (Dahlqvist-Jönsson, Schön et al. 2015) and Australasia (Lammers and Happell 2003; Bennetts, Cross and Bloomer 2011). These movements focused on agitating to improve the range of health and social services available to people experiencing mental health problems, and to combat the stigma and discrimination that many regarded as endemic across these service systems at this time. What later became known across much of the globe as the Mental Health Consumer Movement (MHCM) (see Davidson, Chinman et al. 1999) sought to generate a novel evidence base to guide the ongoing development of participatory models of service development and delivery in mental health care.

Having grown rapidly in the last 10—15 years, the literature associated with this work has had two major impacts on mental health service delivery across North America, Europe and Australasia. First, the literature now provides ample confirmation of the benefits of 'peer involvement' in service development and design. For example, enhanced consumer and peer involvement in 'co-design' approaches to the development of novel services for people experiencing mental distress has been shown to lead to improved client engagement in care, and more importantly, improved treatment outcomes (see Rose 2019 for a comprehensive review of this literature). That improved consumer participation in service development and design processes leads to improved service outcomes across diverse 'patient' groups has now been established in evaluation and program outcomes studies across many countries and cultural contexts, generating an extensive research literature to guide practice (see also Johnston-Devin, Oprescu et al. 2023; Productivity Commission 2020 for reviews).

The second major contribution offered within this literature has been the generation of diverse ideas for promoting growth in the 'peer' or 'consumer' workforce in mental health care delivery, including detailed advice on formal role descriptions, supervision and performance support arrangements, remuneration models, promotions and career and professional development pathways, disciplinary and dismissal arrangements and so on (see Adams 2020; Mental Health Commission of Canada 2016; Productivity Commission 2020; Shalaby and Agyapong 2020; White, Foster et al. 2020 for reviews). This literature has often drawn on parallel developments in human resource management and organisational psychology for insights into the most effective models of organisational support for 'non-traditional' staffing arrangement in health care provision. When sufficiently well-resourced and supported within organisational contexts, this literature provides strong evidence that enhanced provision of 'peer support' through the establishment of formal 'consumer' or 'peer' roles in formal mental health program delivery is associated with significant improvements in service outcomes (see Bennetts, et al. 2011; Davidson, et al. 1999 for reviews). It has also been shown that greater involvement of people with 'lived experience' of mental health care in the delivery of mental health services can help to diminish the stigma experienced by service users in these settings, while combatting the discriminatory attitudes and beliefs that are still held by some clinical and professional staff (see Adams 2020; Shalaby and Agyapong 2020; White, Foster et al. 2020 for reviews).

Reviewing this literature, and associated practice experiences across the fields of mental health service delivery, substance use treatment and related fields, there are a number of important insights relevant to our discussion of participatory approaches to social housing service innovation and program delivery. First, and most importantly, experience in these fields provides ample evidence that enhanced participation of 'service users' (in our case social housing tenants) in policy development and program and service implementation is associated with improved client engagement and program outcomes. Participatory approaches to policy innovation and program delivery are worth pursuing because they lead to better outcomes for service users. Equally important, however, is the contention that service user engagement activities should precede formal opportunities for active participation in policy design and program development processes (Ritter, Lancaster et al. 2018). What this means is that formal opportunities to participate in service design and program delivery should always take place in the context of meaningful engagement with service users. Invitations to simply contribute to service and program evaluation studies, for example, or to attend formal and informal service design workshops, in the absence of ongoing meaningful engagement runs the risk of 'tokenism' where service users feel consulted but not engaged (Bennetts, Cross et al. 2011; Ritter et al. 2018). It follows that participation in social housing service reviews or program design activities should take place via a carefully structured program of engagement activities in which formal opportunities to participate in policy development and service delivery discussions are nested within this broader engagement strategy.

This suggests, finally, a series of organisational requirements to support participatory models of policy development and service delivery across the social housing sector. Taking cues from the literature briefly reviewed here, we would highlight the following practice and engagement recommendations:

- Formal opportunities for tenant participation in social housing policy and practice improvement processes should always take place as part of organisation wide tenant and service user engagement activities.
- Tenant participation is most effective when conducted via transparent processes that may include formal role descriptions, recruitment and selection activities.
- Consideration should be given to remuneration issues, including explicit guidance on when individuals will or will not be paid for their contributions.
- Ongoing support for individuals involved in participatory processes is essential. This should include mentoring, debriefing and case management as appropriate.

It should be noted that there are some limited examples of client and tenant participation in housing policy development in Australia, and social housing provision more narrowly, to draw from in the development of enhanced tenant engagement strategies for the social housing sector. Much of this practice experience has emerged in the specialist homelessness services and support sector where there are a number of models and approaches to consider (see Constantine 2023 for a review). That said, this practice experience has not been well documented and so clear practice recommendations are difficult to identify beyond the broad principles noted about. Constantine (2023) does however point to a strong association between enhanced consumer participation in policy and practice considerations, and stronger client engagement in services. There is also some suggestion that enhanced participation is associated with improved 'non-housing' service outcomes including improved health and wellbeing. Of course, the most important factor in determining housing outcomes in homelessness services is access to appropriate housing stock, which is not a factor that participatory approaches to policy design can readily modify. With this caveat in mind, we now turn to consider the international experience of participatory approaches to social housing provisioning for further practice insights.

2.2 Tenant participation in social housing: an international review

In social housing contexts, tenant or resident participation in policy processes is the major form of participation undertaken. International literature demonstrates that tenant participation can cover a range of programs and levels of tenant involvement. The literature search was conducted through Google Scholar and searches used combinations of the terms "tenant participation", "client participation", "housing services" and "homelessness services" to find relevant literature.

The most extensive English-language literature on tenant participation comes from the UK, where tenant participation has been prevalent since the 1970s (Simmons and Birchall 2007). Although, tenant participation differs between England, Scotland and Wales (Preece 2019; Lambourne and Jenkins 2020). Tenant participation in the UK has been thoroughly explored and conceptualised, including through Cairncross, Clapham and Goodlad's (1997) model which is discussed in the next section. Tenant participation is required by English and Scottish social housing legislation (Preece 2019). According to Simmons and Birchall (2007), in the UK there are two key forms of participation:

- tenants' associations that represent tenants in discussions with housing providers
- tenant management organisations that undertake tasks traditionally done by housing providers.

Preece's (2019: 17) review of existing research on tenant participation also lists further examples of participation types including panels, consultations, decision making and governance. Lambourne and Jenkins's (2020: 345) research in Wales examines the examples of cooking workshops and a youth service forum, which are deemed beneficial as 'softer' tenant participation strategies. However, they also find that only a narrow demographic of tenants engaged (Lambourne and Jenkins 2020). In a summary of the research on tenant motivations and barriers to participation, Preece (2019: 23) highlights that there are both practical barriers—such as costs and accessibility of participation events—and *'less tangible affective atmospheres of participation'* such as the culture of participation experiences. In exploring tenants' decisions to not participate in available programs, McKee (2009) finds that tenants may strategically engage only when issues are important to them. McKee (2009) argues this should not be interpreted as tenants being apathetic, but points to a need for a range of tenant participation opportunities.

Other countries have also yielded academic research on tenant participation programs of various types. In some countries, tenant participation within social housing is a strong component of policy. In Hong Kong, tenant participation was formalised through the Estate Management Advisory Committee in 1995, and at the time of Ming Yip's (2000) research, Hong Kong had the world's largest tenant participation scheme in public housing. Ming Yip (2000: 12) describes tenant participation as focusing on issues such as *'local improvement works, improvement of building management, environmental improvement, the organisation of estate activities and assessment of service contractors' performance'* but not housing policy itself. Further research on tenant participation in Hong Kong contends that tenants do not have greater autonomy necessarily, as the way tenants are governed creates *'"government from a distance" rather than lesser government'* (Lee 2010: 126).

Ireland began to formalise tenant participation at a similar time to Hong Kong, in 1992, and one study of five areas contends that the scheme has been thoroughly implemented (Redmond and Norris 2007). However, the authors find that one particular challenge is that *'tenants and local authority officials held very different views of the meaning of tenant participation'* (Redmond and Norris 2007: 200). Another country with formalised tenant participation is the Netherlands, which in 1998 legislated tenants' agency regarding social housing landlords' actions and policies (Kruythoff 2008: 638). However, as Kruythoff (2008) explores, there is a discrepancy between this legislation and what occurs in practice due to the structural power imbalance between tenants and landlords. Other research from the Netherlands (Huisman and Czischke 2023) finds recent innovation relating to self-management, where tenants manage elements of their housing that would usually be undertaken by the housing provider, and recommend that this be integrated with formal participation.

In other countries, tenant participation appears to be a less-strongly integrated element of social housing systems. In Taiwan, social housing has only been majorly provided since the 2010s, and policy makers were inspired by the Netherlands' social housing system (Yu, Lin and Dąbrowski 2023). Tenant participation in Taiwan has occurred through advocate-led programs such as the Youth Innovation in Social Housing (YISH) Program, which encourages young residents' placemaking (Yu, Lin and Dąbrowski 2023). Yu, Lin and Dąbrowski (2023) conclude that the placemaking activities have been beneficial for tenants. In Poland, tenant participation is also not part of the regulation (Suszyńska 2013). One study of social housing tenants found very low levels of participation, where participation was described as seeking information, initiating changes, and having influence over their housing (Suszyńska 2013: 52). Suszyńska (2013: 52) suggests that Poland follow Western European countries by implementing legal requirements for tenant participation.

There was limited literature found on tenant participation in North America. However, two studies highlight cases of tenant participation in specific circumstances. In the US, Chaskin, Khare and Joseph (2012) explore the processes of participation afforded to residents of Chicago public housing that was redeveloped into mixed-income housing. Participation of those affected by public housing redevelopment into mixed-income housing is required by government (Chaskin, Khare and Joseph 2012). Of note, the authors highlight how race is a *'fundamental factor'* in residents' and stakeholders' views on participation, as most public housing residents in Chicago are African-American (Chaskin, Khare and Joseph 2012: 896). Chaskin, Khare and Joseph (2012: 897) conclude that *'there exist stark differences of opinion among stakeholders and residents regarding the extent that local knowledge, local rights, and local power should be prioritized and in their thinking about the structures that might facilitate these factors.'* Finally, in Canada, Foroughi (2017) examines 'participatory budgeting' at a community housing organisation which has a formal tenant participation system. Participatory budgeting allows tenants decision making power on how funding can be spent in the community. Foroughi (2017: 10) finds a lack of consensus between tenants and providers on what tenant participation and participatory budgeting are meant to achieve. This is a similar finding to Chaskin, Khare and Joseph (2012), as well as Redmond and Norris' (2007) finding that tenants and officials had different ideas of what constituted tenant participation in Ireland.

Overall, the international literature on tenant participation finds mixed success regardless of the structure of the program or length of time such programs have been implemented. Four key observations can be summarised.

- First, having tenant participation as a key component of government regulation on social housing can be beneficial, as it mandates a standard of tenant participation programs. However, legislating tenant participation alone is not a guarantee of success.
- The second observation is that multiple studies found tenants and housing providers and officials had different ideas of what tenant participation should look like and what it should achieve (Foroughi 2017; Chaskin, Khare and Joseph 2012; Redmond and Norris 2007). This can lead to conflict between tenants and housing providers.
- Third, tenant participation programs can be compromised by structural power issues between tenants and housing providers, which can limit tenant autonomy and also lead to conflict (Kruythoff 2008; Lee 2010).
- Fourth, even when programs are successfully implemented, there is a need to consider the factors that motivate tenant participation and reasons why some tenants may not participate (Preece 2019; Lambourne and Jenkins 2020; McKee 2009).

Social housing is not the only housing field to utilise participatory policy making. Some homelessness organisations also involve their end-users in programs. O'Shaughnessy and Greenwood (2021) explore how users of Irish Housing First services and staircase services are empowered, and Buck, Rochon et al. (2004) highlight how a US healthcare organisation for homeless persons integrates the lived experience of end-users into program design. In Australia, Phillips and Kuyini (2017) have investigated end-user participation at NSW Specialist Homeless Services—including participation in policy development and service delivery—and the barriers to people participating.

2.3 Conceptualising tenant participation for housing policy and practice

One of the key models of tenant participation is Cairncross, Clapham and Goodlad's (1997) highly cited model where housing authorities (providers) can be categorised as either 'traditional', 'consumerist' or 'citizenship'. Summarising this model, Hickman (2006) explains that 'traditional' authorities are those where tenant participation is limited; authorities using the 'consumerist' approach favour tenant participation *'for providing better services for tenants as consumers'*; and authorities using the 'citizenship' approach view tenants as citizens who should be empowered through a variety of strategies (Hickman 2006: 213). However, Hickman (2006) concludes that changes in the 1990s policy environment complicated the applicability of Cairncross, Clapham and Goodlad's (1997) model.

Redmond and Norris (2007) also construct a tenant participation framework, building on Cairncross, Clapham and Goodlad's (1997). However, they categorise levels of tenant participation, aims, and typical methods (see Table 2).

Table 3: Levels, aims and implementation methods of tenant participation

Levels of tenant participation	Aims	Typical methods and structures
Information	Information is provided to tenants on the housing service and the receipt of feedback from them.	Newsletters, meetings, leaflets and tenant handbooks.
Consultation and dialogue	The views of tenants are sought and are taken into account in the making of decisions and the provision of services.	Open meetings, questionnaires, tenant surveys, estate boards and forums.
Shared decision making or devolution	Tenants have voting rights or specific agreements over service provision which means that local authorities must act on their views.	Estate agreements, delegation orders, estate boards, service agreements and estate action plans.
Tenant management	Tenants have full control and are thus autonomous in making decisions on the housing service.	Estate management boards and tenant management.

Source: Redmond and Norris (2007: 189)

Linking back to the overview of participatory policy design methods described above, we can consider that the first two housing-related forms of participatory methods identified here fall into 'light' categories of participatory methods. The third, shared decision making or devolution, has the potential to engage tenants and other recipients of housing assistance more 'deeply' in co-design participatory approaches. The fourth, tenant management, involves elements of co-design, as well as forms of co-operative housing models that rely on collaborative governance structures as inherent to co-operative models of housing, and which are beyond the scope of the present study. In short, the present research focuses on the extent to which shared forms of decision making and devolution of decision making can form part of social housing policy processes, compared with those that are based on information sharing only or consultation and dialogue.

2.4 Co-operative models of social housing participation

Though small in scale, the Australian rental co-operative sector stands out due to its well-established stature, diverse governance models and advanced practices in tenant participation. The sector forms part of the community housing sector. While community housing providers are required to demonstrate '*supporting tenant and resident engagement'* as part of the National Regulatory System for Community Housing (Condie and Ayres 2022:9), tenant participation is not a common practice in public housing explored in Section 3, below (Pawson, Milligan et al. 2019). For this reason, policy makers and researchers have increasingly directed more attention towards the co-operative sector as a sector through which lessons about participatory methods to governance and management can be gained.

