



Long-term impact of Cairns homelessness services

Final Report

OCTOBER 2026

AUTHORED BY

Renee Lane, AHURI Limited

Shaun Middlebrook, AHURI Limited

FOR

Mission Australia

Preferred citation

Lane, R. and Middlebrook, S (2026) *Long-term impact of Cairns homelessness services*, AHURI Advisory for Mission Australia, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited, Melbourne.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the participants with lived experience. Your willingness to share your journey has enabled this report.

Acknowledgement of country

AHURI acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout our nation, and we pay our respect to Elders past and present. We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' connections to land, sea and community, and respect their cultural, spiritual and educational practices..

Disclaimer

The opinions in this report reflect the views of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of AHURI Limited, its Board or its funding organisations. No responsibility is accepted by AHURI Limited, its Board or funders for the accuracy or omission of any statement, opinion, advice or information in this publication.

Copyright

© Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited
2026

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License, see <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>.



Contents

List of tables	v
----------------	---

List of figures	vi
-----------------	----

Acronyms and abbreviations used in this report	vii
--	-----

Glossary	vii
----------	-----

Executive summary	1
-------------------	---

1. Introduction	7
------------------------	----------

1.1 About the services	7
------------------------	---

1.2 Purpose of the research	7
-----------------------------	---

1.3 Significance of the research	8
----------------------------------	---

2. Method	9
------------------	----------

2.1 Baseline analysis	10
------------------------------	-----------

2.1.1 Administrative data	10
---------------------------	----

2.1.2 Review of existing evidence	15
-----------------------------------	----

2.1.3 Review of Mission Australia cultural safety frameworks	15
--	----

2.2 Qualitative analysis of housing outcomes and journeys	16
--	-----------

2.2.1 Case worker focus groups	16
--------------------------------	----

2.2.2 Former client interviews	16
--------------------------------	----

2.2.3 Sampling and interviewee demographic characteristics	17
--	----

2.3 Research limitations	18
---------------------------------	-----------

3. Longer-term housing outcomes and wellbeing after exiting into stable independent housing	19
--	-----------

3.1 Most people interviewed have sustained long-term independent housing but with varied experiences around suitability, quality, affordability and safety	19
--	----

3.2 Housing stability creates the foundation for improved overall wellbeing, increased confidence with social boundaries and exploring employment and volunteering opportunities	21
--	----

3.3	For some interviewees, housing stability enabled continued expression of culture	22
3.4	Further evidence is needed to understand the longer-term outcomes of people who did not retain their post-exit tenancy or who did not have a post-exit tenancy	22
4.	Housing journeys since program exit	23
4.1	Most interviewees have retained a stable housing tenure since exit	23
4.2	Interviewees acknowledged the difficulty of transitioning into housing from homelessness	24
4.3	Interviewees talked about how they made their house feel like a home	24
5.	Factors that support and/or hinder housing outcomes	25
5.1	The multidisciplinary model delivered through Going Places reduces barriers to engagement with Mission Australia services and is critical for supporting people to achieve and sustain housing	25
5.2	Person-centred engagement and Indigenous mentor roles help build trust and rapport with people being supported and contribute to the achievement of outcomes	26
5.3	Collaboration between Mission Australia services and the wider sector in Cairns supports housing and wellbeing outcomes	27
5.4	Limited opportunities to assist people to build positive social boundaries during program engagement is a risk for tenancy sustainment	28
5.5	Abrupt transitions between Douglas House and Woree, as well as absence of structured post-exit support creates risk for people's wellbeing and tenancy sustainment	28
5.6	Barriers in the wider housing system impact access to appropriate long-term housing	30
5.7	Service gaps in Cairns impact housing pathways and sustainability of long-term outcomes	30
6.	Improvements to service design and delivery to support better long-term housing outcomes	31
6.1	Greater support during program transition and introduction of post-exit support would sustain tenancies, improve wellbeing and strengthen outcomes	31
6.2	People's engagement with therapeutic supports could be more effective if offered in-house	32
6.3	Cultural safety practices within Mission Australia services should be strengthened and culturally appropriate services are inadequate for First Nations people	32
7.	Additional findings	33
7.1	Limited evidence is available on housing outcomes at program exit for people supported by Going Places	33
7.2	Limited mechanisms are available to systematically assess long-term housing and wellbeing outcomes	33

8. Conclusion and recommendations	34
8.1 Service design and delivery	34
8.2 Improve access to housing	35
8.3 Understand outcomes	36
Appendix 1: Existing evidence overview	37
References	41

List of tables

Table 1: Framework for analysis, research questions and data sources	9
Table 2: Program data analysed	11
Table 3: Overview of existing evidence and relevant findings	37

List of figures

Figure 1: Cohort demographic overview across three programs	10
Figure 2: Clients per program Jan 2018 - Dec 2022	11
Figure 3: Cultural background of clients across the three programs	12
Figure 4: Age of clients across programs Jan 2018 - Dec 2022	13
Figure 5: Reasons for exit	14
Figure 6: Housing tenure at exit: Douglas House and Woree Supported Accommodation	15
Figure 7: Case worker focus groups	16
Figure 8: Interview participants	18

Acronyms and abbreviations used in this report

AHURI	Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute
AHOS	After Hours Outreach Service
FDV	Family and Domestic Violence
NDIS	National Disability Insurance Scheme

Glossary

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

Executive summary

Mission Australia has commissioned AHURI to understand the long-term impact of their homelessness services operating in Cairns to provide insights that can help inform and improve service design and delivery. This report investigates the housing journeys and the overall impact of three Mission Australia homelessness services, primarily focusing on people who have exited from a service three or more years ago.

About the services

Mission Australia operates three interrelated homelessness services in Cairns with funding from the Queensland Department of Housing and Public Works. These provide accommodation and case management support for predominantly First Nations people experiencing chronic homelessness, usually rough sleeping, and often with co-existing challenges such as trauma, mental and/or physical health issues, and disability.

Going Places Street to Home Homeless

Program is a multidisciplinary street-to-home program combining clinical health services with assertive outreach and case management to support people who have been sleeping rough in Cairns to move into stable, long-term and sustainable housing. This program supports people to sustain accommodation first and provides wrap-around support to assist with other needs, including nursing supports, financial mentoring, tenancy skills training and indigenous mentorship.

Douglas House is a 22-bed supported accommodation facility designed to provide people with accommodation and intensive case management support for up to 24 months. It acts as a stepping stone for tenants to develop the skills they need to move sustainably into independent housing or less intensive supported housing (like Woree).

Woree Supported Accommodation (Woree) is transitional supported housing, primarily for people leaving Douglas House or other temporary accommodation. It is designed to

offer the least intensive support and is equipped to provide individualised case management for 20 adults aged 18 and over, for a period of up to 18 months.

Staff practice across all three services is designed to be recovery oriented, trauma informed, strengths based and culturally responsive. Although peoples' journeys through the services vary, services are structured as a graduated pathway, stepping people through progressively lower levels of supports as their needs reduce.

Purpose and significance of the research

This research investigates the longer-term impact of Mission Australia services operating in Cairns and aims to understand the housing outcomes, impact of housing on broader wellbeing, and experience of services focusing primarily on people who have exited the services three or more years ago. Findings from the research provide insights to inform improvements to service design, delivery, and advocacy, to provide better outcomes and tenancy sustainment for the people the services support.

There is very little research in Australia or internationally, that examines the long-term impact on people's housing and overall wellbeing after they leave homelessness services. This study aims to contribute to addressing that gap. A strength of the study is that it looks at outcomes across three homelessness services, where most studies

examine only one program at a time. Although this research does not examine the long-term outcomes for the entire Mission Australia services cohort supported in Cairns, it provides valuable insights for the broader homelessness sector to inform service design, policy and system reform.

The research draws on multiple sources of evidence, including quantitative data analysis establishing a baseline profile of 1,444 people who engaged with the three services between January 2018 and December 2022, existing evaluations and research, and engagement with people with lived experience of the programs and staff. This engagement was underpinned by truth-telling principles to provide deeper context and understanding of participants' experiences.

Key findings

RQ1: What have been the longer-term housing outcomes and change in well-being of people after exiting into stable housing from one or more of Mission Australia's homelessness services in Cairns?

Most people interviewed had sustained long-term independent housing and reported meaningful improvements in health, independence and wellbeing, although affordability and suitability of their housing remained concerns for some

Overall, thirteen out of the fourteen people (94%) interviewed has sustained their housing demonstrating strong outcomes in securing and sustaining long-term housing following program exit. Of those interviewed, one person had a tenancy breakdown however stated that they re-engaged with the programs.



Over half (64%) of the people who have been supported through the three services are in community housing, 14% are in public housing, 14% are in the private rental market, and 7% have returned to support from Mission Australia. Post-exit tenancy durations ranged from one to eight years — a highly positive outcome reflecting the effectiveness of both individual effort and Mission Australia's programs.

Stable housing produced meaningful improvements in health, independence, and quality of life. For some people this was expressed through growing capacity to pursue broader life changes such as exploring employment and volunteering opportunities. For some First Nations interviewees, housing stability also enabled continued expression of culture. While long-term housing outcomes of interviewees were strong overall, some participants raised concerns around housing affordability, suitability of studio-style accommodation, and neighbourhood safety.

RQ2: What have been the housing journeys of people since exit?

Most people interviewed had maintained stable independent housing after exit, whilst a minority moved into more suitable housing with only one tenancy breakdown; interviewees expressed a growing sense of comfort and belonging but acknowledged that it took time to get used to living in a home environment.

Engagement with the program marked a significant turning point in participants' housing journeys. Most maintained stable independent housing after exit, while some moved into properties that better met their support needs. One interviewee experienced a tenancy breakdown but later re-engaged with Douglas House, highlighting the importance of accessible re-engagement pathways. Engagement with Mission Australia's programs was consistently linked to enhanced self-worth and the development of practical skills needed to establish and maintain a tenancy; across interviews, participants also described a growing sense of comfort, belonging and pride in their homes, including through personalising

their spaces with photographs or gardens and valuing the freedom to come and go without the prospect of needing to move on.

When he stopped and said this is going to be your forever home — yeah, I was a bit emotional ... and it's been eight years.

—Interview Participant

Although these accounts indicate progress and recovery from homelessness, many participants also described an initial adjustment period as they became used to living indoors and gradually shifted towards a mindset of stability.

RQ3: What factors have supported and/or hindered peoples housing outcomes?

A range of individual, program, and systemic factors shaped the ability of people supported by Mission Australia to achieve and sustain stable housing.

Trusting staff relationships, holistic case management, cross service collaboration, and cultural safety supported positive outcomes

Program-level factors (including the multidisciplinary Going Places model, trusting and person-centred staff relationships, Indigenous mentor roles, and holistic, strengths-based, trauma-informed case management) played a key role in supporting positive housing outcomes. Strong collaboration both within Mission Australia and with the wider Cairns homelessness sector further strengthened outcomes by enabling timely, coordinated support and consistent care pathways for those supported.

It was one person that gave me a chance, and then it just kicked off. All it takes is a bit of kindness, and you can be where I am pretty much.

—Interview Participant

Limited post-exit support, abrupt program transitions, housing shortages and service gaps hindered long-term stability

At the program level, limited opportunities to build social boundaries, abrupt transitions between programs, and an absence of structured post-exit support undermined tenancy sustainment and wellbeing. At the system level, shortages of affordable and appropriate housing, restrictive public housing settings, and broader service gaps—including limited culturally responsive options for First Nations people—created additional barriers to achieving and sustaining stable housing. Notably, the absence of funding to provide post-exit support remains a wider systems barrier that needs to be addressed to support program level changes.

RQ4: What improvements to service design and delivery could be made to support improved long-term housing outcomes?

Post-exit tenancy sustainment outreach and integrated therapeutic supports are consistently identified as improvements to service design and delivery; increased cultural safety training is also advised to strengthen service delivery

Improving long-term housing outcomes requires three key service enhancements:

- introducing formal post-exit support to help people sustain tenancies, manage social boundaries, and stay connected to community;

- expanding in-house therapeutic supports, including full-time counselling, to address housing, mental health, and complex needs in an integrated way; and
- strengthening cultural safety practice and training to better support First Nations people and reduce the cultural load carried by First Nations staff and Indigenous mentors.

These improvements were consistently identified across interviews with those formerly supported by Mission Australia services, staff focus groups, and existing evidence as critical to closing current service gaps.

There are opportunities to improve data collection at program exit and to strengthen longitudinal evidence on service use and housing pathways

There are notable gaps in data collection and evidence on long-term outcomes, and no systematic mechanisms exist to track people's long-term housing and wellbeing outcomes beyond this report's limited qualitative sample of fourteen interviews. Achieving consistency in exit data collection and considering approaches such as government linked data (used as evidence for comparable services) would provide a more robust, systematic understanding of long-term outcomes across the full cohort of service users.



Woree House communal outdoor courtyard and garden.

Recommendations

The research identifies seven recommendations across three thematic areas including opportunities to strengthen Mission Australia's service design and delivery across its homelessness services delivered in Cairns, advocacy to improve access to housing, and improvements to better understand people's outcomes. Recommendations include actions within Mission Australia's direct remit, recommendations that require support from broader system-level changes, and recommendations directed to the wider housing and homelessness service system.

Recommendations to improve service design and delivery

Recommendation 1: The Queensland Government should fund integrated post-exit tenancy sustainment outreach and therapeutic supports.

Funding permanent features of homelessness service models, including a dedicated outreach role for at least two years after exit to address social isolation, build capacity around social boundaries and support tenancy sustainment, alongside therapeutic support across the three homelessness services in Cairns to improve access and engagement.

