

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PEER  
REVIEWED

FINAL REPORT NO. 339

# Inquiry into integrated housing support for vulnerable families

### Authored by

**kylie valentine**, University of New South Wales

**Kyllie Cripps**, University of New South Wales

**Kathleen Flanagan**, University of Tasmania

**Daphne Habibis**, University of Tasmania

**Chris Martin**, University of New South Wales

**Hazel Blunden**, University of New South Wales

Publication Date October 2020

DOI 10.18408/ahuri7116001



## Title

Inquiry into integrated housing support for vulnerable families  
—Executive Summary

## Authors

kylie valentine, University of New South Wales  
Kyllie Cripps, University of New South Wales  
Kathleen Flanagan, University of Tasmania  
Daphne Habibis, University of Tasmania  
Chris Martin, University of New South Wales  
Hazel Blunden, University of New South Wales

## ISBN

978-1-922498-04-5

## Key words

Alcohol and other drugs, anti-social behaviour, children, crime, domestic and family violence, eviction, housing outcomes, housing pathways, Indigenous domestic and family violence, Indigenous housing outcomes, residential tenancies law, risk, safety, service integration, social housing, tenants, termination, vulnerable families, women.

## Series

AHURI Final Report

## Number

339

## ISSN

1834-7223

## Publisher

Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited  
Melbourne, Australia

## DOI

10.18408/ahuri7116001

## Format

PDF, online only

## URL

<https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/339>  
(full report)

## Recommended citation

valentine, k., Cripps, K., Flanagan, K., Habibis, D., Martin, C. and Blunden, H. (2020) *Inquiry into integrated housing support for vulnerable families*, AHURI Final Report No. 339, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited, Melbourne, <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/339>, doi: 10.18408/ahuri7116001.

## Related reports and documents

Flanagan, K., Blunden, H., valentine, k. and Henriette, J. (2019) *Housing outcomes after domestic and family violence*, AHURI Final Report No. 311, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited, Melbourne, <http://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/311>, doi: 10.18408/ahuri-4116101.

Martin, C., Habibis, D., Burns, L. and Pawson, H. (2019) *Social housing legal responses to crime and anti-social behaviour: impacts on vulnerable families*, AHURI Final Report No. 314, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited, Melbourne, <http://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/314>, doi: 10.18408/ahuri-7116301.

Cripps, K. and Habibis, D. (2019) *Improving housing and service responses to domestic and family violence for Indigenous individuals and families*, AHURI Final Report No. 320, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited, Melbourne, <http://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/320>, doi: 10.18408/ahuri-7116201.

## AHURI

AHURI is a national independent research network with an expert not-for-profit research management company, AHURI Limited, at its centre.

AHURI's mission is to deliver high quality research that influences policy development and practice change to improve the housing and urban environments of all Australians.

Using high quality, independent evidence and through active, managed engagement, AHURI works to inform the policies and practices of governments and the housing and urban development industries, and stimulate debate in the broader Australian community.

AHURI undertakes evidence-based policy development on a range of priority policy topics that are of interest to our audience groups, including housing and labour markets, urban growth and renewal, planning and infrastructure development, housing supply and affordability, homelessness, economic productivity, and social cohesion and wellbeing.

## Acknowledgements

This material was produced with funding from the Australian Government and state and territory governments. AHURI Limited gratefully acknowledges the financial and other support it has received from these governments, without which this work would not have been possible.

AHURI Limited also gratefully acknowledges the contributions, both financial and in-kind, of its university research partners who have helped make the completion of this material possible.

## Disclaimer

The opinions in this report reflect the views of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of AHURI Limited, its Board, its funding organisations or Inquiry panel members. 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.

## AHURI journal

AHURI Final Report journal series is a refereed series presenting the results of original research to a diverse readership of policy-makers, researchers and practitioners.

## Peer review statement

An objective assessment of reports published in the AHURI journal series by carefully selected experts in the field ensures that material published is of the highest quality. The AHURI journal series employs a double-blind peer review of the full report, where anonymity is strictly observed between authors and referees.

## Copyright

© Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited 2020

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



---

### **Inquiry panel members**

Each AHURI Inquiry is supported by a panel of experts drawn from the research, policy and practice communities.