Yet, in the Australian context there is limited understanding of the ways that tenant participation within rental co-operatives that are part of the community housing sector, may inform the broader social housing sector and be transferable to public and community housing more generally. At the time of writing, a large national project funded by the Australian Research Council is being conducted to articulate the value and mechanisms through which value and benefits are achieved within housing co-operatives in the community housing sector (Crabtree-Hayes, Ayers et al. in 2024 - now published no longer in press). Lessons from the research will form the first systematic account of benefits of rental co-operatives in the Australian context including how these can be conceptualised, quantified and understood qualitatively to inform future practice.

Important questions for social housing and housing assistance policy development more broadly to consider in future include:

- How can insights about tenant participation and collaborative asset management within tenant-led housing models, contribute to affordable housing and system-wide innovation?
- How can successful co-operative sector tenant participation and collaborative asset management practices be mobilised to enhance mainstream social housing nationally?
- What are possible implementation and policy implications that can be learned from co-operative community housing sector approaches?

Evidence indicates that 'deep' tenant participation, of the type Redmond and Norris (2007) identify above, has direct advantages and benefits for tenants and governance improvements. Active participation is claimed to help tenants to experience a heightened sense of ownership and autonomy over their living conditions, leading to increased satisfaction and a stronger sense of belonging within their communities (Crabtree, Grimstad et al. 2019). Moreover, tenant participation fosters the acquisition and development of valuable skills such as communication, negotiation and problem-solving, which can positively contribute to education, employment and societal engagement (Crabtree, Grimstad et al. 2019). This empowerment is particularly advantageous in the social housing sector that plays a crucial role in providing housing for highly vulnerable groups. Social housing policies aim to enhance the social and economic inclusion of tenants (Commonwealth of Australia 2018a). Enabling the acquisition of necessary skills through tenant participation may help social housing tenants to achieve their life goals and move to other housing as appropriate.

2.5 Conclusion

Internationally, there is a growing recognition of the value of participatory policy making approaches in response to increasingly complex policy challenges. In this section we have reviewed some of the key approaches, including those ranging from in-depth co-design of policy to those which can be described as light touch or superficial, and which involve information sharing or point-in-time consultation with people affected by policy decisions. The primary form of participation within social housing sectors is tenant participation. The review of international literature presented here indicates that tenant participation in social housing policy and programs is highly variable and has mixed outcomes. Consistent with general participatory policy making principles, it is possible to identify 'light touch' to 'in-depth' approaches to tenant participation and other forms of engagement in social housing and housing assistance collaborative policy design approaches. The extent to which these are currently used in the Australian context is explored in the next section.

3. Tenant participation in Australian social housing sectors

- This chapter examines the extent to which tenant participation features in social housing sectors in Australia.
- The use of tenant participation in national housing policy is scant. However, some states and territories have created guidelines or suggestions for tenant participation in social housing or implemented their own programs in public housing and community housing.
- Participatory methods are increasingly employed across states and territories in social housing sectors in a highly dynamic context. Overall, outcomes of tenant participation programs (in both public and community housing) are not generally publicly available as the field is relatively new, with limited evaluation of outcomes yet undertaken.
- A policy workshop with policy makers and practitioners found that there is growing awareness and investment in engaging lived experience expertise in policy making processes in multiple strategic and operational ways, using a variety of approaches.
- Nationwide investment in building workforce and lived experience capabilities and processes is needed for safe, effective and impactful co-design policy making to form part of social housing policy making.
- Lessons can be learned from international experience including in Scotland and the UK, as well as from supported housing and homelessness sectors nationally.
- The experiences of front-line service officers, as well as social housing tenants and people needing assistance who do not currently live in social housing, are valuable for informing policy innovation and development.

- **Establishment of an Australian Housing Clearinghouse to facilitate sector-wide information sharing geared to supporting lived experience participation in housing assistance and homelessness policy making, coupled with organisational cultural change, and formal recognition of lived experience and tenant advisory groups, is likely to be beneficial in the Australian context.**

3.1 Approaches to tenant participation in policy design

3.1.1 National social housing directions

Social housing is a state and territory responsibility, with significant consistency across states and territories nationally. The National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA) is an agreement between the Australian Government and state and territory governments to *'contribute to improving access to affordable, safe and sustainable housing across the housing spectrum, including to prevent and address homelessness, and to support social and economic participation'* (Commonwealth of Australia 2018a: 1). Although 'participation' appears in this text on the front page, tenant participation is not generally an explicit part of the NHHA or any of the bilateral agreements with states and territories. Table 3 presents a review of the bilateral agreements and any appearance of tenant participation in the documents.

Table 4: Review of state and territory Bilateral Agreements of the NHHA (2018—2023)

State	Tenant participation?
ACT	Nothing found in public domain.
NSW	Reference to 'intensive consultation process' including people with lived experience of homeless and people at increased risk of homelessness that informed development of NSW Homeless Strategy (NSW Government 2019).
NT	Reference to an initiative to consult with older adults to assist with developing social housing accommodation that is appropriate for seniors.
QLD	Nothing found in public domain.
SA	Nothing found in public domain.
TAS	Nothing found in public domain.
VIC	Nothing found in public domain.
WA	Co-design process with community sector referenced in relation to the development of its 10-Year State Homelessness Strategy. Service models for several cohorts (Indigenous Australians, older people, exiting institutions, and so on) in relation to WA's response to national homelessness priorities will be reviewed and potentially re-designed in consultation with the community sector.

Source: Commonwealth of Australia (2018b; 2018b; 2018c; 2018d; 2018e; 2018f; 2018g; 2018h; 2018i)

NSW, the NT and WA mention initiatives or plans involving some principles of tenant participation, but these are generally small components of large frameworks.

3.1.2 State and territory approaches to tenant participation in social housing

Although tenant participation does not feature heavily in national housing policy, nor in the bilateral agreements of the NHHA, some state and territory governments have shown evidence of taking action more recently. The significance and potential benefits of tenant participation for strategic and operational aspects of social housing design, delivery, and outcomes assessment have become more prominent. Some jurisdictions have developed guides that direct best practice examples and approaches for participation in public and community housing, and some governments have implemented tenant participation in their own housing services. There is limited publicly available information about the extent of participatory approaches being used in housing policy and social housing sectors nationally, hence not all current initiatives are able to be reported. Some available examples are summarised here.

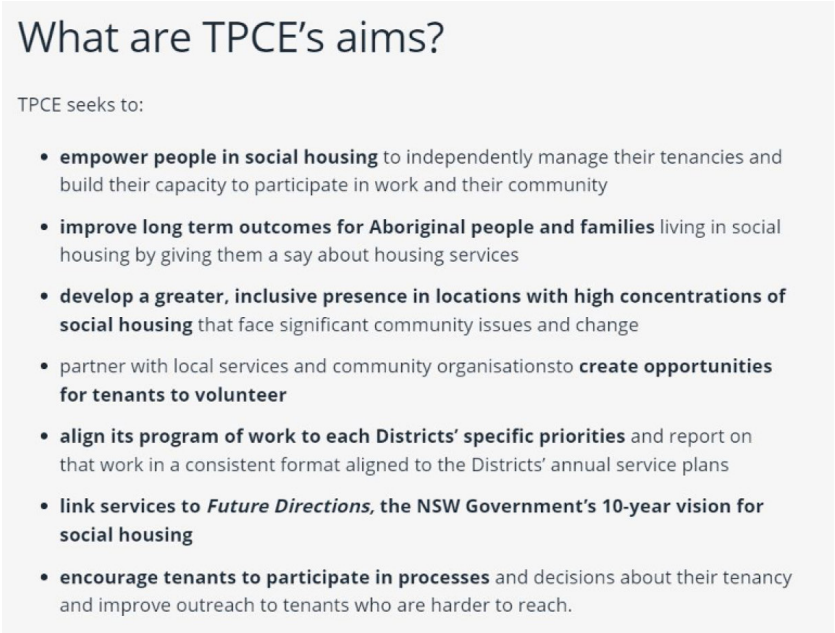
Australian Capital Territory (ACT)

ACT Housing's document Modernising Tenancy Services (ACT Government 2015: 10) contains a section on 'client and tenant feedback' that details community engagement activities. The activity undertaken with public housing tenants takes the form of a survey: the ACT Government Client Satisfaction Survey for Public Housing (2013). ACT Housing also has a Tenants' Consultative Group which consists of 20 tenants that serve in the group for two years (ACT Government 2023). Although outcomes of this program are not publicly available, the website notes that *'Members are also kept informed about how their feedback has been used to implement a range of programs and initiatives'* (ACT Government 2023).

New South Wales (NSW)

The NSW Department of Communities and Justice runs several programs to encourage tenant participation and has held some form of tenant participation since 2000 (NSW Government 2023a). Funding is set aside for these programs, which include grants, tenant councils and representative organisations, and a community gardening program delivered with the Royal Botanic Gardens (NSW Government 2023a). NSW has also recently launched a Tenant Participation and Community Engagement (TPCE) program in collaboration with Mission Australia (NSW Government 2023b). The aims of the program are captured below in Figure 1, an image from the Department of Communities and Justice website.

Figure 1: Tenant participation and community engagement program aims



Source: NSW Government (2023b)

There are no publicly available outcomes of the TPCE program available yet.

Queensland (QLD)

In Queensland, a significant effort to increase various forms of participation by tenants in social housing developments and innovations is underway. This includes a seminar held between Q Shelter and the Queensland Registrar about tenant participation in 2022, including why this is important and how it fits within the National Regulatory Framework (The Deck 2023). Although not publicly reported this includes:

- recognition by the Department of Housing, Local Government, Planning and Public Works of the importance and value of understanding its tenants' experiences, ideas and views on the way that social housing is delivered and managed. Tenants are encouraged and supported to provide ideas and feedback through the department's Your Say website, including targeted consultations, and its TenantConnect webpage geared to supporting access to a range of information including budgeting, crime prevention, concessions, health and wellbeing.
- the Department's Housing Service Centres coordinate the annual My Home Awards, which celebrate connections to home, community and culture and the positive contributions of Queensland public housing tenants. The department also uses initiatives like Social Inclusion Week and Neighbour Day to engage with tenants. These provide opportunities for tenants to share their stories and experiences and for the department to gain a greater understanding of the important issues for tenants which can inform policy and practice enhancements or simplification.

South Australia (SA)

The Innovation in Social Housing Project was delivered in 2016—17 by SA's Office for the Ageing and aimed to identify models for older persons' social housing and the precincts around the housing. Part of this project was a tenant workshop facilitated by the Australian Centre for Social Innovation (TACSI). The tenant workshop engaged with older Housing SA tenants to understand what they want and need from their housing and neighbourhood (TACSI 2019). The case study summary of the Innovation in Social Housing Project states:

> *Feedback from Housing SA tenants and industry professionals indicated that they found the engagement undertaken as part of this project to be valuable and productive, providing opportunities for older Housing SA tenants to have their voices heard and for industry professionals to both increase their understanding of the issues and use their expertise to develop creative and innovative design solutions. Renewal SA is considering the role of this approach in its future consultative processes and is working with TACSI to hold workshops with incoming tenants to further inform current projects. It is intended that the findings of this project will also be shared across government and with the broader housing sector in the future. (Government of South Australia n.d.:2)*

The South Australia case provides one of the more comprehensive summaries and evaluations of their tenant participation initiatives.

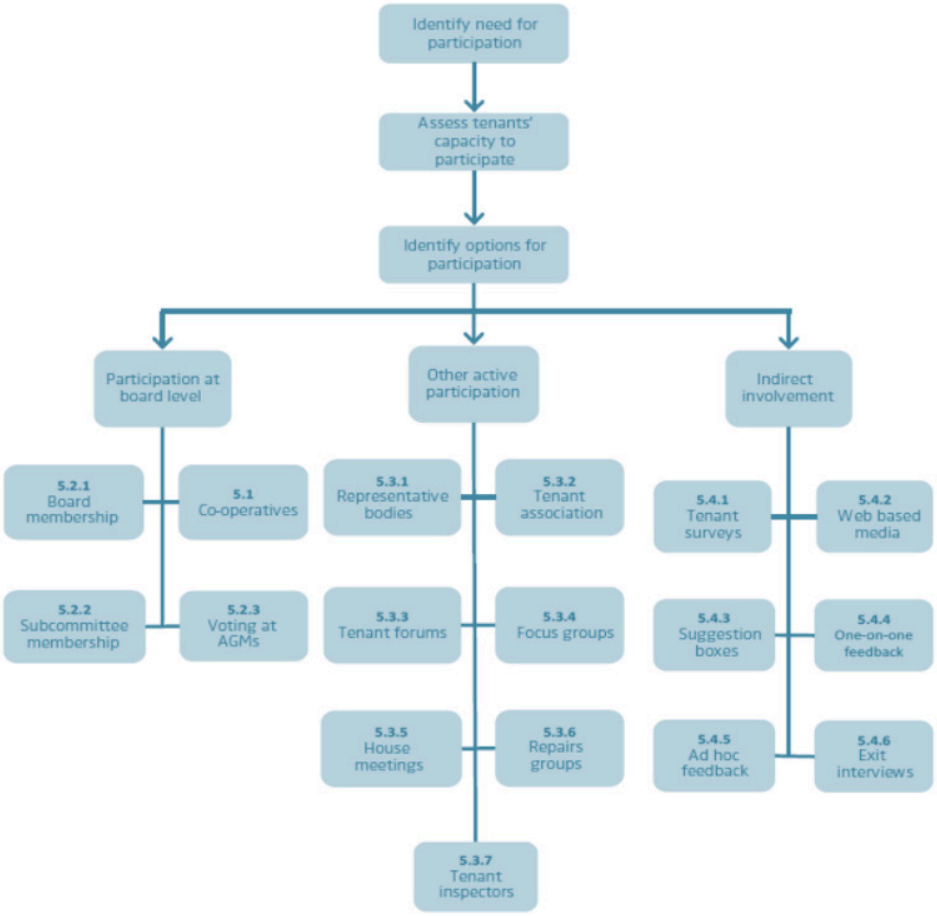
Tasmania (TAS)

The Tasmanian Government recently (2023) undertook a participation program in the formulation of the draft Tasmanian Housing Strategy (Tasmanian Government 2023). The Tasmanian Housing Strategy Lived Experience Consultation was conducted by an external consultant and encompassed *'people who have lived and living experience of housing stress, homelessness, and accessing housing services'*, including those with social housing experience (Mercer-Mapstone 2023: 2). Although only 27 people were consulted, the group was diverse in terms of age, cultural background, sexual orientation, ability, employment status and more (Mercer-Mapstone 2023: 7). The results of this consultation—in which participants were overall extremely critical of the Tasmanian housing system—were made publicly available. Notably, one of the recommendations made by participants was, *'Integrate lived experience engagement into the housing system at every opportunity across all levels of the system'* (Mercer-Mapstone 2023: 5). At this stage, it appears that the Tasmanian Government has taken this into account in their draft Tasmanian Housing Strategy: there is a focus on lived experience and one of the objectives is *'Incorporating lived experience or trauma-informed considerations in operational policy design and reviewing existing policies'* (Homes Tasmania 2023: 35). The Tasmanian example demonstrates a willingness to be transparent about lived experience feedback and, potentially, to build this into statewide strategy going forward.

Victoria (VIC)

Public housing in Victoria includes tenant participation programs, with the website listing items including volunteer awards, a gardening competition and resident surveys (with last available data from 2020) (Housing Vic 2021). However, the Victorian Government has extensive public guidelines about tenant participation in social housing. *The Good Practice Guide: Getting Tenants Involved* (Housing Registrar n.d.) outlines various forms of tenant participation, how to introduce initiatives, barriers, and successful case studies in Australia and overseas. There are seven performance standards that registered housing agencies in Victoria need to comply with, and one of these is 'tenancy management', which involves 'client participation' (Housing Registrar n.d.: 2); therefore, some level of tenant participation is required. The document outlines types of tenant participation and a potential process for implementing them, as captured in Figure 2 below (Housing Registrar n.d.: 4). The three types of participation – participation at board level, other active participation, and indirect involvement – roughly match the levels of participation in Redmond and Norris's (2007) conceptualisation. There is as yet limited publicly available information about the extent to which such approaches are used or the outcomes of these initiatives.

Figure 2: Potential process for implementing tenant participation according to the Victorian Housing Registrar



Source: Housing Registrar (n.d.: 4)

The Housing Registrar's document also recommends that tenant participation strategies should be reviewed at least every three years to evaluate success and what could be improved (Housing Registrar n.d.: 24).

3.1.3 Select tenant participation examples in supported housing and support services

In general, the field of homelessness services in Australia appears to have been quicker to take up and implement participatory methods within its service delivery models, than either social housing sectors or wider housing policy. Illustrative examples of tenant participation in Australia were identified through a non-systematic search of several relevant databases and online using keywords including 'tenant participation', 'co-design', 'collaboration', 'social housing', 'community housing' and so on. The information about the examples of tenant participant was derived largely from the websites and publications (such as annual reports) of the relevant housing and homelessness service providers. No published academic literature was identified that described tenant participation examples in an Australian setting, however this may be due to the non-systematic nature of the search strategy. In the majority of cases, limited information about the tenant participation initiatives was available. The information available tended to be a basic description of the initiative available on the housing provider's website. Sometimes there was more information available in annual reports or other documents (such as terms of reference for advisory groups or engagement strategies). Table 5 presents an overview of the select examples of lived experience participation in these supported housing programs.

Table 5: Examples of lived experience participation in supported housing programs

Name of initiative and organisation	Date /Location	Method/s of engagement	Purpose/s of engagement	Outcome/s	Source
Lived Experience Advisory Group (LEAG) / Lived Experience Advisory Program (LEAP) Launch Housing	2016 – present Melbourne, VIC	Meetings	Have input into several aspects of organisation including service delivery, policy and strategy	Unclear/not reported	Launch Housing (2023)
	Summary: LEAG was an advisory group which comprised up to 10 service users (not strictly tenants) with the aim of providing input into Launch Housing's services, policy, advocacy, business and strategic planning. In mid-2020, the group was expanded into a program (LEAP) to increase opportunities for service user involvement, however it is unclear what the broader program entails and if the advisory group remains. Members are remunerated for their involvement.				
Tenant advisory group (TAG) and Tenant newsletter ("Thrive") Unison Housing	2017 – present (TAG) Melbourne, VIC	Meetings and newsletter	Provide advice to Board on service delivery to meet tenant needs and improve organisational performance (advisory group), receive information (newsletter)	Annual self-review to measure impact and effectiveness (not publicly available).	Unison (2023a; 2023b; 2017)
	Summary: TAG is an advisory group comprising up to 12 tenants (also attended by the CEO and Board) that meets every two months to discuss and provide advice to the Board on how to best meet the needs of tenants and improve the organisation's performance. Members are limited to tenants of at least 1 year who are appointed for a 2-year period (with a maximum term of 6 years). The newsletter ("Thrive") is published twice a year online and distributed in print to all tenants. The newsletter is a means of providing key information and updates (including from TAG) to tenants. It is not clear when the newsletter was established as the earliest edition available online is from 2020, however reference is made to a newsletter in the 2018 annual report.				
Tenant Reference Groups, Tenant Inclusion Panel ("Our Voice"), Tenant Newsletter ("MYPLACE") and Tenant Satisfaction Survey Home in Place (formerly Compass Housing)	2011* – present Various locations, NSW & QLD	Various	Influence organisational policy and decision making (reference groups and panel), receive information (newsletter), provide feedback (survey)	Unclear/not reported	Home in Place (2022; 2023); Gilmour (2011); Compass (2012)
	*Summary: Tenant Reference Groups (TRGs) exist in each branch region and meet quarterly, providing a forum for tenants to discuss key aspects of the service with Home in Place staff. These discussions influence company policy and decision making by feeding into an overarching Tenant Inclusion Panel (the "Our Voice Panel") which in turn reports to the Board. The current TRG and inclusion panel model appears to have developed over several years, beginning as the Compass Tenant Engagement Panel (CTEP). *The earliest mention of the reference group / panel model is 2011, and the name/approach appears to have changed over time.*				

Continued Table 5: Examples of lived experience participation in supported housing programs

Name of initiative and organisation	Date /Location	Method/s of engagement	Purpose/s of engagement	Outcome/s	Source
Tenant Participation framework (*Building Bridges – Community Building and Engagement Strategy 2021-2024*) which includes a Tenant Reference Group, Tenant Advisory Groups, and several other initiatives (workshops, e-panel, survey, newsletter, participatory budgeting, community events, etc.). Bridge Housing	2021 – present (*TRG formed in 2015) Sydney, NSW	Various (e.g., meetings, newsletters, online forums, workshops)	Have input into decision making, policy and service delivery (reference and advisory groups), receive information (newsletter), provide feedback (survey, community events, e-panel)	Outcomes framework identified in strategy but results unclear/not reported	Bridge Housing (2018; 2023)
	Summary: "Building Bridges – Community Building and Engagement Strategy 2021-2024" describes Bridge Housing's tenant participation framework. Initiatives describes in the strategy include a Tenant Reference Group (TRG), which sits between several Tenant Advisory Groups (tenant run groups in different geographical areas and for different community groups) and the Senior Management Team, which in turn sits below the Board. The TRG comprises representatives from each advisory group and meets every two months with senior managers to provide updates from the community and individual tenant groups, explore policy changes, build capacity through training, and provide an avenue for tenants to be directly involved in shaping services and addressing systemic issues.				
Tenant Satisfaction Survey, Tenancy Advisory Group (TAG) Centacare Evolve Housing	Unclear when established, appears ongoing TAS	Survey, Meetings	Provide feedback about service delivery to guide future efforts (survey), contribute to decision making (TAG)	Results of 2018 survey published online, outcome/s unclear	Centacare Evolve Housing (n.d.; 2023)
	Summary: The Tenant Satisfaction Survey is an anonymous survey conducted annually to gather feedback about the services provided to tenants. The Tenancy Advisory Group (TAG) is open to all tenants and meets every two months. It was established to ensure the perspectives of tenants and the community were include in decision making by the organisation.				

Source: Multiple web-based resources, as reported in table.

The predominant tenant participation initiative appears to be tenant advisory or reference groups of a similar format (such as tenants as members, regular meetings, discussions feeding into higher levels of organisational management). However, several differences are noted in how these are described, such as the remuneration and term of members, the apparent nature and strength of the link between the group and management (including the mechanism by which the advisory group feeds into discussions and decisions at a higher level), and the desired outcomes. For example, some advisory groups are described as having input into policy, whereas others simply refer to service delivery. These examples best match with the 'Information' and 'Consultation and dialogue' levels in Redmond and Norris's (2007: 189) framework—the less-involved tenant participation strategies, rather than the higher end where tenants make decisions and have autonomy. Minimal information is provided anywhere about how successful these groups are at achieving their aims. The lack of public information on outcomes makes it difficult to discern what works for tenant participation programs in Australia – as well as to understand the extent to which participatory methods are utilised across housing and homelessness sectors nationally.

3.2 Policy perspectives: challenges, opportunities and future directions

Perspectives of key policy makers and practitioners in the Australian housing, social housing and homelessness sectors were sought on the extent to which lived experience and tenant participation currently form part of regular social housing policy processes, or could do so in future. A workshop held with these key experts additionally assisted to 'stress test' preliminary findings of the national review, above.

Key themes arising in the policy workshop are presented in summary form, organised thematically. Combined, these point to growing appetite for participatory policy design methods in the Australian housing, social housing and housing assistance sectors. However, current practice is limited and will benefit significantly from future investment, resourcing, and commitment to workforce and tenant empowerment and capability development.

3.2.1 Recognition of the value of lived experience and tenant participation

The policy workshop revealed that there is considerable awareness in the Australian context of the potential value of increased participation by social housing tenants and other recipients of housing assistance in policy design processes. However, there was also recognition that the extent to which participatory methods were used in housing policy and social housing policy is highly variable, tending towards very limited use beyond social housing satisfaction surveys. It was recognised that there is potential value in looking to homelessness and other supported housing sectors, as well as other fields of public policy and international experience, for lessons about how participatory methods could be taken up in the Australian context.

> *I just think we're still at step one on this. There's a lot more willingness, but we haven't looked at what we need, to get to where we need to be, if this is going to be meaningful. (Community housing 1)*

> *I've always said if you were looking at the design of a service, the best place to go is complaints that you've had about that service, that's the best feedback that you can possibly have. (Community housing 1)*

3.2.2 Cultural change and champions of policy co-design

Significantly, workshop participants were aware of the ways that organisational culture and broader public discourse can shape the way that people living with housing assistance and other forms of welfare can be perceived. It was suggested that there can be, in some cases, an underlying yet unspoken belief that welfare recipients (such as social housing tenants) are not deserving of having a voice at the table. This was discussed in the context of participatory policy methods working well: there must be respect and recognition of the expertise of all participants involved in the policy making process, which may require workforce training and changing cultural norms. Another significant aspect of culture that affects the uptake of participatory methods is that often key champions within organisations must take the lead to develop design processes. It was suggested that such champions also require resources and support for co-design processes to be successful and sustainable.

> *I think it goes back partly through, 'This is welfare housing. You should be grateful you're having it.' I don't mean that that's what people say or really think, but that it's somewhere in the DNA of all people working in housing Australia. […] 'You might be, you know, asked the odd question, but you really, seriously should just be grateful you are here. You don't expect to shape this.' So it means that we don't have the same infrastructure and the same institutions that are in the UK to support tenants to participate, whether it's tenants' associations that can, you know, in Scotland for example, they're registered, once they're registered, they get access to funds to support them independently of their landlord. (Community housing 1)*

I think that often people leading tenant participation or consultation work, with the direct focus on that, [are] champions of it. But then they have a challenge in stakeholders within the social landlord organisations, to convince them of the worth of tenant participation, then to convince them that it's worth the time and the money investment to go ahead with that. So I think that's a real challenge that can affect the quality of the tenant participation or consultation process. (Government housing service 2)

3.2.3 From satisfaction surveys to co-design processes

There was general recognition in the policy workshop that Australia routinely does collect some useful information about tenant perspectives and satisfaction. Social housing surveys form an important information source about trendline data and how tenants are faring overtime. However, there was also recognition that undertaking social housing satisfaction surveys does not in itself amount to participatory policy making and is limited in the extent to which it can actively inform either policy development or policy innovation. In Australia, there is a current climate in which some states and territories are moving from what was described as a 'tick box satisfaction survey approach' toward in-depth co-design processes.

[Tenant participation is] really not embedded in Australian ways of thinking, I almost feel like saying that it's now become default that we do attempt surveys and we can demonstrate that we've looked at the results and somehow or other that's fed through into something we've done and that's it. You don't have to go further than that. That ticks all the boxes and things, and that's it's almost now become what we do. (Community housing 1)

I think using that word participation is very important, because that demonstrates intent of an ongoing conversation and actually bringing people to the table to participate in the development and doing that co-design piece. (Government housing service 1)

…it does feel a little bit tokenistic. Sometimes we'll send out a survey and then we'll do no follow up. We're not actually making any commitment to follow through with any of the feedback we've received. It's just a, 'Yes, there was lived experience' or whatever. It's the terminology of the day, I mean, 'there's consumer engagement' or whatever the terminology is, we've done that, tick box. But I do sense that the tides are shifting and definitely from a [their jurisdiction] perspective there is a real investment in doing so. […] not just because we need to tick that box for a project, but having it in an ongoing participatory fashion where we are following up with people, we're building those relationships, and we're getting that sort of end-to-end feedback and delivering on those actions. (Government housing service 1)

3.2.4 Workforce development and participant capabilities

It was understood among participants in the workshop that policy co-design and other deep participatory policy making methods require organisational resourcing, skill development, funding and deep commitment to processes that take more time than usual within government departments, to be successful and sustainable.

There was also recognition that the expertise and experience of service officers with frontline experience formed a valuable and rich wealth of information and expertise in itself, which could be brought to policy co-design processes.

I know, having undertaken this [project title] reform of our service system, the workers who are working day-to-day on the ground with people, I mean they've got a richness in their experiences. They're hearing stories every day. They've got a fabulous wealth of knowledge. They're hearing from people every day [about] what's not working, what is working, what people want. So I think we undervalue that a bit. (Government housing service 1)

I think an important part of anyone who's working with social housing tenants on tenant participation is that they need to have as part of their role, whether explicitly or implicitly, a commitment to advocacy on behalf of the tenants who are involved in participation, because just from my experience those tenants who are sharing their time and their experience will have often issues and challenges that they want resolved as well. […] in terms of facilitating participation, there has to be a willingness and a generosity of spirit to help and put people in contact with people who can help with their issues and […] someone in the middle, a go-between person who can provide supports. (Government housing service 2)

3.2.5 Power imbalances and internal and external processes

There was discussion of how to obtain a 'representative' sample of tenants. Participants discussed, for example, that when tenants apply to participation programs through written online forms, the tenants who apply will be those fluent in English and articulate, rather than those with more complex challenges. However, it was also raised that those with the most complex circumstances—who provide an important perspective—often cannot spare any time because they are in crisis.

Maybe you're finding people who have had an experience of that in the past and now [they're] in [a] more stable situation. And I suppose that's an opportunity to pick up some experiences of more acute crisis from people who have experienced that and are now in a better place. (Government housing service 2)

…And but then we also acknowledge, well, we probably shouldn't be in the room and running [the workshop] ourselves because we're not going to get probably, you know, there is that power imbalance you talk about there, where we're their landlords, in some instances we're funding some of the services they're accessing. So then we're looking at a model that's going to be more costly and resource intensive because we're going to have to hire a third-party facilitator who's accredited and trauma-informed. (Government housing service 1)

You can think of a great model and do all this research, but I don't think you're ever going to have a one-size-fits-all kind of model, which goes back to what [other participant] was saying or what as well around multiple means of getting engagement and feedback. (Government housing service 1)

3.2.6 Investment, resourcing and information sharing

A critical component for policy participatory methods to be successful and sustainable is investment of funding, workforce training, capability development and support for participants in processes, and information sharing. There appears to be great value in establishing a platform or clearinghouse through which social housing departments and staff can access and share information across states and territories, as well as access international best practice examples to guide their policy co-design work.