Recommendation 2: Mission Australia should increase its cultural safety training and ongoing cultural supervision for all staff in these services.

While the research finds that Mission Australia has strong foundations in place for culturally safe service delivery, the recommendation responds to the finding that the Cultural Safety Framework was inconsistently implemented, there was limited staff training and a need to strengthen service delivery.

Recommendations to improve access to housing

Recommendation 3: Governments should increase housing options to strengthen housing pathways in Cairns, including:

- Supported housing options, including options suitable for people with children
- Public and affordable housing options, including options suitable for families.

Housing shortages in Cairns, including limited public housing and a lack of supportive housing, constrain housing pathways and restrict access to appropriate long-term housing, particularly for couples, families, victim-survivors of family and domestic violence with children, young people leaving care, and those with high health needs. Recommendation 3 responds to this by identifying the need for additional housing options in Cairns that are appropriate and accessible for the cohorts served by homelessness services.



Recommendation 4: The Queensland Government should reform public housing policy settings to improve access to housing. Areas for reform include:

- Raise income eligibility thresholds for public housing so people unable to afford private rental properties can access secure housing
- Remove custody-related reapplication requirements for public housing to reduce delays in access to housing
- Reintroduce tenancy reviews to ensure larger public housing properties are made available for families
- Implement culturally responsive allocation processes and tenancy rules that prioritise family connection, reunification and healing (e.g. consideration of future households needs including size and suitability).

The research finds that existing public housing policy settings compound housing scarcity, further limiting or delaying people's access to public housing. Recommendation 4 identifies the key areas where advocacy is needed to address these settings.

Recommendations to better understand outcomes

Recommendation 5: Mission Australia should investigate whether recent changes to service delivery provide sufficient support for people transitioning between Douglas House and Woree Supported Accommodation.

Many interviewees identified a need for increased support during and after the transition between Douglas House and Woree, to help address social isolation associated with the increased independence this transition brings. In recent years, staff have supported social inclusion by helping people engage in social groups and activities after moving to Woree. However, further evidence is needed to understand the effectiveness of this approach, and whether additional changes, such as increased step-down support or transition plans with a greater focus on social inclusion, are needed to strengthen the transition process.

Recommendation 6: Mission Australia should update program reporting to ensure standardised data collection for housing outcomes at program exit across the three homelessness services operating in Cairns.

Housing outcomes at exit are reported differently for Going Places as compared to Woree and Douglas House. This recommendation addresses this by calling for program reporting fields to be updated so that housing outcome at exit is recorded consistently across all three homelessness services in Cairns, which will provide greater transparency over people's outcomes, regardless of their reason for exit.

Recommendation 7: The Queensland Government should initiate and participate in longitudinal data linkage of existing cross sector data to understand people's homelessness journeys, service use and long-term outcomes.

There is currently limited evidence on the long-term housing and wellbeing outcomes for people supported through Mission Australia's homelessness services in Cairns. Drawing on approaches used to understand long-term outcomes in similar homelessness programs, this recommendation identifies an opportunity to systematically analyse existing government held data to build a clearer picture of these long-term outcomes.



1. Introduction

Mission Australia has commissioned AHURI to understand the long-term impact of Mission Australia's homelessness services operating in Cairns to provide insights that can help inform and improve service design and delivery. This report investigates the housing journeys and the overall impact of services operating in Cairns, focusing primarily on people who had exited from a Mission Australia homelessness service three or more years ago. The research primarily draws on interviews and focus groups conducted with people formerly supported by Mission Australia homelessness services in Cairns, and Mission Australia staff. It also includes analysis of program data, existing program documentation, evidence and evaluations.

1.1 About the services

Mission Australia operates three interrelated homelessness and housing services in Cairns, with funding from the Queensland Department of Housing and Public Works. The services support predominantly First Nations people experiencing chronic homelessness, usually rough sleeping, and often with co-existing challenges such as trauma, mental and/or physical health issues, and disability. Staff practice across all three services is designed to be recovery oriented, trauma informed, strengths based and culturally responsive.

Going Places Street to Home Homeless Program is a multidisciplinary street-to-home program combining clinical health services with coordinated case management to support people who have been sleeping rough in Cairns to move into stable, long-term and sustainable housing. Case management support is provided for people over 16 years of age. This program supports people by helping them to sustain accommodation first and providing wrap-around support to assist with other needs.

Douglas House is a 22-bed supported accommodation facility designed to provide people with accommodation and intensive case management support for up to 24 months. It acts as a stepping stone for tenants to develop the skills they need to move sustainably into independent housing.

Woree Supported Accommodation (Woree) provides a transition (primarily out of Douglas House or other temporary accommodation) into Mission Australia social housing. It is equipped to provide supported housing with individualised case management for 20 adults aged 18 and over, for a period of up to 18 months.

While journeys through the services vary according to individual need, the services are intended to provide, where appropriate, a pathway through progressively lower levels of support as peoples' support needs reduce.

1.2 Purpose of the research

The purpose of the research is to understand the longer-term impact of Mission Australia services operating in Cairns, namely Going Places Street to Home, Douglas House, and Woree Supported Accommodation. The research aims to understand the housing outcomes, impact of housing on broader wellbeing, and experience of services for people who had exited the services, with recruitment prioritising those who exited three or more years ago, while also including some participants who exited more recently. Findings from the research provide insights to inform improvements to service design, delivery and advocacy, to provide better outcomes and tenancy sustainment for people supported by Mission Australia's homelessness services in Cairns.

The research is guided by four questions:

RQ1: What have been the longer-term housing outcomes and change in the well-being of people after exiting into stable housing from one or more of Mission Australia's homelessness services in Cairns?

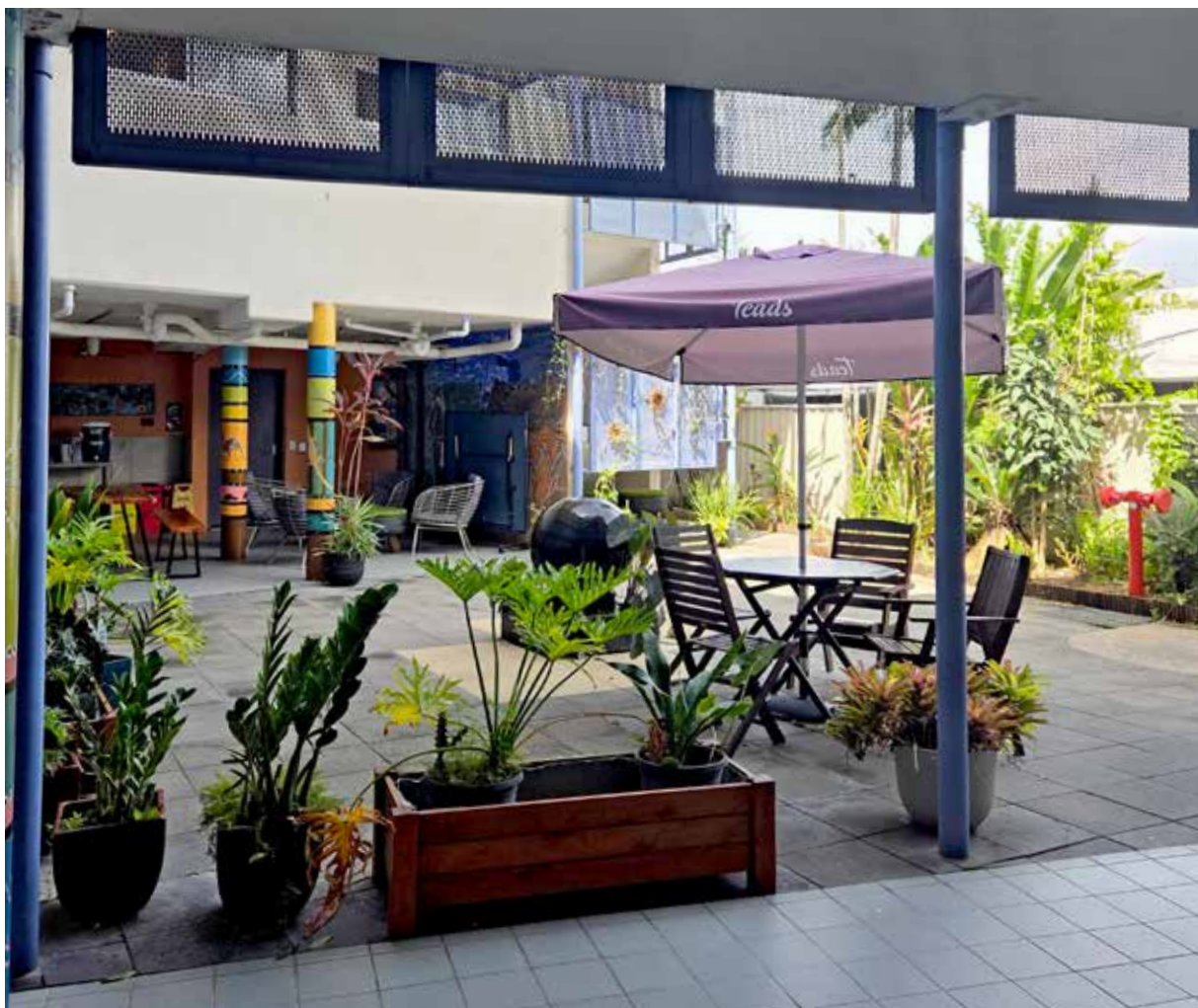
RQ2: What have been the housing journeys of people since exit?

RQ3: What factors have supported and/or hindered people's housing outcomes?

RQ4: What improvements to service design, delivery and advocacy could be made to support improved long-term housing outcomes?

1.3 Significance of the research

There is very little research in Australia or internationally, that examines the long-term impact on people's housing and overall wellbeing after they leave homelessness services. This study addresses that gap. A strength of the study is that it looks at outcomes across three homelessness services, where most studies examine only one program at a time. Although this research does not examine the long-term outcomes of the entire Mission Australia services cohort in Cairns, it provides valuable insights for the broader homelessness sector to inform service design, delivery and advocacy for policy and system reform.



Outdoor communal courtyard at Douglas House.

2. Method

This research primarily takes a qualitative approach to explore the long-term housing outcomes and wellbeing of people formerly supported by Mission Australia's homelessness services in Cairns. Analysis of program data and a review of previous evaluations contribute baseline and contextual information.

The research comprises two stages:

- **Baseline analysis:** review of previous evaluation results and program administrative data to identify the outcomes and impacts of each of the services that have been measured and captured previously.
- **Qualitative analysis of housing outcomes and journeys:** interviews with people formerly supported by Mission Australia's services in Cairns to understand their housing journeys and outcomes. In addition, two online focus groups with case workers.

Table 1 presents the analytical framework, detailing the housing and wellbeing outcomes examined, the corresponding data sources, and the methods used to address the research questions. This table is used to inform the information being analysed across the information sources, and how the findings and analysis are used to answer the research questions.

Table 1: Framework for analysis, research questions and data sources

Research Question	Framework for analysis		Data source
RQ1: What have been the longer-term housing outcomes and change in the wellbeing of people after exiting into stable housing from one or more of Mission Australia's homelessness services in Cairns?	Appropriateness of housing in terms of: • Affordability • Safety • Quality • Location • Suitability	Self-reported changes to wellbeing since housed: • Physical health • Emotional wellbeing • Social connections • Participation in employment or volunteering • Expression of culture	• Interviews
RQ2: What have been the housing journeys of people since exit?	• Housing tenure at exit and current (e.g. public housing, community housing, private rental) • Security of tenure/mobility • Confidence in tenancy management	How people feel about living in a long-term housing tenure	• Interviews
RQ3: What factors have supported and/or hindered peoples housing outcomes?	Identification of enablers and barriers to post-exit housing and wellbeing outcomes across: • Mission Australia program delivery • External services and supports • Broader housing market system, settings and policies		• Existing evidence • Interviews • Focus Groups
RQ4: What improvements to service design, delivery and advocacy could be made to support improved long-term housing outcomes?			

Source: authors

2.1 Baseline analysis

The baseline analysis reviewed existing information available on the programs, including results from previous evaluations, and information collected from people when they exited a program.