The Inquiry Panel is to provide guidance on ways to maximise the policy relevance of the research and draw together the research findings to address the key policy implications of the research. Panel members for this Inquiry:

- Heather Nancarrow, ANROWS
- Kym Goodes, TasCOSS
- Ruby Steele, Legal Aid NSW
- Moo Baulch, DV NSW
- Tammy White, NT Department of Housing and Community Development NT
- Esther Kwali, Victorian Department of Health and Human Services
- Nicole Fields, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet
- Rachel Livingston, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet
- Carol Atkinson and Yvette Park, NT Government (via phone link)
- Jeanette Lewis, Housing Tasmania
- Shelley Booth, DV NSW
- Chris Hartley, Homelessness NSW
- Ruby Steele, Legal Aid NSW
- Cassandra Dawes, ANROWS

---

# Executive summary

## Key points

- In general, crisis and emergency responses are reportedly effective in meeting the short-term needs of women and children, especially non-Indigenous women and children in major urban areas. However, this is not universal. Indigenous women and children in remote and regional areas face acute shortages in housing support and culturally safe service.
- Moving from short-term or transitional accommodation into permanent, independent housing is very difficult, and sometimes unachievable, for women and children affected by domestic and family violence (DFV).
- Specialist Homelessness Services (SHSs) and other human services are not able to compensate for the absence of affordable, suitable housing across the housing system: the provision of such housing is not within their remit or control yet it is critical to allowing women and children to flourish in the longer-term.
- Social housing is valued by tenants, and investment to overcome current undersupply could address problems with pathways to permanent housing.

- **In social housing's currently marginalised state, tensions exist between aspirations to support vulnerable groups and policies relating to tenancy management: in particular, the role of social landlords in relation to crime and anti-social behaviour.**
- **Housing pathways are constrained by capacity and resource scarce constraints within housing support systems. These constraints appear to be more significant barriers to safe and sustainable housing pathways than problems of integration between systems.**
- **Other areas of government policy, such as the income support system, exacerbate poverty and disadvantage and make re-establishing stable housing more difficult for women who have experienced DFV.**

## Key findings

The housing and other needs of vulnerable families cannot be met by one sector. This is increasingly recognised in policy and program design. The *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children*, for example, recognises that ‘all systems need to work together’ and aspires to ‘an unprecedented level of collaboration with the broader community and governments’ (Council of Australian Governments 2010: 11). However, there are gaps in provision to vulnerable families across the housing system, and a need for improved responses in emergency accommodation, social housing, and private rental housing. The interactions between housing and human services, particularly child protection and family support, also work against policy aspirations to improve support for vulnerable families and reduce the risks of homelessness and other adverse events. While areas of strength and effective service delivery are evident, these are not uniformly available to all groups and in all areas.

Refuges, shelters and transitional accommodation remain a vital, albeit necessarily specialised and limited, part of the service system and provide valuable support for many families. However, the lack of secure, affordable and permanent housing is a systemic issue.

Indigenous women and children, especially in regional and remote areas, have very limited housing options and housing pathways in the aftermath of DFV. Acute shortages in crisis, transitional and long-term accommodation mean that Indigenous women and children are routinely turned away from refuges and safe houses because they are at capacity. In these circumstances they become trapped in a revolving door seeking shelter with family/friends or returning to an unsafe home. This is the case even in the context of a significant growth in awareness and resources to respond to families who have experienced DFV. The capacity of the service system away from metropolitan areas, and the cultural safety of services, remain areas where policy development, and resources to build workforce capacity and service quality are needed.

Social housing continues to be an important destination tenure for women leaving DFV. While it does not always offer an ideal living environment for women dealing with trauma or safety concerns, it does provide secure tenure and ongoing affordability. The marginalisation of social housing, through years of underinvestment, means not only is there insufficient housing for all who need it, but the little there is often comes in concentrations of disadvantage, and subject to sharply judgemental conditionality. Social housing legal responses to crime and to non-criminal anti-social behaviour (hereafter referred to as ‘misconduct’) conflict with other policies and practices to support vulnerable families in sustaining their tenancies. Although social housing landlords are generally strongly committed to assisting women leaving DFV, in social housing women are subject to unrealistic expectations about controlling the misconduct of male partners and visitors—and may be evicted because of violence against them. Tenancy termination is a blunt, heavy instrument that especially impacts on women, children, Indigenous persons and persons with problematic alcohol and other drug use.

