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Understanding children's housing in Australia: a data framework



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Summary

Key points

- Housing impacts children's wellbeing through a variety of channels, including stability, tenure and conditions; these can also overlap with each other and other factors to compound structural disadvantage.
- The timing of exposure to housing inputs matters, and outcomes can be particularly affected at key transitional stages, such as school entry.
- Australia has a robust collection of datasets and linked data providing insight into children's housing, albeit with limitations and gaps, including the difficulty of capturing children's own voices in the data.
- Policy measures that would improve children's housing and related outcomes in Australia include: the prevention of housing instability and housing-related harm, minimising disruption where it arises, improving the quality of homes, reducing structural housing inequities and, finally, building better national monitoring systems and child-relevant evidence through the addition of housing variables in major surveys.
- One of the major challenges associated with improving children's housing outcomes is better translating the existing evidence into policy, advocacy and other key implementation areas, such as schools and healthcare providers.
- Improving children's housing outcomes requires both better policy responses in housing, health and education, and a more integrated evidence base that can support policy reforms over time.

Key context

While the effects of the current housing-related crises are well documented in Australia for renters (Stone et al. 2015), first home purchasers (Pawson et al. 2025), older renters (Tually et al. 2022) and other population groups, comparatively little is known about the experience of children. This is likely the result of children being a rarer focus in mainstream data collections as well as perceptions of children being less affected or even unaffected by many housing issues, in large part due to the consumer focus that has taken hold in housing. As a result, children's experiences are increasingly invisible, despite growing evidence that the housing crisis has disproportionately affected households with children. Given the importance of housing to child wellbeing, investigating children's housing experiences and their consequences is essential.

In many respects, the relationship between housing and health and wellbeing outcomes will be similar for children and adults: for example, exposure to poor conditions, such as damp, cold or mould may impact respiratory health (although children, particularly very young children, will be more physiologically vulnerable). In general, poor housing affordability contributes to poverty and related consequences. However, children's greater physical vulnerability and dependence on caregivers increases the nature of such risks, especially for very young children. This reinforces the need to examine the consequences of housing circumstances for children.

This project investigates extant policy, child wellbeing, Australian housing, and quantitative and national data infrastructure sources. It provides an accessible guide for policy stakeholders to the diversity of children's housing situations in Australia, improved understanding of the gaps in knowledge and risks associated with those gaps, and an evidence-based priorities roadmap to fill the gaps in future data collection and research.

Key methods

This project was conducted across three research streams.

- Research Stream 1 comprised a comprehensive scoping review of the current state of research on children's housing and wellbeing in Australia; this included a desk review of data that provided an overview of extant sources on children's housing in Australia, considered potential links with children's outcomes, and identified gaps in the literature.
- Research Stream 2 utilised the key national datasets identified in the scoping and data review to provide insight into children's housing circumstances in Australia and how they have changed over time, particularly regarding tenure, stability and conditions.
- Research Stream 3 created a framework and roadmap for the future study of children's housing in Australia. As well as being guided by the evidence collected in the first two streams, the roadmap was informed by two policy workshops with key stakeholders: the first tested the direction of the initial research and helped to shape the priorities of the project; the second allowed stakeholders to provide feedback and guidance on the usefulness of the proposed roadmap, and disseminated the research.

Key findings

This report finds that housing is a foundational determinant of child wellbeing in Australia. Housing influences children's outcomes through multiple, interrelated mechanisms, including residential stability, tenure, dwelling conditions, and broader patterns of structural and cumulative disadvantage. Housing shapes children's lives both directly, through exposure to affordability challenges and poor quality environments, for example, and indirectly, through impacts on parental stress, family functioning, and access to important services such as education and health. These effects are particularly significant during key developmental transitions such as school entry, when instability and disruption can compound disadvantage. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children experience a disproportionate burden of housing-related risk, reflecting entrenched structural inequities.

The evidence base linking housing and child outcomes in Australia is growing, particularly since 2010. It consistently positions housing as a critical social determinant of wellbeing and development. The research shows that housing is associated with children's physical health, mental health, behavioural outcomes, developmental vulnerability and educational attainment. It also demonstrates that housing disadvantage is rarely isolated, but instead interacts with poverty, remoteness, service access and broader socioeconomic conditions. However, although this research is policy-relevant and increasingly sophisticated, children's own perspectives are rarely captured directly, with housing often examined through adult-focused datasets. As a result, children remain largely invisible within mainstream housing research and data systems.

Children's housing circumstances have changed significantly over the past two decades. Families with children are increasingly reliant on mortgage debt and private rental, which results in greater exposure to affordability pressures and insecurity. Residential mobility is common in childhood and is concentrated in the private rental sector, where instability risks are greatest. A small but persistent proportion of children experience homelessness. Affordability stress is widespread, although different measures capture distinct dimensions of financial strain. Housing condition problems—including major repair needs and thermal discomfort—remain concentrated among lower-income households and are particularly prevalent among Indigenous families. Importantly, many children experience multiple housing risks cumulatively over the course of childhood rather than as single, isolated events, reinforcing the life-course implications of housing disadvantage.

Australia possesses a substantial but fragmented data infrastructure for examining children's housing. Major national surveys and linked administrative datasets provide valuable insights, yet no single dataset captures the full range of housing dimensions alongside outcomes across childhood. Children's direct responses are limited, the tracking of children across multiple households is difficult, and measures of affordability, overcrowding and housing quality lack standardisation across datasets. Coverage of housing in administrative data is limited, reflecting that housing remains largely a private domain. Thus, although Australia's data foundations are strong, strategic enhancement and harmonisation are required to build a coherent, child-focused housing evidence system.

Key policy and practice opportunities

Our evidence-based roadmap provides a way for policy and practice to strengthen the foundations for decision-making about children's housing, while simultaneously improving how existing systems respond to children's needs. The roadmap is framed around three linked objectives: 1) making children more visible in housing and related data systems; 2) improving the quality, consistency, and linkage of information on housing circumstances and outcomes; and 3) ensuring that the data are used in ways that support earlier intervention, better targeting and more accountable policy.

These objectives demonstrate how the report's research outputs can be implemented to enable the creation of a more robust, child-focused housing evidence system for Australia. Key priorities include:

- building early warning and monitoring systems for children's housing risk
- strengthening data collection and linkage, including continuity measures to capture disruption in children's lives
- expanding and standardising the measurement of housing quality and child-relevant housing conditions.

Investing in these areas will strengthen Australia's research and evaluation capacity, which, in turn, will support timelier, targeted and effective action to foster the housing conditions that will make Australian children grow and thrive.

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Acronyms and abbreviations

AHCD	Australian Housing Conditions Dataset
AHURI	Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute
HAS	housing affordability stress
HILDA	Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia
LSAC	Longitudinal Study of Australian Children
LSIC	Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children
NAPLAN	National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy
PRS	private rental sector

Glossary

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

1. Introduction

Housing in Australia has undergone significant change in recent decades, raising concerns about a housing crisis (Pawson et al. 2025). This housing crisis has disproportionately affected households with children (see Figure 1), yet the impact on children is often missing from conversations about housing. This, in part, results from children being somewhat 'hidden' within households in data, but it also reflects the view that children are protected from housing issues as they are not the main consumers of housing. However, while children are not the primary consumers, in so far as they are not responsible for finding and paying for housing, they are nonetheless exposed to the impacts of poor quality and insecure housing as occupants. Research has established that children are aware of, and affected by, housing difficulties, even where their caregivers try to shield them (Commissioner for Children and Young People 2023, 2024; Ridge 2002). Further, although children are often viewed as (and are) resilient in the face of such stresses, research shows that being resilient – and needing to be resilient – even successfully so, impacts wellbeing, both during childhood and adulthood (De France et al. 2022), making it essential to take action to minimise the impacts of housing difficulties on children.

1.1 Policy issue

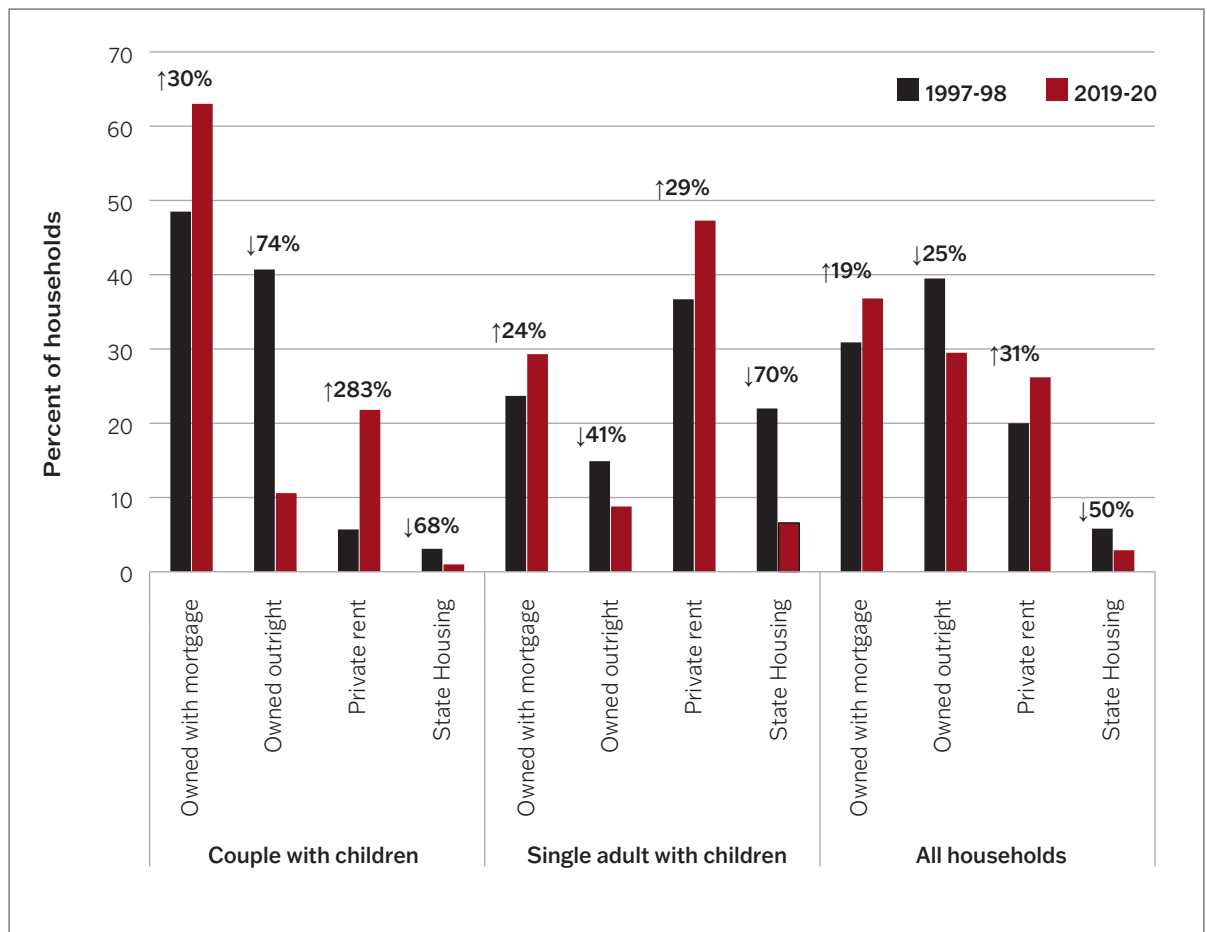
Australia's housing crisis has numerous wide-ranging impacts. These are often framed around changes in tenure, particularly the inaccessibility of owner occupation and extended reliance on the private rental sector (PRS). Such issues have implications beyond tenure due to the nature of housing policy in Australia. Figure 1 shows that increasing numbers of households have a mortgage or pay private rent, which means that more households with children are exposed to housing costs at a time when costs are increasing. Median mortgage costs for couples with children increased from \$287 per week in 1997–98 (adjusted to 2019–20 prices) to \$497 per week in 2019–20; for private rentals, the equivalent figures are \$309 and \$421, respectively (ABS 1999, 2022a). Increased spending on housing has implications for spending on other essentials, such as food, learning resources and healthcare.

The light-touch approach to regulation of the PRS in Australia means that private rentals are often of lower quality than owner-occupied homes (ABS 2022b), with consequences for health and wellbeing. Research on Australian rental homes during the COVID-19 pandemic found that households with children were more likely to have quality issues, and to have higher numbers of such issues, than households without children (Clair 2020).

The PRS is also considerably more insecure than other forms of tenure. This has significant implications for children, as frequent and/or involuntary moves are linked with poorer engagement with health and education services (Clair 2019). Housing insecurity can also lead to homelessness, particularly in competitive rental markets where households with children may be seen as less desirable tenants (Ziersch et al. 2024). Recent figures indicate that nearly one-quarter (23.6%) of homeless people are aged 18 or under (ABS 2023). Alarming, a significant number of these children are unaccompanied – that is, without a parent or caregiver (Homelessness Australia 2024).

This administrative data provide some insight into how children's housing has changed, but they provide little detail into children's lived experiences or the impact of such changes. Given discussions around the inclusion of housing in future human rights legislation in Australia (Karp 2024; Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights 2024), and children's right to a 'standard of living adequate for ... physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development' (Unicef n.d.), as well as children's right to a say in the things that affect them, improving information on children's housing and its impacts is essential.

Figure 1: Tenure changes for households with children compared to all households in Australia

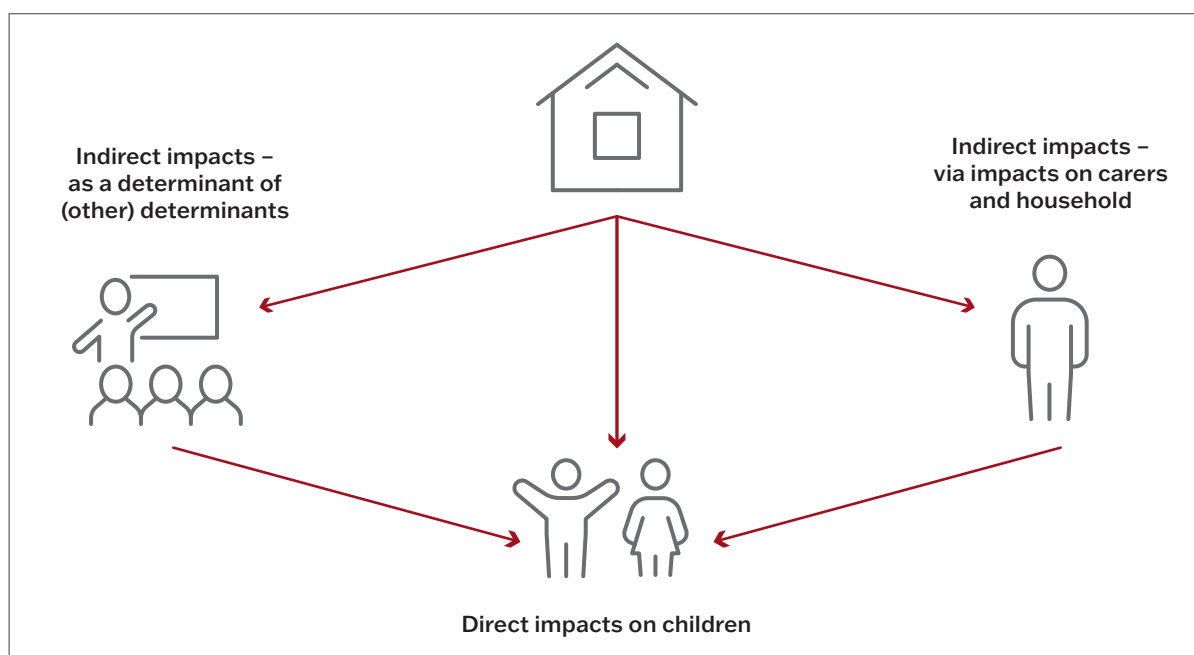


Source: ABS (1999, 2022c).