2.1.1 Administrative data

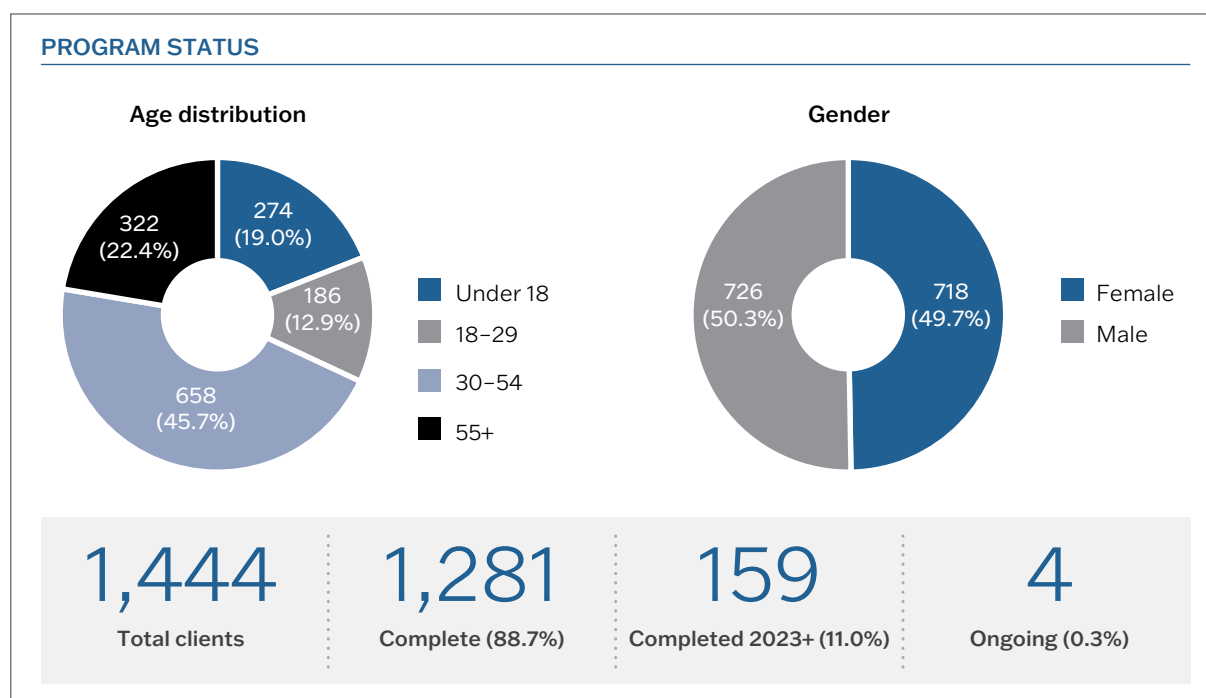
Analysis of de-identified administrative program data established a baseline of housing outcomes for people across Douglas House and Woree¹ (at the time of program exit) against which longer term housing outcomes from interviews can be contextualised and considered. The baseline analysis provides an overview of people supported and their outcomes, based on data provided by Mission Australia over a five-year period, from January 2018 – December 2022. The timeframe of the baseline analysis captures the cohort across the three programs to broadly align with the interview sample of people formerly supported by Mission Australia which targeted those who had exited services three or more years prior.

Demographic profile

Across the five-year period, a total of 1,444 people were engaged in a program, 88.7% had completed their support, 11% were still receiving support beyond the five-year timeframe but had exited the program, and 3% were still receiving support at the time of research commencement. Most were aged 30-54 years, there is an almost equal gender split, and First Nations people made up 75.5% of people who received support (Figure 1).

Most people supported were in Going Places (83.7%), followed by Douglas House (11.1%) and Woree (5.2%) (Figure 2), reflecting limited program intake for programs providing supported accommodation (Table 2).

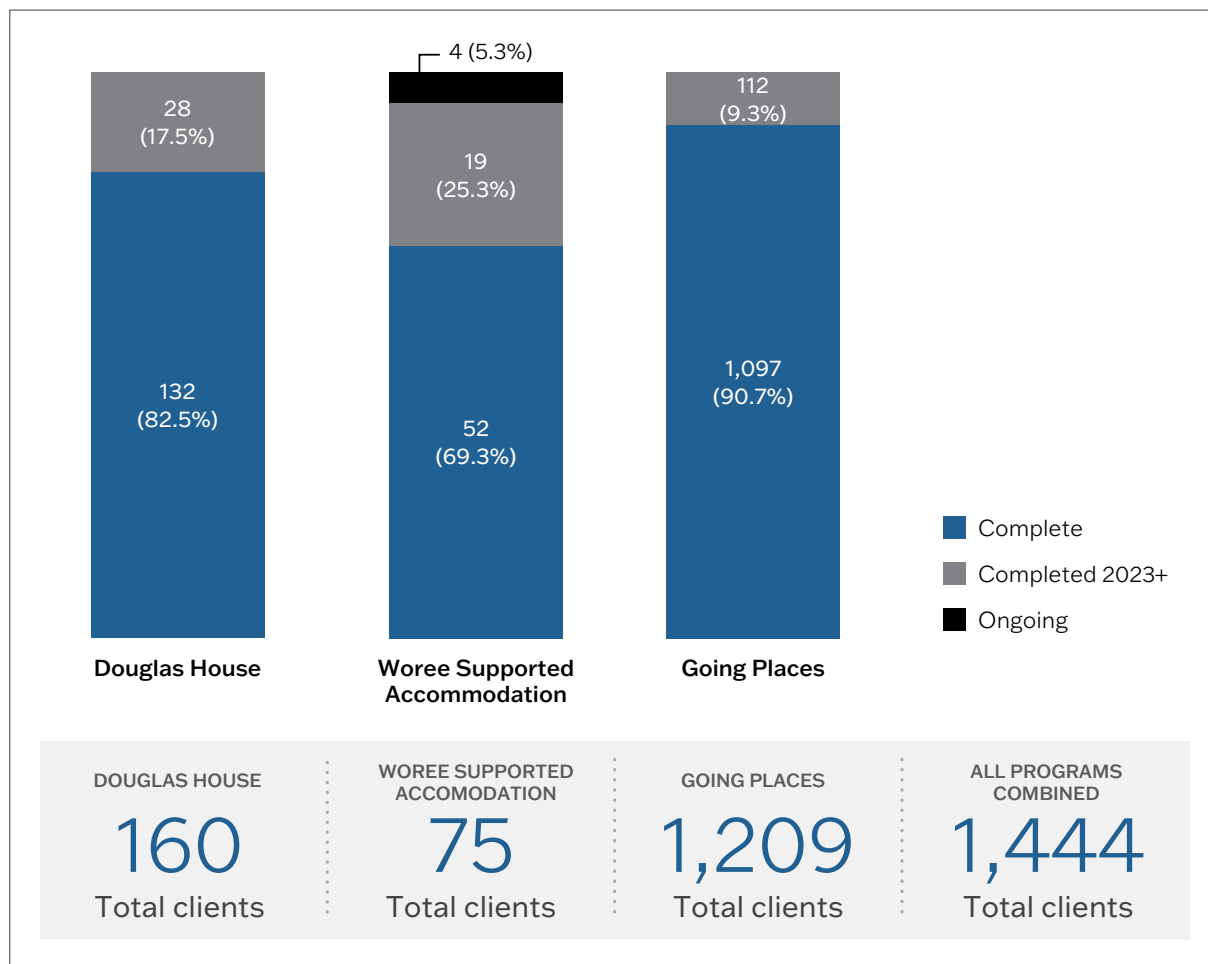
Figure 1: Cohort demographic overview across three programs



Source: authors

¹ Housing outcome at exit was not available for Going Places.

Figure 2: Clients per program Jan 2018 - Dec 2022



Source: authors

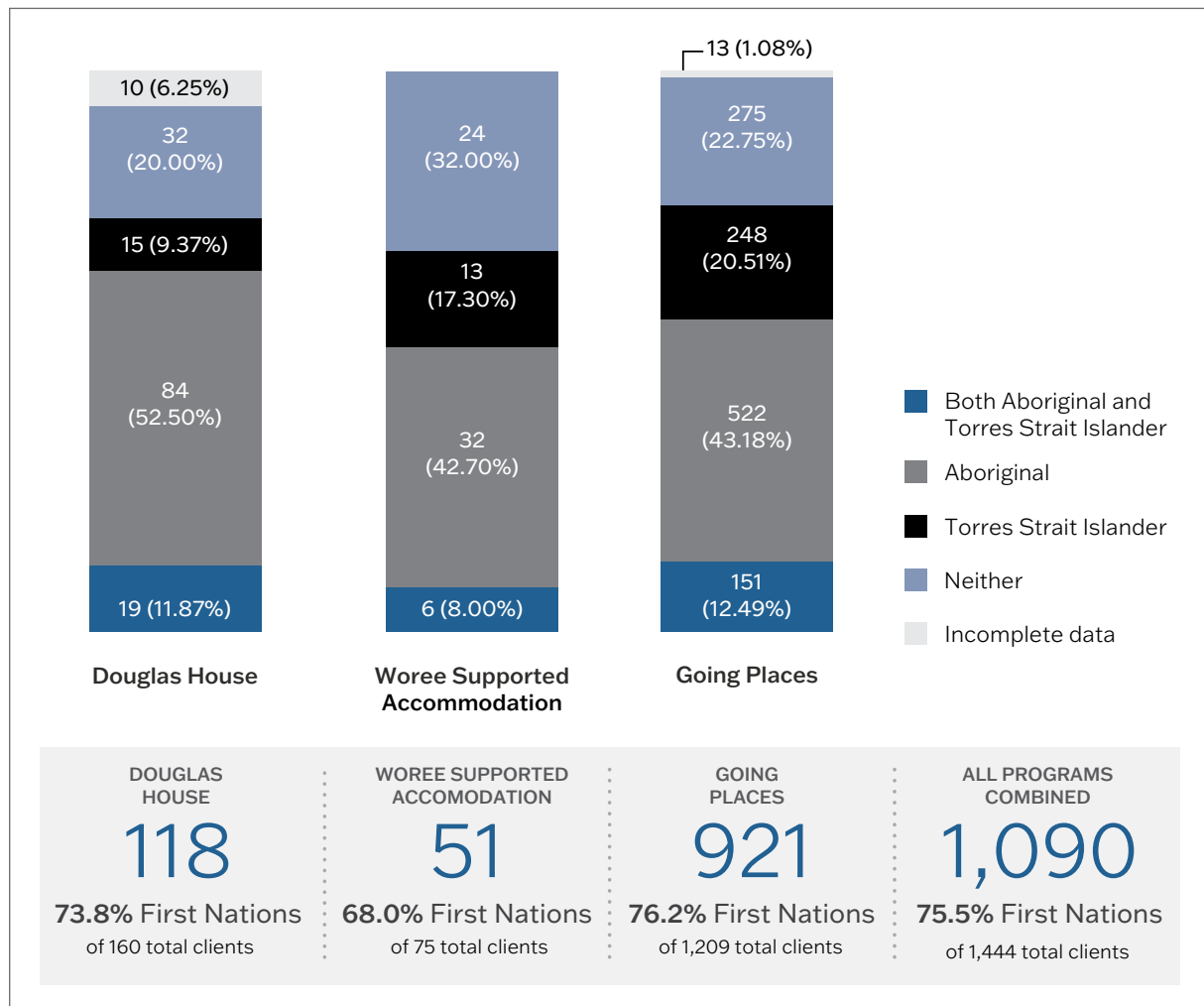
Table 2: Program data analysed

Program	Timeframe	Data item
Going Places	January 2018 – December 2022	• Support period commencement and completion
Douglas House		• Age
Woree		• Cultural background
		• Reason for closing
		• Housing tenure upon exit

Source: authors

Most people identified as having First Nations cultural background, though proportions varied by program (Figure 3). This reflects how need for intensive homelessness support by First Nations communities in Cairns largely outweighs that of other communities. The proportion of First Nations community members accessing the services is reflective of a larger social issue around support for and understanding of First Nations communities in Cairns as a result of on-going systemic injustices experienced.

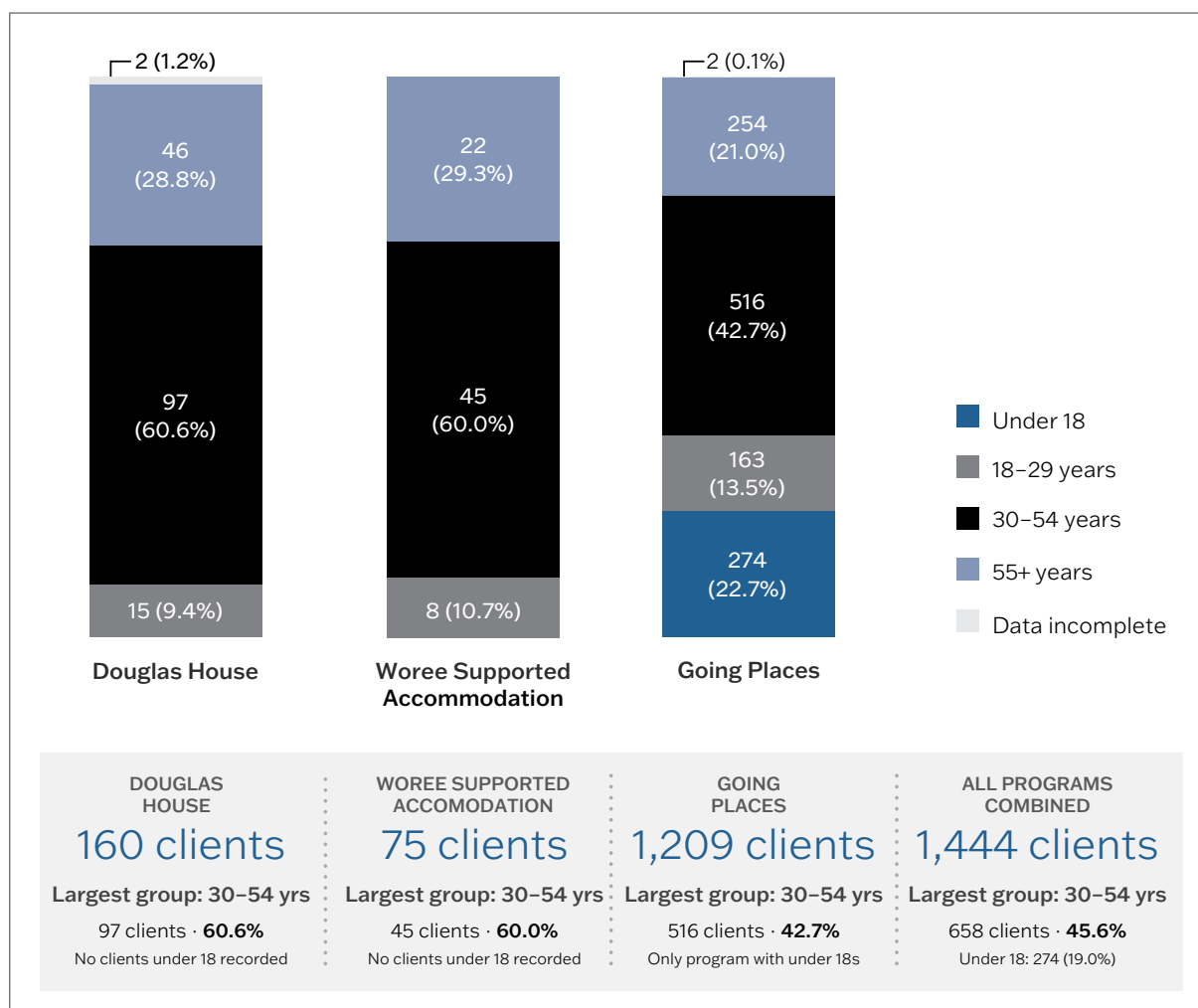
Figure 3: Cultural background of clients across the three programs



Source: authors

The five-year cohort comprised of mostly people aged 30 – 54 (45.6%). Going Places included a large portion (22.7%) of people aged under 18 (Figure 4), which reflects the eligibility restrictions for access to Douglas House and Woree, and the inclusion of children presenting for support to Going Places either alone, or as part of a presenting unit (e.g. with their parent or caregiver).

Figure 4: Age of clients across programs Jan 2018 - Dec 2022



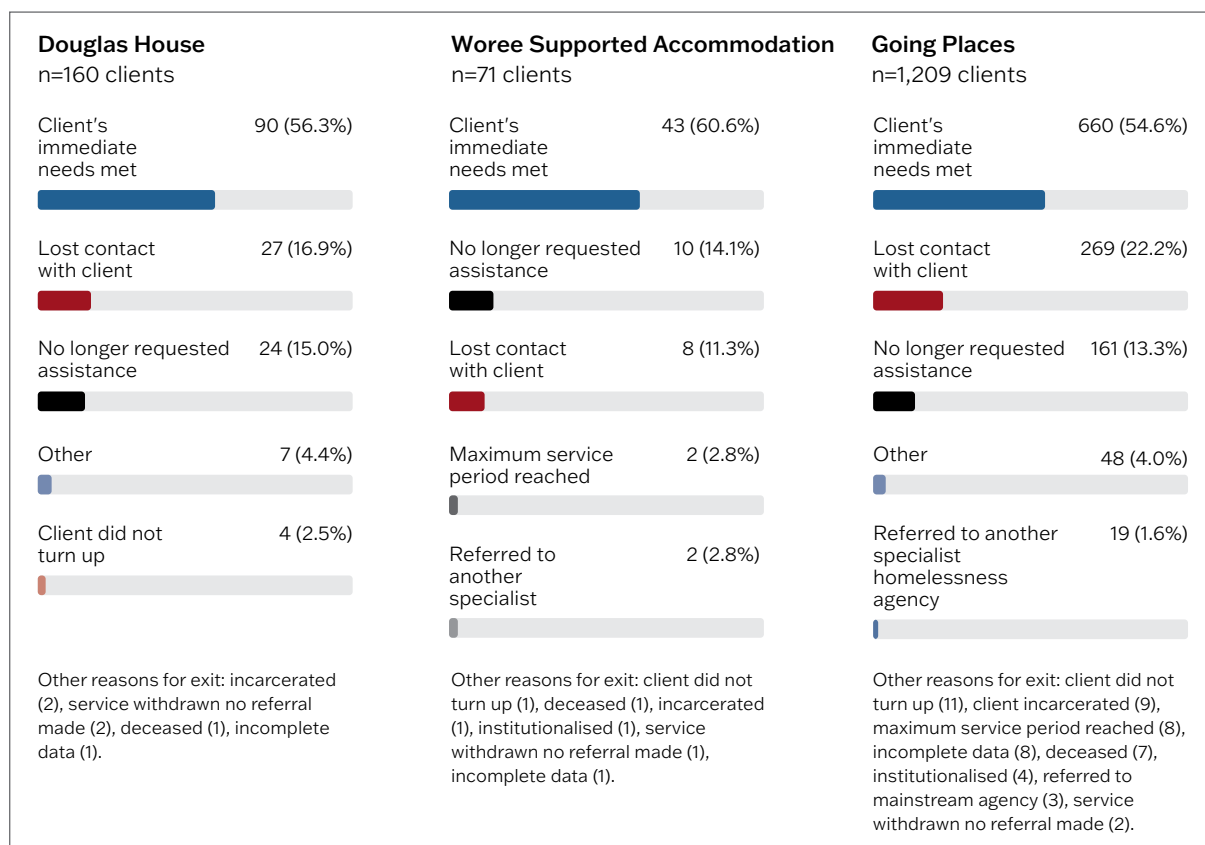
Source: authors

Reasons for exit

Most people exited the programs because their immediate needs were met: 56.3% Douglas House, 60.6% Woree and 54.6% Going Places. This indicates strong positive outcomes but does not always mean that housing was secured for a client (Figure 5).

Lost contact was the second most recorded exit reason for Going Places clients (22.2%) and Douglas House (16.9%), which reflects the transiency of this cohort. For those who progressed to Woree, the second most common exit reason was the client no longer requesting assistance, showing their confidence in moving to independence.

Figure 5: Reasons for exit



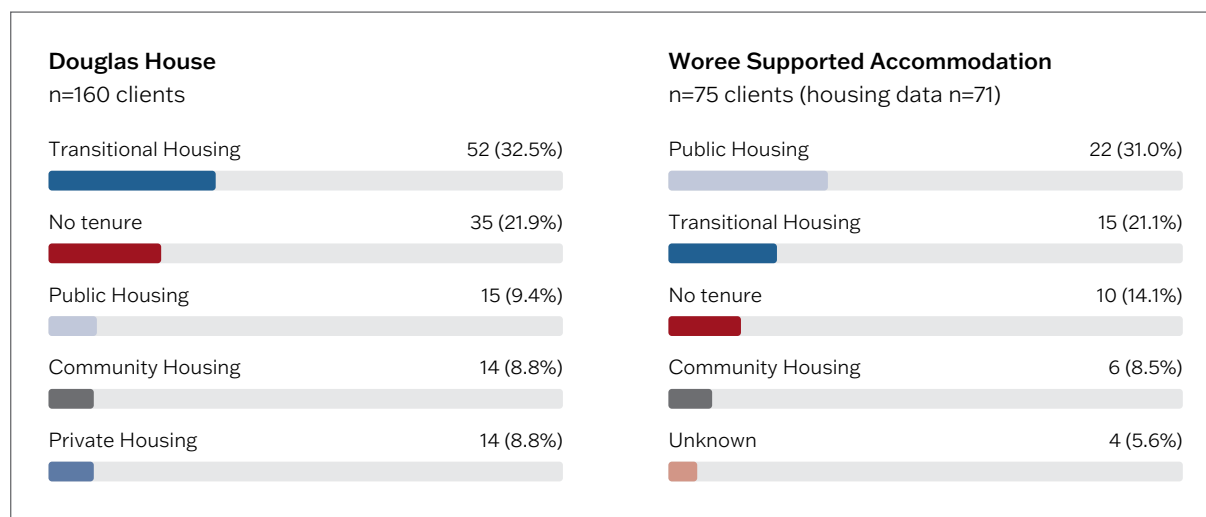
Source: authors

Note: Across the programs, 4 clients with ongoing support periods have "reasons for closing" listed — these have been excluded from the above figures.

Housing tenure at exit

As housing tenure upon exit for Going Places is reported separately via monthly SRS status updates, data about housing tenure upon exit was only available for Douglas House and Woree (Figure 6).

Transitional housing was the most common housing type for people exiting Douglas House (32.5%), compared to public housing for people exiting Woree (31%). This pattern reflects a common housing pathway where people at Douglas House typically transition into Woree or other transitional housing arrangements, and on to independent housing. Community housing exits were similar across both programs (just under 9%).

Figure 6: Housing tenure at exit: Douglas House and Woree Supported Accommodation

Source: authors

Note: Across programs, 4 people from Woree are recorded as having exits into Woree – these are recorded as data incomplete.

2.1.2 Review of existing evidence

A review of existing evaluation reports identifies the outcomes and impacts of each of the services previously captured, and issues or themes relevant to the present study (see Appendix 1, Table 3). Housing and wellbeing outcomes measured across existing evidence focus on outcomes achieved during program engagement and upon exit, and do not capture longer-term outcomes for people supported by Mission Australia homelessness services in Cairns.

Evaluations of Going Places and Douglas House indicate both programs achieve housing retention among people who access housing, with public and community housing the most predominant housing accessed. However, a notable portion did not secure housing at exit, and longer-term housing outcomes are largely absent (Galloway 2017; Parsell et al 2019). Program participation is associated with client-reported improvements in control over who enters their housing, increased independent living skills, and improvements to overall wellbeing such as social engagement and wellbeing. However, such improvements noted are based on impact measurement surveys that capture people's experiences of housing and wellbeing upon entry and at exit from programs, rather than long-term impacts. Findings must also be interpreted with caution as they are based on a small sample size (Mission Australia 2025a; 2025b). See Appendix 1, Table 3 for an overview of existing evidence.

2.1.3 Review of Mission Australia cultural safety frameworks

A review of Mission Australia's cultural safety frameworks provided researchers with a baseline understanding of how services are intended to be delivered to be culturally safe and appropriate.

2.2 Qualitative analysis of housing outcomes and journeys

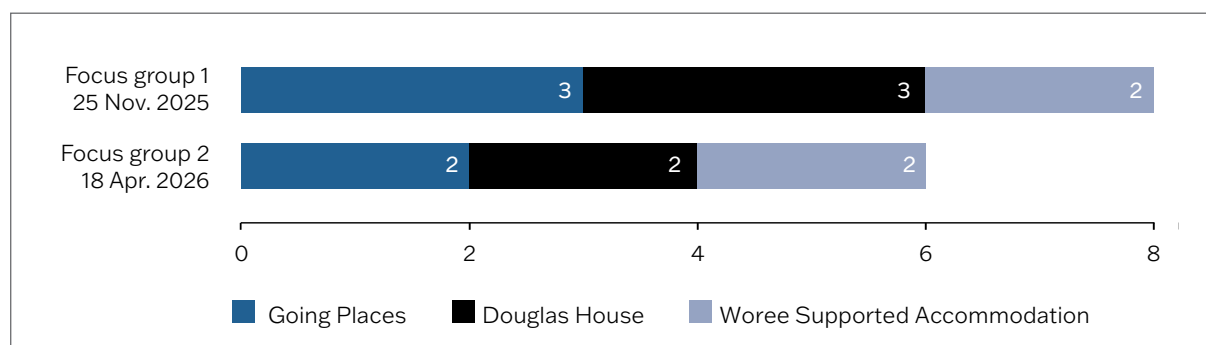
This primary component of the research involved interviews with people formerly supported by Mission Australia. Interviews sought in depth information on people's housing journeys and outcomes following exit from the Mission Australia homelessness services. Two online focus groups with case workers added contextual information and tested research findings.

2.2.1 Case worker focus groups

The evaluation conducted two focus groups with current case workers in three Mission Australia services. In the first focus group, which had 8 participants, AHURI researchers gathered participants' views on the factors that impact housing outcomes during service engagement and observations of what impacts people's longer-term housing outcomes.

For the second focus group, which had 6 participants, AHURI researchers re-engaged with focus group participants after having interviewed people formerly supported by Mission Australia. Researchers used this focus group to test preliminary research findings with the case workers to help shape recommendations. Focus groups lasted between 60 and 90 minutes, were recorded with participants' permission and transcribed and anonymised for thematic analysis.

Figure 7: Case worker focus groups



Source: authors

2.2.2 Former client interviews

AHURI conducted 14 interviews with people who were formerly supported by at least one of the three Mission Australia services (Figure 8). Interviews utilised a truth telling approach and narrative interview techniques. Truth telling shifts the definition of evidence, makes space for marginalised voices, and produces knowledge that is accountable to the communities it represents. For First Nations participants, First Nations researcher Shaun Middlebrook's use of the truth telling facilitated open, deep, constructive engagement by both First Nations participants and non-First Nations people as equals (Barolsky 2023). Researchers used narrative interview techniques to prompt the participant to tell their story about their experience of Mission Australia services and housing journey after exit. This involved the following steps:

1. **Preparation:** the interviewer explains the process and ensures informed consent.
2. **Initiation:** the interviewer asks the initial open-ended question inviting the participant to share about their housing journey since exiting the Mission Australia service and what has impacted their journey
3. **Narrative phase:** the participant tells their story; the interviewer listens with use of minimal prompts.

AHURI researchers worked with Mission Australia staff to identify and contact potential interview participants. Where contact remained, caseworkers invited people by phone or in person to express interest in an interview with AHURI. Recruitment prioritised people who had moved across all three services, while also seeking participants with more limited engagement across the services. Mission Australia staff or AHURI researchers then completed a screening process, depending on participant preference, to gather background information and interview preferences. AHURI researchers contacted participants at least two weeks before the interview to build rapport, provide information and answer questions.

Interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes each and were conducted in-person or over the phone. All interviewees received a verbal briefing of the participant information sheet and were asked whether they provided verbal consent to participate and have the interview recorded. This verbal briefing was used to avoid embarrassment for any individuals experiencing literacy issues. Participants were given a \$50 voucher in recognition of their contribution to the research. Where consent was provided, interviews were recorded and transcribed, or researcher notes were used to assist with thematic analysis.

Ethics clearance for this component of the research was received from the Swinburne University Human Research Ethics Committee (HC8884).

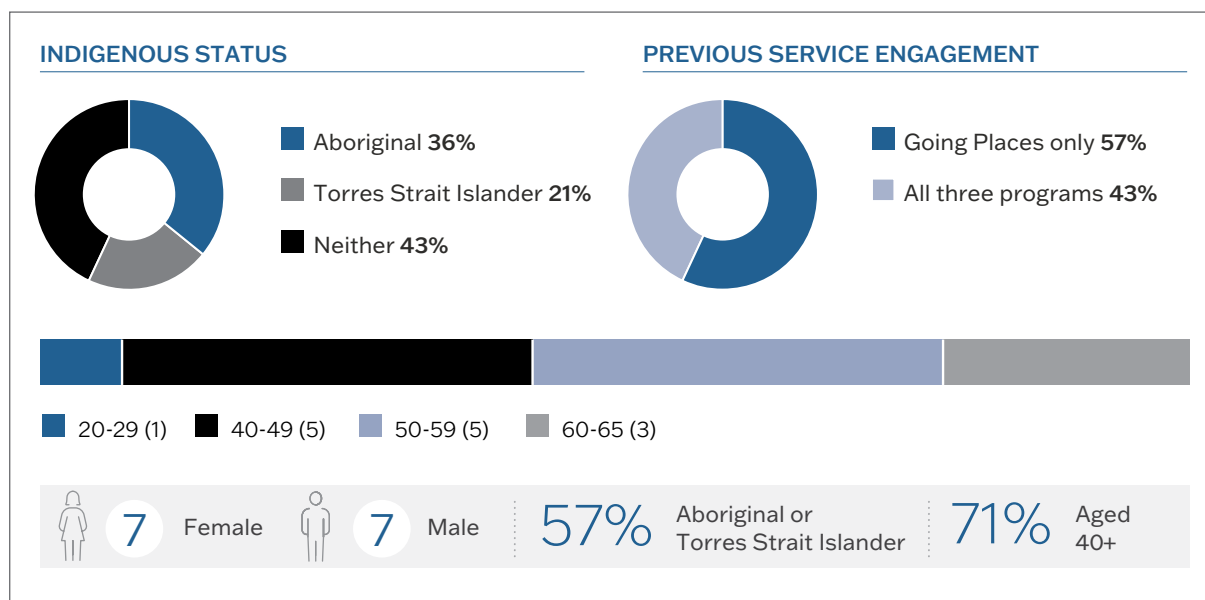
2.2.3 Sampling and interviewee demographic characteristics

Purposive sampling was used to recruit interview participants. Most participants (71.4%, n=10) had last been supported by Mission Australia homelessness services in Cairns three or more years before the interview, while the remaining participants had received support more recently. One interview participant had returned to support from Mission Australia; across the remaining participants, the median time since support received was 5.7 years, and the average was 3.8 years.

Interview participants were broadly representative of service users overall (see 2.1.1) with an equal gender split, approximately one fifth (21%) identifying as Torres Strait Islander, and approximately half falling within the ages of 30-54. Compared to service users overall, interview participants included higher proportions of those aged 55+ (22.5% and 42.9% respectively) and those who do not identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (22.9% and 43% respectively). And compared to service users overall, interview participants included slightly lower portions of those identifying as Aboriginal (44% and 36% respectively), and those aged between 18-29 (12.9% and 7.1% respectively). Program data shows that 57% (n=6) were supported through the pathway of all three Mission Australia services, and 57% (n=8) were supported by Going Places.

Comparison of service interactions to the service users overall is not available due to data limitations in linking peoples' journeys across the three services from data provided. These difficulties are in part due to the contractual requirement to report service data into an external database (i.e. data is not captured in Mission Australia's central record management system).

Figure 8: Interview participants



Interview transcripts and notes were de-identified and analysed for key themes, against the research questions. For First Nations participants, a First Nations researcher led this analysis in discussion with the research team.

2.3 Research limitations

Baseline (administrative) program data (at exit from a service) were incomplete for some services and time periods, which limited the consistency and comparability of baseline outcome measures across programs. Data completeness and consistency varied across programs over time, with housing at exit measures not uniformly captured, and some years containing missing data. Differences in data collection practices between services limited direct comparability of outcomes particularly for longitudinal analysis.

People previously supported were not required to maintain contact with Mission Australia following program exit, nor to provide updated contact details. This significantly constrained recruitment, as many potential participants could not be reached due to outdated records. As a result, the sample was drawn from individuals who were contactable through existing records and networks, and who agreed to participate.

The interview sample comprised primarily individuals who were housed at the time of data collection. Consequently, the findings under-represent the post-exit experiences of people who returned to homelessness - noting that one research participant had re-engaged with a service following tenancy breakdown. Consultation with Mission Australia staff indicate that those people who either exit a service with no housing outcome or who go on to experience housing instability and homelessness typically return to Mission Australia services, engage with other community services, or relocate from Cairns. 2016-2026 data from Douglas House and Woree shows 22.09% of people engaged with the services have had more than one tenancy which is indicative of repeat support.

The findings, particularly those relating to research questions 1 and 2 (RQ1 and RQ2) only reflect the experiences of those interviewed, the majority of whom achieved stable housing outcomes. These findings should not be generalised to all people supported through Mission Australia services in Cairns.

3. Longer-term housing outcomes and wellbeing after exiting into stable independent housing

Overall, Mission Australia's programs supported most people interviewed to achieve and sustain long-term independent tenancies of one to eight years duration. Though housing was retained, people expressed challenges with housing affordability in the private rental market, dwelling suitability and neighbourhood safety. Having stable independent housing produced meaningful positive changes in people's sense of self, safety and quality of life. This included better health, greater independence and freedom, an increased sense of security, a growing capacity to explore culture, and more capacity to seek out employment and volunteering opportunities. While interviewees achieved largely positive housing and wellbeing outcomes, further evidence is needed to understand the long-term housing and wellbeing outcomes of those who do not exit into housing and those who lost their tenancies soon after program exit.

This section addresses the first research question by examining the longer-term housing outcomes and wellbeing changes reported by people after exiting Mission Australia's homelessness services in Cairns. Longer term housing outcomes include where they are housed, housing suitability, affordability and quality. Impact on wellbeing include self-reported changes to physical health, emotional wellbeing, expression of culture, participation in employment or volunteering and social connection as a result of housing stability. Evidence primarily utilises findings from fourteen interviews conducted with people formerly supported by Mission Australia.

3.1 Most people interviewed have sustained long-term independent housing but with varied experiences around suitability, quality, affordability and safety

The thing is, I've been in the place, come this October it will be eight years. – Interview Participant

Interviews asked people about their long-term housing outcomes and showed that over half (64%) are in community housing, 14% are in public housing, 14% are in the private rental market, and 7% have returned to support from Mission Australia. Overall, 94% (n=13) of those interviewed had sustained their housing demonstrating strong outcomes in securing and sustaining long-term housing following program exit. Post-exit tenancy durations ranged from one to eight years. This highly positive outcome reflects the effectiveness of both individual effort and Mission Australia's programs.

I think it was maybe 12 months, maybe 12 and a half months [until] I ended up with my unit where I am now. And I've been here like three years now ... - Interview Participant

One participant had returned to Douglas House following eviction from their Community Housing property, though this was not identified as an immediate post-exit experience (see section 4.1).

Interviewees generally reported that their current accommodation met their immediate needs. However, dissatisfaction with studio-style living arrangements was common, with interviewees describing these as restrictive. In one case, confined studio accommodation was identified as triggering due to previous trauma. Most interviewees expressed a preference for accommodation with a separate bedroom, citing anticipated benefits to their mental health, personal well-being, and capacity for personal growth. Some interviewees also expressed a desire for multiple bedrooms in future housing, both to accommodate visiting family and to prepare for the possibility of reuniting with their children.

The fact that I'm not living in a bedroom, for me, it really impacts my mental health not having a bedroom. It's not good for your sleep hygiene. It's not good to have your bed as a couch or as anything else but your bed. But it's impossible to have that space that's just sleeping when you live in a studio apartment. – Interview Participant

It's just a little studio apartment ... It's not very big and I do have confinement issues... But it's my little place in the world. I have a door that locks and a roof over my head and I can sit on the balcony and still watch the world go by. – Interview Participant

Maybe in the future ... maybe my kids might come up, if that was the case, I'd probably look to get a bigger place, you know? – Interview Participant

Most interviewees described the affordability of their housing as manageable, citing automated rent deductions as useful, and were generally able to meet essential living costs such as food and utilities. Some interviewees noted it was manageable because they did not spend money on things like alcohol. Affordability emerged as an ongoing concern for some, with one interviewee describing the ongoing difficulty balancing rental payments with the cost of meals and another individual in a private rental reporting a heightened risk of homelessness due to continual rent increases since the COVID-19 period.

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. – Interview Participant

It's just been taken care of from day one. So, it's a much [easier] — even the electricity gets taken. So, whatever's left, that's what you get. – Interview Participant

The quality of accommodation varied considerably, ranging from modern, well-maintained properties to older dwellings requiring ongoing maintenance. Some interviewees reported unresolved maintenance issues and a perceived lack of responsiveness from the Department of Housing. Others acknowledged quality concerns but expressed reluctance to raise them, citing gratitude for having secure housing. Almost all interviewees raised concerns about the absence of air conditioning, with some noting that being able to regulate the temperature in their home was important for managing their health conditions.

My aircon's a bit broken, so I went out to real estate [to see] if they can do something about the aircon ... Because I'm diabetic, I get huge hyperhidrosis, I have like 10 showers a day. – Interview participant

Honestly, if you've been homeless, it doesn't matter what it looks like... you've got a roof over your head. – Interview participant

Proximity to services, transport and city centres was broadly valued with several interviewees noting access to a good bus route, being close to the city, or being close to hospital and support services.

Interviewees in properties fitted with security cameras, external gates, and secure entry systems reported a stronger sense of personal safety. However, neighbourhood safety was a significant and recurring concern across the cohort. Many interviewees described feeling unsafe both within their homes and in the surrounding neighbourhood. Common issues included anti-social behaviour from neighbouring residents, transient individuals, and a high presence of drugs and alcohol. Theft and unmet health needs within the community were identified as contributing factors, with some interviewees noting that housing providers do not adequately consider who they place together and expressed a desire for additional support for neighbouring tenants with complex needs.

I feel safe because there's CCTV. And we have like a front gate locking system, so you can't get in there unless you have like the little round thing to make the elevator beep. And I've got a front door key. And then there's two elevators, and then there's cameras on every level, so I feel very safe where I am. – Interview Participant

The neighbourhood is not right, it's the people who came after who they put in housing. Drugs coming and going, and there are needles in the garden and all that sort of stuff. – Interview Participant

3.2 Housing stability creates the foundation for improved overall wellbeing, increased confidence with social boundaries and exploring employment and volunteering opportunities

Improvements to wellbeing varied significantly across interviewees, reflecting the diversity of their circumstances and histories represented in those interviewed. A consistent finding was that stable housing produced meaningful, positive changes in participants' sense of self, safety, and quality of life. Post exit, interviewees described improvements in overall well-being such as improved health (e.g. eating better, sleeping better, reduced substance use), greater independence and freedom, improved mental health, a sense of pride and ownership in their homes and progress in recovery from homelessness. Some clearly expressed increased feelings of security and a growing capacity to pursue broader life changes. Engagement with Mission Australia's programs was consistently linked to enhanced self-worth and the development of practical skills needed to establish and maintain a tenancy.

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. – Interview Participant

I am very proud of where I am compared to where I was, not only three years ago, but even compared to ten years ago. – Interview Participant

I just eat really well and take care of myself a lot better than I ever have actually, so it's pretty good. – Interview Participant

Interviewee: "...cooking, baking and cleaning. Yeah, I loved that. I was getting more motivated since I've been [at Douglas House]"

Interviewer: "And now you feel confident in your house?"

Interviewee: "yeah...my favourite thing to cook is bolognaise and curry prawn."

Several interviewees reported increased confidence to explore employment and volunteer opportunities. The support provided has also fostered a renewed desire to reconnect with family and engage in social activities. Housing stability was identified as a key enabler of healthy boundaries, providing the space necessary to heal from the experiences of homelessness.

I want to get into my studies now ... I want to [work] with Communities and get into working. – Interview Participant

3.3 For some interviewees, housing stability enabled continued expression of culture

For First Nations interviewees, achieving housing security enabled continued expression of culture. They spoke of being able to cook Johnny Cakes and the importance of sharing that with friends and family, how having stability in their life has created the space to be open to exploring culture, and wanting to be involved in work that connected them with community. Housing stability was identified as a foundational condition that enabled this cultural reconnection, which interviewees described as a meaningful and important aspect of their broader recovery and well-being.

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. – Interview Participant

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. – Interview Participant

When asked whether housing stability had increased their interest in exploring their own history and culture, one participant indicated that they were now interested in doing so.

