

The role of single-site supportive housing in addressing homelessness

SINGLE-SITE SUPPORTIVE HOUSING PROVIDES HOUSING TO SOME PEOPLE EXITING CHRONIC HOMELESSNESS WHOSE NEEDS HAVE NOT BEEN MET BY OTHER HOUSING AND SOCIAL SERVICE PROVISION SECTORS. TENANTS VALUE THE SAFETY AND CONTROL OVER THEIR LIVES THAT THIS HOUSING MODEL ENABLES.

KEY POINTS

- Single-site supportive housing helps tenants overcome the problems, often enduring, relating to chronic homelessness and to achieve positive life changes.
- Supportive housing is not a passive resource, but it is shaped by the experiences of the people who live in and those who deliver the supportive housing services. Support is aimed at assisting tenants to develop independent living skills.
- The long-term nature of the housing provides security and stability to tenants, which is central to their progressing to thinking about subsequent life improvements. Tenants are able to determine the changes they wish to make, including if and when to leave supportive housing.

*This bulletin is based on research conducted by **Dr Cameron Parsell, Ms Ornella Moutou and Mr Eduardo Lucio** at The University of Queensland, and **Dr Sharon Parkinson** at the AHURI Research Centre—Swinburne University of Technology. The research examined the nature of supportive housing for people with experiences of homelessness.*

- Safety and security, key features of single-site supportive housing, are valued by tenants. Actively providing security, including monitoring of tenants, contributed to safety and tenants feeling in control of their lives. Conversely these act to limit privacy and undermine autonomy.

CONTEXT

Supportive housing represents an important component in contemporary efforts to end homelessness. It encompasses service models that integrate the provision of ongoing affordable housing and other support to different target groups. Affordable tenancies can be in social housing or the private rental sector. However, most supportive housing approaches rely on social housing.

Supportive housing includes both scattered-site housing with outreach support and single-site housing with onsite support. The support can vary from low to high intensity, but extends beyond one-off, short-term or time-determined transitional engagement. The level and intensity of support is voluntary and determined by the tenant. The provision of tenancy and support services are integrated, although accessing housing is not contingent upon accessing support or complying with the requirements of support providers.

RESEARCH METHOD

A quantitative survey was completed by tenants of scattered-site and single-site supportive housing (n=102). Qualitative interviews were also conducted with tenants (n=28) and tenancy and support providers (n=22), and focused exclusively on single-site supportive housing with onsite support.

Tenants' interviews focused on what was perceived as desirable and undesirable about single-site supportive housing with onsite support, how it compared with previous housing, and what contributed to or threatened housing sustainment.

Supportive housing providers' interviews examined the nature of support in supportive housing, the program objectives, the critical features of success, and the challenges experienced.

KEY FINDINGS

Supportive housing helps tenants become 'good tenants'

Single-site supportive housing is a deliberate housing response for people with experiences of chronic homelessness who are assessed as requiring support. It is characterised by onsite support staff and a range of security features, including concierge and monitored access in and out of the building.

Tenants are deemed to be highly vulnerable because of life experiences, such as trauma and dysfunctional families. Supportive housing is a mechanism to address and assist tenants to overcome the disadvantages, often life-long, that had made them eligible for supportive housing.

Supportive housing is more than helping tenants successfully make the transition into housing after exiting homelessness. Support is a deliberate means to help tenants become 'good' tenants, meaning being a good neighbour, keeping one's property clean, paying rent, and in the context of high density living, behaving pro-socially in communal areas.

Single-site supportive housing aims to transform people's lives to an extent where tenants can determine when to leave supportive housing and access housing in the market. Achieving the life change is premised on the provision of long-term housing, and the social and psychological benefits that long-term housing fosters.

Tenants are active participants in supportive housing

Supportive housing providers deliver a range of supports. The concierge service provides active monitoring to foster the conditions for a safe and controlled living environment. Support creates the conditions for people to live together in a cohesive and desirable way.

Tenants of supportive housing are active participants. Through their actions and the dynamic relationships with neighbours and support and housing workers, tenants play determining roles in constructing the nature of

supportive housing. Supportive housing is not a passive resource, but rather it is shaped and constituted by the experiences of the people who live in and those who deliver the supportive housing services.

Practical support for tenants critical for success

The key elements of success of single-site supportive housing are the provision of practical support to address day-to-day problems and the accessibility of support workers.

Supportive housing and, specifically, the support provided by supportive housing staff, coincided with positive life changes. Tenants not only described making a diverse range of life improvements in supportive housing, they also attributed their positive life changes to supportive housing.

Tenants and supportive housing service providers saw the stable and secure supportive housing as a stepping stone to life beyond supportive housing. The security and stability afforded to tenants because of the long-term nature of the housing provided was central to their progression to where they could think about subsequent life improvements. Service providers highlighted that long-term supportive housing ensured that tenants felt a sense of belonging and stability after exiting homelessness. It was the benefits that go with long-term housing, coupled with support, that allowed tenants to improve their lives to a point where they—and not the landlord—would decide that supportive housing was no longer necessary.

The safety and security provided in single-site supportive housing are critical to fostering the conditions for tenants to exert control over their lives and make positive life changes. A key challenge for support services, including concierge personnel, is to balance removing barriers to accessing services and providing security, while at the same time ensuring that their presence is not considered intrusive and abnormal by tenants.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The benefits of single-site supportive housing must be understood as a solution in the context of the failure of other systems to provide housing that is safe and secure. Based on the evidence generated in this research, there are several key policy implications.

- Single-site supportive housing with onsite support works well for people who have experienced chronic homelessness and other negative housing outcomes in other forms of housing and homeless accommodation. The model is effective and desirable because it represents a means for people to achieve safety.
- The model is successful in enabling people with chronic experiences of homelessness and support needs to access housing immediately without the need for interventions to prepare them for housing, and to sustain housing for at least 18 months. The coupling of support with affordable housing is identified as important for them to remain housed.
- As communities and informal support networks contribute to sustainable housing, it is important to consider the allocation of housing in higher density living and the dynamics of neighbours. Tenants desire to socialise and support and be supported by their neighbours. However, unless well managed, this can also undermine recovery efforts and contribute to or exacerbate personal problems.
- Tenants must be able to actively shape the nature of supportive housing. Support is effective when it is a practical resource to address problems, when barriers to access support are removed, and when support is sufficiently broad to make opportunities available for tenants to exercise choices.
- Supportive housing is most successful in improving the lives of tenants when:

1. Tenure arrangements let tenants feel secure within the frame of unlimited provision of housing and support. For tenants to move on from supported housing, this will be best achieved if tenants are provided with opportunities to improve their lives, and then to leave of their own volition.
2. Tenants determine the nature of the changes they want to make to achieve their own ideal of a positive life. Supportive housing has a significant role in providing the resources and opportunities for tenants to reach a stage where they can identify the life trajectories and life changes they want to achieve.

FURTHER INFORMATION

This bulletin is based on AHURI project 21024, *An evaluation of the nature and effectiveness of supportive housing models.*

Reports from this project can be found on the AHURI website: www.ahuri.edu.au or by contacting AHURI Limited on +61 3 9660 2300.

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