As well as being important in its own right, childhood is an instrumental period that plays a hugely influential role in later health, social and employment outcomes. Small differences in early life can accumulate and widen over a life course. Therefore, targeted interventions in childhood can offer the opportunity to interrupt potential cumulative disadvantage (Melo et al. 2019). An ecological approach to childhood development emphasises the importance of the environments in which children spend their time, especially homes (Bronfenbrenner 1979).

In many ways, the relationship between housing and health and wellbeing outcomes is similar for children and adults: exposure to poor conditions, such as damp and cold, may impact respiratory health for both groups; likewise, poor housing affordability may lead to, or increase the effects of, poverty and its consequences. However, children are additionally vulnerable in two main ways. First, children – particularly very young children – are more physiologically vulnerable due to their developing immune systems, behaviours, rapid development and size (Chaudhuri and Fruchtengarten 2005; English et al. 2020). Second, children are impacted by the health and behaviour of their caregivers (Figure 2). To give one example: poor housing quality affects children's asthma symptoms via exposure to allergens, pollution and mould; caregiver stress, including housing affordability stress, also affects asthma severity, as stressed caregivers are less likely to adhere to their children's asthma medication routines (Sandel and Wright 2006; Shalowitz et al. 2001). A certain degree of household stress is likely to be somewhat universal across age groups; however, children's dependence on their caregivers increases the extent and exposure of such risks, especially among very young children. Insecure housing can also make it more difficult to access vital childhood services, such as healthcare and education.

Figure 2: Pathways between housing and child outcomes



Source: Authors.

1.2 Research aims

Housing has always played a key role in children's lives. In the context of the current housing crisis, an improved understanding of the impact of housing on children's lives is needed. The changes to housing that characterise the crisis – shifting trajectories associated with decreased access to owner occupation, higher costs and longer mortgages for those that do manage to secure one, as well as the increased reliance on the PRS and a shrinking social rental sector – have disproportionately affected households with children. Despite this, research on children, although increasing, has been relatively limited.

Children are implicated in much of the work on first homeowners and renters, as these groups have a high proportion of people of child rearing age, yet children are rarely the explicit focus of study. Given the importance of housing to child wellbeing, and the right of children to have a say in things that affect their lives, an investigation into children's housing experiences and their consequences is essential.

A body of evidence on the relationship between housing and children's outcomes in Australia has been growing in recent decades, but considerable work needs to be done in terms of synthesis and analysis. This report proposes a framework and a forward-looking, evidence-based roadmap focused on strengthening early warning and monitoring systems; improving data collection, linkage and continuity across childhood; and expanding and standardising the measurement of child-relevant housing conditions. Strategic investment in these areas would significantly improve Australia's capacity to identify housing-related risk, prevent harm and interrupt cycles of cumulative disadvantage across the life course.

Consistent with the literature reviewed in Chapter 3, this report distinguishes between housing circumstances and child outcomes. The key housing circumstances considered are housing tenure, affordability, stability and mobility, housing conditions (e.g. infrastructure quality), overcrowding and homelessness. The principal child outcomes are physical and mental health, socio-emotional wellbeing, child development and educational attainment. The report examines both the evidence linking these domains and the capacity of existing Australian datasets to measure them. Throughout this report, housing is understood not simply as a contemporary living circumstance, but as a key life-course influence that shapes children's developmental trajectories, opportunities and future life chances.

1.3 Key concepts and considerations

Children/childhood

In line with legal definitions, we consider children/childhood to be between the ages of 0 and 17 years. At times, we specify 'dependent children' to make it clear that we are talking about children under the age of 18 in a household, rather than the adult children of survey respondents. Childhood encompasses multiple developmental stages. The definitions of these can vary, but usually include:

- infancy – typically children aged up to 1 year (WHO n.d.)
- early childhood – often children aged 0–8 years (WHO 2020)
- adolescence – often children and young adults aged 10–19 years (WHO 2024).

Households

Not all children live with (both of) their biological parents. Some might live in single-parent families, in 'blended' families with one or both of their parents' new partners, spending time across multiple households, with other relatives or carers, or in foster or out-of-home care. This complicates the idea of the 'typical' household and this report should be read with these nuances in mind. We highlight where available data can account for some of these nuances, such as via information on the housing of parents who are not the primary caregiver/ the respondent to the main survey. We also note that some children are not part of broader households (e.g. 'unaccompanied' homeless children).

Parents/carers/caregivers

We refer to adults living with children as parents/carers/caregivers throughout this report to acknowledge that not all children live with their (biological) parents, as noted above.

Indigenous/Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

We use the terms 'Indigenous' and 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander' in this report. We acknowledge that such language is contested and that the term 'First Nations' may be preferred by some individuals and groups.

2. Research design

This project examines the existing literature and data on children's housing to gain a better understanding of how housing affects children in Australia. This insight informs a roadmap for future research and data collection.

2.1 Research approach

Focusing on the extant data and evidence landscape of children's housing, this project has three research streams:

- **Research Stream 1** reviews the existing evidence on children's housing in Australia. It consists of a scoping review of literature and desk-based review of data that respond to the following questions:
 - What is the existing evidence linking housing to child outcomes in Australia?
 - What data is available that enables analysis of children's housing in Australia?
- **Research Stream 2** analyses the data identified in Stream 1 to provide an overview of children's housing circumstances, and how they have changed in Australia during the 21st century.
- **Research Stream 3** develops a children's housing framework and identifies evidence-based priorities to better facilitate the future study of children's housing.

The research streams are supported by evidence from policy stakeholders via participation in policy workshops during the project. We summarise the approach taken in each stream below.

2.1.1 Research Stream 1: evidence review

Research Stream 1 comprises a scoping review of the literature and a desk review of the data. The literature review provides a comprehensive overview of the current state of research on children's housing and wellbeing in Australia, identifying gaps in knowledge. A scoping review was deemed most appropriate given the likely importance of grey literature and literature from third-sector organisations to the evidence base, the suitability of scoping reviews for mapping fields of study and the potential for scoping reviews to identify gaps in existing research (Arksey and O'Malley 2005).

The desk review provides an overview of the existing data on children's housing in Australia. The sources include the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey; the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC); the Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children (LSIC); the Australian Housing Conditions Dataset; and administrative data.

The desk review investigates the adequacy of the existing data for addressing important research questions; the availability of control variables and important outcome measures for analysis, including the impact of housing policy and assistance decisions; and research gaps identified in the literature.

2.1.2 Research Stream 2: analysis of existing data

Research Stream 2 utilises the data identified in Research Stream 1 to provide insight into how children's housing circumstances have changed over time in Australia and the implications of those changes. Drawing from the four major datasets identified in Research Stream 1 (LSAC, LSIC, HILDA and AHCD), it considers the different variables that can be extracted from each of the datasets, focusing on housing tenure, stability and conditions. In addition, Research Stream 2 provides reflections on the limitations of each dataset.

2.1.3 Research Stream 3: children's housing framework and evidence-based priorities roadmap

Research Stream 3 brings the evidence together to create a framework and evidence-based priorities roadmap for the future study of children's housing.

The roadmap was informed by two stakeholder policy workshops: the first was held in Adelaide in July 2025 and the second was held online in February 2026. The first workshop was held early in the project to ensure that the evidence review captured the priorities of the policymakers and data custodians. The second workshop was held towards the end of the project to allow stakeholders to provide feedback and guidance around the usefulness of the proposed roadmap and to maximise the dissemination of the research.

The home is a central site of childhood development and plays a key role in children's access to, and experience of, essential services such as health and education (Bronfenbrenner 1979). Reflecting this, the roadmap incorporates various aspects of housing and shows why these matter for children. It considers direct influences (e.g. housing conditions) and indirect influences (e.g. parental stress and health), facilitating the systematic inclusion of children in the study of housing in future research, policymaking and data collection.

3. What is the existing evidence linking housing to child outcomes in Australia?

This chapter summarises the literature on children's housing in Australia, identifying the strengths and limitations in our existing knowledge and key data assets. A scoping review was undertaken to identify gaps in the existing research, key trends and major datasets, thereby providing an important foundation for the project's later phases.

3.1 Review protocol

The scoping review was undertaken between July and October 2025. It was conducted in accordance with a five-stage protocol adapted from established scoping review frameworks (Arksey and O'Malley 2005; Levac et al. 2010):

1. identify the research question
2. develop the search strategy and identify relevant studies
3. select studies in accordance with inclusion and exclusion criteria
4. chart the data
5. collate, summarise and report the results.

The question 'What is the existing evidence linking housing to child outcomes in Australia?' was broken down into key search terms, with initial search strategies tested across all databases. Filtering methods were applied to the search query (e.g. publication from 1 January 2000 to 31 July 2025, English language, focusing on and in Australia). The final search was run in three databases: Informit, Scopus and Proquest Central. The results were downloaded as RIS files and imported into the systematic review software, Covidence. The search returned 1,661 studies for screening. Most duplicates were automatically removed by Covidence (n = 313) and the remaining duplicate articles were removed by the research team (n = 8).

The first round of screening (n = 1,339) focused on titles and abstracts and excluded articles that did not address our research question or were deemed to be irrelevant (n = 1,248). Each article in the second round of screening (n = 90) was assessed by two reviewers in accordance with the inclusion criteria. To be included, an article had to be an Australian study or report published after 2000 that measured the impact of housing input(s) on children's wellbeing. The 47 studies identified for inclusion were extracted from Covidence using a data extraction template with key criteria agreed upon by the research team (e.g. location of study, year of publication, data collection method, housing input, description of population and sample size, child outcome, dataset used, and established findings or relationship between housing and child outcome). Further details relating to the search strategy, study selection PRISMA flowchart and the 47 studies included in the review are provided in Appendices A, B and C, respectively.

3.2 Review findings

The studies mainly focus on children in early childhood through to adolescence, with many concentrating on preschool and primary school-aged children, and fewer extending into the teenage years. Age reporting is quite heterogeneous: some studies specify narrow age bands, others use broad categories (e.g. early childhood, school-age) and some draw on large cohort datasets that follow children over time. This reflects a field that is interested both in early developmental impacts of housing and in how housing circumstances shape educational, behavioural and health outcomes across childhood.

Methodologically, the literature is dominated by quantitative and mixed methods designs. Many studies use large secondary datasets (e.g. longitudinal child or household surveys, administrative health or education data), while others rely on cross-sectional surveys, cohort studies or linked data. A smaller but important group of studies use qualitative or participatory approaches (e.g. interviews, case studies, photovoice), particularly in Indigenous or highly disadvantaged settings. Overall, this shows an emphasis on population-level patterns complemented by more contextual, in-depth work.

In terms of disciplinary orientation, most papers sit at the intersection of health, social policy and education. The dominant outcome categories are health, education and behaviour (often in combination). Consequently, many of the studies are published in public health, child development, social policy or interdisciplinary journals: few appear in specialist housing journals. Considered as a whole, the body of work can be characterised as applied, policy-relevant research that treats housing as a social determinant of child health and development. In the more technical and theoretical literature, considerations of children were underdeveloped.

Just over half of the studies examined housing as the primary driver of children's outcomes. The remainder positioned housing alongside other variables, including culture, remoteness, social or economic disadvantage, familial relationships, and exposure to drugs or alcohol in a home/neighbourhood environment. Almost all the studies measured a combination of housing inputs, the most prevalent of these being

- dwelling condition or presence of structural issues (40%)
- tenure (38%)
- residential instability/house moves (34%)
- overcrowding or household density (people per bedroom) (30%)
- thermal comfort, indoor environmental quality, presence of damp or mould (17%)
- homelessness/insecure housing (6%).

Most papers included a range of tenure types; however, a small proportion considered only rental households: public or private (26%); public, either community- or government-owned (11%).

3.2.1 Core outcome domains

The literature is dominated by physical health, behavioural/mental and social-emotional wellbeing, child development and education, with most studies explicitly treating these as interconnected outcome domains rather than separate silos. The literature clusters around a small number of core outcome domains, often examined in combination rather than in isolation. The key categories are discussed further below.

Physical health outcomes

The single most common focus, either alone or combined with other domains, relates to physical health. This includes infectious disease, respiratory health, ear and hearing problems, general health status, hospitalisation and other morbidity indicators. Many papers treat housing conditions (crowding, damp, infrastructure quality) as direct exposures shaping children's physical health.

Behavioural, mental health and social–emotional outcomes

A substantial subset of studies examines outcomes related to behaviour, emotional wellbeing and psychosocial health (also labelled behaviour, social and emotional wellbeing, and mental health). These are often linked to housing stress and instability, crowding or family strain, and frequently appear alongside broader health outcomes rather than on their own.

Developmental outcomes

Several papers focus on developmental risk, developmental vulnerability or broader child development measures (particularly in early childhood). These sit at the intersection of health and behaviour, capturing cognitive, social and emotional development, and how these are shaped by housing quality and stability.

Educational outcomes

Education appears either alone or combined with health and behaviour in many studies. This includes school readiness, attendance, engagement, learning outcomes and broader educational performance. The last is often linked to residential instability, crowding or insecure housing.

Broader social outcomes

A small number of papers extend into other important domains, such as poverty-related outcomes or justice system involvement, showing how housing can also be connected to more distal social trajectories.

3.3 How does housing drive child outcomes?

Housing influences child outcomes through multiple, interrelated pathways. Rather than acting as a single risk factor, housing shapes children's health, development, behaviour and educational trajectories by structuring their physical environments, their stability and continuity of daily life, and the psychosocial conditions within families.

Across the 47 reviewed studies, four closely connected mechanisms emerged: housing stability; housing tenure; housing conditions and dwelling type/environment; and the cumulative effects of crowding, disadvantage and structural inequality. While other pathways may also influence children's outcomes, these mechanisms were consistently identified in the Australian literature reviewed for this report.

Housing stability

There is a well-established relationship between residential instability and children's psychosocial and educational outcomes, although health effects appear more contingent on children's initial health status (Baker et al. 2019). Frequent house moves in childhood are associated with poorer academic results, particularly for children who are already socially and economically disadvantaged or struggling within the school system (Young 2002). Relocations around the time of school entry are linked to poorer academic performance in Grade 3, though these effects appear to attenuate by Grades 5 and 7 (Vidal and Baxter 2018).

Beyond education, housing stability also plays a protective role in relation to broader life trajectories. Having access to stable housing, alongside factors such as being female, experiencing fair treatment as an Indigenous person, abstaining from substances and being employed, is associated with non-involvement in the justice system (Young et al. 2025). Conversely, Howard et al. (2003) found that, within a population of young offenders, one of the most significant predictors of a prior suicide attempt is housing stress (especially location and number of homes an individual had lived in). Together, these studies suggest that housing stability contributes to continuity of schooling, routines and social supports, reducing exposure to cumulative stress and disruption during key developmental periods.