## Policy development options

Policy development options to better integrate specialist homelessness services with the broader service system include:

- greater investment in a range of affordable housing options, particularly social housing that is planned and designed to be safe, secure and supportive, as well as affordable in the long-term
- strategies to address the impact of different levels of affordability and availability of housing across private rental markets, which make rental subsidies ineffective in some areas and severely limit the housing options for vulnerable families
- alignment of integrated, trauma-informed practice, which occurs at the level of local service delivery, with broader systemic interventions
- changes to income support policies to address poverty and social exclusion.

Policy development options to better support Indigenous families include:

- establishing and building the capacity of specific Indigenous landlord organisations, housing officers in mainstream providers, support workers and tenant advocates
- harnessing the experience and knowledge of Indigenous landlord organisations to build community capacity with a view to adjusting tenancy law, policy and practice. In particular, these organisations and communities can work towards changes that recognise cultural obligations and extended family responsibilities, rather than imposing responsibility and liability on tenants individually
- sustained investment in building the cultural safety of mainstream services and systems
- strategies to address the tensions between policies to support families to maintain care of their children, with child protection policies that mandate permanency planning.

Policy development options to better integrate social housing policy with policies to support vulnerable people include:

- reviewing social housing policies and practice for gender impacts, and sponsoring the cultivation of respectful relationships
- adopting 'the best interests of the child' as the paramount factor in decisions about tenancy termination affecting children
- moving support out of the shadow of tenancy termination
- giving tenants more certainty through commitments that no-one will be evicted into homelessness
- ensuring proper scrutiny is applied to termination decisions and proceedings, and to sector practice
- more effective service integration between housing and child protection practices, so that children are not removed or remain in out-of-home care unnecessarily
- reforming the law regarding tenants' extended and vicarious liability for other persons
- adopting harm minimisation as a guiding principle for responses to alcohol and other drug use, including where there is criminal offending.

In the jurisdictions where they are already established, specific Indigenous landlord organisations, housing officers in mainstream providers, support workers and tenant advocates are often able to collaborate and negotiate the complexity of Indigenous tenants' complex personal histories, institutional contacts and interpersonal relations, shaped by past and present institutionalised racism and colonialism. Establishing and building the capacity of these organisations and workers should be a priority in all jurisdictions.

## The study

Domestic and family violence (DFV), mental illness and problematic alcohol and other drug use are significant risk factors for homelessness. A range of policy responses has been devised to prevent homelessness among those affected by these issues, and to provide support to those who are experiencing homelessness. Evidence is emerging of promising practices that could be expanded. However, there are also indications of existing practices and policies in the housing field that may impede effective responses or worsen the hardships and injustice faced by vulnerable groups (Jones, Phillips et al. 2014).

Vulnerability to homelessness and violence are produced by multiple causes, and integrated responses to address this vulnerability have been identified in a number of strategies and policies as a priority. This Inquiry investigated how policy and program responses are experienced by key population groups in different types of housing tenure. The research focused on how integration is actually operating in different contexts:

- the integration of housing and other support for women experiencing DFV in different housing tenures
- integrated support for Indigenous women experiencing DFV
- the integration of social housing policy with policies to support women affected by domestic and family violence and other especially vulnerable households.

The overarching research question for the Inquiry is:

- How can housing support for vulnerable families be best integrated with other types of support, to enhance safety and wellbeing?

This research question is supported by three more specific research questions, which were addressed by individual projects:

- How effective are existing housing policies and practices in preventing homelessness and enhancing safety and wellbeing for women who have experienced domestic violence and their children?
- How can housing and other service responses to DFV be improved to meet the needs of Aboriginal individuals and families more effectively?
- Do social landlords' legal responses to occupier misconduct appropriately address women affected by DFV and other especially vulnerable households?

These three research projects encompass the experiences of different population groups, across critical transition points and different housing sectors.





**Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute**

Level 12, 460 Bourke Street

Melbourne VIC 3000

Australia


+61 3 9660 2300

[information@ahuri.edu.au](mailto:information@ahuri.edu.au)

[ahuri.edu.au](http://ahuri.edu.au)

 [twitter.com/AHURI\\_Research](https://twitter.com/AHURI_Research)

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

 Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute