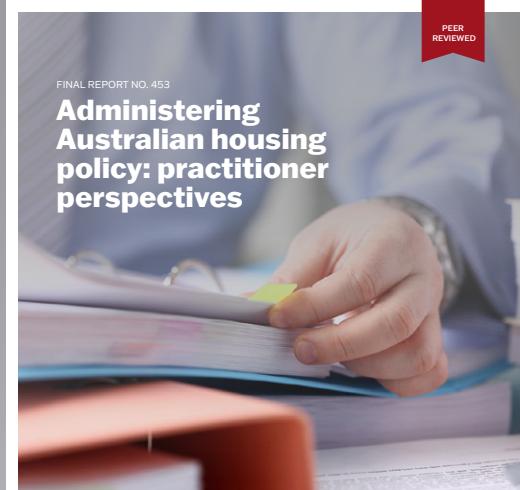


# How governance arrangements can better support housing policy delivery in Australia



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## What this research is about

This research aims to deepen our understanding of the design and impact of the 'machinery of government' – the administrative, bureaucratic or institutional arrangements that deliver public policy – with respect to housing policy in Australia.

Drawing on the insights of current and former senior housing policy officials, the study identifies a set of principles to guide the best feasible governance and policy outcomes.

## Why this research is important

Machinery of government changes occur regularly in Australia's public sector at the federal and state/territory levels. However, there has been little focus on the impact of such changes for the delivery of housing policy, or which arrangements are most suitable for effective delivery.

### Based on

Final Report No. 453: *Administering Australian housing policy: practitioner perspectives*

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### View the report



Changes to the machinery of government may lead to a loss of institutional knowledge and key expertise, and impede efficiency, effectiveness and innovation.

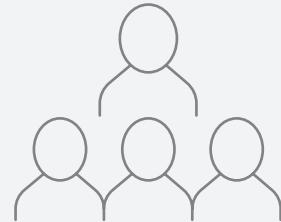
Identifying and settling on a feasible and effective governance and administrative structure will allow agencies – and the people working within them – the longevity and stability to deliver better policy outcomes.

## At a glance

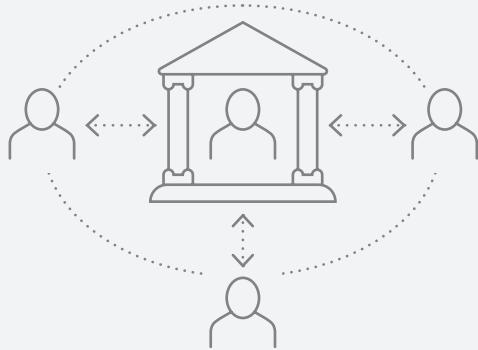
### Insights from senior officials to guide better housing policy delivery:



Jurisdictions should integrate housing and homelessness policy levers within a standalone government agency.



A positive culture as well as transparent, principled and communicative leadership enhances outcomes.



Strong relationships and networks foster collaboration within and across governments.



A bipartisan national housing strategy would help unify and align government and community action.

## Key findings

Insights from current and former senior state and territory housing officials centred around three themes.

### **Influence of machinery of government arrangements**

While research participants agreed that a faultless machinery of government structure does not exist, there was considerable consensus on what elements were most effective.

In their experience, integrating housing within larger portfolio departments makes it difficult for housing policy and services to secure enough attention and resources against larger or more crisis-driven areas like health and child protection.

Participants favoured a model in which as many housing and homelessness policy levers as feasible were brought into a standalone agency that could act with relative autonomy in response to housing need.

### **Importance of culture and leadership**

For participants, organisational culture and leadership quality were more significant than an agency's governance arrangements or how it was administratively structured.

In their experience, placing people in need of housing assistance at the centre ensures a positive culture and aligned organisational objectives.

Organisational success was also strongly linked to transparent, principled and communicative leadership. Collaboration and strong relationships across jurisdictional and political lines was considered important as well.

### **Impact of politics and partisanship**

Participants noted the impact of partisan politics on policy delivery and the ongoing pressure to manage the potential of negative public reaction. They expressed frustration that effective initiatives developed under one government could be reversed by another.

'Participants favoured a model in which as many housing and homelessness policy levers as feasible were brought into a standalone agency that could act with relative autonomy in response to housing need.'

Some participants had at times experienced a reluctance within government to respond to evidence from external sources. This created a barrier for agencies trying to promote evidence-informed, effective policy solutions.

Another issue was that housing portfolios were often assigned to relatively new or inexperienced ministers. This could undermine housing's status in Cabinet or budget processes and could have negative consequences for resourcing and political support.

## Policy actions

### A workable machinery of government design

The research identified four principles that could underpin a workable machinery of government design to inform future administration:

- Consolidate as many housing and homelessness policy levers as possible within a single agency.
- Provide the agency and its decision-makers with sufficient budgetary autonomy to appropriately direct funding across its functions.
- Ensure that housing functions are not integrated into a welfare 'super' department containing other human services functions.
- Manage housing asset and tenancy functions together so that conflicting incentives play out transparently.

### A work culture that enhances machinery of government arrangements

The research also found that machinery of government settings should foster:

- clarity of purpose, built on values that centre the interests of those in need of housing assistance
- leaders that support this organisational purpose and communicate transparently and collaboratively
- communication channels that allow the free flow of information, and facilitate collaboration and negotiation across functional areas and in intergovernmental contexts
- established interpersonal relationships, processes and practices that are effective while facilitating innovation and improvements as necessary.

'The research also found that machinery of government settings should foster clarity of purpose, built on values that centre the interests of those in need of housing assistance.'

## A bipartisan national strategy

The research concluded that partisan shifts in housing policy will continue to undermine the effectiveness of outcomes unless a coordinated approach is taken to stabilise housing system structures within Australia's federated system.

A bipartisan national housing strategy could guide policy approaches that maximise the contribution of existing programs and exploit the potential of new programs.

Prioritising housing policy within a national agenda could align government and non-government organisations, and those with lived experience, around a core purpose.

'A bipartisan national housing strategy could guide policy approaches that maximise the contribution of existing programs and exploit the potential of new programs.'

## Research design

The research was conducted in three phases: a literature review of the existing state of knowledge of housing policy administration; semi-structured interviews with 12 current or retired housing officials who had experience working in government housing agencies; and a panel discussion with a subset of interviewees to validate and further explore identified themes.

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