Yeah, I've always wanted to learn about my culture because ...we never really knew where it came from in my family. I don't know what my land is, I don't know the language, I don't know the culture ... But I would say yeah, I am, but it's just I don't know how to go about it. – Interview Participant

3.4 Further evidence is needed to understand the longer-term outcomes of people who did not retain their post-exit tenancy or who did not have a post-exit tenancy

While most people interviewed for the research experienced positive long-term housing outcomes resulting in improvements to their wellbeing, the research did not engage with many individuals who subsequently lost their tenancies and did not engage with any individuals who did not exit into housing. In focus groups, Mission Australia staff identified that many people lose their tenancy within 18 months of exit. Challenges include not having control of who comes into their home which puts tenancies at risk, and environments people live in not being conducive to positive change. Further evidence is needed to understand the longer-term housing and wellbeing outcomes for this group of people.

4. Housing journeys since program exit

Most interviewees had sustained stable housing after exiting the program, with 13 of 14 remaining in independent long-term housing. Stable housing supported a growing sense of comfort, belonging and recovery, with many people demonstrating the process of personalising their homes as an important marker of progress. While one person experienced tenancy breakdown and returned to Douglas House for support, this highlighted the importance of accessible pathways back into assistance when needed. Those with long histories of homelessness or recurrent homelessness recognised that the feeling of having a sense of home could take years to settle into.

This section addresses the second research question by investigating the housing journeys of people since they exited Mission Australia homelessness programs and moved into their own long-term housing. Evidence for this research question draws on the experiences shared by people previously supported by Mission Australia homelessness services in Cairns, who were interviewed for their research. Housing journeys includes both where people have lived since exit to the time of the interview, and information that people shared about their experiences of 'home' since program exit.

4.1 Most interviewees have retained a stable housing tenure since exit

Interviews asked people about their long-term housing outcomes. Most people interviewed had very stable housing journeys after program exit. Thirteen out of 14 people interviewed had moved into their long-term housing and remained in independent housing. Among these, two people moved between properties to dwellings that better met their accessibility needs. Patterns of housing tenure at exit are similar to existing evidence for Going Places where public and community housing were the most predominant housing accessed (Galloway 2017; see also Appendix 1, Table 3).

In reflecting on the time that Mission Australia had found and offered people their housing, interviewees expressed a mix of excitement, relief, disbelief and fear, with some describing the offer of housing as emotionally overwhelming because it represented safety, permanence and a possibility they had not imagined for themselves.

Excited, scared, it was surreal. Yeah, it didn't quite feel real, even when I first moved in here ... here with what little I had and all the blessings they gave me and the things they gave me to move in with, it still didn't feel real for the longest time ... it's just something I never imagined would happen. I was always waiting for the shoe to drop, for something to have been taken away from me for a little while, but that was my own traumas and things running ... yeah, excited and safe. I knew I was going to be safe. – Interview Participant

Only one interviewee described an unstable housing journey after exit, having been evicted from their community housing property and subsequently returning to Douglas House for support (see section 5.4). This was not identified as an immediate post-exit experience, but it demonstrates the importance of accessible pathways back into support when tenancies break down. Although the interviewee described feeling as though they had failed and needed additional mental health support, they reflected positively on Mission Australia's willingness to

re-engage and support them to move towards housing again, describing this support as making them feel alive.

And that's what would make me feel alive ...I'm thinking like because of the situation I was in, like I'm thinking that they accepted me back in again, you know what I mean, and there's a lot of people waiting.

– Interview Participant

4.2 Interviewees acknowledged the difficulty of transitioning into housing from homelessness

For some people with long histories of homelessness or those who have consistently experienced homelessness throughout their lives, they recognised that the feeling of having a sense of home could take years to settle into. Those who went from Going Places and into their own housing talked about the adjustment period from sleeping outside to sleeping indoors in their own home. Others reflected on how they sometimes find it difficult to be in the mindset that they now have a home, they still operated out of fight or flight, with a bag packed ready to go should they need to move one quickly.

And I found it really hard to be here for the first, I don't know, three to six months. All I did was curl up and cry and was scared. And even now it's still hard. But it's my little place in the world. – Interview Participant

I could not sleep in the bed for six, seven months down the track. I curled up in the corner, on the floor, I was asleep, I had no lights on. – Interview Participant

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. – Interview Participant

4.3 Interviewees talked about how they made their house feel like a home

A consistent theme across interviews was an increasing sense of comfort and stability within current housing. Housing stability provided people with a growing sense of comfort, stability and belonging. Interviewees described how they actively personalised their spaces by displaying photographs, creating gardens and obtaining pets; these were described as expressions of ownership and recovery. This sense of 'making a home' was widely reported as a marker of progress and interviewees showed a sense of pride in their homes. Others found a sense of home in their freedom to come and go as they please without the fear of being moved on or having family living nearby.

No stress. Nobody can say now, 'oh you can't stay here, you've got to move on'. You're paying rent, it's your home. – Interview Participant

I'm happy with it, I created my little garden out there ... And it feels like home. I got a little bird now. – Interview Participant

I have three shelves from the last person ... they put them up, painted it red, really nice red ... so I put stuff on there, like memorabilia, my mum's photos and my auntie's photos and everything – they've passed. – Interview Participant

The whole environment is good, because it's my space, you know? That's why I tell my family I love my space. And I come and go whenever I feel like it. – Interview Participant



5. Factors that support and/or hinder housing outcomes

Housing outcomes were shaped by both program level and system level factors. At the program level, practical and flexible staff support, trusting relationships with people being supported, and holistic, strengths-based and trauma-informed case management supported positive housing outcomes. First Nations staff and Indigenous Mentor roles also strengthened engagement with First Nations people supported. Coordination across Mission Australia programs and collaboration with other community services further supported housing outcomes.

Factors that hindered outcomes included limited structured post-exit support and abrupt transitions between Mission Australia programs. At the system level, shortages of affordable and appropriate housing, service gaps and restrictive social housing settings created additional barriers to achieving and sustaining stable housing. Additionally, the absence of institutionalised policy frameworks or funding commitment to provide ongoing support limits services' capacity to assist people to sustain their tenancies post-exit.

The findings presented in this section draw together evidence on the factors that support or hinder people's housing outcomes after exiting Mission Australia's homelessness services in Cairns. The section is organised in two parts: the first identifies factors that support housing outcomes, and the second identifies factors that hinder the achievement of housing outcomes. Evidence includes existing research and evaluations, interviews with people formerly supported by Mission Australia, and focus groups with Mission Australia staff.

Factors that support housing outcomes

Together, the multidisciplinary model delivered through Going Places, collaboration within Mission Australia and across the Cairns homelessness sector, and shared program features such as holistic, strengths-based and trauma-informed

practice support a person-centred approach that enables positive outcomes.

5.1 The multidisciplinary model delivered through Going Places reduces barriers to engagement with Mission Australia services and is critical for supporting people to achieve and sustain housing

Both existing evidence and staff identify the multidisciplinary model of Going Places as a key mechanism through which Mission Australia is able to engage with people on the streets and support them in their housing journey. Existing evidence notes that the multidisciplinary model and subsequent interagency coordination have enhanced people's access to services, strengthened communication around their health needs and improved the capacity to address those needs, which is critical for supporting people to achieve and sustain housing outcomes given that unmet health issues can negatively impact tenancy sustainment (Perrens and Fildes 2019; Parsell et al 2019). Staff similarly identified the multidisciplinary model and holistic case management—including nursing supports, financial mentoring and tenancy skills training—as central to tenancy readiness. They also emphasised that AHOS (After Hours Outreach Service) teams build trust with people sleeping rough by addressing urgent health needs,

creating opportunities to discuss longer-term housing options.

5.2 Person-centred engagement and Indigenous mentor roles help build trust and rapport with people being supported and contribute to the achievement of outcomes

Existing evidence, Mission Australia staff and interviewees bring to light the importance of building trust and rapport with people being supported, highlighting how person-centred support is key to the achievement of housing outcomes in the long term.

Existing evidence identifies key features across the three Mission Australia services which support achievement of outcomes, including holistic case management, strengths-based and trauma-informed approaches, and staff ability to develop trust and rapport with people. Development of trust and rapport helps people being supported to feel comfortable with identifying their needs, enhancing the ability to address needs and achieve outcomes (Galloway 2017; Perrens and Fildes 2019). Findings from interviews further support this, with all interviewees speaking highly of Mission Australia staff across all programs, showing that the individual relationships staff fostered with interviewees were impactful. Many named and expressed thanks for the staff who helped them get to where they are today.

Those guys and girls are like earth angels. I have no doubt, if it wasn't for Steve and the team here in Cairns keeping an eye out for me, I wouldn't have made it. – Interview Participant

Additionally, existing evidence identified the culture of working 'with' rather than 'for' people being supported as important for fostering empowerment, building capacity and setting them up for independence into the future. Many interviewees reflected on how the skills acquired across cooking, cleaning and household management learnt during their time in Douglas House, built their capacity and supported their housing and wellbeing outcomes in the long-term. Interviewees demonstrated a clear understanding of the expectations of their tenancies such as the need to manage visitors, notify their housing provider of overnight guests and maintaining good relationships with neighbours. Interviewees consistently reported that engagement with Mission Australia staff contributed to improved self-worth and supported the practical development of skills required to establish and maintain tenancy. The support offered was described as central to interviewees' healing journeys, with improvements noted in confidence, mental health management and overall well-being (see section 3.2).

It's a stepping stone, but it's a stepping stone that, in truth, it's saved my life in more ways than one ... I wouldn't have the free will I have now and the freedom I have now. And yeah, some days are harder than others but it's still beautiful and I'm still grateful to be here. – Interview Participant

Multiple interviewees specifically mentioned the practical items provided when they moved into their own housing — furniture, kitchen items, white goods, bedding and grocery vouchers — as deeply meaningful. For people who had been homeless, often with nothing, these basics represented a real beginning and highlight how deeply the support provided was appreciated.

I didn't go in with anything, but they gave me things. I looked after them – I still got the things they gave me. – Interview Participant

Existing evidence identifies the important role of the Indigenous mentor roles across the programs for supporting engagement with services, helping people foster a sense of identity and supporting people with the challenge of establishing social boundaries with family and community where these may put tenancies at risk (Perrens and Fildes 2019). While First Nations interviewees demonstrated awareness of maintaining social boundaries where it would put tenancies at risk, First Nations interviewees mostly reflected on feeling supported to express culture during their time in the programs through connections with Indigenous mentors, and support with art and cooking groups.

They had workshops. They've got everything right down to normal art and creative arts where they show you how to create a lot of things ... [art for] Indigenous culture for Australia. – Interview Participant

Social groups and yarns, just to catch up and just have a yarn. – Interview Participant

Finally, existing evidence identified that a culture of flexibility, innovation and learning across services delivered, supports advocacy for changes to meet unmet needs and enables services to trial new ideas and ways of working to enhance outcomes (Perrens and Fildes 2019). Staff confirmed this approach citing the hiring of a counsellor to work across Douglas House and Woree to support peoples transitions and engagement as an example of this.

5.3 Collaboration between Mission Australia services and the wider sector in Cairns supports housing and wellbeing outcomes

Existing evidence, staff and interviewees all identify collaboration as important for achievement of housing outcomes. Internal collaboration across Mission Australia services and the broader homelessness sector was cited in existing evidence as enabling staff to manage referral pathways, connect people with

services they need, and build staff capacity. Staff also identified collaboration between Mission Australia and other services, such as Anglicare and the Salvation Army, as important for supporting people who typically fall through the cracks (Perrens and Fildes 2019).

Results of such collaborations were acknowledged by interviewees who credited strong internal networks and coordinated engagement across programs with enabling timely responses to people's housing needs. Interviewees frequently acknowledged the speed with which ongoing housing was secured, attributing this largely to the proactive approach of staff. Going Places, in particular, was praised for the speed with which staff responded to people's needs, with interviewees expressing gratitude for the limited waiting time in obtaining secure housing.

Even when I was anxious or tired, or I'd given up, they'd still turn up and drag me to the housing office to sign paperwork... I might have given up sometimes, but they didn't. They never gave up on me. They didn't give up. – Interview participant

Overall, six interviewees were supported through the full pathway of Mission Australia services, transitioning from Going Places, Douglas House and on to Woree, before exiting. These interviewees found the experience positive overall and valued the structure and time it gave them to build skills, form relationships and gradually prepare for independence. This supports the finding that pathways through the three Mission Australia services supports people's tenancy and wellbeing outcomes.

Several interviewees also acknowledged Mission Australia's collaboration with broader services in the sector, describing how staff linked them with needed support such as advocating for them within other systems (e.g. helping with NDIS applications, navigating Centrelink and liaising with housing providers). This system navigation was often crucial to interviewees' long-term stability and achievement of outcomes.

Interviewee: I'm with NDIS, I get support three days, four days a week ...

Interviewer: Did Mission Australia support you getting your NDIS package?

Interviewee: Yes, they did ... it has been so good. They helped me out so much.

Factors that hinder housing outcomes

Limited opportunities for staff to build people's capacity for maintaining social boundaries, abrupt transitions between the level of support provided between program transitions and upon program exit, and barriers in the wider housing system negatively impact people's housing outcomes.

5.4 Limited opportunities to assist people to build positive social boundaries during program engagement is a risk for tenancy sustainment

Existing evidence identifies the challenge of supporting people to redefine relationships with family and community members where those relationships may place tenancies at risk (Perrens and Fildes 2019). Staff focus groups for this research reinforced this finding, identifying social boundaries as a key factor affecting long-term tenancy sustainment. Staff noted that, during program engagement, there are limited opportunities for people being supported by services to practice setting and maintaining these boundaries, partly because the security gates and accommodation layout at Douglas House and Woree reduce exposure to the types of social pressures people may encounter once living independently. Interviewees' post-exit experiences varied in how prepared they felt to manage relationships that could place their tenancy at risk. However, one participant's experience illustrates the importance of ongoing support in this area, as complexities with their mental health, combined with difficulty keeping others out of their property, ultimately contributed to their eviction.