It's not as easy as it sounds to kind of get tenant participation happening in the buy and it's actually quite resource intensive I suppose, to do it properly and not do a kind of tokenistic job. […] resources and to look after the people that you're getting the information from. (Government housing service 1)

We have to go out there and try to recruit people and make sure that we can find times and support them to attend and participate and it really took around a big investment, but that's because we decided the outcome we wanted was, I guess, a model with fidelity that we're going to actually get that genuine feedback in buying and investment and create that safe space for that to happen. (Government housing service 1)

…we need to take into account that [participants have] got children, responsibilities and they've got other things going on. And so they can't all get together on a Monday at 10:00 o'clock in the morning, to sit around in a group and provide feedback on something and those kinds of things. So some very micro and practical responses there. (Government housing service 1)

I think in terms of us refining models, it's really important for us to have an opportunity to share best practice. And I'm also going back to being transparent. I think that aids not only outcomes and encourages participation from those tenants and from those people with lived experience, but it also aids future research and developing and the continuous improvement process of these kind of models. (Government housing service 1)

3.2.7 A commitment to listening

Finally, it was noted that, as well as having a commitment to developing processes and practices and organisational culture that supports participatory design methods, it is essential that the outcomes of such processes form a genuine component of policy development within organisations. The way co-designed information is used is a critical component of this and transparency must be made around how information that has been co-developed is used in policy design and innovation. It was recognised that participants must see and recognise their voice within outcomes of participatory processes, or alternatively, have a clear understanding as to why that may not be the case in particular contexts where this may not be possible (for example, being beyond the scope or resources of an organisation to deliver desired outcomes).

…some of the things that people would like are not within our gift to give them either. And then so we have to have those conversations about what we can do and what they can expect from us and say, 'yeah, you're signing up to participate, but we may not be able to do everything you would like us to do. They might be able to work together with you to get someone else to do it, but you know this process may not lead to that.' (Community housing 1)

…it depends what is the intention and the outcome of your engagement and your participation. Do you just want confirmation bias kind of thing? Are you going out there to go, 'Well, this is what we want to do and we just want you to take your hands and tell us what we think? It's already fantastic.' Or are we actually approaching you invested and actually hearing your thoughts and ideas and open to shifting a little bit on our end and meeting you somewhere in the middle, if that's within our capacity and ability to do so? So I think that comes down to it, as well as what's the outcome. You know the outcome you get is going to depend on what you're actually open to getting, and that comes down to the approach as well. (Government housing service 1)

…an important part of that feedback loop is explaining why decisions are made, how codesign import or feedback has been used. (Government housing service 2)

…if we want to do this more broadly across housing and homelessness, there's going to need to be multiple different models because the way that we're engaging with public housing tenants is going to look different to those in crisis accommodations, those in short-term supported accommodation, shelters and whatnot. (Government housing service 1)

3.3 Policy development implications of this research

Tenant participation across social housing sectors nationally is highly variable. Some states and territories have current tenant participation programs or initiatives. Victoria, NSW and the ACT appear to have ongoing programs in their public housing, while SA and Tasmania held one-off consultation exercises to shape future housing policy (with the potential for Tasmania to include lived experience on an ongoing basis). However, tenant participation or broader lived experience consultation are not a key part of national housing policy.

It is notable that best practice guides—such as the Victorian Housing Registrar document (Housing Registrar n.d.)—recommend regularly reviewing tenant participation programs. However, this chapter's exploration of tenant participation programs from both government and non-government sources provided limited evidence of review or outcomes. The evaluation of these programs may be internal and not available to the public. However, the ability for public and community housing services to improve their tenant participation programs could be enhanced by knowledge of what successes (or limitations) others have experienced. Transparency around tenant participation program outcomes could prove useful for building better programs in the future.

Establishment of a new Australian Housing Clearinghouse to facilitate participatory methods within housing sectors in the Australian context is indicated by this research. A housing clearinghouse could include: cross-sector sharing of best-practice examples of participatory methods; collation and analysis of case studies related to particular types of participation within policy and program design and innovation across housing policy, social housing and homelessness fields; and open sharing of practice guidelines and materials to facilitate safe and effective participatory methods to form part of mainstream housing policy making. Clearinghouse models in a range of policy and practice realms have been proven to be effective when resourced well, available, accessible to a wide range of stakeholders, and owned and managed by persons of direct relevance to the policy and practice field in question (Hirsch et al 2023).

Despite being broader than the social housing sector, current work underway toward development of a National Housing and Homelessness Plan represents significant opportunities for progressing a participatory policy co-design process with people with lived experiences across the housing system. This includes the possibility of ongoing national recognition of the importance and opportunity for best-practice associated with 'deep' as well as 'light' methods of policy making across all spheres of housing assistance and supported housing. Given the variability in jurisdictions taking up tenant participation, future national housing policy could prioritise participation as a key component of housing systems, to ensure more consistent take-up.

4. Tenant participation: a foundational aspirations analysis

- This chapter analyses the Australian Housing Aspirations (AHA) Survey, concentrating on five low-income tenure groups.
- These five groups were included because individuals with very low to low incomes in the private rental sector, as well as those with mortgages, might transition onto social housing waiting lists or move into social housing due to life events. As a result, it is essential to extend the perspective beyond just social housing tenants and encompass a broader view of the Australian housing system.
- The majority across the five groups found that their current dwelling type and location meet their short-term aspirations (one to two years). Fewer participants found that these attributes meet their longer-term (five to 10 years) aspirations: 54.3 per cent of social housing tenants; 39.1 per cent of very low-income and 40.8 per cent of low-income private renters; and 50.0 per cent of very low-income and 66.2 per cent of low-income owners with a mortgage.
- The majority across the five groups (79.7% of social housing tenants, 81.9% of very low-income, 71.9% of low-income private renters, and 80.4% of very low-income and 70.5% of low-income homeowners with a mortgage) expressed that they need assistance to meet their short and/or longer-term aspirations, or were not sure about it.

- **Looking towards possible future strategies, 43.2 per cent of social housing tenants indicated a likelihood of exploring the option of moving to a different dwelling or location, and 36.9 per cent expressed their intention to save for a deposit. These two strategies also emerged as the most probable future actions for private renters (52.2% and 47.3%, respectively), as well as homeowners with a mortgage (55.6% and 46.6%, respectively).**

Social housing surveys can be considered a 'light touch' means of engaging tenants in participatory policy methods, according to definitions described in Section 2, above. The Social Housing Survey conducted annually in Australia, focuses on experiences with current housing, general housing satisfaction, maintenance issues and repairs, safety and security of the neighbourhood and other aspects of current experience. In contrast, the Australian Housing Aspirations Survey enables additional analysis, focused on what tenants and other participants indicate about the housing pathways they aspire to, the types of supports they believe are needed to achieve these, and how well their current housing is likely to support them to achieve the housing they need.

4.1 The Australian Housing Aspirations (2018) survey and about the comparison groups

The Australian Housing Aspirations (AHA) survey (Stone, Rowley et al. 2020b) is used to respond to Research Question 2: What are the housing outcome aspirations of social housing tenants, and very low and low-income households, what supports do they need to attain these, and what is their access to such supports?

The survey was carried out online from August to October in 2018 and the responses were collected by an independent survey company. Three population-based quotas of age (people aged 18 to 34, 35 to 54 and 55 years or above), income (very low income, low income, moderate income, high income and very high income) and gender were established to secure the most representative sample nationally. Overall, 7,343 respondents filled the survey. The dataset is available in Australian Data Archive (ADA) Dataverse (Stone, Rowley et al. 2023). All tables and figures are the authors' own analyses based on the AHA Survey data.

For the purposes of this study, the AHA Survey participants were divided into five groups considering their household tenure and individual or household income (this was dependent on household type; a participant in a single person household was asked to report their individual income, whereas a participant in a couple household was asked to report their household income).

The five groups were as follows:

1. participants in households that rented from a state or community housing provider, hereafter referred to as 'social housing tenants' (n= 413)
2. participants in households that rented from a private landlord or a real estate agent and had a very low income (income was up to $31,000 per annum), hereafter referred to as 'very low-income private renters' (n= 561)
3. participants in households that rented from a private landlord or a real estate agent and had a low income (income was between $31,001 and $59,999 per annum), hereafter referred to as 'low-income private renters' (n= 604)
4. participants in households that owned a home with a mortgage and had a very low income (up to $31,000 per annum), hereafter referred to as 'very low-income owners with a mortgage' (n= 234)
5. participants in households that owned a home with mortgage and had a low income (income was between $31,001 and $59,999 per annum), hereafter referred to as 'low-income owners with a mortgage' (n= 331).

While the report primarily focuses on individuals in social housing, it is also recognised that people with very low to low incomes in the private rental sector, as well as those with mortgages, could transition onto social housing waiting lists and/or into social housing due to life events such as income loss, health issues or the loss of a partner.

4.2 Socio-demographic characteristics of social housing tenants and low and very low-income households

Socio-demographic characteristics are presented in Table 6. Among participants residing in social housing, 41.7 per cent fell within the age group of 35 to 54 years, while 31.2 per cent were aged 55 years or older. Approximately half of the participants living in social housing were female (50.1%), and they were in single-person households without children (51.8%). Moreover, 9.2 per cent of participants in social housing identified their origin as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. Regarding health conditions, 50.4 per cent of participants who resided in social housing indicated either themselves or a member of their household had an ongoing physical health condition, while 40.2 per cent reported an ongoing mental health condition. A significant majority (82.5%) of participants in social housing, either themselves or their partner, received government benefits, allowances, or pensions.

The largest proportion of participants in the very low-income bracket (48.0%) and the low-income bracket (43.5%) within the private rental sector fell into the youngest age group (18 to 34 years). Among participants in the very low-income group, 63.8 per cent resided in single-person households without children. Concerning health conditions, 36.9 per cent of very low-income participants (or someone in their household) in the private rental sector had an ongoing physical health condition, and 31.4 per cent had an ongoing mental health condition. In comparison, participants in the low-income category within the private rental sector exhibited lower percentages for ongoing physical and mental health conditions—18.5 per cent and 16.9 per cent, respectively.

Slightly more than half (53.8%) of participants falling within the very low-income bracket and owning a home with a mortgage were in the youngest age group. Regarding sex, a significant portion of participants in the very low-income (59.9%) and low-income (56.7%) groups, who owned a house with a mortgage, were female. When considering household compositions, 65.4 per cent of very low-income participants with a mortgage lived in single-person households. In comparison, among participants with low income and a mortgage, 33.8 per cent were in single-person households, 29.0 per cent were couples living together without children, and 25.1 per cent were couples living with children. In terms of physical health, 29.5 per cent of participants in the very low-income group with a mortgage (or anyone in their household) reported having an ongoing physical health condition. For participants with low income and a mortgage, the corresponding figure was 21.1 per cent.

Table 6: Socio-demographic characteristics

Socio-demographic characteristics	Social housing tenants (n=413)	Very low-income private renters (n=561)	Low-income private renters (n= 604)	Very low-income owners with a mortgage (n=234)	Low-income owners with a mortgage (n=331)
Age group					
18-34	112 (27.1%)	269 (48.0%)	263 (43.5%)	126 (53.8%)	109 (32.9%)
35-54	172 (41.7%)	173 (30.8%)	248 (41.1%)	53 (22.7%)	139 (42.0%)
55+	129 (31.2%)	119 (21.2%)	93 (15.4%)	55 (23.5%)	83 (25.1%)
Sex					
Female	206 (50.1%)	290 (52.5%)	284 (47.3%)	139 (59.9%)	187 (56.7%)
Male	205 (49.9%)	262 (47.5%)	316 (52.7%)	93 (40.1%)	143 (43.3%)
Household composition					
Single person, no children	214 (51.8%)	358 (63.8%)	252 (41.7%)	153 (65.4%)	112 (33.8%)
Couple living together, no children	49 (11.9%)	68 (12.1%)	141 (23.4%)	26 (11.1%)	96 (29.0%)
Couple living with child/ren[1]	73 (17.7%)	49 (8.8%)	136 (22.5%)	21 (9.0%)	83 (25.1%)
Single person living with child/ren[1]	77 (18.6%)	86 (15.3%)	75 (12.4%)	34 (14.5%)	40 (12.1%)
Identifying as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander					
Yes	38 (9.2%)	27 (4.8%)	19 (3.1%)	4 (1.7%)	9 (2.7%)
No	375 (90.8%)	534 (95.2%)	585 (96.9%)	230 (98.3%)	322 (97.3%)
An ongoing physical health condition or a disability that impacts upon your housing choice 2					
Yes	208 (50.4%)	207 (36.9%)	112 (18.5%)	69 (29.5%)	70 (21.1%)
No	205 (49.6%)	354 (63.1%)	492 (81.5%)	165 (70.5%)	261 (78.9%)
An on-going mental health condition or a disability that impacts upon your housing choice [2]					
Yes	166 (40.2%)	176 (31.4%)	102 (16.9%)	44 (18.8%)	51 (15.4%)
No	247 (59.8%)	385 (68.6%)	502 (83.1%)	190 (81.2%)	280 (84.6%)
Receiving government income in the form of in the form of benefits, pension or allowance [3]					
Yes	341 (82.6%)	369 (65.8%)	281 (46.6%)	115 (49.1%)	138 (41.7%)
No	72 (17.4%)	192 (34.2%)	322 (53.4%)	119 (50.9%)	193 (58.3%)

Data source: Stone, Rowley et al. 2018; authors' own analysis.

NOTES: Percentages in each column represent the distribution of socio-demographic characteristics within the corresponding tenure group.

1-Dependent and/or independent children

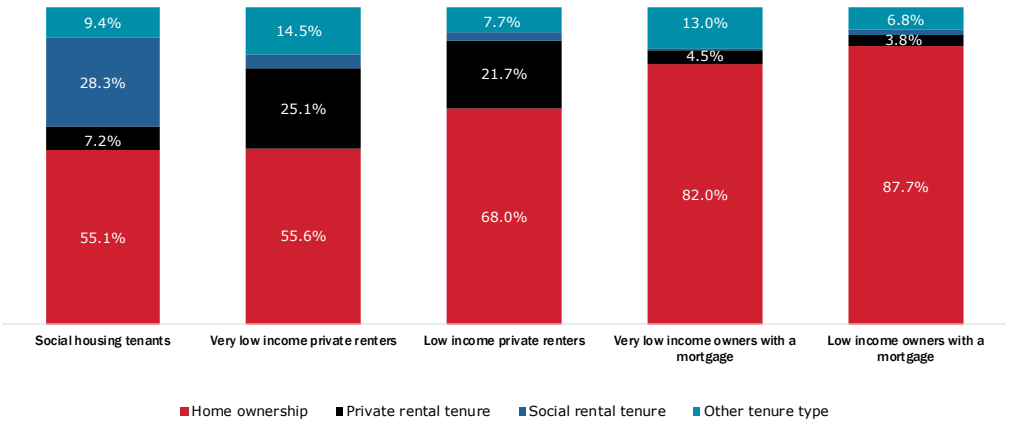
2-Respondent or anyone in their household

3-Respondent or their partner

4.3 Desired housing attributes of social housing tenants and low and very low-income households

The participants were asked about their ideal tenure type (see Figure 3). Slightly over half of social housing tenants (55.1%) and very low-income private renters (55.6%) would ideally prefer to own their own homes. Among social housing tenants, 28.3 per cent expressed a preference for remaining in social housing, while 25.1 per cent of very low-income private renters and 21.7 per cent of low-income private renters indicated a desire to continue renting from a private landlord. Furthermore, a majority of participants in the very low-income group (82.0%) and the low-income group (87.7%) who own a home with a mortgage expressed the aspiration of homeownership.

Figure 3: Ideal tenure type of the five tenure-income groups



Data source: Stone, Rowley et al. 2018; authors' own analysis.

NOTE: Home ownership includes outright ownership, shared ownership/equity and ownership with a mortgage; Private rental tenure includes renting from a private landlord and through a real estate agent; Social rental tenure includes renting from a state or community housing provider; Other tenure type includes living with parents or guardians, living in a lifestyle or retirement village, living in a shared housing, no preference and other tenure type.

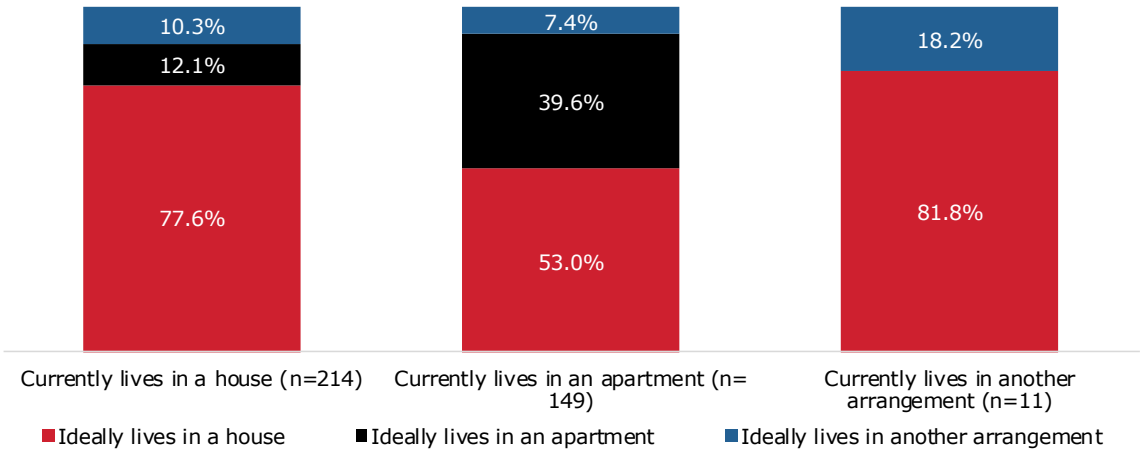
Survey participants were asked about their ideal dwelling type, ideal number of bedrooms and ideal location. See Figures 4 to 6 for social housing tenants and Appendix A for very low-income and low-income private renters and participants with mortgages.

When comparing current and ideal housing attributes, it becomes evident that, at present, the largest proportion of social housing tenants reside in houses (58.5%), with a majority of them (77.6%) expressing a preference for continuing to do so. Approximately half of those currently living in apartments (53.0%) would prefer to reside in a house, while 39.6 per cent wish to remain in an apartment.

Regarding the size of their homes, less than a third of social housing tenants in one-bedroom homes (29.6%) wish to maintain that arrangement. Conversely, 38.3% of them aspire to move into a two-bedroom home, and about a third (32.1%) express a preference for a three bedroom or more home. Among social housing tenants in two-bedroom homes, about half would prefer to stay in a two-bedroom arrangement (50.4%), while 45.5 per cent would prefer a three bedroom or more home. For participants currently living in a three bedroom or more home, the majority (82.7%) wish to continue in a similar setting.

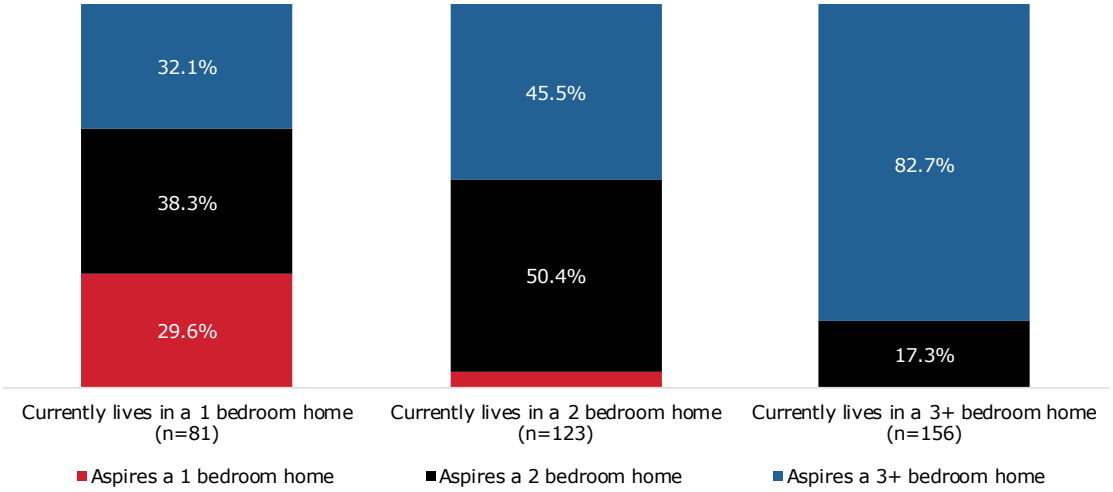
Shifting the focus to location, a substantial proportion of individuals already reside in their ideal areas. The gap between current situation and ideals is the most notable for social housing tenants living in middle or outer suburbs; 19.1 per cent aspire to living in the CBD or inner suburbs, while 18.3 per cent would ideally live in regional areas.

Figure 4: Social housing tenants: current and ideal dwelling type



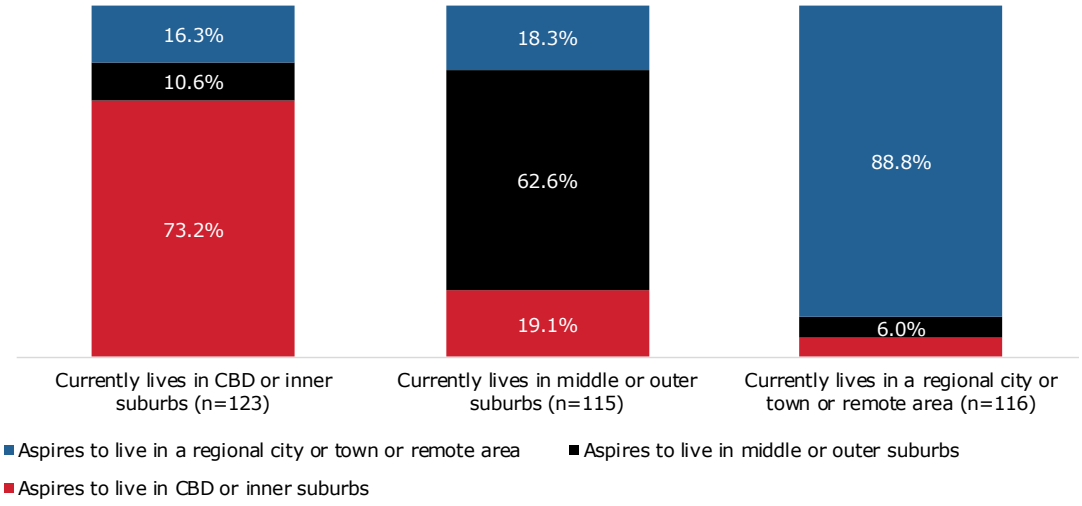
Data source: Stone, Rowley et al. 2018; authors' own analysis.

Figure 5: Social housing tenants: current and ideal number of bedrooms



Data source: Stone, Rowley et al. 2018; authors' own analysis.

Figure 6: Social housing tenants: current and ideal location



Data source: Stone, Rowley et al. 2018; authors' own analysis.

4.4 Housing aspirations and housing aspirations gaps for social housing tenants and low and very low-income households

Survey participants were asked about their short-term aspirations (one to two years) and long-term aspirations (five to 10 years).

When considering short-term aspirations, a large proportion of participants in social housing (51.3%) and those who own a home with a mortgage (52.1% in the very low-income group and 64.0% in the low-income group) desired to remain in their current dwelling. Approximately one-fifth (19.9%) of social housing participants and 15.8 per cent of very low-income individuals who own a home with a mortgage, as well as 14.8 per cent of owners with mortgages in the low-income bracket, expressed a preference for relocating to a different dwelling within their local area. Comparatively, among participants who rent from private landlords, a lower proportion desired to remain in their current dwelling—38.1 per cent among those with very low income and 42.5 per cent among those with low income. Additionally, 25.5 per cent of participants in the very low-income group and 29.3 per cent of participants in the low-income group indicate a preference for relocating to a different dwelling while staying within their local area.

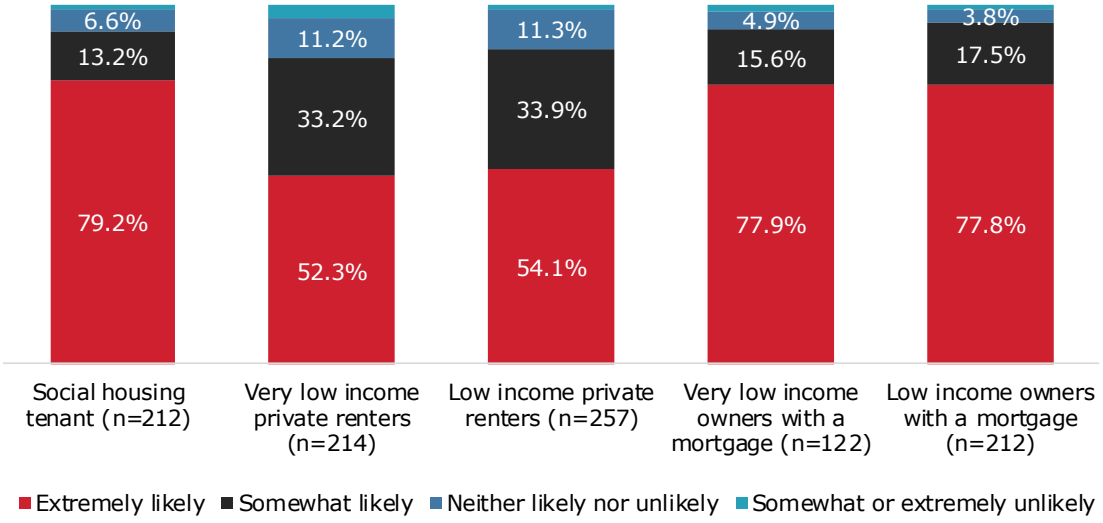
Participants were asked whether their current dwelling type and location align with their short-term aspirations. The majority across the five groups indicated that both aspects meet their expectations (82.6% of social housing tenants, 78.8% of very low-income private renters, 82.5% of low-income private renters, 81.2% of very low-income owners with a mortgage, and 90.3% of low-income owners with a mortgage). When asked whether their current dwelling meets their longer-term aspirations (five to 10 years), fewer participants agreed with that: 54.3 per cent of social housing tenants; 39.1 per cent of very low-income and 40.8 per cent of low-income private renters; and 50.0 per cent of very low-income and 66.2% of low-income owners with a mortgage.

4.4.1 Aspiration gaps

Participants who indicated a desire to remain in their current dwelling in the short-term were asked about their perception of the likelihood of their ability to do so, see Figure 7. The figure shows a considerably higher proportion of participants in social housing (79.2%) and individuals who owned a home with a mortgage (in both the very low-income (77.9%) and low-income groups (77.8%)) who perceive it as extremely likely that they will remain in their current dwelling. This is in contrast to participants who rented from a private landlord, where a lower percentage of participants in the very low-income group (52.3%) and the low-income group (54.1%) thought that it was extremely likely that they will stay in their current dwelling in the short-term. However, if positive responses (extremely likely and somewhat likely) are summed, then the majority of participants found that it is likely they will stay in their current dwelling in the short-term across all tenure groups.

Participants who expressed a desire to move to a different dwelling within the next one to two years were asked about their reasons for wanting to make this move. The most common responses are shown in Table 7.

Figure 7: Perceived likelihood of being able to stay in their current dwelling in the short-term



Data source: Stone, Rowley et al. 2018; Authors' own analysis.

NOTE: 'n' represents the total number of participants

Table 7: Most common reasons for wanting to move to a different dwelling within the next one to two years

Most commonly chosen options	Social housing tenants (n=201) [1]	Very low-income private renters (n=347) [1]	Low-income private renters (n=347) [1]	Very low-income owners with a mortgage (n=112) [1]	Low-income owners with a mortgage (n=119) [1]
1	To feel more safe and secure (14.4%, n=29)	To move somewhere more affordable (14.1%, n=49)	To purchase a dwelling (17.0%, n=59)	To gain some independence (27.7%, n=31) [2]	To gain some independence (18.5%, n=22) [3]
2	To access a dwelling more suitable for your needs (13.4%, n=27)	To access a dwelling more suitable for your needs (12.4%, n=43)	To access a dwelling more suitable for your needs (14.1%, n=49)	To access to better employment opportunities (13.4%, n=15)	To access a dwelling more suitable for your needs (16.0%, n=19)
3	To purchase a dwelling (11.9%, n=24)	To move to a better quality dwelling (11.2%, n=39)	To move to a better quality dwelling (12.1%, n=42)	To access a dwelling more suitable for your needs (12.5%, n=14)	To move to a better quality dwelling (15.1%, n=18)
4	To move to a better quality dwelling (11.4%, n=23)	To find somewhere that feels like home (10.4%, n=36)	To find somewhere that feels like home (9.2%, n=32)	To move to a better quality location (8.0%, n=9)	To move to a better quality location (8.4%, n=10); To access to better employment opportunities (8.4%, n=10); To find somewhere that feels like home (8.4%, n=10)
5	To move closer to family (10.0%, n=20)	To purchase a dwelling (8.4%, n=29)	To move to a better quality location (8.9%, n=31)	To move to a better quality dwelling (7.1%, n=8); To find somewhere that feels like home (7.1%, n=8); To downsize (7.1%, n=8)	To move somewhere more affordable (7.6%, n=9)

Data source: Stone, Rowley et al. 2018; Authors' own analysis.

NOTES: This was a multiple-response question, allowing participants to select as many relevant options as applicable. The percentages presented reflect the distribution of each option within their respective tenure groups.

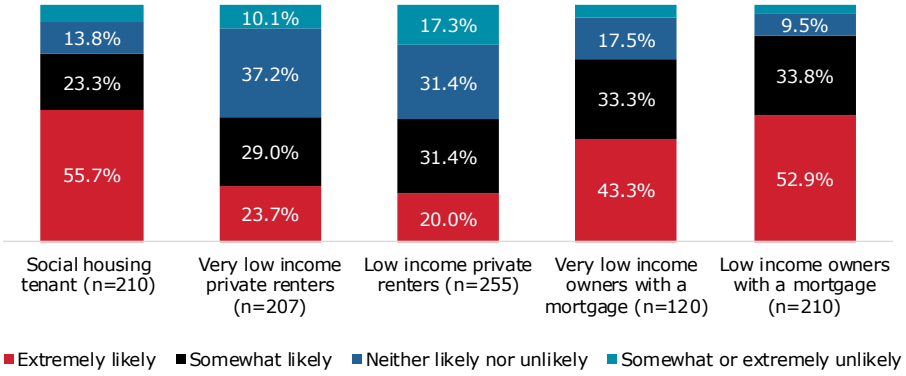
1-n represents the total number of participants within each tenure group who desired to relocate to a different dwelling within the next one to two years.

2-Within this group, 105 participants were living with their parents, which might explain this outcome.

3-Within this group, 66 participants were living with their parents, which might explain this outcome.

Participants who wanted to stay in their dwelling in the short-term and found that it is likely, or neither likely nor unlikely, were asked if they could stay in this dwelling long-term (five to 10 years), see Figure 8.

Figure 8: Perceived likelihood of being able to stay in their current dwelling in the long-term



Data source: Stone, Rowley et al. 2018; Authors' own analysis.

NOTE: 'n' represents the total number of participants within each tenure group who desired to stay in their current dwelling within the next one to two years and found that this is extremely likely, somewhat likely or neither likely nor unlikely.

Slightly more than half the participants in social housing (55.7%) and low-income participants with a mortgage (52.9%) and 43.3 per cent of very low-income participants with a mortgage found that it is extremely likely that they are able to stay in their dwelling long-term. Similar to the short-term results, a smaller proportion of participants in the private rental sector found that it is extremely likely that they are able to stay in their dwelling for long-term (23.7% of very low-income group and 20.0% of low-income group).

4.4.2 Addressing aspiration gaps

Participants whose current homes did not meet their short and/or long-term housing aspirations were asked whether they need assistance to achieve these aspirations. A majority of these participants indicated that they either need assistance or were uncertain about it. This response was observed among 79.7 per cent of social housing tenants, 81.9 per cent of very low-income and 71.9 per cent of low-income private renters, and 80.4 per cent of very low-income and 70.5 per cent of low-income homeowners with a mortgage.

For those who expressed the need for assistance or uncertainty, a follow-up question was asked that focused on the likelihood of accessing various channels of help. Among social housing tenants, a large proportion found it very likely or quite likely that they could access financial or legal advice (60%), low-deposit home loans (47.9%), subsidised rent in the private rental market (45.2%), and government grants to help with a deposit (45.1%). Conversely, they considered it unlikely that they would access assistance from existing networks, such as deposits from parents or family (66.9%), inheritance (59.6%), or shared ownership arrangements with friends and family (53.8%).

Likewise, very low-income and low-income private renters found it to be very likely or quite likely that they could access financial or legal advice (62.1%), low-deposit home loans (54.0%), subsidised rent in the private rental market (45.8%), government grants for deposit (45.7%) and stamp duty relief (45.5%). The least likely forms of help for this group were inheritance (63.0%), shared ownership products through the government (59.3%), and parental or family assistance with deposits (55.8%).

Among very low and low-income homeowners with a mortgage, the most likely forms of assistance were financial and legal advice (69.3%), low-deposit home loans (58.3%), and stamp duty relief (47.9%). Conversely, they considered inheritance (56.8%), shared ownership products through the government (52.2%), and shared ownership with friends and family (51.7%) as the least likely forms of help.

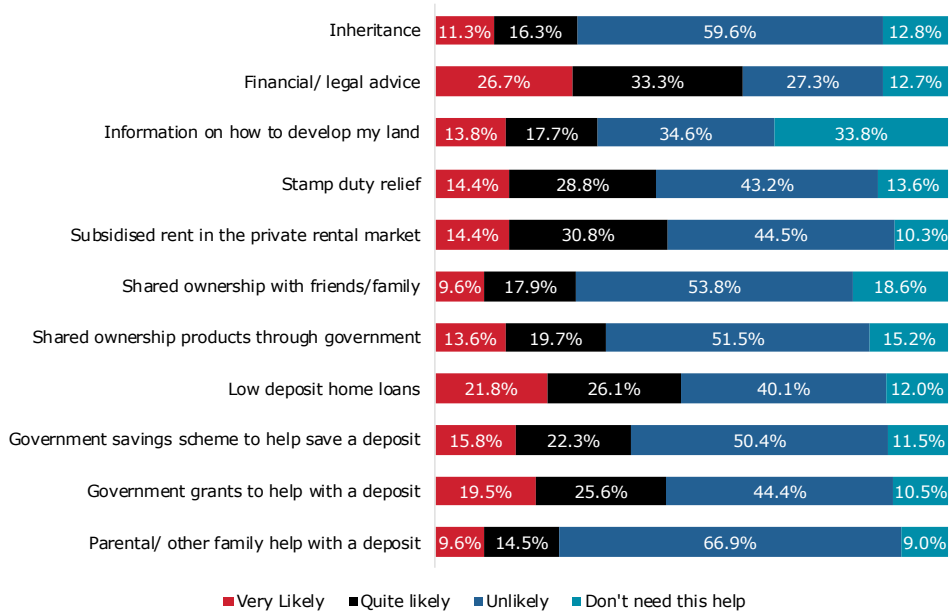
Table 8: Help needed to meet housing aspirations

	Social housing tenants	Very low income private renters	Low income private renters	Very low income owners with a mortgage	Low income owners with a mortgage
Do you think you will need any help meeting your short and longer term housing aspirations?					
Yes	109 (48.0%)	208 (53.9%)	173 (43.4%)	57 (41.3%)	46 (34.9%)
Unsure	72 (31.7%)	108 (28.0%)	114 (28.6%)	54 (39.1%)	47 (35.6%)
No	46 (20.3%)	70 (18.1%)	112 (28.0%)	27 (19.6%)	39 (29.5%)

Data source: Stone, Rowley et al. 2018; Authors' own analysis.

NOTE: This question was asked from participants whose current dwelling did not meet their short and/or long-term housing aspirations. Option 'don't know' was removed from this analysis.

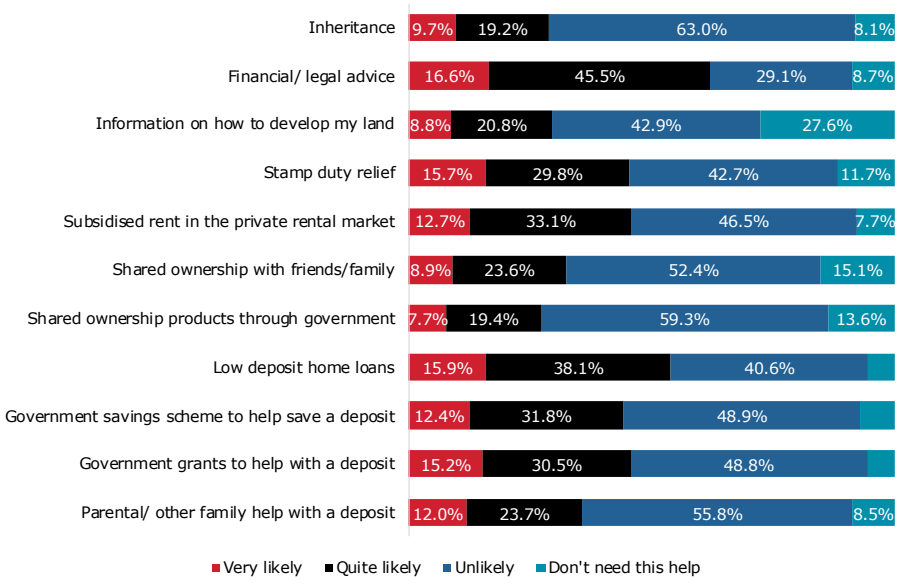
Figure 9: Social housing tenants: ability to access different forms of help



Data source: Stone, Rowley et al. 2018; Authors' own analysis.

NOTE: This question was asked from participants who responded that they need help meeting their short and long-term housing aspirations or were unsure about it.

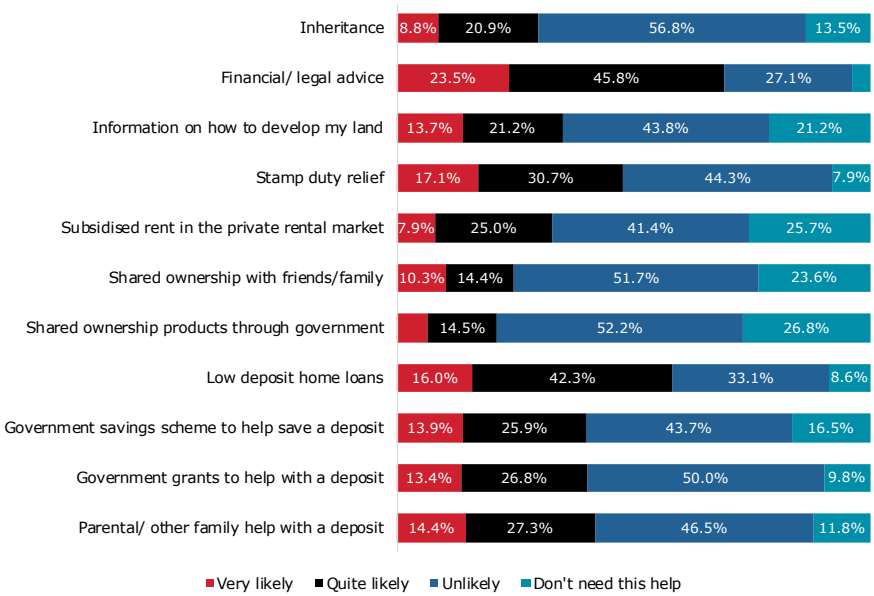
Figure 10: Very low-income and low-income private renters: ability to access different forms of help



Data source: Stone, Rowley et al. 2018; Authors' own analysis.

NOTE: This question was asked from participants who responded that they need help meeting their short and long-term housing aspirations or were unsure about it.

Figure 11: Very low-income and low-income owners with a mortgage: ability to access different forms of help



Data source: Stone, Rowley et al. 2018; Authors' own analysis.

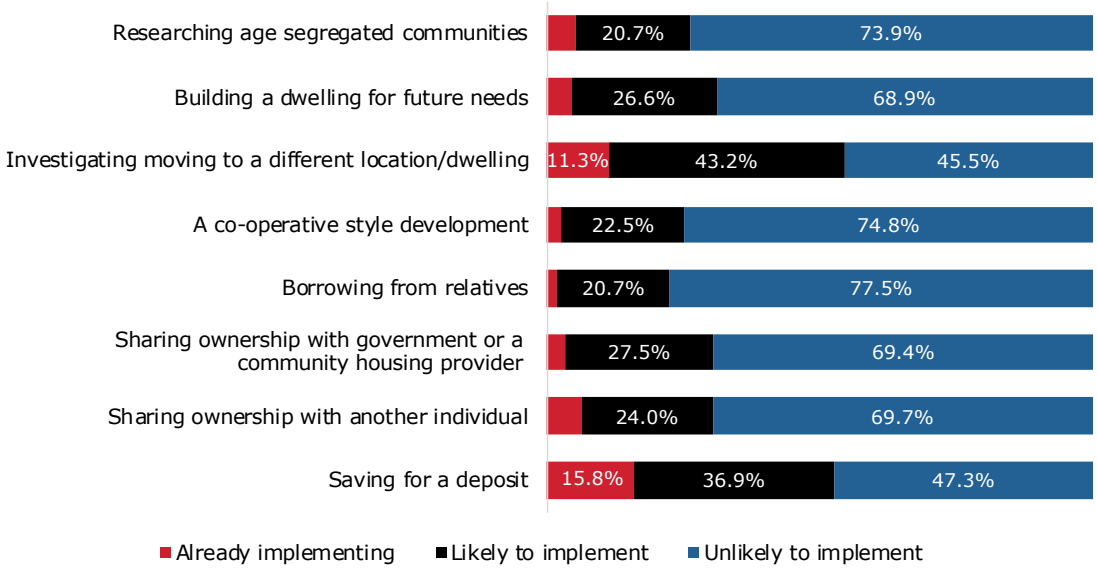
NOTE: This question was asked from participants who responded that they need help meeting their short and long-term housing aspirations or were unsure about it.

Participants whose current homes didn't meet their short and/or long-term aspirations, or those uncertain about it, were asked about their strategies to fulfil their housing aspirations. In terms of the actions they were already taking, 15.8 per cent of social housing tenants, 22.2 per cent of very low-income and low-income private renters, and 26.7 per cent of very low and low-income homeowners with a mortgage were saving for a deposit.

Looking towards possible future strategies, 43.2 per cent of social housing tenants indicated a likelihood of exploring the option of moving to a different dwelling or location, and 36.9 per cent expressed their intention to save for a deposit. These two strategies also emerged as the most probable future actions for private renters (52.2% and 47.3%, respectively), as well as homeowners with a mortgage (55.6% and 46.6%, respectively).

On the other hand, borrowing from a relative (77.5%), living in a cooperative style development (74.8%) and researching age segregated communities (73.9%) were among the least likely strategies to meet their aspirations for social housing tenants. Similarly, for private renters, strategies such as borrowing from relatives (74.5%), moving to a cooperative-style development (74.2%), sharing ownership with a government or community housing provider (72.8%), and researching age-segregated communities (72.8%) were considered the least likely. Homeowners with a mortgage were least inclined to consider sharing ownership with a government or community housing provider (74.1%), researching age-segregated communities (68.0%), borrowing from relatives (67.3%), and living in a cooperative-style development (66.9%).

