MISSION AUSTRALIA

AHURI Professional Services And Mission Australia · October 2026

The Long-Term Impact of Homelessness Services in Cairns

Going Places Street to Home · Douglas House · Woree Supported Accommodation



OUR WORK

We welcome and work alongside people and communities who seek our support. We meet them where they are, focusing on their strengths and working together to provide support when going through tough times, so they can lead their best life.



Our Program Pillars:

Housing and homelessness

Outcome: Safe, secure and affordable homes for all

Children, young people and families

Outcome: Safe, resilient and thriving families, children and young people

Mental health

Outcome: Improved mental health and wellbeing

People with disability

Outcome: Inclusive communities and thriving lives

Employment, financial support and community engagement

Outcome: Increased participation and stronger communities

Alcohol and other drugs

Outcome: Building healthier lives

Mission Australia's Homelessness Services in Cairns

Going Places Street to Home

- Multidisciplinary program
- Supports people who have been sleeping rough in Cairns
- Aim is to move into stable, long-term housing

Douglas House

- 22 bed supported accommodation
- Support for up to 24 months
- Aim is to move into independent housing

Woree Supported Housing

- Transitional supported housing
- Targeted at those leaving Douglas House or other temporary accommodation, for a period of 18 months

A key knowledge gap: what happens after people exit a service?

Purpose of the research

To understand the **long-term impact** of the Cairns homelessness services **for people who exited three or more years ago.**

Research questions

1. What have been the longer-term housing and wellbeing outcomes?
2. What have been people's housing journeys?
3. What factors have supported and/or hindered people's housing outcomes?
4. What improvements to service design, delivery and advocacy could be made to support outcomes?

Data and methodology

Administrative Data	Data from 1,444 people
Review of existing literature	Review of existing evaluation reports
Interviews with service users	14 interviews using a truth telling approach
Caseworker focus groups	Focussed on evidence and emerging findings

Limitations

Small qualitative sample comprised of people who were housed at the time of data collection

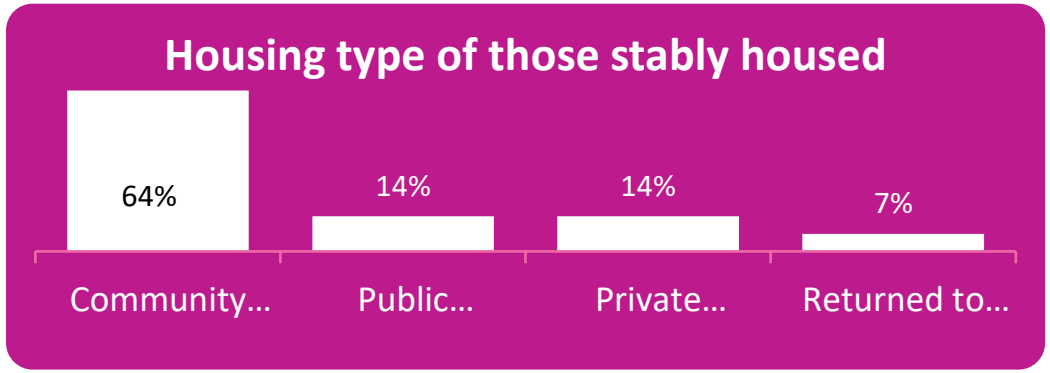
Longitudinal Qualitative Insights

Sustained housing since exit

- 13 out of the 14 people interviewed had moved into long-term housing and remained independently housed
- People were living mainly in community housing
- Post-exit tenancy durations ranged from 1-8 years

Housing stability is the foundation for improved wellbeing

- Improvements in wellbeing and health (e.g. eating better, sleeping better, reduced substance use).
- Greater independence and freedom and sense of pride and ownership
- Increased confidence to explore volunteer and employment opportunities



Quotes from interview participants

"It's my little place in the world and I make sure all my bills come out before I even get to touch my money. So that my rent stays paid and I'm not at risk of losing this. You know, it's a blessing, it's a gift to me."

"For me, [the support provided] was about being able to maintain tenancy, have those independent skills, get my well-being sorted out because it takes a while to get that stability after you've been homeless for so long and that mentality."

Longitudinal Qualitative Insights

Housing stability enabled continued expression of culture

- First Nations participants spoke of how having stability in their life had created space to be open to exploring culture and wanting to be involved in work that connected them to culture.

There were ongoing challenges when transitioning into stable housing

- Adjustment from rough sleeping to sleeping inside
- Shifting mindset to stability
- Concerns around neighborhood safety
- Housing quality and affordability

Quotes from interview participants

"That's why I thought I'd get into working with the mob, you know? Yeah. I like to help people too. It makes you feel good, community service…I want to give back to the community. Yeah."

"Oh, I love Johnny Cakes, at my place I make a lot… I give it to my sister and to my other cousin sister. She lives upstairs and my cousin sister stays downstairs, so I give it to them…it's nice to have family close by."

"Like for me, even to this day, I'm the kind of person that constantly feels like I've got flight. And so, I've always got a backpack with everything I need in it. It's ready to go. And it took me ages to get out of the headspace of – I don't deserve nice things because it's just going to get taken off me – and to be able to go, 'no, you work hard, you deserve to treat yourself'. But it took a very long time to get to that point."

Factors That Supported Or Hindered Long-term Housing Outcomes

Enablers

- ✓ **Multidisciplinary model** (assertive outreach, clinical and nursing care, case management, financial mentoring and tenancy skills) reduces barriers to engagement.
- ✓ **Person-centred support**, including strengths-based and trauma-informed approaches, develops trust and builds capacity.
- ✓ **Indigenous mentors** foster a sense of identity and expression of culture
- ✓ **Flexibility, innovation and learning** to adapt services to support people's needs.
- ✓ **Cross sector collaboration** to provide continuity of care and fast housing pathway.

Barriers

- × **Social boundaries** with family and community members that may place tenancies at risk
- × **Abrupt transitions between services and when exiting.**
- × **Limited post exit support to support people to navigate issues with their tenancies and build social and community connections.**
- × **Housing supply shortages for people with complex needs**
- × **Public housing barriers including income thresholds, tenancy reviews and culturally responsive allocation processes.**

What Are The Implications Of This Research?

Service design & delivery

- Fund integrated post-exit tenancy sustainment and therapeutic support
- Dedicated post-exit outreach role for at least two years
- Expand in-house therapeutic and counselling services
- Increase cultural safety training and supervision for staff

Housing access

- Increase supported social housing for people with complex needs
- Reform public housing settings including income eligibility, custody-related reapplication requirements and tenancy reviews
- Implement culturally responsive allocation processes that prioritise family connection, reunification and healing

Impact & evidence

- Review Douglas House → Woree transition arrangements
- Standardise housing outcome data collection across programs
- Advocate for longitudinal data linkage to better understand people's homelessness journeys, service use, policy settings and long-term impact

Thank you

For more information scan here:

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