5.5 Abrupt transitions between Douglas House and Woree, as well as absence of structured post-exit support creates risk for people's wellbeing and tenancy sustainment

Existing evidence, staff and interviewees identified how drop-offs in supports when transitioning between programs and post-program exit impact negatively on people's wellbeing and tenancy sustainment. While interviewees appreciated the support received (see sections 5.2 and 5.3), many who transitioned between the three services struggled with the step-down of support between Douglas House and Woree. In particular the change of living environment, while purposefully focused on increasing independence, was difficult for some people struggling with social isolation.

If they were able to make that transition a little bit more smooth, because some people need that engagement, that community contact you know? If you've got mental health and depression and all that, being isolated is not good for them. – Interview Participant

Interviewees saw ongoing social inclusion as especially important during and after the transition into long-term housing. Several interviewees wanted continued help to connect with social groups, community activities and other informal sources of connection. Some described the Mission Australia women's group and social activities as valuable to their wellbeing and to reduce isolation – from interviews it appears continued access to these groups has been facilitated in more recent years.

Interviewees also reported on the need for longer support after program exit to help navigate issues with their tenancies (e.g. the quality of their accommodation and accessing additional support services required). Crucially, staff identified that many people lose their tenancy within 18 months of exit. Challenges include not having control of who comes into their home which puts tenancies at risk, and environments people live in not being conducive to positive change.

For staff, this indicates the need for a dedicated outreach role extending for at least two years post-exit. This role would address areas not consistently covered through existing programs, including tenancy sustainment, support to manage family and social boundaries that may place tenancies at risk, and connection to community activities aligned with individual interests and preferences. Whilst interviewees identified that more assistance is required to connect them in with community activities to support their wellbeing, staff additionally noted that not all people they support want to stay connected in with activities run by Mission Australia and have expressed the need for support to access other groups or activities in the broader community.

Existing evidence recommends additional funding to enable longer post-exit support periods from services to both support transitions into tenancies and strengthen tenancy sustainment (Perrens and Fildes 2019). It also highlights how the absence of institutionalised policy frameworks and funding commitments limit the capacity for the provision of ongoing support to assist people to sustain their tenancies (Parsell et al 2019).



Left photo: Housing unit at Woree House, Top right photo: Woree House Homelessness week bench, Bottom right photo: Services board at Woree House.

5.6 Barriers in the wider housing system impact access to appropriate long-term housing

Existing evidence and Mission Australia staff observe that housing shortages and system settings limit access to appropriate housing, negatively impacting long-term housing outcomes.

Existing evidence identifies this particularly affects couples, families, victim-survivors of family and domestic violence (FDV) with children, young people leaving care and those with high health needs for whom options are limited (Perrens and Fildes; Galloway 2017). The limited supply of supportive housing constrains progression across the services and reduces the number of people the programs can assist (Perrens and Fildes 2019). This scarcity reportedly impacts housing outcomes by diminishing motivation and affecting people's mindset and goal-directed behaviour (Perrens and Fildes 2019). Existing evidence recommends more general and supportive housing in Cairns to accommodate a range of cohorts such as families, couples and individuals with different support needs (Perrens and Fildes 2019).

Mission Australia staff identified discrimination in the private rental market and limited access to public housing as key factors contributing to ongoing rough sleeping and constrained housing pathways for the people they support in Cairns. In alignment with existing evidence, staff also highlight the shortage of supported housing options as a barrier for people with complex needs and noted a specific gap in accommodation for people with children, as neither Douglas Housing nor Woree can accommodate families. Staff highlighted the following existing public housing settings as requiring reform:

- Income thresholds: public housing income eligibility thresholds have not kept pace with Centrelink payment increases, leaving some people ineligible for social housing yet unable to afford private rental.

- Tenancy reviews: the absence of reviews for existing public housing tenancies can result in larger properties being under-occupied, limiting the availability of appropriately sized homes for families.
- Custody-related reapplication requirements: requirements to reapply for social housing following changes in custody arrangements cause unnecessary delays in accessing housing.
- Culturally responsive allocation processes: Affordable and public housing allocation and tenancy rules should be designed to recognise the unique cultural experiences and needs of First Nations tenants. Systems should respond to priorities such as family connection, reunification and healing. Allocation decisions should also consider future household needs, including size and suitability, to better support family well-being and long-term outcomes.

5.7 Service gaps in Cairns impact housing pathways and sustainability of long-term outcomes

Existing evidence identifies the unwillingness of some services in the community to engage with people supported by Mission Australia as a further barrier for those supported through Going Places in impacting long-term outcomes (Galloway 2017). Staff identify some existing referral pathways, including the Homestay model, as poorly aligned with the cultural and relational complexity experienced by some of the people they support. Staff also noted that aged care services are under-resourced and not sufficiently culturally responsive, leaving some people who have complex needs without adequate support and creating out-of-scope demand on Mission Australia staff. Mission Australia staff also reported difficulties connecting First Nations men with support programs as only two in Cairns were available and stated that a greater diversity of support services catered to First Nations men would further support long-term outcomes.

6. Improvements to service design and delivery to support better long-term housing outcomes

Changes to service design and delivery identified to support improved long-term housing outcomes include delivery of post-exit tenancy sustainment support and in-house therapeutic supports. Post-exit support was identified across all forms of evidence as a gap and would provide people with support to sustain their tenancies such as managing social boundaries, addressing social isolation and assistance to liaise with tenancy managers. Staff identified the opportunity for delivery of in-house therapeutic supports as a more effective option to improve engagement and outcomes than reliance on external referral pathways. One final improvement identified by Staff to improve service delivery includes strengthening cultural safety practice and training.

This section examines improvements to service design and delivery that could improve long-term housing outcomes for people exiting Mission Australia's homelessness services in Cairns. Evidence draws on interviews with people formerly supported by Mission Australia, focus groups with Mission Australia staff, and existing evidence. The section identifies three key areas for improvement: extending post-exit support to assist with tenancy sustainment and social connection; strengthening access to in-house therapeutic supports; and improving cultural safety practice and culturally appropriate service responses for First Nations people being supported.

6.1 Greater support during program transition and introduction of post-exit support would sustain tenancies, improve wellbeing and strengthen outcomes

As described in section 5.5, increased support during program transitions is required to combat feelings of isolation experienced between

Douglas House and the more independent living arrangements of Woree Supported Accommodation. Although in more recent years, staff have facilitated such inclusion by including transitioned tenants in social groups and activities, further evidence on the impact of this is needed to understand if greater focus needs to be placed on people's needs during and after they transition into Woree to support their wellbeing needs.

Similarly, establishment of formal post-exit support is required to support people to sustain their tenancies (i.e. support to manage social boundaries, support to liaise with tenancy managers) and provide individualised support to connect with community activities and support services as needs arise. Greater supports during program transition, and post-exit tenancy sustainment support are the most pressing areas for improving service design and delivery as identified across this research. Post-exit support in particular is highlighted across existing evidence, staff focus groups and feedback from interviewees.

6.2 People's engagement with therapeutic supports could be more effective if offered in-house

While the multidisciplinary approach and AHOS teams within Going Places, and Indigenous mentor roles improve people's engagement with the services (see sections 5.1 and 5.2), staff reported that current supports are weighted too heavily towards housing, and that in practice, housing, mental health and broader therapeutic needs cannot be addressed in isolation; programs need greater capacity to respond to these needs together. Given the high proportion of First Nations people being supported and those with complex needs, staff viewed in-house therapeutic support as more effective than external referrals, as established relationships and trust between staff and the people they support improves engagement. Staff noted that the introduction of a full-time nurse had improved people's engagement and suggested this model could guide future decisions about therapeutic staffing. They also identified the current counselling role as under-resourced at three days per week and recommended expanding it to a full-time position.

6.3 Cultural safety practices within Mission Australia services should be strengthened and culturally appropriate services are inadequate for First Nations people

While Mission Australia has established important foundations for culturally safe service delivery, including Indigenous mentor roles, First Nations staff, and partnerships with Aboriginal service providers, gaps in cultural safety practice and training present ongoing challenges. First Nations staff and Indigenous mentors carry a significant cultural load, both in supporting people using the services and in ensuring colleagues work in culturally safe ways. This stems from inconsistent implementation of Mission Australia's Cultural Safety Framework and from inconsistent and limited training. Staff also noted the complexity of navigating cultural conflicts when supporting First Nations people from outside the local area. Beyond internal practice, staff identified a shortage of culturally appropriate services for First Nations men in Cairns and highlighted the need for more tailored local options (see section 5.7).

7. Additional findings

While not directly related to service design or delivery, the research identifies opportunities to improve the programs' exit data collection and strengthen longitudinal evidence on service use, housing pathways and long-term post-exit outcomes.

This section presents additional findings from the research, drawing on researcher observations about the limitations of existing evidence and administrative data for understanding people's long-term outcomes.

7.1 Limited evidence is available on housing outcomes at program exit for people supported by Going Places

As outlined in Section 2.1.1, administrative data collected for Going Places is not consistent with data for Douglas House and Woree. Instead, housing tenure at program exit is recorded separately through monthly SRS status updates. This limits the ability to track client pathways and compare housing tenure at exit across the three services. Previous evaluations of Going Places, including its first seven years of operation and the period following implementation of the multidisciplinary model, captured housing outcomes at program exit (Galloway 2017; Parsell et al. 2019; see Appendix 1). However, current program administrative data could be strengthened by including a dedicated field for housing outcome at exit, consistent with reporting for Douglas House and Woree, rather than relying on the existing high-level 'reason for closing' category (see Figure 5).

7.2 Limited mechanisms are available to systematically assess long-term housing and wellbeing outcomes

Beyond the qualitative research conducted for this report, limited evidence is available on the long-term outcomes of people supported by Mission Australia's homelessness services

in Cairns. Existing evidence presented in Appendix 1 focuses on housing and wellbeing outcomes at program exit, or on changes in housing and wellbeing between program entry and exit. As described in Section 2.3, this research included fourteen interviews with people, all of whom had achieved a housing outcome and most of whom had maintained their housing. This represents a small sample of all people supported by Mission Australia's homelessness services in Cairns and reflects the challenges of contacting a vulnerable cohort who are not required to remain in contact with the service after support ends. As current service models provide only limited post-exit support, long-term housing and wellbeing outcomes are not systematically collected.

Comparable research on long-term housing and wellbeing outcomes for homelessness programs has used linked government data to examine service use and interactions with health, housing, welfare and justice systems over time (Ombler et al. 2024). In Australia, this approach remains limited, with the 50 Lives 50 Homes final evaluation reporting outcomes for people just over five years post-exit (Wood et al. 2022). Linked-data approaches provide an opportunity to systematically understand long-term housing and wellbeing outcomes for entire cohorts of service users, including outcomes that are unlikely to be captured through qualitative research alone. The Queensland Government should be encouraged to initiate or participate in research projects that link its administrative data with the data and other evidence held by the community service organisations it commissions for service delivery, to inform policy, program design and continuous improvement of service delivery.

8. Conclusion and recommendations

The research indicates that Mission Australia's Cairns homelessness services — *Going Places: Street to Home, Douglas House and Woree Supported Accommodation* — supported most people to achieve and sustain long-term housing.

Overall, thirteen out of fourteen (94%) of those interviewed had sustained their housing demonstrating strong outcomes in securing and sustaining long-term housing following program exit.

Interviewees reported tenancy stability of up to eight years, alongside meaningful improvements in health, independence, wellbeing, safety and sense of home. Stable housing provided a foundation for broader recovery, including improved confidence, stronger capacity to manage day-to-day living, greater social connection and, for some First Nations interviewees, continued or renewed opportunities to express and explore culture.

Positive outcomes were supported by trusting relationships with Mission Australia staff, holistic and trauma-informed case management, multidisciplinary support, Indigenous mentor roles, practical assistance to establish and maintain tenancies, and collaboration across Mission Australia services and the wider Cairns homelessness sector.

However, the findings also show that long-term housing outcomes remain vulnerable to both service-level and system-level barriers. These include limited structured post-exit support and absence of policy frameworks or funding to deliver ongoing support, abrupt transitions between programs, limited opportunity to build people's capability to maintain social boundaries, social isolation, housing affordability pressures, shortages of appropriate and supported housing, and gaps in culturally appropriate services for First Nations people being supported.

The recommendations arising from this report include actions within Mission Australia's direct remit, service-level recommendations that require support from broader system-level changes, and recommendations directed to the wider housing and homelessness service system. Collectively, the recommendations focus on improving service design and delivery, strengthening housing pathways and access to appropriate housing, improving data collection, and building a stronger evidence base on long-term outcomes.

8.1 Service design and delivery

The research consistently identifies post-exit tenancy sustainment support, and the in-house delivery of therapeutic supports as both existing gaps and key opportunities for improving long-term housing and wellbeing outcomes. Although the research supports the inclusion of these roles within service models (see Section 6), sustained delivery requires dedicated government funding, rather than reliance on ad hoc or discretionary funding arrangements.

Recommendation 1 addresses the need for government to fund these roles within homelessness service models.

Recommendation 1: The Queensland Government should fund integrated post-exit tenancy sustainment outreach and therapeutic supports

Funding permanent features of homelessness service models, including a dedicated outreach role for at least two years after exit to address social isolation, build capacity around social boundaries and support tenancy sustainment, alongside therapeutic support across the three homelessness services in Cairns to improve access and engagement.