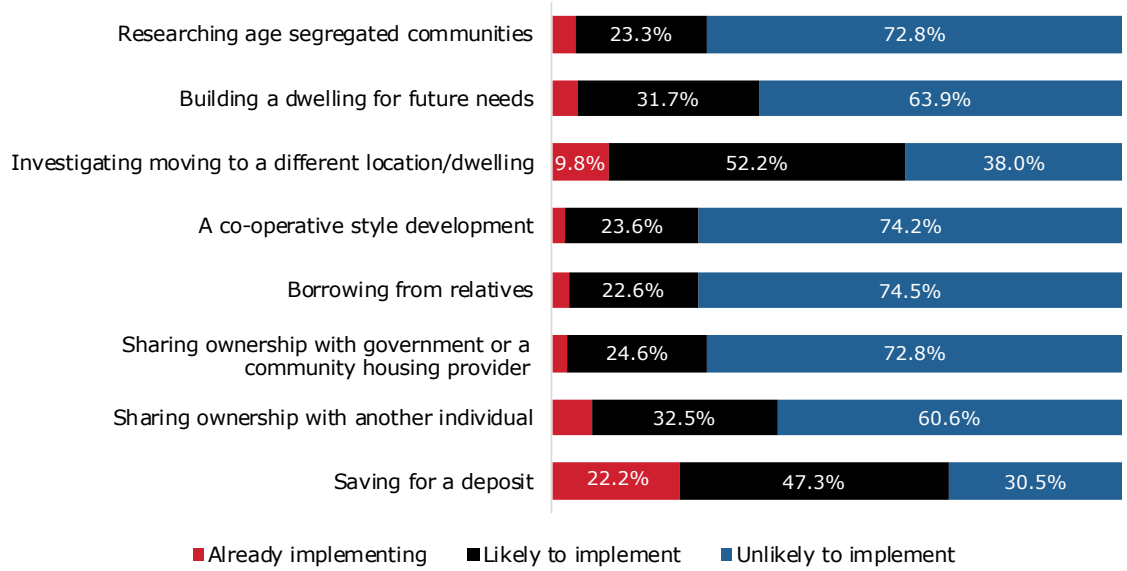
Figure 12: Social housing tenants: strategies to meet housing aspirations



Data source: Stone, Rowley et al. 2018; Authors' own analysis.

NOTE: This question was asked from participants whose current home did not meet their short and/or long-term housing aspirations or they were not sure about it.

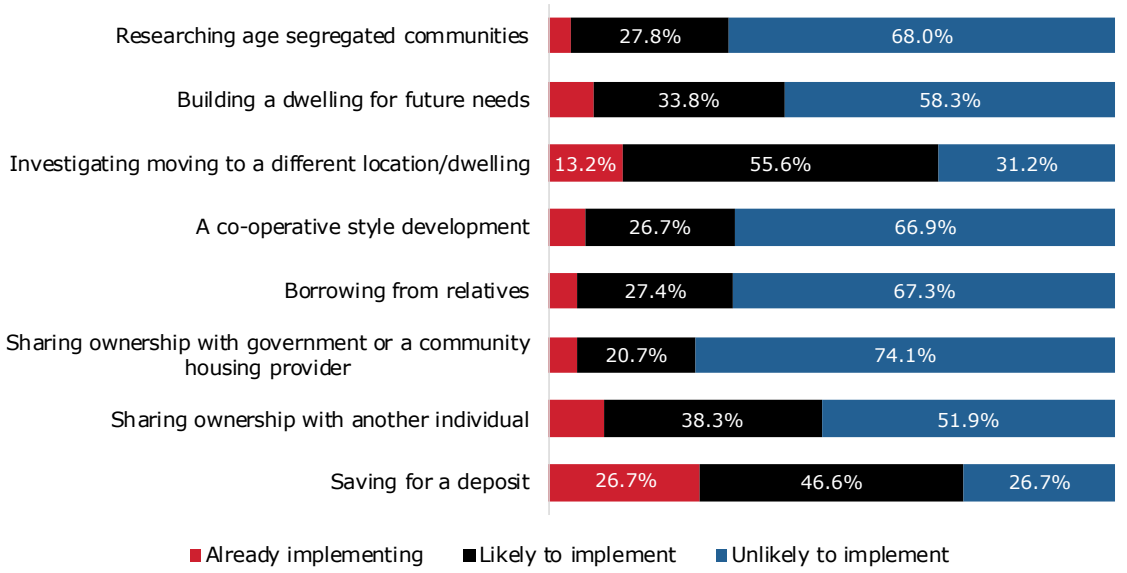
Figure 13: Very low-income and low-income private renters: strategies to meet housing aspirations



Data source: Stone, Rowley et al. 2018; Authors' own analysis.

NOTE: This question was asked from participants whose current home did not meet their short and/or long-term housing aspirations or they were not sure about it.

Figure 14: Very low-income and low-income owners with a mortgage: strategies to meet housing aspirations



Data source: Stone, Rowley et al. 2018; Authors' own analysis.

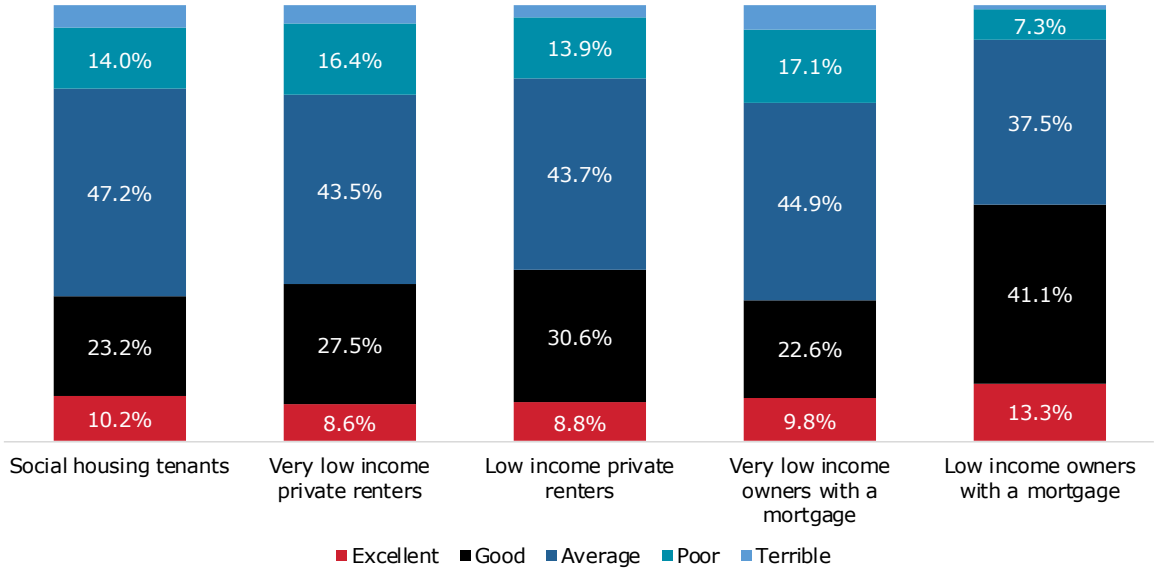
NOTE: This question was asked from participants whose current home did not meet their short and/or long-term housing aspirations or they were not sure about it.

4.5 Achieving housing aspirations across housing assistance models

Participants were asked to assess their understanding of the housing market or system, considering aspects like purchasing and renting dwellings, housing finance and legal rights. Approximately one-third of social housing tenants (33.4%) and very low-income participants from households with a mortgage (32.5%) rated their understanding as excellent or good. In comparison, among participants in the low-income bracket with a mortgage, slightly more than half (54.4%) considered their understanding as excellent or good.

For those participants who ranked their understanding as average, poor or terrible, an additional question was asked about the channels they would employ to enhance their comprehension of the market or system, see Table 8. Professional advice emerged as the most favoured avenue among social housing tenants and individuals in the very low or low-income brackets who were in households that owned with a mortgage. Conversely, for very low-income and low-income private renters, the primary option was to seek guidance from friends, family and colleagues at work. Interestingly, the third most popular channel for social housing tenants was government websites, while private renters and mortgage-holding homeowners would seek guidance from dedicated property websites.

Figure 15: Participants understanding about the housing market or system (buying or renting a dwelling, housing finance, legal rights and so on)



Data source: Stone, Rowley et al. 2018; Authors' own analysis.

Table 9: Most common channels participants would use to increase their understanding of the housing market or system

Most commonly chosen options	Social housing tenants	Very low-income private renters	Low-income private renters	Very low-income owners with a mortgage	Low-income owners with a mortgage
1	Professional advice (56.2%, n=118)	My family/ friends/ work colleagues (54.2%, n=169)	My family/ friends/ work colleagues (53.1%, n=164)	Professional advice (58.9%, n=86)	Professional advice (58.9%, n=83)
2	My family/ friends/ work colleagues (45.7%, n=96)	Professional advice (49.0%, n=153)	Professional advice (50.8%, n=157)	My family/ friends/ work colleagues (56.8%, n=83)	My family/ friends/ work colleagues (56.7%, n=80)
3	Government websites (45.2%, n=95)	Dedicated property websites (47.1%, n=147)	Dedicated property websites (47.9%, n=148)	Dedicated property websites (50.0%, n=73)	Dedicated property websites (44.7%, n=63)

Data source: Stone, Rowley et al 2018; Authors' own analysis.

NOTES: (1) This was a multiple-response question, allowing participants to select as many relevant options as applicable. The percentages presented reflect the distribution of each option within their respective tenure groups.

(2) This question was asked from participants who rated their understanding of the housing market/ system as average, poor or terrible.

Participants aged 35 to 64 years were asked about their feelings regarding their current and future housing situations, as outlined in Table 9. Among this group, very low-income homeowners with a mortgage (60.2%) and low-income homeowners with a mortgage (65.7%) had the highest level of agreement that they feel sufficiently secure and in control of their housing circumstances to plan well for the future, followed by social housing tenants (42.7%). Very low-income private renters (30.0%) and low-income private renters (35.6%) reported feeling the least secure and in control when planning for their future.

Regarding the aspects of ageing and retirement, a large portion of very low-income private renters (75.9%), low-income private renters (70.9%), social housing tenants (71.8%), and very low-income homeowners with a mortgage (67.5%) expressed that they lack the necessary wealth, income, or equity to adequately plan for retirement. 56.3 per cent of low-income homeowners with a mortgage, 47.0 per cent very low-income homeowners with a mortgage, and 43.1 per cent of social housing tenants agreed that they currently have the ability to access housing that will enable them to live well as they age. On the contrary, 56.9 per cent of very low-income private renters and 48.8 per cent of low-income private renters did not find that are able to access housing that supports ageing well.

Table 10: Participants' feelings about their housing now and in the future

	Social housing tenants	Very low-income private renters	Low-income private renters	Very low-income owners with a mortgage	Low-income owners with a mortgage
You currently have enough control/security in your housing to enable you to plan well for your future					
Yes	106 (42.7%)	70 (30.0%)	103 (35.6%)	50 (60.2%)	119 (65.7%)
No	85 (34.3%)	112 (48.1%)	132 (45.7%)	18 (21.7%)	36 (19.9%)
Don't know	57 (23.0%)	51 (21.9%)	54 (18.7%)	15 (18.1%)	26 (14.4%)
You currently have sufficient wealth/income/equity to plan well for your retirement					
Yes	32 (12.9%)	22 (9.5%)	45 (15.6%)	19 (22.9%)	61 (33.7%)
No	178 (71.8%)	176 (75.9%)	205 (70.9%)	56 (67.5%)	97 (53.6%)
Don't know	38 (15.3%)	34 (14.6%)	39 (13.5%)	8 (9.6%)	23 (12.7%)
You currently have the ability to access housing that will enable you to live well as you age					
Yes	107 (43.1%)	59 (25.4%)	93 (32.2%)	39 (47.0%)	102 (56.3%)
No	93 (37.5%)	132 (56.9%)	141 (48.8%)	24 (28.9%)	47 (26.0%)
Don't know	48 (19.4%)	41 (17.7%)	55 (19.0%)	20 (24.1%)	32 (17.7%)
You will have the ability to support your child(ren) in future years					
Yes	47 (19.0%)	30 (13.0%)	68 (23.5%)	23 (27.7%)	68 (37.6%)
No	108 (43.5%)	94 (40.7%)	93 (32.2%)	22 (26.5%)	44 (24.3%)
Don't know	93 (37.5%)	107 (46.3%)	128 (44.3%)	38 (45.8%)	69 (38.1%)
You will have the ability to support your parent(s)/other family as they age					
Yes	44 (17.9%)	23 (10.0%)	46 (16.1%)	14 (17.3%)	39 (21.7%)
No	110 (44.7%)	103 (45.0%)	127 (44.4%)	24 (29.6%)	68 (37.8%)
Don't know	92 (37.4%)	103 (45.0%)	113 (39.5%)	43 (53.1%)	73 (40.5%)

Data source: Stone, Rowley et al. 2018; Authors' own analysis.

NOTE: This question was asked from participants who were aged 35 to 64 years.

4.6 Policy development implications of this research

The analysis of the AHA Survey, while not initially designed for policy co-design, bears importance in comprehending the housing aspirations of not only social housing tenants but also individuals within very low and low-income households. This holds critical value, given that current approaches predominantly focus on measuring the satisfaction of social housing tenants. This fails to provide insights into the desired housing outcomes of individuals in both the short and long-term, essential for fostering feelings of safety, security and control within their homes. This gap is further bridged by encompassing other potentially vulnerable groups beyond social housing, enabling a more holistic examination of the housing system. This approach has the potential to offer assistance to those who may eventually find themselves on social housing waiting lists. Notably, the qualitative aspect of this research underscores the existence of a similar inclusive approach focused on vulnerable groups in the Tasmanian Housing Strategy Lived Experience Consultation, which aimed to hear from people with experience of social housing, homelessness and housing stress.

However, it is important to acknowledge that the survey was conducted in 2018, and since then, the Australian housing crisis has evolved. This evolution may have led to an increase in the number of individuals falling into vulnerable categories, potentially reshaping their aspirations. Additionally, while participants of the AHA Survey considered cooperative developments and government equity schemes to be among the least likely strategies to fulfill their aspirations in 2018, it is plausible that attitudes towards them could have shifted by the time of this report's publication, five years later, given the increased public attention these schemes have received.

Within the five distinct groups examined, differences in aspirations were apparent, particularly in terms of ideal tenure types. For instance, while the predominant aspiration across all income groups within each tenure is homeownership, a higher proportion of individuals with very low to low incomes in the private rental sector express a preference for renting from a private landlord compared to current social housing tenants and homeowners with a mortgage. The implication here is that a diverse range of assistance provisions is imperative, tailored to the unique needs of different cohorts.

Concerningly, while a significant proportion of each tenure group indicated that their current dwelling aligns with their short-term aspirations (one to two years), fewer participants found that their current home meets their longer-term aspirations (five to 10 years). This disparity is especially prominent among very low-income and low-income private renters. Therefore, understanding individuals' needs and preferences becomes crucial in ensuring housing security. This necessity is compounded by the ongoing housing crisis, changes in tenure structures, an ageing population and discussions around ageing-in-place.

Furthermore, when addressing the gaps in meeting aspirations, social housing tenants express a lower likelihood of being able to rely on their existing networks. This reaffirms the earlier point about the necessity of providing a diverse range of solutions and assistance to accommodate the various needs of different groups.