Housing tenure

Residence in lower-income public or social housing is consistently associated with poorer developmental and educational outcomes in Australia, as well as worse health and behavioural outcomes for children. Alongside factors such as parental unemployment and food insecurity, living in social housing is a strong predictor of poorer educational performance (Walls et al. 2022). Similarly, Taylor and Edwards (2012) found that children living in public housing exhibit less developed receptive vocabulary and substantially higher rates of behavioural and emotional problems.

Health outcomes also vary by tenure. Children from renter (private and public rental) households have the highest risk of tooth loss compared to those in owner-occupied households, with low-income children experiencing worse dental health overall (Fleitas Alfonzo et al. 2022). Likewise, children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds experience higher rates of respiratory symptoms, including asthma (Mostafaei 2010). Where public housing intersects with child protection involvement, the risks intensify, resulting in higher rates of hospitalisation, emergency department presentations, developmental vulnerabilities and youth justice contacts (Malvaso et al. 2022). Longer-term trajectories are also affected: adolescents raised in social or public housing are more likely to become smokers as young adults, even after accounting for smoking exposure within the home (Singh et al. 2025). These findings suggest that tenure functions not merely as a housing category, but as a marker of potential cumulative disadvantage, insecurity and constrained access to supportive environments.

Housing conditions and dwelling type/environment

The physical quality and design of housing directly impacts children's health and wellbeing. Poorly maintained and/or designed dwellings increase the risk of injury, stress associated with noise and disrupted sleep. The lack of basic protective features, such as insect screens, increases exposure to insect-borne illness (Young 2002). The standard of the internal environment, including air quality, lighting, thermal comfort and acoustic conditions, has also been shown to significantly influence both physical and mental health. For example, Alizadeh et al. (2023) found that poor indoor environmental quality is associated with increased risks of ADHD and related behaviours.

Respiratory outcomes feature prominently in the literature. Dust and mildew in the home are significant contributors to asthma prevalence in primary school-aged children (Young 2002). Knibbs et al. (2018) estimate that damp housing and gas stoves account for 7.9 per cent and 12.3 per cent of asthma burden, respectively, among children under 14. Boeyen et al. (2017) further show that newer homes and proximity to traffic are associated with poorer respiratory function in children aged 5–12, whereas adequate home heating in the first year of life is associated with improved lung function. Beyond respiratory health, dwelling type may also shape other outcomes: Ip et al. (2008) report significantly higher rates of myopia among children living in apartments compared to other housing forms. Overall, this body of evidence demonstrates that specific, modifiable features of housing environments directly shape children's health and developmental risks.

Crowding, disadvantage and structural inequality

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, housing-related risks are both more severe and more tightly coupled with broader structural disadvantage. Dwelling condition, crowding, and poor standards of hygiene and ventilation contribute substantially to the high burden of gastrointestinal, skin, respiratory and ear infections experienced by children in remote communities (McDonald 2009). Evidence suggests that new housing can reduce the incidence of skin infections, particularly where it alleviates crowding and improves waste removal and sanitation systems (Bailie et al. 2005).

Housing quality, tenure and neighbourhood disadvantage also have strong direct effects on Indigenous children's mental health and wellbeing (Shepherd et al. 2012). Privately rented and owner-occupied housing are associated with better overall outcomes—including health, education, and social and emotional wellbeing—than government housing (Dockery 2017). Across these studies, crowding emerges as particularly important for learning outcomes, largely because it constrains children's ability to find quiet spaces to study (Dockery and Sykes 2023). Outside education, crowding and high occupant density appear to have more limited negative effects on socio-emotional and general health outcomes for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous children (Dockery 2020). These findings reinforce the view that housing operates not only as an environmental exposure, but also as a structural determinant that amplifies or mitigates broader patterns of inequality.

Overall, the evidence shows that housing influences outcomes for children through multiple reinforcing pathways. It does this by shaping physical exposures in the home, structuring stability and continuity in children's lives, influencing family stress and functioning, and embedding children within wider patterns of social and economic advantage or disadvantage. This makes housing a critical upstream determinant of child health, development and wellbeing – and a powerful policy lever.

3.4 Key data assets

Most of the studies identified in our scoping review used existing datasets, sometimes in combination with linked administrative data and/or medical databases. A handful employed qualitative data in combination with the existing quantitative datasets. A smaller proportion of collected their own quantitative data.

The main datasets include:

- Growing up in Australia: the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC)
- Footprints in time: the Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children (LSIC)
- Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey

Other, less prevalent, datasets include:

- Housing Infrastructure and Child Health (HICH) Study
- Kids in Communities Study (KiCS)
- Australian Early Development Census
- Study of Environment on Aboriginal Resilience and Child Health (SEARCH)
- Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey (WAACHS)
- Childhood Injury Prevention Study (CHIPS)
- National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS)
- The Generation 1 Study

3.5 Implications

As discussed above, the literature identifies four core mechanisms through which housing can affect children's health and wellbeing outcomes: 1) housing stability, 2) housing tenure, 3) housing conditions and dwelling type/environment, and 4) crowding, disadvantage and structural inequality. It is important to note that the impact of tenure is often shaped by other mechanisms and policy decisions, rather than any inherent characteristics of tenure.

The key outcomes captured in the literature include physical and mental health, socio-emotional wellbeing, and child development, behaviour and education. Many studies considered multiple outcomes, highlighting that housing affects children through cumulative and interacting pathways, and that timing matters (i.e. early childhood vs adolescence), with greater problems arising around times of transition, such as starting school.

The evidence base reinforces that housing disadvantage is unevenly distributed, with a higher burden of housing-related health risks in remote and disadvantaged communities. Much of the research was focused on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and housing. Intersections with income, geography, service access and structural inequality reinforce the need for targeted and universal policy approaches.

More broadly, there remains limited capacity to examine how housing experiences accumulated during childhood shape health, educational, housing and socioeconomic outcomes later in life, highlighting an important priority for future longitudinal research.

The literature review points to a future research agenda on housing and children organised around five linked questions:

- How do different dimensions of housing disadvantage (e.g. affordability stress, insecurity, poor conditions, crowding and homelessness) accumulate across childhood, and are there particular developmental stages when exposure is most harmful?
- How do housing experiences affect children directly, and how are these effects mediated through caregiver stress, family functioning, access to services and neighbourhood context?
- How do these relationships vary across groups of children, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children with disability, children in regional and remote areas, and children living across multiple households or outside conventional household arrangements?
- What aspects of housing policy, rental regulation, housing assistance and service intervention reduce harm or improve children's outcomes?
- How can children's own experiences, preferences and understandings of home be better incorporated into housing research?

These questions highlight several important gaps in the existing literature. The Australian evidence base is strong in identifying associations between housing and children's health, development and education outcomes, but weak in explaining causal pathways, cumulative exposure, timing, mechanisms and policy effects. It also remains limited in its capacity to capture children's voices, distinguish voluntary from involuntary mobility, follow children across multiple homes, and examine housing as both a determinant and an outcome of broader structural disadvantage.

These gaps provide the basis for the data review that follows. It asks whether Australia's existing surveys and linked administrative datasets are able to answer these priority research questions and identifies where data enhancement or new collection is required. Similar questions have been examined internationally using longitudinal child cohort studies and linked administrative data systems that track children's housing experiences and outcomes over time. Assessing the capacity of Australian data to support comparable analyses is, therefore, an important priority for future research.

4. Review of available data on Australian children's housing

A review was conducted to provide a comprehensive understanding of the data available for conducting research into children's housing. The data sources summarised here fall into three groups: 1) widely used survey data, 2) data identified during the scoping review and 3) data identified by policy stakeholders during the first workshop.

The first policy stakeholder workshop took place in July 2025 and included representatives from the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS), the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, SA-NT Datalink, the Office of the South Australian Commissioner for Children and Young People, BetterStart and the South Australian Council of Social Service. This in-person workshop introduced attendees to the aims of the project and used the following questions, designed to prompt insights into data requirements, as a guide for discussion:

- What are the emerging policy priorities that have not yet been addressed and that we should be preparing for?
- What other key issues do you see emerging for children's housing in the next 10 years?
- What is the imperative for children's housing (as opposed to housing for adults)?
- What other data assets should we be aware of for this project?
- Are there any differences that should be considered in children's housing in remote/regional vs metropolitan areas?
- Do you see different issues for children belonging to diverse cultural groups?
- What are the specific housing challenges for children with disabilities?
- What are some positives around children's housing in Australia that we should have considered today?

Detailed notes were recorded regarding attendee responses, and these insights shaped the data audited as well as topics explored within the data.

Although qualitative data featured heavily in the scoping review (Chapter 3), and plays an essential role in any field, we focus on quantitative data in this chapter, as secondary analysis is more typical in quantitative research. It also reflects our focus on the quantification of children's housing circumstances. In particular, we focus on contemporary quantitative data that is readily available to researchers.

4.1 Data review

The identified quantitative data sources include both surveys and administrative data, with some surveys also available linked to administrative data. Increasingly, combined administrative datasets are available for analysis. These collections combine existing administrative datasets (specific combinations depend on the project) into a single source to expand their potential use. Many of these datasets are not specific to childhood but nonetheless provide useful context into children's lives. Relevant administrative datasets include:

- Australian Early Development Census
- National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy
- Medicare Benefits Schedule
- Pharmaceuticals Benefits Scheme
- Census of Population and Housing
- Australian Immunisation Register
- DOMINO Centrelink Administrative Data
- Personal Income Tax
- National Disability Insurance Scheme
- My School

Table 1 provides a summary of the contemporary datasets (including combined administrative datasets) available to researchers (via the Australian Bureau of Statistics or Australian Data Archive) at the national level. Table 2 provides the same information, but at the sub-national level.

Table 1: Data review summary – national data

Dataset name	Data type	Date coverage	Linked admin available	Child response/level	Sample size	Housing variables	Child variables	Notes
Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA)	Survey, longitudinal panel	2001–	No	No	17,000 adults	Tenure, property type, moves, behind on payments, energy use	Birth weight, hospital admissions/visits, doctor visits, general health	SEIFA information available. Detailed geographic details available subject to access restrictions
Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC) (Growing up in Australia)	Survey, longitudinal cohort	2004–	Yes	Yes	10,000 children	Tenure, housing payments, property type, external conditions, moves, pets, neighbourhood	Cognitive function, health, education/school	Linked data: NAPLAN, health and Centrelink (subject to access restrictions). SEIFA in main file. Two cohorts: B (0–1 years) and K (4–5 years) in 2004
Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children (LSIC)	Survey, longitudinal cohort	2008–	Yes	Yes	1,700 children	Homelessness, moves, time at address, property type, conditions, housing payments, tenure	Education/school, health (rating and conditions), strengths and difficulties questionnaire, friends, sleep	Linked data: NAPLAN (subject to access restrictions). Two cohorts: B (0.5–2 years) and K (3.5–5 years) in 2008
Longitudinal Study of Australian Youth (LSAY)	Survey, longitudinal cohort	1995–(latest cohort 2015–)	Yes	Yes	14,500 children (latest cohort)	Living with parents/in own home, housing payments, homelessness	Education outcomes (PISA ¹), employment transitions, wellbeing, health	Linked data: NAPLAN and education records (subject to access restrictions), cohorts aged 15+, many housing questions only for older ages
Australian Housing Conditions Dataset	Survey, repeat cross-sectional	2016 ² , 2020 ³ , 2022, 2024	No	No	4,500, 15,000, 22,500, 20,000 households	Tenure, type, subjective affordability, satisfaction, conditions, thermal comfort, moves, perceived security	None	–

¹ Programme for International Student Assessment, see OECD (n.d.).

² New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia only.

³ Rental housing only.

Table 1 (continued): Data review summary – national data

Dataset name	Data type	Date coverage	Linked admin available	Child response/level	Sample size	Housing variables	Child variables	Notes
AIHW Child Wellbeing Data Asset ⁴	Linked admin., longitudinal	–	N/A	Yes	Population	Potentially minimal based on current linkage plans	Development, health	Includes Australian Early Development Census, Medicare Benefits Schedule, Pharmaceuticals Benefits Scheme Currently open for pilot projects
Person Level Integrated Data Asset (PLIDA) ⁵	Linked admin., longitudinal	2006–23	N/A	Yes	Population	Dependent on data linkage selections	Dependent on data linkage selections	Formally known as MADIP Charge to access via DataLab Wide-ranging administrative data access
Australian Child and Youth Wellbeing Atlas	Linked admin.,	1990–	N/A	No	Population	Overcrowding, homelessness	Health, education, material wellbeing, other	Strength in data visualisation, area-level data

Notes: SEIFA – Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas.

Source: Authors.

⁴ See AIHW (2026).⁵ See ABS (2018).

Table 2: Data review summary – sub-national data

Dataset name	Data type	Date coverage	Geog. coverage	Child response/ level	Sample size	Housing variables	Child variables	Notes
Generation Victoria (GenV)	Longitudinal, cohort	TBC	Victoria	TBC	Children born between October 2021 and October 2023	TBC	Rapid response surveys, biobank	Data not yet available (likely mid-2026)
South Australian Population Health Survey	Repeated cross-sectional survey	2018–	South Australia	Adults respond on behalf children	7,000 people	Tenure	Extensive health information	
Wellbeing and Engagement Census/ Collection ⁶	Longitudinal survey	2014–	South Australia	Yes	Variable, 108,000 students in 2025	None	School engagement and learning, health and wellbeing	Age 9–18, conducted via schools
SA–NT Datalink	Linked admin., longitudinal	1985–	Northern Territory, South Australia	Yes	Population coverage	Public Housing and Homelessness services data	Public hospital/ ambulance/ mental health service/ primary healthcare data, NAPLAN, justice and child protection, Centrelink	Access may take time Cost to access
Better Evidence, Better Outcomes, Linked Data (BEBOLD)	Linked admin., longitudinal	1991–	South Australia	Yes	All SA resident children born 1991 or later	As SA–NT	As SA–NT	Access may take time
Life Course Data Initiative	Linked admin., longitudinal	2023–27	Currently SA and ACT	Yes	Population	TBC	As PLIDA	Focused on children Pilot stage ⁷ Links PLIDA with additional data (BEBOLD)

Source: Authors.

⁶ See Gregory et al. (2022); South Australia, Department for Education (2025).⁷ See ABS (n.d.).

4.2 Overview of the major national datasets

This section provides a brief overview of the major national datasets and the types of children's housing experiences that can be elucidated from the data.

4.2.1 Longitudinal Study of Australian Children

The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC) was the most commonly used dataset in our scoping review. Its large sample size, national coverage, longitudinal nature, and inclusion of responses from both children and their adult caregivers makes it a very strong dataset. A particular strength of LSAC is the ability to study children over the whole of their childhood, providing insight into their experiences at various stages of childhood and into adulthood. It also has links to administrative data, making it well placed to study the impacts of policies and interventions. A recent example is an AHURI report (Leishman et al. 2025) on the impact of Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA), which found that CRA was associated with a lower likelihood of homelessness for adults who, as children, grew up with parents who received CRA and were able to improve their housing circumstances.

LSAC has numerous limitations. For example, as a cohort study, its ability to provide insight into the ongoing housing issues experienced by children is limited. The nature and extent of housing information contained in the later surveys is also significantly limited. Further, LSAC does not oversample any sub-populations within Australia, limiting its use for such groups. The Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children (LSIC) is available for this purpose, although it is important to note that this dataset is not representative of the experience of all Indigenous children; nonetheless, it provides important insight.