A further opportunity to strengthen service delivery relates to cultural safety training for Mission Australia staff in Cairns. First Nations staff consulted as part of the research noted that while strong foundations for culturally safe service delivery are in place, inconsistent implementation of Mission Australia's Cultural Safety Framework and limited staff training has placed a disproportionate cultural load on First Nations staff.

Recommendation 2: Mission Australia should increase its Cultural Safety training and ongoing cultural supervision for all Mission Australia staff in the three services.

8.2 Improve access to housing

Housing shortages - including limited social housing and a shortage of supportive housing - constrain housing pathways and restrict access to appropriate long-term housing, particularly for couples, families, victim-survivors of FDV with children, young people leaving care, and those with high health needs. Recommendation 3 acknowledges the need for additional housing options in Cairns that are appropriate and accessible for cohorts served by homelessness services.

Recommendation 3: Mission Australia should advocate for Governments should increase housing options to strengthen housing pathways in Cairns, including:

- Increase supported housing options, including options suitable for people with children
- Increase public and affordable. housing options, including options suitable for families

The research identifies that the existing public housing settings compound this housing scarcity and limit or delay people's access to public housing. Recommendation 4 identifies key areas for advocacy required.

Recommendation 4: Mission Australia should advocate for The Queensland Government should reform public housing policy settings to improve access to housing.

Areas for reform include:

- Raise income eligibility thresholds for public housing so people unable to afford private rental properties can access secure housing
- Remove custody-related reapplication requirements for public housing to reduce delays in access to housing
- Reintroduce tenancy reviews to ensure larger public housing properties are made available for families
- Implementation of culturally responsive allocation processes and tenancy rules that prioritise family connection, reunification and healing (e.g. property allocation processes consider future household needs including size and suitability).

8.3 Understand outcomes

Many interviewees identified the need for increased support during and after program transitions between Douglas House and Woree to combat social isolation associated with the increased independence. In more recent years, staff have facilitated social inclusion by supporting people's engagement in social groups and activities after they move to Woree. However, further evidence is needed to understand effectiveness of this and whether any additional service delivery changes need to be made (e.g. increased step-down support or transition plans with a greater focus on social inclusion) to strengthen transitions.

Recommendation 5: Mission Australia should investigate whether recent changes to service delivery provide sufficient support for people transitioning between Douglas House and Woree Supported Accommodation.

Administrative data for Going Places is not collected consistently with data for Douglas House and Woree. Housing tenure at program exit is instead recorded separately through monthly SRS status updates, which limits the ability to track client pathways and compare housing tenure at exit across the three services. Recommendation 6 addresses this by updating program reporting fields so that a dedicated housing outcome at-exit field is recorded consistently across all three homelessness services in Cairns.

Recommendation 6: Mission Australia should update program reporting fields to ensure standardised data collection for housing outcomes at program exit across the three homelessness services operating in Cairns.

Housing outcomes at exit are reported differently for Going Places as compared to Wooree and Douglas House. This recommendation addresses this by calling for program reporting fields to be updated so that housing outcome at exit is recorded consistently across all three homelessness services in Cairns, which will provide greater transparency over people's outcomes, regardless of their reason for exit.

Recommendation 7: The Queensland Government should initiate or participate in longitudinal data linkage of existing cross sector data to understand people's homelessness journeys, service use, policy settings and long-term outcomes.

There is currently limited evidence on the long-term housing and wellbeing outcomes for people supported through Mission Australia's homelessness services in Cairns. Drawing on approaches used to understand long-term outcomes in similar homelessness programs, this recommendation identifies an opportunity to systematically analyse existing government held data to build a clearer picture of these long-term outcomes.

Appendix 1: Existing evidence overview

Table 3: Overview of existing evidence and relevant findings

Citation and program	Purpose and outcomes measured	Relevant findings
Galloway (2017) Going Places	Quantitative analysis of clients engaged from 2010-2016 (the first seven years of operation) - Service delivery duration - Service delivery outcomes - Housing outcomes upon exit of the program	Housing outcomes upon exit 72% of clients were offered and took up housing (93% maintained housing on exit) 29% of clients did not have housing at the time of exit Housing tenure upon exit - Public housing (41.55%), Access Housing (community housing) (24.65%), private rental (21.8%), Douglas House/ Woree (8.37%) which only came available 2014/16 Barriers to housing outcomes not related to an individual's circumstances - Lack of housing stock available - Clientele banned from some places - Service providers in the community do not want to engage Enablers of positive housing outcomes during program - Active listening of staff to client concerns and issues - Staff engaging in goal directed behaviour towards achieving a housing outcome regardless of client's additional presenting issues - Development and implementation of case management plans that remove barriers to accessing housing (e.g. securing proper ID, assistance with housing application forms, overcoming housing debts), assistance to access crisis accommodation and assistance with financial management, builds a team of support around a client to address needs, and links people back to informal networks of support - Seeing initial tenancy breakdowns as a use for future reflection and operating through values of hopefulness, optimism, inclusion and non-judgmentalism Recommendations - Follow-up with clients 12 months and 24 months after they have been housed to understand sustainability of housing outcomes

Table 3: (continued) Overview of existing evidence and relevant findings

Citation and program	Purpose and outcomes measured	Relevant findings
Parsell et al. (2019) Going Places	Investigates how the multidisciplinary model within Going Places, is experienced and delivered in practice Housing outcomes of clients at program exit and post-exit	Housing outcomes: 67% of clients accessed housing, all of whom sustained tenancies at program exit Housing outcomes post-exit: 94% continued to sustain tenancies 4 months post-exit (two tenancies broke down) *model is not resourced to provide support for more than four months post-tenancy allocation Enabler: Multidisciplinary model (assertive outreach, facilitating access to housing, integrated healthcare and psychosocial support) results in improvements to interagency service coordination, increases clients access to services, removes barriers to client engagement with services, and assists clients to obtain housing
Carrington & Mesinga (2017) Douglas House	Investigates the implementation of the Douglas House practice model Service delivery outcomes, e.g. tenancy related factors during program engagement: duration, tenancy disruptions, termination; and housing upon exit	Housing outcomes and tenure upon exit: 25% of clients were evicted, 29% exited voluntarily, 39% had a planned and assisted transition, and 7% were reported as 'other' - Of the 28 (56%) clients who exited Douglas House, 25% exited into homelessness, 18% moved in with family, 18% moved into health and aged care facilities, 11% moved back to Country, 11% moved into supported accommodation, 7% into independent accommodation, 7% unknown

Table 3: (continued) Overview of existing evidence and relevant findings

Citation and program	Purpose and outcomes measured	Relevant findings
Perrens & Fildes (2019) Going Places Douglas House Woree	Evaluates the effectiveness of all three programs, including how they work together Improvements between beginning and end of support across: • Feeling of control over home • Independent living skills • Integration into community • Economic wellbeing	As a result of program engagement, clients reported • Minor increases (< +2) to indicators for achieving better housing outcomes and improving independent living skills • Minor increases to (< +3.6) indicators for integration into the community in terms increased engagement with employment, culture/spirituality, volunteering, and community; multi-service users presented even greater improvements of (> +15.3) • Significant increases (> +7.4) to indicators for integration into the community in terms of increased engagement with friends, family, education and training. • Significant increases for improving economic wellbeing (+17.7); multi-service users presented lower improvements in economic wellbeing (+10.4) As a result of program engagement, staff reported • Significant increases to ratings of clients' ability to maintain a tenancy (single service users +30.3, multi-service users +33.3) • High levels of confidence and pride that positive outcomes were being achieved for clients across key areas (housing, tenancy outcomes, living skills, personal wellbeing, health, connection to community and culture, and economic wellbeing). Staff identified the following enablers: • Trust, rapport and open communication with clients and recovery workers • Collaboration between Mission Australia housing and community services staff providing the integrated model of housing and support • Collaboration with broader Cairns homelessness sector enables staff to manage referral pathways, connect clients with services, and build staff capacity • Holistic case management approach, strength-based trauma-informed model, cultural respect, Indigenous mentor roles, shared values across services, culture of flexibility, innovation and learning, and commitment to doing with rather than for a client. • Pathway through Mission Australia services promotes consistency of client care resulting in propensity for success in clients maintaining tenancies • Addition of clinical healthcare practitioners (multidisciplinary model at Going Places) both improves communication about client health needs and the ability to address unmet health needs as important to housing outcomes as these can unravel a tenancy (e.g. unstable mental health) • Indigenous mentors and recovery workers supporting clients to establish boundaries and avoid negative influences in relation to engaging with family or community Staff identified the following barriers: • Shortage of long-term housing options constrains clients' ability to exit • Need for more supportive housing to support ability to transition between services • Lack of accommodation options for couples, families, those escaping FDV with children, young people leaving child protection systems, and those with high health needs. • Challenge of helping clients redefine how to engage with family or community as established patterns can put tenancies at risk

Table 3: (continued) Overview of existing evidence and relevant findings

Citation and program	Purpose and outcomes measured	Relevant findings
Perrens & Fildes (2019) <i>Going Places</i> <i>Douglas House</i> <i>Woree</i> <i>(continued from previous page)</i>		Recommendations: - Funding to enable Mission Australia to provide longer support periods for clients transitioning into independent living to support tenancy sustainment immediately following their exit, and for ongoing support. - Further support for clients with capacity to engage in education, training, employment or volunteer work. - More housing (general and supported accommodation types) in Cairns is required to address severe shortages, a mix of housing to accommodate different cohorts and needs, and housing options that are affordable for people on low incomes as this is a barrier to housing for those receiving the Newstart allowance
Mission Australia (2025a) <i>Douglas House</i>	Evaluates extent to which Douglas House is being delivered in alignment with the flagship service model and how the service contributes to client outcomes. Improvements for clients with closed cases across: - Standard of living - Health and wellbeing - Support and connections - Independence	Housing: 63% of clients were within or above normative range for improved standard of living. Wellbeing: clients reported improved: - Personal wellbeing scores (50%) - Satisfaction with relationships (50%), health (38%), safety (25%), and connection to community (38%) - Sense of achievement (50%) - Sense of future security (38%) - Sense of control (50%)
Mission Australia (2025b) <i>Woree</i>	Evaluates the extent to which Woree is being delivered in alignment with the flagship service model and how the service contributes to client outcomes. Improvements for clients with closed cases across: - Standard of living - Health and wellbeing - Support and connections - Independence	Housing: 50% of clients felt happier with their standard of living Wellbeing: clients reported improved: - Personal wellbeing scores (50%) - Satisfaction with relationships (25%), health (75%), safety (75%), connection to community (50%) - Sense of achievement (50%) - Sense of future security (75%). Enablers: Time engaged: clients that engage with services for longer than 4.2 months, and ideally longer than 9.5 months are more likely to have positive housing outcomes at exit Level of brokerage: clients who receive brokerage, a greater total amount of brokerage and who receive brokerage for housing related costs were more likely to have a positive housing outcome at exit Amount of support received (time) particularly in the first 1-13 weeks of engagement was associated with positive housing outcomes at exit

Source: authors.

References

- Barolsky, V. (2023) 'Truth-telling about a settler-colonial legacy: decolonizing possibilities?', *Postcolonial Studies*, 26, (4):540-556.
- Reconciliation Australia (2025) *Guide- Truth-telling: Way for Everyone to Participate*, https://www.reconciliation.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/GUIDE_Truth-telling_Ways-for-Everyone-to-Participate_web.pdf
- Carrington, A. and Mensinga, J. (2017) *Douglas House, Supported Housing services, practice model development and evaluation*, James Cook University, Cairns.
- Galloway, G. (2017) *Going Places: Cairns Street to Home Outcomes 2010-2016*, Alan Webster Consultancies, Redlynch.
- Mission Australia (2025a) *Homelessness and Stable Housing Support Evidence to Action: Douglas House*, Mission Australia, Cairns.
- Mission Australia (2025b) *Homelessness and Stable Housing Support Evidence to Action: Woree Supported Accommodation*, Mission Australia, Cairns.
- Ombler, J., Jiang, T., Fraser, B., Nelson, J., McMin, C., Hawkes, K., Atatoa-Carr, P., Pehi, T., Aspinall, C., Bierre, S., Schick, K. Howden-Chapman, P. and Pierse, N. (2024) 'Five-Year Post-Housing Outcomes for a Housing First Cohort in Aotearoa, New Zealand', *International Journal on Homelessness*: 4(1).
- Parsell, C., Clarke, A. and Vorsina, M. (2019) 'Evidence for an integrated healthcare and psychosocial multidisciplinary model to address rough sleeping', *Health and Social Care in the Community*, 28(1), <https://doi.org/10.1111/hsc.12835>.
- Perrens, B. and Fildes, J. (2019) *Evaluation of Mission Australia's Cairns homelessness services 2019*, Mission Australia, Sydney.
- Wood L, Vallesi S, Tuson M, Quinn D, Turvey J. (2022) *Zero Project: A Housing First Response to Ending Homelessness in Perth. Findings from the 50 Lives 50 Homes Program*. Final Evaluation Report 2022, Centre for Social Impact, University of Western Australia Business School; Institute for Health Research, University of Notre Dame Australia, Perth.



Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute

Level 12, 460 Bourke Street

Melbourne VIC 3000

Australia

+61 3 9660 2300

information@ahuri.edu.au

ahuri.edu.au

 [Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute](https://www.linkedin.com/company/ahuri-research/)

 [facebook.com/AHURI.AUS](https://www.facebook.com/AHURI.AUS)

 [instagram.com/ahuri_research/](https://www.instagram.com/ahuri_research/)