5. Policy development and innovation options

This research project has examined the extent to which participatory policy making forms a current part of social housing policy in the Australian context and how this might be developed, in order to innovate within the currently constrained Australian social housing system. In particular, the project set out to examine how participation in policy processes currently assists with access to social housing, the types of housing assistance models open to eligible applicants, and how participatory policy making methods are used to evaluate and improve services that are currently in place. The project forms part of an Inquiry into social pathways within social housing, which seeks to examine social housing policy innovation regarding access, assistance models and outcomes.

5.1 What are the key questions the research answers?

The overarching question addressed by this project is:

Can tenant participation and policy co-design help transform Australia's straitened social housing sector into a system for socially supported housing pathways?

This question is addressed via three sub-questions, focused on development of an actionable evidenced-based pathway for policy innovation and development:

1. What is best practice participatory and policy co-design, and how can this inform housing policy design and innovation practice?
2. What are the housing outcome aspirations of social housing tenants, and very low/low-income households, what supports do they need to attain these, and what is their access to such supports?
3. What are the policy and practice implications of the research findings and how can these be actively developed within Australian social housing and housing assistance systems?

To address these questions, a mixed methodology was employed that involved review of best practice examples and principles of co-design and participatory policy making methods internationally and nationally, a review of current approaches to social housing policy co-design, as well as a desk-based review of the extent to which participatory policy design methods are used in social housing systems in Australia currently. Policy findings of the research were discussed within a policy workshop as part of the project methodology. In addition, drawing on participatory methods approaches, we undertook original analysis of the AHA Survey to understand a population analysis of the aspirations of social housing tenants, and low and very low-income households living in private rental and mortgaged homes. The rationale for this analysis is that a population survey can form part of the first step of policy co-design processes.

Key findings of this research are that while internationally, and across a wide range of public policy realms, policy co-design and participatory methods are well used, the uptake of participatory methods beyond 'light touch' consultation (via surveys such as the national social housing satisfaction survey) is limited in the Australian context. There is a difference between the extent to which participatory methods are used in homelessness services and public health compared with the limited use of participatory methods in more mainstream general parts of the housing system, including social housing. There is limited information available publicly about participatory approaches to program and policy development which are increasingly used across states and territories. Limited information about these approaches and evaluation outcomes undermines information sharing across housing sectors and jurisdictions.

While the Social Housing Satisfaction Survey provides important information on a regular basis, it does not provide the kind of deep or detailed information that can be considered a co-designed methodology, nor lead to the types of outcomes associated with effective policy co-design processes. Indeed, the dearth of participatory methods has resulted in a current absence of publicly available evaluation or information about outcomes of co-design policy making in social housing sectors in Australia. It is therefore not possible to determine how effective policy co-design could be in the Australian context, based on current practice and information.

Despite this, the project has examined, via a desk-based review, some of the key initiatives currently underway across state and territory housing providers to engage tenants and other populations in housing assistance in policy making processes. At the time of writing, evidence indicates growing appetite for and awareness of the value of including a diverse range of voices and perspectives in policy making, and how this can enhance systems in Australia. This includes initiatives within the Tasmanian context, Victorian practice, and early stages of consultation underway in developing a new National Housing and Homelessness Plan. Increased lived experience participation is consistent with the widespread use of policy making methods that are participatory in international contexts, as well as with systems thinking and understanding that diverse expertise is potentially useful for responding to complex challenges.

Specific findings of the research conducted include:

- A toolbox of participatory methods is needed for wide reach and wide engagement across population cohorts with varied needs for housing assistance, to achieve different types of policy design inputs within a variety of processes across sectors.
- An ongoing commitment to resourcing, investing in, and training workforces, and building participant capability and supports for policy co-design, is necessary if participatory methods are to become part of mainstream Australian social housing policy making processes.
- While participatory policy making and co-design methodologies appear promising, there is at present very little evaluation to confirm what works well, under what conditions, and for whom, within social housing and other forms of housing assistance contexts, given the dearth of co-design programs underway. It is difficult to understand the value of participatory methods when limited commitment and resourcing is evident. This is a field that is likely to change and grow in current years.
- Pilot testing of a toolbox approach to participatory policy making methods, across social housing and other forms of housing assistance, appears to be a promising way to rapidly assess how policy co-design can be scaled up.
- International examples and sharing of knowledge across social housing agencies and other housing assistance services—via a platform such as a nationally funded clearinghouse—appears necessary for policy co-design to become a successful and potentially sustainable component of national housing policy making in future.
- Participatory methods typically focus on current or former users of service systems, but could usefully be expanded to include viewpoints and engagement with people with wider experience, such as the private rental and ownership sectors, as well as of homelessness and marginal housing, in addition to social housing.

- Recognition of expertise of frontline staff is an important but untapped source of potential policy innovation expertise.

5.2 Final remarks

Importantly, the Australian National Housing and Homelessness Plan, under development at the time of writing, presents a potential new policy landscape in which participatory methods may become more embedded within policy making processes. For example, as part of the preliminary consultation process for the development of the national plan, there is a deep commitment to engagement with communities, individuals, and population cohorts with lived experience of housing assistance and homelessness services. International best practice indicates that ongoing commitment to wide-ranging engagement with the diversity of lived experience stakeholders across the housing system (including, but not limited to, social housing) may form a worthwhile feature of any national plan. This would require genuine commitment, resourcing, funding, workforce development and—most importantly—a commitment to ensuring the dignity and safety of participants within policy making processes.

This report has examined how participatory methods of policy making and innovation are currently employed in the Australian housing and homelessness context and future directions associated with enhancing participation. Further steps toward increasing participatory policy design will, importantly, include persons with lived experience from the outset.

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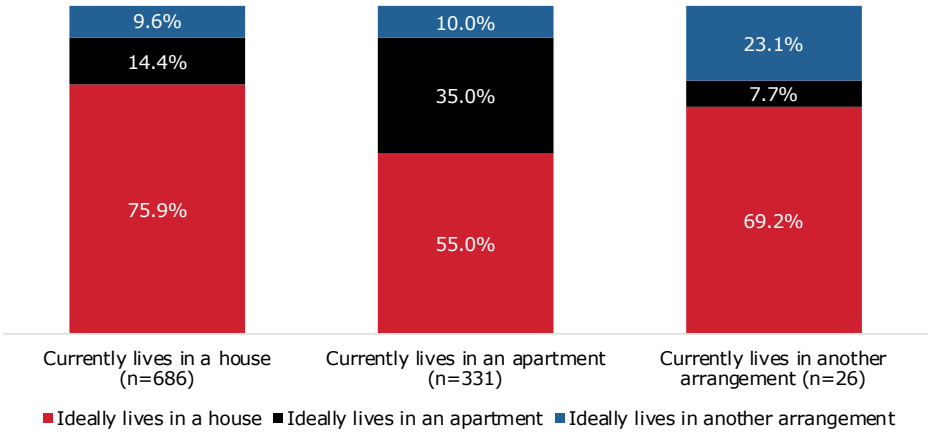
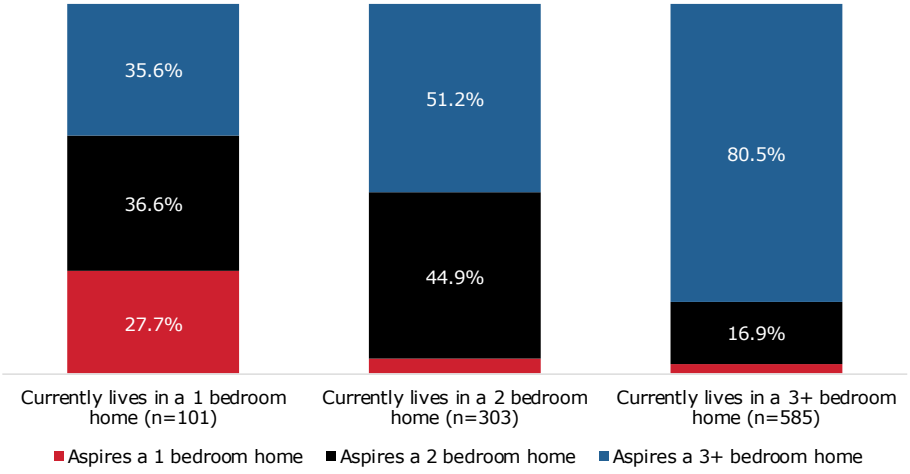
Appendix A

Figure A1: Very low-income and low-income private renters: current and ideal dwelling type



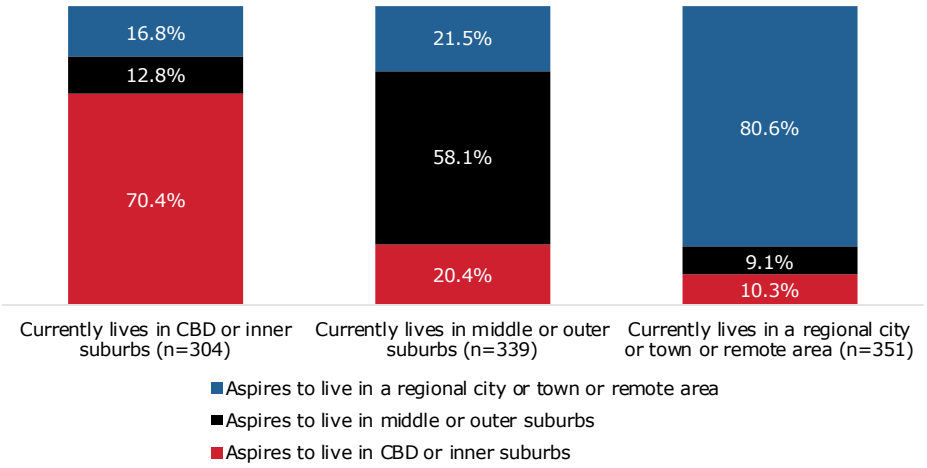
Data source: Stone, Rowley et al. 2018; Authors' own analysis.

Figure A2: Very low-income and low-income private renters: current and ideal number of bedrooms



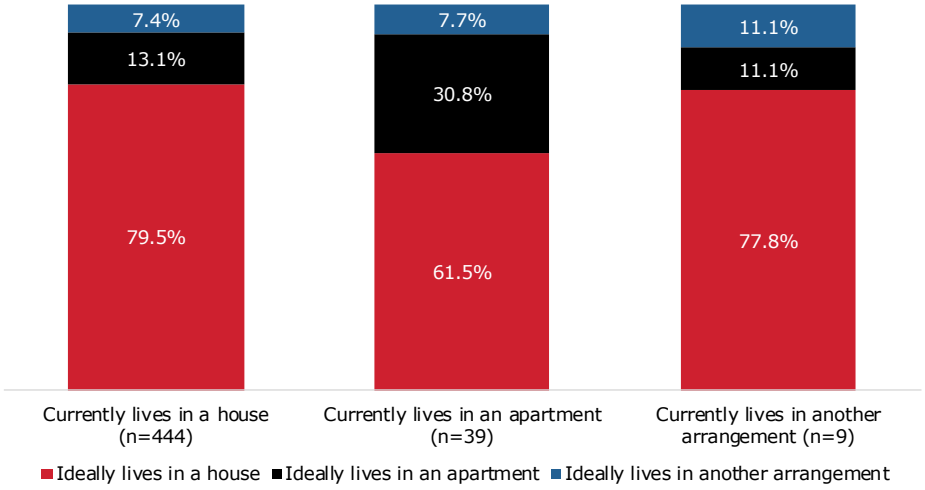
Data source: Stone, Rowley et al. 2018; Authors' own analysis.

Figure A3: Very low-income and low-income private renters: current and ideal location



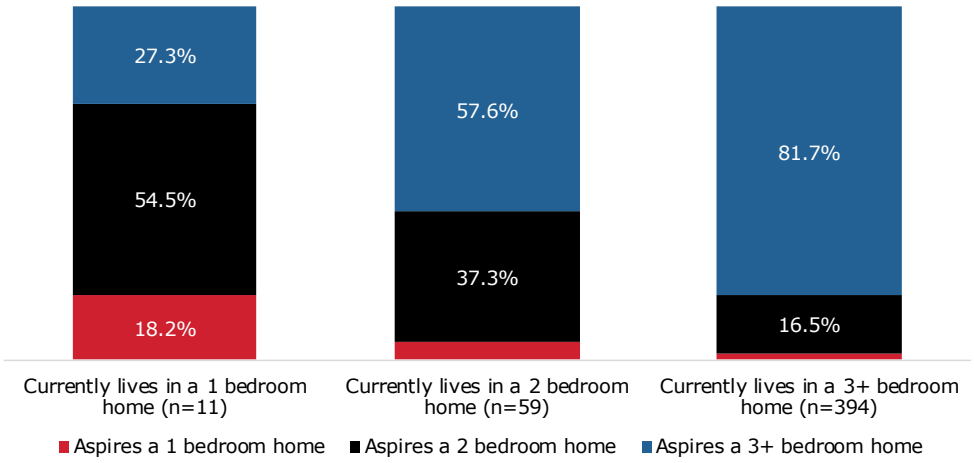
Data source: Stone, Rowley et al. 2018; Authors' own analysis.

Figure A4: Very low-income and low-income owners with a mortgage: current and ideal dwelling type



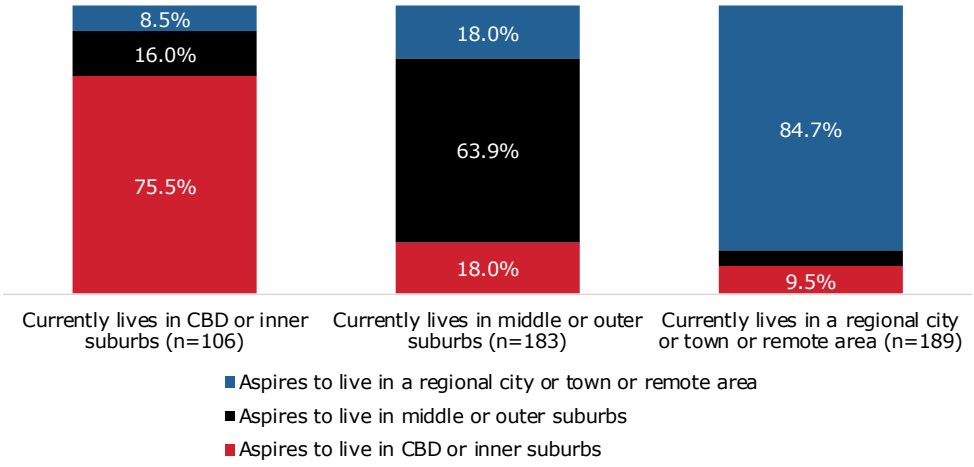
Data source: Stone, Rowley et al. 2018; Authors' own analysis.

Figure A5: Very low-income and low-income owners with a mortgage: current and ideal number of bedrooms



Data source: Stone, Rowley et al. 2018; Authors' own analysis.

Figure A6: Very low-income and low-income owners with a mortgage: current and ideal location



Data source: Stone, Rowley et al. 2018; Authors' own analysis.

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