4.2.2 Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children

Starting with a sample of 1,671 children from 11 locations across mainland Australia, LSIC provides detailed insight into two cohorts of Indigenous children. LSIC includes responses from the parent or carer that best knows the child, as well as information from the second parent in most waves (including some information about their home) as well as information from other adults in the children's lives (such as teachers). Surveys include a wide range of instruments designed to measure child development, health and social/emotional wellbeing. It is linked with a range of administrative datasets, as well as information reported by children themselves in later waves (DSS 2024b). LSIC is an important asset for measuring efforts to achieve 'Closing the Gap' targets and outcomes, several of which focus on children and one on housing – namely, ensuring that 'people can secure appropriate, affordable housing that is aligned with their priorities and need' (Closing the Gap n.d.).

4.2.3 Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia Survey

The Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey is, arguably, Australia's primary social survey infrastructure. It is a highly used, in-depth social survey with a large sample size of around 17,000 people annually. However, it did not feature heavily in the research discussed in Chapter 3, likely reflecting the absence of children from the data collection, as well as somewhat limited housing information. Information is collected from adult respondents on the characteristics of dependent children in the household, as well as health information, facilitating analysis. Unlike LSAC, which, by its nature focuses on children, an advantage of HILDA is that you can compare the housing situations of households with and without children.

4.2.4 Australian Housing Conditions Dataset

The Australian Housing Conditions Dataset (AHCD) is a relatively new repeat cross-sectional survey. First conducted in 2016 across three states, the most recent two collections (2022 and 2024) are nationally representative surveys of Australian households across tenures. Although housing-focused, the survey does ask some broader questions about demographics (including about the presence of children in the household) and impacts of housing on (adult) health and wellbeing. Unlike LSAC and HILDA, AHCD surveys collect information from one (adult) household member only. A recent (2024) pilot study extended the AHCD approach to 500 households with children, seeking to test the potential for questions focused on the impact of housing on children. Again, the data was collected from adults. This data has not yet been made available to researchers.

4.2.5 Additional data assets

There are several new sub-national datasets, both existing and emerging. A recent development has been the Gen V cohort survey (GenV n.d.) of children born between 4 October 2021 and 3 October 2023 in Victoria. It involves regular data collection, including biological samples, but is not yet available for access.

Other sub-national examples generally take the form of state government surveys or linked data collections. The state surveys often have detailed coverage of their area of interest (i.e. health, wellbeing and education) but limited information on housing. The linked data collections have a greater range of data, and benefit from not being affected by issues such as attrition or response bias in the same way as surveys, but, by their nature, contain little to no subjective information.

A difficulty of using administrative data for housing is that housing is a largely private domain in Australia. Unless a person is living in public housing (a very small proportion of households in Australia) or receives CRA (renters only), housing information is unlikely to be collected. The Census of Population and Housing includes considerable information about housing and children in the home. Notably, it is not limited to those in private residences and includes information on children living in alternative places, such as temporary accommodation and hotels that may otherwise be missed, but data is collected relatively infrequently – every five years.

4.3 Limitations of data collection

All data collection involves important and unavoidable limitations. These include financial and resource limits, the impact of survey length and content on participants (including participant recruitment and retention), and ethics. In outlining the limitations of the existing data, our intention is merely to highlight areas that would benefit from further attention. Although such limitations are a consideration, the need for comprehensive data on children's housing and wellbeing remains. Summarising the existing data highlights not only the gaps but also the potential areas for expansion that may present cost-effective means of improvement.

4.4 Implications and opportunities for future data collection

In consideration of the research summarised in Chapter 3 and the gaps identified here, future data collection should focus on:

- the different stages of childhood and different needs of children across childhood
- pathways for housing to positively influence children via their caregivers
- the different housing circumstance of children, including the fact that some children live in multiple homes
- the unequal distribution of housing issues across demographics
- the need to include control variables and confounders in analyses, including information about engagement with government support
- the broad aspects of housing that influence outcomes
- the sometimes-variable nature of measurement of these characteristics (e.g. differing measures of housing affordability and overcrowding)
- the nuances in some characteristics (e.g. reasons for moving) that might reflect insecurity or a forced move, or might represent an aspirational move for a better/more suitable home/location
- the benefits of asking children about their views on housing
- the cases in which housing itself is an outcome of interest.

The wide range of outcomes influenced by housing include physical and mental health (injury, diagnoses, diet and exercise, access to services), education (attainment, enjoyment, access to services), social relationships, subjective wellbeing, development and more.

The limited inclusion of children's voices in housing research reflects both an evidence gap and a methodological challenge. Research with children requires careful attention to consent and assent processes, age-appropriate methods, ethical considerations and the inclusion of children whose housing circumstances may make participation more difficult. Future efforts to strengthen child-centred housing data should therefore focus not only on collecting children's perspectives, but also on developing robust and inclusive methods for doing so.

Ideally, we need data that includes children and their adult caregivers (both resident and non-resident) alongside a range of demographic, housing and control variables and outcomes of interest. Sample sizes need to be large enough to study the different stages of childhood, as well as any subgroups of interest. It is not possible to achieve these characteristics in a single Australian dataset currently (Table 3). However, the existing data infrastructure has potential. For example, it might be possible to include a youth survey as part of HILDA, akin to the UK Household Longitudinal Study (UKHLS). The UKHLS surveys 10–15-year-olds in chosen households, collecting important information on their lives. Adding an additional survey to HILDA would, of course, require funding as well as ethical approval, and we do not mean to underestimate the work that would be involved. Adding to existing resources rather than creating a for-purpose survey has several advantages: it could be used longitudinally with existing data, include a wide range of controls and confounders, and link child and adult responses. Furthermore, the costs involved with designing and producing entirely new data assets cannot be underestimated, only reinforcing the advantages in building on existing resources and data infrastructure.

Table 3: Summary of data availability

	HILDA	LSAC	AHCD	LSIC
Housing tenure			*	**
Housing stability				
Housing conditions				
Housing affordability measures	***	***	****	***
Overcrowding measures				
Coverage of children in multiple households				
Cumulative exposure over childhood				
Information on parents/caregivers			*****	
Child-level responses				
Comparison with households without children				
Child health measures				
Child education measures				
Child developmental measures				
Socio-demographic details				

Red = good coverage, grey = some coverage, white = no coverage.

* Includes nuances such as ownership of other properties (including rentvestors) and whether renting via letting agent in PRS

** Includes temporary/transitory tenures

*** Includes housing affordability stress (HAS) and late payments; HAS calculation possible in some waves of LSIC

**** Subjective affordability and residual income questions

***** Information collected from one adult in the household

Source: Authors.

5. The housing circumstances of Australian children: a view from the data

This chapter analyses the types of questions that can be addressed using existing Australian datasets and identifies important evidence gaps. The first dataset, the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC), provides an overview of housing for a cohort of children born in the early 2000s. This is complemented by analysis of Indigenous Australian children using the Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children (LSIC). The third dataset, the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey, provides longitudinal insight, capturing change over time and the evolving circumstances for Australian households with children. Finally, the Australian Housing Conditions Dataset (AHCD) provides cross-sectional but detailed insight into the housing conditions of Australian households in 2024.

5.1 Data on a cohort of Australian children: insights from LSAC

LSAC (DSS and AIFS 2025) follows two cohorts of children: the baby (B) cohort includes children born between March 2003 and February 2004, and the K (child/kinder) cohort includes children born between March 1999 and February 2000. Data collection for both cohorts began in 2004. We focus on the B cohort, as it facilitates the study of housing from birth (summarised below in Table 4), and utilise data up to Wave 8, as Wave 9 was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. During the lockdowns, two online surveys and some telephone interviews took place rather than in-person data collection. The questionnaire was reduced to allow for COVID-related questions, with housing questions among those removed. The focus for housing in Wave 10 was on children who had moved out of the family home, limiting data availability, and covering young people outside our age focus.

Table 4: LSAC data summary (B cohort)

Wave	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9C1 9C2	10
Age	0	2	4	6	8	10	12	14	16 17	19
Year	2004	2006	2008	2010	2012	2014	2016	2018	2020 2021	2023–24
Unweighted sample	5,107	4,606	4,386	4,242	4,085	3,764	3,381	3,127	-	-

Notes: short, between wave surveys were conducted between Waves 2 and 3 (Wave 2.5), and Waves 3 and 4 (Wave 3.5). Source: Authors, based on Hockey et al. (2025).

5.1.1 Housing insecurity and affordability

Over the course of the survey, households became less likely to move: over one-third (36%) of children had moved in the two years prior to Wave 2, compared to one-sixth (16%) in the two years prior to Wave 8. The number of times that children moved varied considerably within the sample: nearly one-quarter lived in the same home from birth, while just under 5 per cent moved 10 or more times by the age of 14. Waves 5–8 asked about experiences of homelessness in the previous two years: such experiences ranged from 2.7 per cent in Wave 5, to 2 per cent in Wave 8. Housing affordability challenges decreased over time: one-third of households experienced housing affordability stress (30% or more of income spent on housing costs, income in the lowest 40th percentile) in Wave 1, compared to 17.5 per cent in Wave 8. Similarly, reports of not being able to pay the rent or mortgage on time showed a downward trend, from nearly 10 per cent in Wave 1 to just over 5 per cent in Wave 8. It is worth noting that these affordability measures are likely underestimated, as they only include rent and mortgage costs, and not broader costs such as maintenance and travel.

5.1.2 Housing conditions

Information on housing conditions is somewhat limited in the data. LSAC asks about whether respondents can adequately heat or cool their home in the context of affordability; therefore, the results reflect housing conditions and financial concerns. Likewise, the question on housing conditions refers to external conditions only, not internal. The results for this indicator suggest a small improvement in external conditions over time, with just over 5 per cent to just over 4 per cent of children living in homes that had bad or poor external conditions between Waves 1 and 8. Similarly, reports of being unable to adequately heat or cool the home due to cost dropped from just over 4 per cent to just over 1 per cent during the same period. Experiences of overcrowding (where more than two people share bedrooms, not available at Wave 1) varied somewhat, with 10 per cent of children living in overcrowded homes in Wave 2, compared to nearly 12 per cent at Wave 4, declining to 7 per cent at Wave 8. The extent to which these changes are due to changes in the housing market/housing policy and/or the cohort nature of the data, reflecting progression as adults in the household attain higher incomes, is unclear.

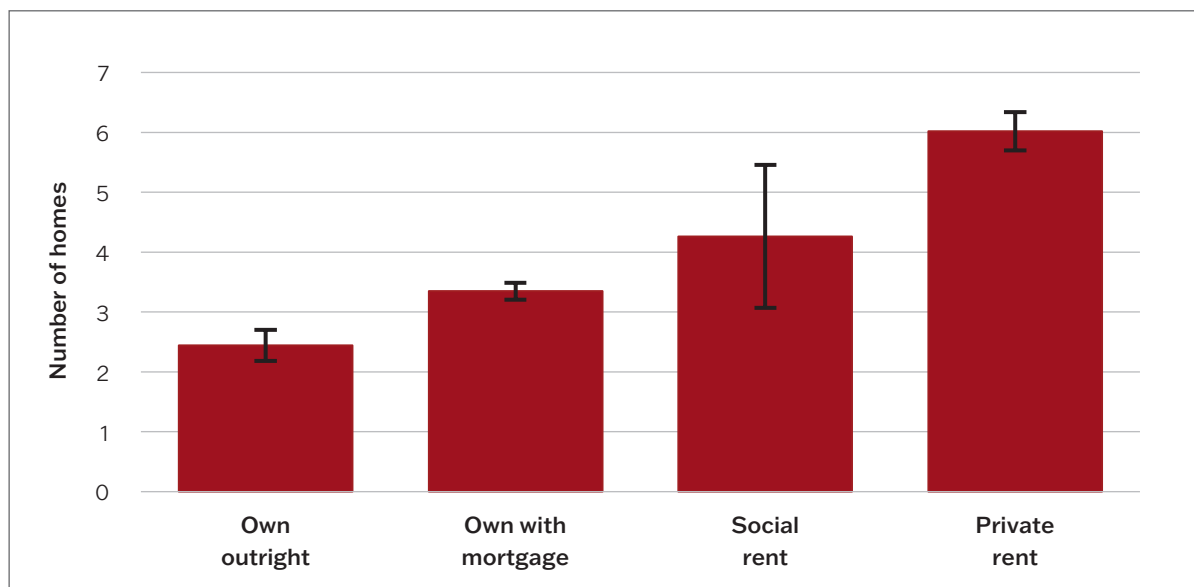
5.1.3 Housing tenure

Shifts in tenure can have flow-on effects on various housing characteristics. In the first LSAC survey, 62 per cent of children lived in homes that were owned (7% of which were owned outright), 30 per cent were in private rentals and 4 per cent were in social/public rental homes.⁸ By Wave 8, these figures had shifted to be more akin to Australian averages, with just over 74 per cent in owned homes (of which nearly 16% were owned outright), around 21 per cent in the private rental sector (PRS) and just under 3 per cent in social/public housing. This shift in tenure was also reflected in a shift towards lower density dwelling types: 82.5 per cent of children lived in separate homes in Wave 1 and nearly 7 per cent in flats; by Wave 8, 9 in 10 children were in separate homes, with just 2 per cent remaining flats.

As noted previously, the PRS is the most insecure form of tenure in Australia; this is evidenced in the LSAC data showing the number of times a child has moved since birth.⁹ More than 1 in 8 children living in the PRS at Wave 8 had lived in 10 or more homes since birth, compared to less than 1 in 20 living in a socially rented home (although it is worth noting that the small number of children living in the social rental sector in the data may affect this and other figures) and 1 in 40 children living in a home owned with a mortgage (see also Figure 3).

⁸ See DSS and AIFS (2025).

⁹ The period covered by LSAC predates recent moves to limit no grounds evictions in many states.

Figure 3: Mean number of homes lived in since birth by tenure at Wave 8

Source: Authors, based on (DSS and AIFS 2025).

Tenure also had important implications for housing affordability, with over one-third of those living in the PRS experiencing housing affordability stress compared to 27 per cent of social renters (again noting the small sample size) and 7 per cent of those paying a mortgage. Notwithstanding this, the rates of overcrowding were much higher for private renters than for owner occupiers (9% overcrowding in the PRS compared to 4.5% in homes owned with a mortgage); however, this may reflect a possible adaptation to poor affordability by living in a smaller home.

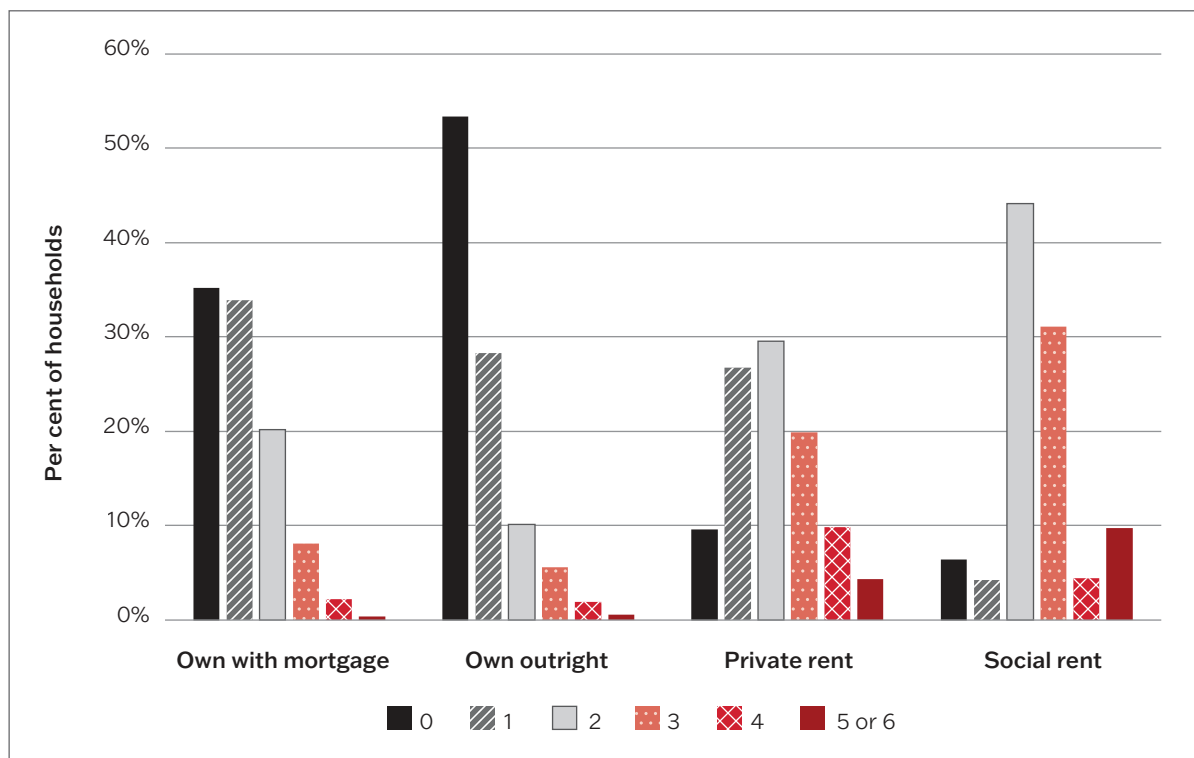
External conditions also varied significantly across tenures with over one-quarter of social rental homes being in a poor or bad external condition, compared to just over 5 per cent for PRS homes and around 3 per cent for owner-occupied homes.

5.1.4 Advantages and limitations

LSAC enables researchers to investigate cumulative impacts over time – and, thus, to highlight significant disparities in children’s experiences of housing. For example, Figure 4 shows the number of different housing issues (e.g. housing affordability stress, overcrowding, poor external conditions, homelessness, late payment of rent/mortgage, unable to heat or cool home due to cost)¹⁰ experienced by children over the course of their lives up to Wave 8 (age 14) by tenure type. Overall, just under one-third of children experienced no housing issues, another 30 per cent experienced only one issue, and another third experience two or three issues. But as Figure 4 demonstrates, the likelihood of experiencing housing issues varies significantly depending on housing tenure.

¹⁰ Taking into account that not all measures were available in all waves.

Figure 4: Number of housing issues experienced by children aged 0 to 14 years (tenure at Wave 8)



Source: Authors, using data from DSS and AIFS (2025).

LSAC provides much-needed insight into children's lives, facilitating comparison across housing tenures and other demographics. It collects information from both parents (where relevant), even when one parent does not live full-time in the same home as the survey child. It also includes a wide range of child-related outcome measures. However, due to its focus, it is not possible to compare the housing experiences of households with and without children. It is also difficult to disaggregate time trends in housing from trends associated with households getting older, with associated shifts in income, childcare costs and so on. Information on housing conditions is also limited, and children themselves are not asked about their housing experiences.

5.2 Data on Indigenous children's housing: insights from LSIC

LSIC (DSS 2024a), like LSAC, follows two cohorts of children. The baby (B) cohort was aged between six months and two years (born December 2006 to November 2007) at the time of the first wave of data collection in 2008, and the kinder (K) cohort was aged between three-and-half years and five years (born between December 2003 and November 2004) at the time of the first survey. A purposive sampling technique was used, focusing on 11 sites chosen to cover the range of environments that Indigenous children live in. The resulting sample of around 1,650 children is not representative of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families nationally, but it nonetheless provides detailed insights into Indigenous children's lives and, importantly, their housing (DSS 2024b). Because of the smaller sample size relative to LSAC, we retain both cohorts of children for our analysis. The LSIC survey is conducted annually, with the most recent data, from Wave 14, covering the period up to December 2021.

Figure 5: Housing tenure in LSIC



Source: Authors, using data from DSS (2024a).

5.2.1 Housing tenure

Compared to the broader population covered in LSAC, the children in LSIC are much more likely to live in social housing that is owned or managed by a community group, government housing authority or Indigenous Community Housing Organisation (Figure 5). Social housing was home to over half of the children surveyed, compared to 4 per cent of children in LSAC. Owner occupation, whether via mortgage or outright, was lower among Indigenous households, but shared the upward trend identified in LSAC. Unlike in LSAC, the proportion of households living in the PRS increased among LSIC participants. Most children in the LSIC survey lived in separate homes (over 90% across waves), with a small but increasing number living in a hostel or having no permanent home over the course of the survey, peaking at over 5 per cent in 2020.

5.2.2 Overcrowding

Unlike many other surveys, LSIC asks participants about their perception of crowding in the home (Wave 4 onwards). Perceived overcrowding decreased over time, with nearly 17 per cent of respondents reporting feeling crowded in Wave 4, down to under 9 per cent in the most recent wave. Overcrowding measured using the binary indicator of more than two people sharing a bedroom (as used above) also decreased over the study period, down from nearly 30 per cent in Wave 1 to a little over 20 per cent in Wave 14. The disparity between the number of people per room measure often used, and the subjective measure of overcrowding, highlights the importance of collecting different approaches to important housing measures, particularly subjective ones.

5.2.3 Housing conditions

LSIC includes a range of variables relating to housing conditions, but such questions are not asked at every wave of the survey. Some housing problems were common, with nearly 11 per cent of homes needing major repairs to windows and doors across five waves. Other areas showed improvement over the course of the survey, with nearly 7 per cent of people reporting needing major electrical repairs in Wave 5, down to 1.5 per cent in Wave 14. Overall, more than one-quarter of people reported needing at least one major repair in their home, and nearly 30 per cent reported at least one housing issue when first asked in Wave 4, falling to just over 17 per cent in Wave 14. Housing condition issues were more prevalent in social rental homes: one-third of social rentals had at least one issue, compared to approximately one in eight PRS and two in five owned homes.

5.2.4 Housing insecurity and affordability

In terms of stability, LSIC asked the primary parent/carer if they had experienced homelessness in the past five years in Waves 3, 9 and 14. Reported experiences of homelessness were consistent over these periods, with 8–9 per cent of respondents reporting homelessness. In most cases, the study child was living with the parent experiencing homelessness. Other evidence of instability comes from information on the number of homes a child has lived in since birth. Using data from Wave 14, 57 per cent of survey children had lived in one home since birth, while just under 2 per cent had lived in six or more homes. Affordability issues, characterised as not being able to make housing payments on time, affected almost 10 per cent of households over the study period.

5.2.5 Advantages and limitations

LSIC is an essential data resource that provides detailed, and otherwise unavailable, insights into the housing situations of Indigenous children and their families. LSAC, for example, notes in its data user guide that those living in very remote areas were not included in the survey, and that the survey had high levels of attrition for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents (Hockey et al. 2025). LSIC is also particularly strong in terms of its housing coverage generally, including information on periods of homelessness and temporary accommodation, subjective perceptions of crowding and detailed housing condition information. This information, alongside considerable information on the children themselves (provided by the children and the adults who know them) and linked administrative data, makes it an especially strong dataset for understanding children's housing circumstances and the relationship between housing and wellbeing.

5.3 Data on households with children in Australia since 2001: insights from HILDA

HILDA (DSS and MIAESR 2024) is a longitudinal panel survey that started in 2001. Unlike LSAC and LSIC, it is not a cohort study; nor does it focus on children. Instead, it includes information on all members of a household, which may include children. As such, it can be used to compare households with and without children and examine how housing situations have changed over time. Data is collected from people in eligible households aged 15 years and over, although few respondents are this young.

The nature of the data means that researchers have access to information on adults and households rather than children. Households with (dependent) children are identified as those in which the youngest household member is aged under 18 years (e.g. rather than including adult children). Most data collection takes place in the year equivalent to the wave number: Wave 1 in 2001, Wave 2 in 2002 and so on. Our analysis uses the 23rd release of HILDA, covering the period 2001–23, with weights applied. Across this period, around one-third of households contained at least one dependent child (Table 5).

Table 5: HILDA sample, 2001–23, with respect to dependent children

	No dependent children (% , weighted)	Dependent children (% , weighted)	n (unweighted)
2001	65.67	34.33	7,517
2002	65.68	34.32	6,947
2003	66.52	33.48	6,826
2004	66.71	33.29	6,728
2005	67.10	32.90	6,875
2006	67.07	32.93	6,901
2007	66.78	33.22	6,825
2008	66.91	33.09	6,833
2009	67.13	32.87	7,008
2010	67.40	32.60	7,093
2011	67.64	32.36	9,316
2012	67.74	32.26	9,258
2013	67.81	32.19	9,292
2014	67.53	32.47	9,281
2015	67.78	32.22	9,362
2016	67.95	32.05	9,491
2017	68.44	31.56	9,482
2018	68.65	31.35	9,371
2019	68.65	31.35	9,403
2020	68.69	31.31	9,277
2021	69.31	30.69	9,076
2022	69.69	30.31	8,734
2023	69.85	30.15	8,678
Total	67.81	32.19	189,574

Source: Authors, using data from DSS and MIAESR (2024).

5.3.1 Housing tenure and dwelling type

Across the survey period, households with dependent children were more likely to live in homes owned with a mortgage than households without children, but the percentage of households with children living in the PRS increased over this time (Table 6). The proportion of households with children living in social rent homes over the study period declined by almost half. Households with children were also more likely to live in separate homes rather than flats or other dwelling types, although the proportion living in separate homes dropped from almost 89 per cent in 2001 to 84 per cent in 2023 (the equivalent for households without dependent children was 69% to 68%).

Table 6: Overview of tenure changes by presence of children under 18 years old in household

		Own with mortgage	Own outright	Private rent	Social rent	Other
Households with children	2001	44.15%	25.16%	22.35%	5.54%	2.80%
	2023	55.87%	12.01%	26.76%	3.01%	2.26%
	Change	↑26.6%	↓52.3%	↑19.7%	↓45.7%	↓19.3%
Households with no children	2001	17.65%	49.74%	22.36%	5.70%	4.56%
	2023	24.16%	39.02%	28.44%	4.09%	4.29%
	Change	↑36.9%	↓21.6%	↑27.2%	↓28.2%	↓0.06%

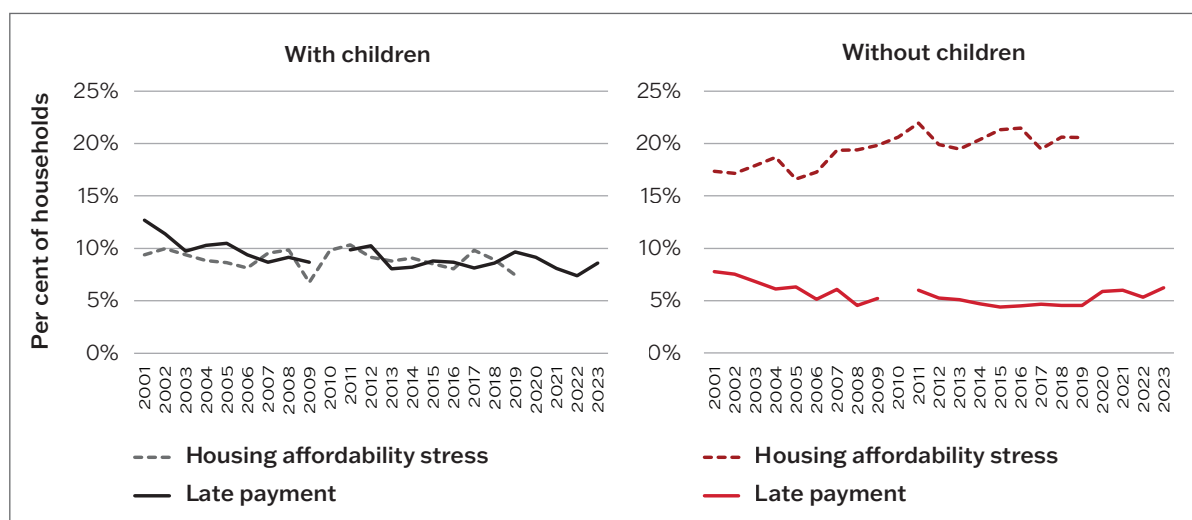
Source: Authors, using data from DSS and MIAESR (2024).

5.3.2 Housing insecurity and affordability

It is not possible to explore the number of homes a child has lived in since birth in HILDA, but it is possible to investigate whether a household has moved in the 12 months before the survey. Moves are common: at least 15 per cent of the overall sample moved between waves, with households with children being marginally less likely to have moved in the past year.

Housing costs (rent and mortgage payments) and income are included in the HILDA Survey. However, the announcement by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) that it is not releasing the most recent statistics on Australian income distribution (ABS 2025) will make it difficult to calculate housing affordability stress (HAS) for Waves 20 onwards. For those waves where HAS can be calculated, risk is higher among households without children (Figure 6, dotted lines). An alternative measure of affordability collected in HILDA is whether people report not being able to pay their mortgage or rent on time. For this measure of affordability, households with children report greater difficulties (Figure 6, solid lines). Comparing the two measures suggests that they are capturing different measures of affordability stress, as the overlap between them is small (Table 7). This divergence highlights the importance of measurement approach and the benefit of including multiple measures of such issues in surveys. Notably, private renters were more likely to report both HAS and being late with housing payments, and renting significantly increased the risk of falling behind with housing payments for households with children (Table 8).

Figure 6: Housing affordability measures for households by year



Source: Authors, using data from DSS and MIAESR (2024).

Table 7: Comparison of housing affordability measures

	HAS: affordable	HAS: unaffordable	Total
Late housing payment: No	78.69%	11.59%	90.28%
Late housing payment: Yes	7.18%	2.54%	9.72%
Total	85.87%	14.13%	100.00%

Source: Authors, using data from DSS and MIAESR (2024).

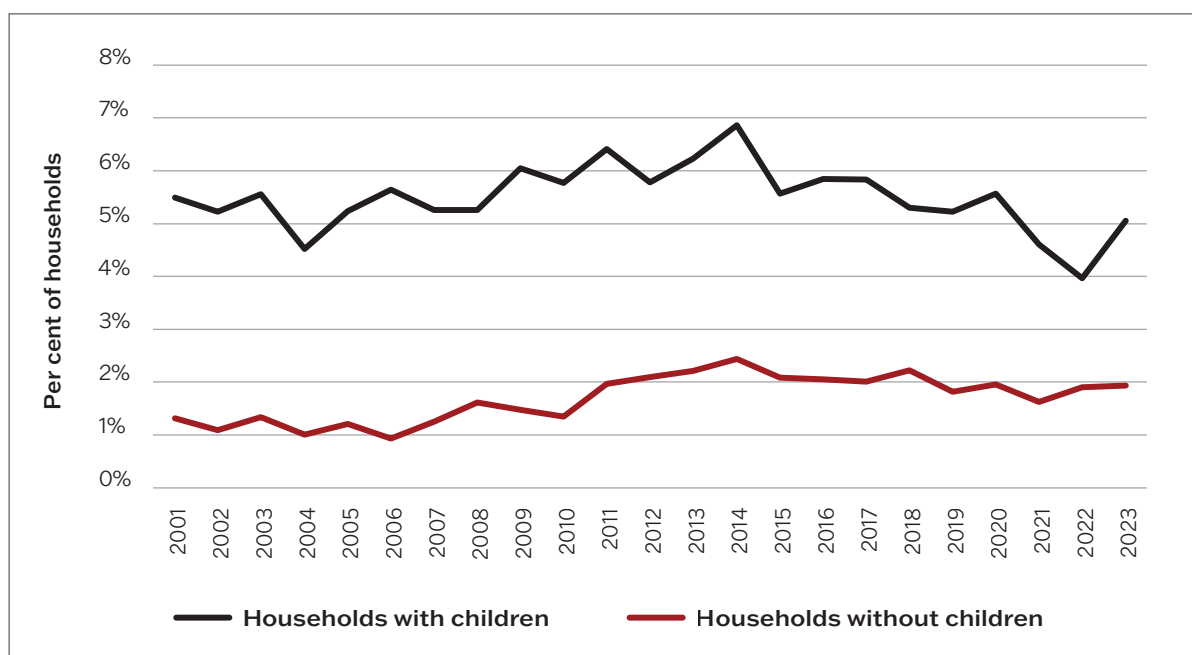
Table 8: Per cent of households reporting being late on a housing payment by tenure and presence of children

	Households with children	Households without children
Own with mortgage	6.81%	6.37%
Private rent	17.58%	10.55%
Social rent	15.78%	7.79%

Source: Authors, using data from DSS and MIAESR (2024).

5.3.3 Overcrowding

Overcrowding (indicated where more than two people share a bedroom, for consistency with LSAC) fluctuated over the period of study, but absolute figures did not change hugely. Crowding was consistently higher for households with dependent children compared to those without, but households without children saw a small rise over the period (Figure 7). Once again, there are notable cross-tenure differences. Around 3–4 per cent of children in owner-occupied homes experienced overcrowding, compared to 10 per cent of children in the PRS and 11 per cent of those in social/public housing. Unfortunately, there is no further information on housing conditions.

Figure 7: Overcrowding over time

Source: Authors, using data from DSS and MIAESR (2024).

5.3.4 Advantages and limitations

HILDA provides large-scale, nationally representative and longitudinal data on Australian housing conditions for households with and without dependent children. It is worth noting that we have presented a broad comparison here, including people without dependent children (which may include people who have never had children, people who may have children in the future, people who have children aged 18 or over in the home, or whose children have moved out of home) and those with dependent children. As such, more direct comparisons – for example, controlling for respondent age – may be useful, as the HILDA Survey includes people as young as 15 and as old as over 100 years. Other analyses may want to limit comparisons to households that are otherwise similar to those with children, rather than all households. More broadly, a challenge of using HILDA for studying children's housing is that children themselves do not feature in the survey and information on housing conditions is somewhat limited.

5.4 Data on Australian homes and their residents: insights from AHCD

The AHCD (Baker et al. 2025) is a nationally representative survey of around 20,000 households that provides unusually rich information on housing quality, affordability, tenure and lived experience. The data used here have been weighted using the project's population weights (Leishman and Xu 2025) to ensure that results reflect the national population. Overall, the dataset offers a robust platform for profiling the housing circumstances of children and the households in which they live, and for comparing these with households without children.

5.4.1 Housing tenure and dwelling type

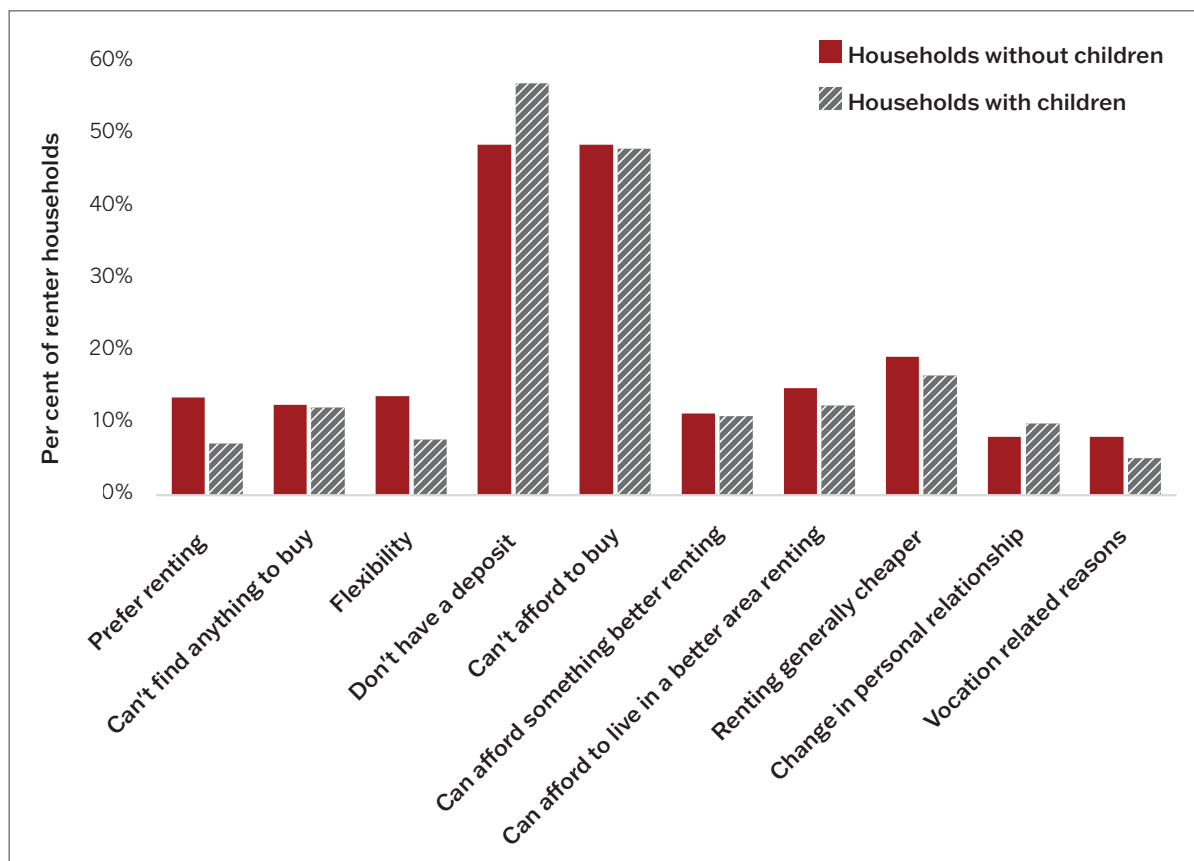
Households with and without children look broadly similar across many dimensions. However, there are some consistent and policy-relevant differences, particularly in relation to tenure and housing pathways. Households with children are almost twice as likely as households without children to have a mortgage: around 55 per cent of all households with children are purchasing their home, reflecting the strong association between family formation and entry into home ownership. Correspondingly, households with children are less likely to be renters (23% of households with children compared to 27% for households without), and less likely to own their home outright than households without children (20% compared to 42%).

The AHCD includes nuanced information around renting types. Using this information, we can see that households with children that rent privately are slightly more likely to rent through a real estate agent (around 88% compared to 83%), suggesting a stronger reliance on the formal private rental market rather than informal or family-based arrangements.

Among private renters, the reasons for renting differ in subtle but revealing ways between households with and without children, consistent with life-course explanations (Figure 8). Relatively few households with children who rent report that they do so because they prefer renting (7%) or appreciate its flexibility (8%), compared with almost 14% of households without children. Similarly, households with children are less likely to cite flexibility for work or education as reasons for renting. Instead, a much larger share (around 57%) report that they are renting while saving money for a house deposit. Overwhelmingly, renters are renting because they are unable to access home ownership. It is not a matter of preference. This reinforces the idea that renting for families is more often a transitional or constrained state rather than a lifestyle choice. Consistent with this, households with children who rent are less likely to view renting as a cheaper option than buying.

Households with children are more likely to live in separate houses: around 76 per cent of households with children occupy a detached dwelling, reflecting both preferences and constraints associated with family living, such as space requirements and access to outdoor areas.

Figure 8: Reasons for renting among private renters in the AHCD

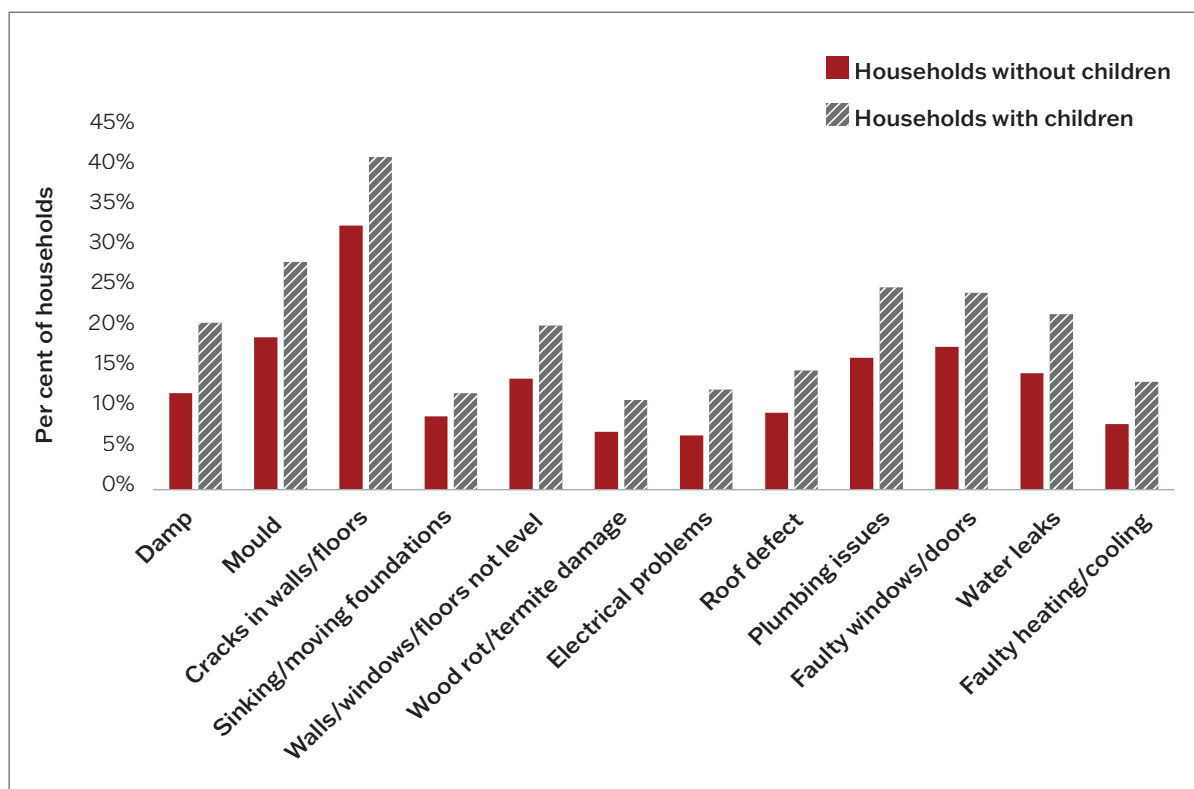


Source: Authors, based on Baker et al. (2025).

5.4.2 Housing conditions

Households with children report somewhat poorer housing conditions than those without children. Overall, households with children are also more likely to live in homes with dwelling problems (Figure 9). Those who rent are more likely to report dwelling problems, such as water leaks, electrical issues or difficulties keeping the home warm in winter or cool in summer. For example, around 27 per cent of households with children reported difficulty in maintaining a comfortable indoor temperature, compared to 22 per cent of households without children. This rose to 38 per cent of renter households with children. In other respects, the experiences of households with and without children are quite similar, for example, in terms of reported problems with outside noise and noise from neighbours.

Figure 9: Housing condition issues in the AHCD



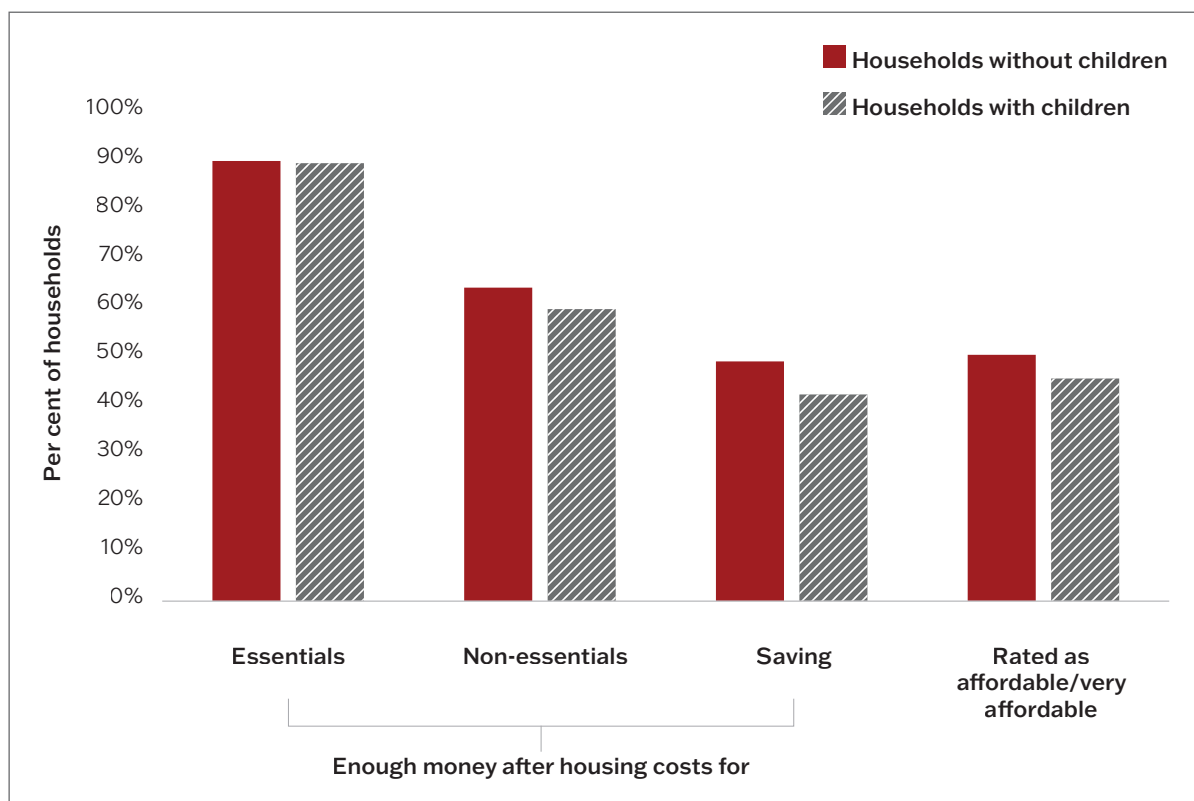
Source: Authors, based on Baker et al. (2025).

5.4.3 Housing insecurity and affordability

Another strength of the AHCD is its range of affordability questions: for example, it asks about perceived affordability as well as residual income after housing costs. Looking across the whole population, households with children tend to find their housing slightly less affordable than households without children: 45 per cent of households with children report that their homes are affordable compared to 50 per cent of households without children (Figure 10). For 10 per cent of households in the sample, regardless of the presence of children, housing costs do not leave enough money for spending on other essentials (this rises to almost 15% for households with children in the PRS). Housing costs have a somewhat greater impact on affordability in terms of the income left for non-essential spending and saving for households with children, with gaps of around 5 per cent between households with and without children. It should be noted that, for all households, the proportion of people unable to put any money to one side after meeting housing costs is alarmingly high: 46% per cent. Households with children appear to be somewhat more likely to have experienced an unjustified rent increase, with 24 per cent of all renters with children (25% of private renters with children) affected compared to 20 per cent of renters without children.

In terms of residential mobility and dwelling type, households with children appear, on average, slightly more stable. Around 22 per cent had moved in the previous year, compared to 30 per cent of households without children.

Figure 10: Housing affordability



Source: Authors, based on Baker et al. (2025).

5.4.4 Advantages and limitations

Overall, the findings suggest that households with children, although they share many housing experiences with the rest of the population, are more tightly anchored to ownership pathways, more reliant on renting as a transitional state, and slightly more exposed to affordability pressures and some dwelling condition issues than households without children. The AHCD surveys provide a high level of detail on housing in Australia, but there is limited information on children in households. A recent pilot survey focused on households with children utilising the AHCD infrastructure and featuring specific questions on children's wellbeing alongside the impact of housing was conducted with promising results, indicating that further data collection focused on children is feasible.

5.5 Implications

This chapter provided an overview of the contemporary housing experience of children based on four major national datasets: LSAC, LSIC, HILDA and AHCD. The analysis illustrated the types of insights available from the existing datasets – it did not provide definitive explanations of housing effects. It is clear that each of the datasets is useful to the study of children's housing experiences, but also that each has limitations.

LSAC and LSIC provide good insights into children's housing and, more broadly, their lives, by including a diverse range of child outcome measures and demographics. Being cohort surveys, one major advantage of LSAC and LSIC is that they facilitate analysis of cumulative impacts over the course of childhood. Conversely, a significant limitation is that they cannot be used to compare the housing experiences of households with and without children. Further, both surveys provide limited insight into the ongoing housing issues experienced by children because the cohorts age into adulthood.

HILDA includes information on all members of a household and can be used to compare households with and without children. Another benefit of HILDA is that it can show how housing situations change over time. A challenge of using HILDA for studying children's housing is that children themselves do not feature in the survey.

The AHCD offers rich evidence into the housing circumstances of children and the households in which they live. It allows comparisons to be drawn between households with and without children. As its central focus is housing, the AHCD collects a wide range of housing variables, but there is limited information on children in households. Further, as data for the AHCD has only been collected over four years (2016, 2020, 2022, 2024), it does not provide sufficient coverage for change over time to be measured.

An important next step will be the development of a program of longitudinal and multivariable research that is capable of identifying the mechanisms through which housing circumstances shape children's outcomes and assessing the effectiveness of policy interventions designed to reduce housing-related disadvantage.

6. Evidence priorities roadmap: improving children's housing and wellbeing outcomes

The evidence priorities roadmap was developed through synthesis of three sources: the literature review in Chapter 3; the data review and analysis in Chapters 4 and 5; and feedback from stakeholder workshops involving policymakers, service providers, data custodians and researchers. The roadmap should be understood as a strategic framework for strengthening evidence and monitoring policy responses relating to children's housing rather than as a prescriptive implementation plan.

Several proposed actions extend beyond housing policy and reflect issues repeatedly identified in both the literature and stakeholder consultations, including the role of schools, health services and other systems in identifying and responding to housing-related disadvantage. The roadmap is intended to identify areas where improved evidence, coordination and monitoring may support better outcomes. It is not intended to provide detailed policy design.

The roadmap is organised around three overarching objectives:

- making children visible in housing and related data systems
- improving the quality, consistency and linkage of housing and wellbeing data
- ensuring that evidence is used to support policy action and accountability.

To operationalise these objectives, five priority domains were identified through the literature review, data review and stakeholder consultations. These domains provide the structure of the roadmap presented below.

This chapter translates findings from the three research streams (described in Chapter 2) into a policy-relevant framework for improving children's housing and wellbeing outcomes in Australia. The evidence priorities roadmap draws from all elements of the project, including the scoping review, which examined literature on the relationship between housing and child outcomes; the review of the data landscape; the quantitative analysis that examined children's housing circumstances; and the two policy stakeholder workshops.

The first policy stakeholder workshop guided the focus of the data review and analysis, and the second provided an opportunity for key data custodians, policymakers and advocacy groups to assess the usefulness of the proposed roadmap and how it could contribute to improving children's housing outcomes. The second policy stakeholder workshop was held in February 2026 after the conclusion of the evidence/literature review and analysis of existing data. A draft of the roadmap was presented to attendees for feedback. The workshop focused on the following questions:

- Can the proposed roadmap facilitate evidence relating to children's housing?
- What are the structural barriers to policy usefulness?
- Can you suggest how best to disseminate the findings?
- Who in the policy landscape is best placed to champion the roadmap and its priorities?

Key organisations were invited to take part in the second workshop, with the majority belonging to three distinct groups: data custodians, policymakers and advocacy groups. These included BetterStart, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, the Office of the South Australian Commissioner for Children and Young People, the Commonwealth Department of Education, the South Australian Council of Social Service, the Australian Institute of Family Studies, the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and the University of Melbourne.

6.1 Key evidence insights shaping the framework

Research Streams 1 and 2 demonstrate that housing is a critical upstream determinant of child wellbeing, including health, development, behaviour and education outcomes, and that it affects these outcomes through multiple, interconnected pathways.

6.1.1 Housing influences multiple, interconnected outcome domains

The Australian evidence consistently links housing to four outcomes:

- physical health (particularly respiratory and infectious disease)
- mental health, behavioural issues and social–emotional wellbeing
- child development (especially early childhood development)
- educational outcomes (school readiness, attendance, engagement, achievement)

Many studies considered multiple outcomes, reinforcing the point that housing affects children through cumulative pathways that interact. Since disentangling these pathways is difficult, a universal approach is likely to have positive impacts across multiple outcomes.

6.1.2 Housing operates through multiple mechanisms

The literature review identified four core mechanisms through which housing can affect children's health and wellbeing: housing stability; housing tenure; housing conditions and dwelling environment; overlapping issues, structural disadvantage, housing and place. The key points associated with each of these mechanisms are outlined below.

- Housing stability:
 - frequent moves disrupt schooling, social networks and routines
 - effects are strongest during key developmental transitions (e.g. school entry).
- Housing tenure:
 - proxy for cumulative disadvantage across other aspects of housing (e.g. conditions or security) rather than a causal factor alone
 - public/social housing exposure frequently overlaps with income insecurity, food insecurity and service system contact due to selection effects into the tenure.
- Housing conditions and dwelling environment:
 - direct impacts on respiratory health, injury risk via environmental and other pathways, sleep and neurodevelopmental outcomes
 - modifiable environmental exposures represent actionable policy levers.
- Overlapping issues, structural disadvantage, housing and place:
 - particularly important for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children
 - strong links to infectious disease burden, learning environments and social wellbeing.

6.1.3 Housing disadvantage is unevenly distributed

The literature review highlighted three key points in relation to housing disadvantage:

- There is a higher burden of housing-related health risks in remote and disadvantaged communities.
- There is considerable research into Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child housing.
- There are notable intersections with income, geography, service access and structural inequality.

These points reinforce the need for targeted policy approaches.

6.1.4 Children's housing experiences are dynamic across childhood

In relation to children's housing experiences across childhood, the longitudinal evidence and cohort data demonstrate that:

- The timing of exposure to housing issues matters (i.e. early childhood vs adolescence).
- The duration and repetition of housing problems is important.
- The cumulative exposure to housing issues across childhood shapes later outcomes.

These points support policy investment in early intervention and sustained stability pathways.

6.1.5 Australia has fragmented data pertaining to children's housing

The data review shows that Australia has good data infrastructure pertaining to children's housing, including the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC), the Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children (LSIC), and the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey. There is also growth in this area, including the Person Level Integrated Data Asset (PLIDA), the Child Wellbeing Data Asset (CWDA), and the Better Evidence Better Outcomes Linked Data (BEBOLD) via SA-NT Datalink. In addition, there are emerging child housing datasets covering different jurisdictions.

Some notable gaps include not hearing children's own voices, limited housing condition data in longitudinal population surveys, limited information about multi-home living arrangements, few measures of important concepts such as tenure and affordability, and limited differentiation between aspirational and stress-driven housing moves.

It is also important to note that much of the data in this survey came from cohort studies, which, by their nature, 'age out' of providing contemporary information on children's lives. Although they remain hugely valuable, providing insight into the impacts of childhood on adult lives, new child cohorts should be recruited to ensure that data on children and childhood continues to be collected.

Building on this evidence base, this project highlights the following five domains for priority action. We summarise them here, reflecting on the insights from the policy workshops, before detailing policy responses in Chapter 7.

6.2 Roadmap priorities: five domains

6.2.1 Build a national children's housing evidence and monitoring system

Australia has strong data assets but limited integration and limited child-specific housing monitoring. Ongoing, high-quality data is essential for both monitoring children's wellbeing and achieving the changes necessary to maximise their wellbeing. The priorities include:

- strengthening linkage between housing, education, health and social service datasets
- expanding child-relevant housing variables in major surveys
- developing national children's housing stability indicators
- enabling longitudinal tracking of housing exposure across childhood.

This will produce enhanced evidence that will facilitate the proactive tackling of housing-related issues.

6.2.2 Prevent housing instability and housing-related harm

Housing disadvantage accumulates across childhood and is associated with multi-domain outcomes. Better data can help to:

- embed early housing risk identification in health, early childhood and education systems
- expand tenancy sustainment and early financial supports
- target early childhood periods and school transition points.

6.2.3 Minimise disruption when instability occurs

The effects of housing instability are increased by disruption to schooling, routines and social supports. Improved data linkage and collection can support:

- rapid rehousing models, prioritising school continuity within primary and secondary settings
- integrated housing–family support responses
- school-based identification and support pathways.

6.2.4 Improve housing quality and child-focused design

Dwelling quality directly affects respiratory health, neurodevelopment, injury risk, skin conditions and sleep. A better understanding of the extent, location and nature of housing issues can support government to:

- strengthen minimum housing standards (ventilation, damp, thermal comfort)
- target housing upgrades in high-risk communities
- incorporate child development considerations into housing design standards.

6.2.5 Reduce structural housing inequities

Housing disadvantage is structurally patterned, particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. High-quality data evidence will enable us to:

- expand culturally informed, community-controlled housing responses
- address crowding through supply and design solutions
- integrate housing with place-based service delivery models.

6.3 Reflections from policy workshops

The policy stakeholder workshops provided an opportunity for key data custodians, policymakers and advocacy groups to assess the proposed roadmap and how well it contributes to improving children's housing outcomes.

Overall, stakeholders were supportive of the proposed roadmap and the five priority domains. Most participants agreed that the roadmap was useful in identifying gaps in the current data landscape, including where improvements could be made to strengthen links between the administrative and survey data. Some stakeholders from advocacy organisations pointed out that the roadmap may have more direct application for policymakers, as several of the key domains related to housing policy areas that were not restricted to children.

6.3.1 Barriers to change

The stakeholders identified numerous structural barriers that have prevented meaningful change in children's housing outcomes, including:

- governance and integration in research
- the characteristics of the private rental sector
- political unwillingness to act on evidence (rather than a lack of evidence)
- misdirection of resources, despite evidence to the contrary
- high cost of accessing as well as producing data
- structural silos in government departments and data systems that prevent a holistic and child-centred approach
- a reluctance to view children as people in their own right
- the difficulty maintaining a representative cohort in surveys and not just engaging families or households of a particular socioeconomic group.

The absence of children's lived experiences and voices in the available literature and data was noted by many stakeholders. On this point, it was noted that the lived experience of children and young people may not always align with the terminology used in data collection. One participant observed that children and adolescents rarely self-identify as homeless, even if they technically sit in that category; therefore, their experience may not be captured through traditional data collections methods. This highlights the need for alternative framing and measurement approaches.

6.3.2 Strategies for implementation and dissemination

Various strategies were offered by the workshop participants to mobilise the roadmap and disseminate the evidence.

- **Actively engage with advocates, sector organisations and communities.** Engagement with key advocacy organisations already delivering services to children and young people is a priority, especially if they have established relationships with government and experience lobbying for children's interests.
- **Consider areas of existing policy leverage.** This is important because there can only be a few key policy agendas demanding resources at the one time.
- **Form partnerships and collaborate with key organisations that support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's housing interests.**
- **Highlight powerful stories behind the data to convey important messages about children's housing circumstances.** Where possible, emphasise positive stories from the data.

- **Form coalitions with policymakers and advocates who have direct channels to the community service sector.** Share research and data with these organisations, as this allows the key priorities to funnel back into policy.
- **Package data to address specific questions that stakeholders need answered.** This will provide understaffed and under-resourced organisations with the evidence they require at minimal expense.
- **Build workforce capability to inform child-focused housing responses.** This can be integrated through training in allied health and teacher education programs, and through professional development via professional associations and, possibly, medical colleges, including the Royal Australasian College of Physicians.

The stakeholders were largely supportive of the proposed evidence and priorities roadmap and policy options. The discussion underscored the importance of the roadmap in translating the research and data limitations into a set of realistic priority domains for future action. The roadmap makes it clear that data infrastructure is a core component of effective, child-centred policy and practice for improving outcomes for children. This requires not only better policy responses in housing, health and education, but also a more integrated evidence base that can support policy reforms over time.

7. Policy and practice opportunities

The central aim of this report has been to provide a comprehensive understanding of the data currently available for research into children's housing in Australia and the influence of housing on children's wellbeing, and to use this assessment to guide future data collection and evidence development.

The policy and practice opportunities presented in this chapter represent immediate actions arising from the roadmap outlined in the previous chapter. They do not constitute additional priorities but, rather, reflect practical areas in which progress can be made against the roadmap's broader objectives.

Across the preceding chapters, this report has mapped the existing research evidence/literature, and reviewed the strengths and limitations of key national and sub-national data assets (Research Stream 1); demonstrated what can, and cannot, currently be said about children's housing circumstances and their consequences (Research Stream 2); and developed an evidence-based roadmap to foster better children's housing and wellbeing outcomes in Australia (Research Stream 3).

The scoping and data reviews show that Australia has a comparatively strong but fragmented data landscape. Important longitudinal surveys, cohort studies and linked administrative datasets provide valuable insights into aspects of children's lives and housing experiences. Yet significant gaps remain. Children are often invisible – or only indirectly visible – in housing data; information on housing quality, stability and multi-home living arrangements is limited or inconsistent; child perspectives are largely absent; and it remains difficult to distinguish between different types of housing mobility or to track cumulative exposure to housing stress across childhood. These limitations directly impact policy and service systems' capacity to identify need, target interventions, monitor change and evaluate what works for children. They also constrain further academic research.

The evidence priorities roadmap outlined in Chapter 6 translates these evidence and data gaps into a set of priority domains for future action. The roadmap establishes that improving outcomes for children requires not only better policy responses in housing, health and education, but also a stronger, more integrated evidence base that can support those responses over time. In this sense, data infrastructure is not a technical add-on to reform, but a core enabler of more effective, child-centred policy and practice.

The opportunities outlined in this chapter focus on where policy and practice can act to strengthen the evidence foundations for decision-making about children's housing, while simultaneously improving how existing systems respond to children's needs. They are framed around three linked objectives: 1) making children more visible in housing and related data systems; 2) improving the quality, consistency and linkage of information on housing circumstances and outcomes; and 3) ensuring that data are used in ways that support earlier intervention, better targeting and more accountable policy. Taken together, these opportunities provide a bridge between the analytical work of this report and a practical agenda for building a more robust, child-focused housing evidence system for Australia.

7.1 Build early warning and monitoring systems for children's housing risk

A first opportunity is to strengthen Australia's capacity to identify, monitor and respond to children's housing risk earlier and more systematically. The data review undertaken in this project shows that, while Australia has strong survey and administrative data assets, children's housing stress and instability are often only visible after problems have escalated into crisis, service contact or homelessness. Housing risk is rarely tracked in a consistent way across health, education and social service systems, and there is limited capacity to monitor cumulative or repeated exposure to housing stress across childhood.

This creates a clear opportunity to develop early warning and monitoring systems that make children's housing circumstances more visible within existing data and service infrastructures. In practice, this could include the routine collection of a consistent set of child-relevant housing indicators (e.g. recent moves, affordability stress, crowding and basic dwelling problems) within universal and near-universal systems such as maternal and child health services, early childhood education, schools and primary care. When combined with appropriate data linkage and governance arrangements, such indicators could support population-level monitoring, local service planning and earlier, more targeted intervention.

From an evidence perspective, this would address one of the central limitations identified in this report: the difficulty of tracking the timing, duration and accumulation of housing disadvantage across childhood. Better monitoring would improve the capacity to evaluate policy reforms, assess the effectiveness of prevention and sustainment programs, and identify groups of children at heightened risk before harms become entrenched.

Key challenges include data governance, privacy and system interoperability, as well as the risk of increasing reporting burdens on frontline services. There is also a need to ensure that improved visibility of housing risk leads to supportive responses rather than punitive or exclusionary consequences for families. Careful co-design with services and communities, clear purpose limitations and strong ethical safeguards will be essential to realising the benefits of this opportunity.

7.2 Strengthen data linkage and continuity measures to capture disruption in children's lives

A second opportunity lies in improving how existing data systems capture disruption and continuity in children's lives when housing instability occurs. The evidence reviewed in this report shows that the impacts of housing instability are driven largely by disruption to schooling, routines and support networks, yet current data collections make it difficult to observe these processes directly or to distinguish between different types of residential mobility. In particular, it remains challenging to identify whether moves are forced or aspirational, whether they involve school changes, or whether children are experiencing repeated or short-duration episodes of instability.

This points to the need for stronger use of linked administrative and survey data to track continuity and disruption across key domains of children's lives. For example, improved linkage between housing assistance data, education records, and health and social service datasets could enable more systematic analysis of how housing moves intersect with school changes, service use, and health or developmental outcomes. Similarly, modest enhancements to longitudinal surveys, such as more detailed questions on reasons for moving, multi-home living arrangements and schooling continuity, would substantially improve the analytical power of existing data assets.

From a policy and practice perspective, better measurement of disruption would support more precise targeting of supports, more nuanced evaluation of rehousing and crisis response programs, and stronger accountability for child-centred outcomes such as educational continuity. It would also allow policymakers to move beyond crude counts of moves or homelessness episodes towards a more child-relevant understanding of instability and its consequences.

The main barriers here are technical and institutional: data are held across multiple jurisdictions and agencies, linkage processes are complex and time-consuming, and access arrangements can be slow and costly. There are also legitimate concerns about privacy and consent, particularly when linking sensitive information about children and families. Overcoming these challenges will require sustained investment in linkage infrastructure, clearer cross-portfolio governance arrangements and a stronger policy mandate for child-focused outcome monitoring.

7.3 Expand and standardise measurement of housing quality and child-relevant housing conditions

A third major opportunity is to improve the consistency and coverage of data on housing quality and child-relevant housing conditions. The data review shows that while there is strong evidence linking dwelling conditions, such as damp, cold, poor ventilation, crowding and safety, to children's health and development, these factors are unevenly and inconsistently measured across Australia's major data collections. In many longitudinal and administrative datasets, housing quality is either absent or captured only in very limited ways, constraining both policy evaluation and research.

This creates a clear case for expanding and standardising the collection of child-relevant housing condition measures across key surveys and, where feasible, administrative systems. For example, incorporating a small core set of validated indicators on thermal comfort, damp and mould, crowding, safety and basic amenity into major population surveys such as the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey or future child-focused modules would substantially strengthen the evidence base. The Australian Housing Conditions Dataset also provides a platform that could be further leveraged or linked to child outcome data to better understand the distribution and impacts of poor housing environments.

From a policy perspective, better data on housing quality would enable more targeted regulation, investment and upgrade programs, and would support evaluation of whether changes to standards and enforcement are truly improving children's environments. It would also allow housing quality to be treated more explicitly as a public health and child development issue, rather than solely as a matter of consumer protection or asset condition.

Challenges include survey length constraints, costs of data collection, and the need for measures that are both robust and feasible to collect at scale. There is also a risk of inconsistency if different jurisdictions or datasets adopt divergent measures. Addressing these issues will require coordination across data custodians, agreement on a small set of priority indicators and a clear policy commitment to treating housing quality as a core component of children's wellbeing.

7.4 Final remarks

Taken together, these opportunities provide a practical agenda for moving from a fragmented and partial evidence base towards a more integrated, child-centred approach to housing data, policy and practice. Investing in this agenda will not only strengthen research and evaluation capacity, but also support more timely, targeted and effective action to improve the housing conditions in which Australian children grow and thrive.

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Appendix A: Scoping review search strategy

Table A1: Final search strategy for Scopus, Informit and Proquest

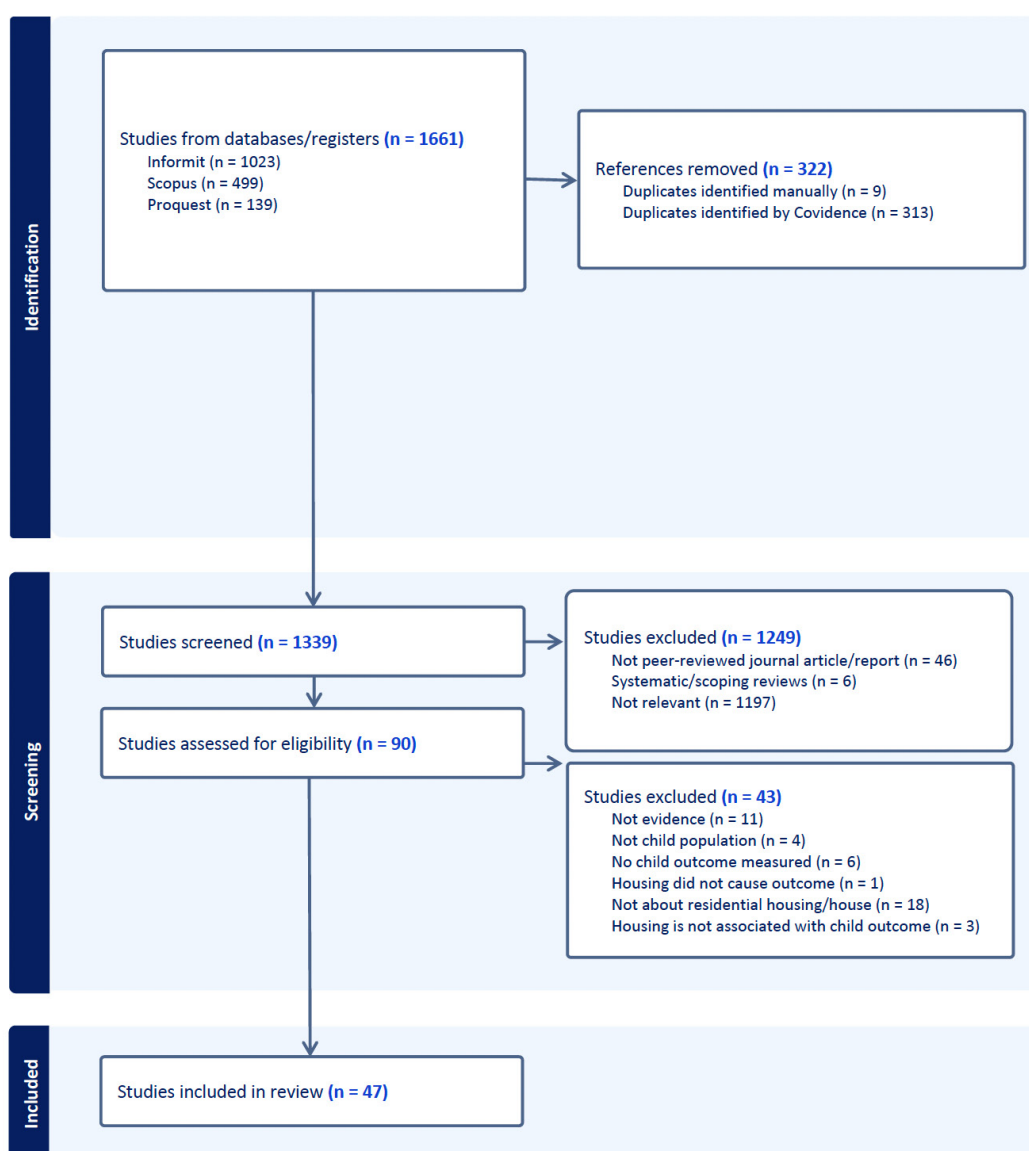
Population	Concept	Context
child*	wellbeing	Australia*
children*	“well being”	English language
adolescen*	well-being	1 January 2000 to 31 July 2025
toddler*	health	Incl. peer-reviewed journal articles,
bab*	behaviour*	books, reports
infant*	education	
	school*	
	homeless*	
	impact*	
	outcome*	

Source: Authors.

Appendix B: Scoping review PRISMA flowchart

Figure A1: PRISMA flowchart depicting the article search, review and selection process

What is the existing evidence linking housing to child outcomes in Australia?



Source: Authors.

Appendix C: Scoping review full-text articles

Table A2: Articles included in full-text review

Year of publication	Title	Lead author
2025	'Smoking uptake among adolescents in social housing Australia'	Ankur Singh
2024	'Understanding the social and emotional wellbeing factors protecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people from justice system involvement'	Maicee Young
2024	'Housing Australian children: a snapshot of health inequities in the first 2000 days'	Yuxi Li
2024	'Inclusive online learning in Australia: barriers and enablers'	Linda Marsden
2023	'The built environment and early childhood development: qualitative evidence from disadvantaged Australian communities'	Karen Villanueva
2023	'Home indoor environmental quality and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder'	Sima Alizadeh
2022	'Housing quality, remoteness and Indigenous children's outcomes in Australia'	Alfred Dockery
2022	'Remote housing for Indigenous children in the Fitzroy Valley, Western Australia: a case study'	Alfred Dockery
2022	'Examining the intersection of child protection and public housing: development, health and justice outcomes using linked administrative data'	Catia Malvaso
2022	'Can social risks in early life predict children's health and academic outcomes? An analysis of the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children'	Alexandra Walls
2021	'Home ownership, income and oral health of children in Australia: a population-based study'	Ludmila Fleitas Alfonz
2020	'Developmental risk among Aboriginal children living in urban areas in Australia: the Study of Environment on Aboriginal Resilience and Child Health (SEARCH)'	Shingisai Chando
2020	'Household density and children's wellbeing in Australia: are children's homes too empty?'	Alfred Dockery
2020	'The relationship between housing and children's socio-emotional and behavioral development in Australia'	James O'Donnell
2019	'The impact of hearing impairment on Aboriginal children's school attendance in remote Northern Territory: a data linkage study'	Jiunn-Yih Su

Table A2 (continued): Articles included in full-text review

Year of publication	Title	Lead author
2019	'Local housing characteristics associated with early childhood development outcomes in Australian disadvantaged communities'	Karen Villanueva
2019	'How does household residential instability influence child health outcomes? A quantile analysis'	Emma Baker
2019	'Overcrowded housing: one of a constellation of vulnerabilities for child sexual abuse'	Rosemary L Cant
2019	'High-rise parenting: experiences of families in private, high-rise housing in inner city Melbourne and implications for children's health'	Fiona J Andrews
2018	'Housing conditions associated with recurrent gastrointestinal infection in urban Aboriginal children in NSW, Australia: findings from SEARCH'	Melanie J Andersen
2018	'Damp housing, gas stoves, and the burden of childhood asthma in Australia'	Luke D Knibbs
2018	'The "invisible homeless" challenges faced by families bringing up their children in a remote Australian Aboriginal community'	Anne Lowell
2017	'Culture, housing, remoteness and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child development: evidence from the Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children'	Alfred Michael Dockery
2017	'Residential relocations and academic performance of Australian children: a longitudinal analysis'	Sergi Vidal
2017	'Investigating the relationship between environmental factors and respiratory health outcomes in school children using the forced oscillation technique'	Jonathon Boeyen
2014	'Preschool participation among Indigenous children in Australia'	Belinda Hewitt
2014	'The dynamic family home: a qualitative exploration of physical environmental influences on children's sedentary behaviour and physical activity within the home space'	Clover Maitland
2013	'Housing and children's development and wellbeing: evidence from Australian data'	Alfred Dockery
2012	'The effects of house moves during early childhood on child mental health at age 9 years'	Alice R Rumbold
2012	'Socioeconomic disparities in the mental health of Indigenous children in Western Australia'	Carrington CJ Shepherd
2012	'The influence of unstable housing on children's wellbeing and development'	Matthew Taylor
2012	'Housing and children's wellbeing and development: evidence from a national longitudinal study'	Ben Edwards
2012	'The impact of housing improvement and socio-environmental factors on common childhood illnesses: a cohort study in Indigenous Australian communities'	Ross S Bailie
2010	'Exploring cross-sectional associations between common childhood illness, housing and social conditions in remote Australian Aboriginal communities'	Ross Bailie
2010	'Housing stability over two years and HIV risk among newly homeless youth'	Doreen Rosenthal
2010	'"Are we moving again this week?" Children's experiences of homelessness in Victoria, Australia'	Maggie Kirkman
2010	'The impact of domestic and school air quality on respiratory symptoms among primary school students with different socioeconomic backgrounds'	Masoud Mostafaee

Table A2 (continued): Articles included in full-text review

Year of publication	Title	Lead author
2009	'A case study of physical and social barriers to hygiene and child growth in remote Australian Aboriginal communities'	Elizabeth McDonald
2008	'Myopia and the urban environment: findings in a sample of 12-year-old Australian school children'	Jenny M Ip
2006	'Socio-economic distribution of environmental risk factors for childhood injury'	Joseph V Turner
2006	'Families at risk: the effects of chronic and multiple disadvantage'	Phillip Slee
2005	'Skin infection, housing and social circumstances in children living in remote Indigenous communities: testing conceptual and methodological approaches'	Ross S Bailie
2005	'Household hygiene practices in relation to dampness at home and current wheezing and rhino-conjunctivitis among school age children'	Guicheng Zhang
2003	'Suicidal behavior in a young offender population'	John Howard
2002	'The influence of social and economic disadvantage in the academic performance of school students in Australia'	Gillian Considine
2002	'Non-shelter outcomes of housing: a case study of the relationships between housing and children's schooling'	Peter Young
2001	'Domestic exposure of asthmatic and non-asthmatic children to house dust mite (Der p1) and cat antigen (Fel d1) in Adelaide, South Australia'	KD Thomas

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