

Submission on the National Housing and Homelessness Strategy

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Overview

About ARCSHS

The Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health, and Society (ARCSHS), based in La Trobe University, conducts world-class research and education on the social dimensions of sexuality, gender, health, and human relationships. We work collaboratively with other researchers, communities, community-based organisations, government, and professionals to advance knowledge and promote positive change in policy, practice, and people's lives.

ARCSHS is a national leader in LGBTIQ+ health and well-being research, as the home to some of Australia's largest studies on LGBTIQ+ experiences, including Private Lives and Writing Themselves In. We are also home to Rainbow Health Australia, an organisation with responsibility for supporting the capacity of human services to provide affirming, inclusive services to LGBTIQ+ people. This is done through training, implementation support and other capacity building, as well as holding the national standards for LGBTIQ+ affirmative practice in the Rainbow Standards and supporting quality assessment through the Rainbow Tick.

While our expertise and remit extend to other disciplines, we locate our submission in relation to our expertise in LGBTIQ+ health, well-being and evidence for affirmative service provision and social policy.

About this Submission

ARCSHS is grateful for the opportunity to make this submission on the national housing and homelessness strategy, and congratulate the Department on taking a broad-based, consultative approach to this topic of such profound importance to so many people in Australia. We appreciate all efforts to resolve this crucial, complex issue.

As a research centre that focuses on understanding challenges facing our most marginalised communities, and identifying levers for change to address these challenges, we recognise that resolving the gap in housing access is fundamentally interlinked with solving some of the most significant drivers of, and consequences of inequality facing Australia today. Housing security is a fundamental starting point from which people can flourish and create fulfilling, meaningful lives.

While we realise that many of the important measures to understand pathways into homelessness and early interventions to prevent homelessness may be outside the remit of this strategy and department, we feel nonetheless compelled to highlight the need for a holistic, whole of country, cross-departmental and multi-disciplinary approach that includes LGBTIQ+ people:

- Policies and strategies to address discriminatory attitudes and behaviours towards LGBTIQ+ people in the general community, which can act as structural-level drivers of homelessness.
- Supports for parents and families of LGBTIQ+ youth to prevent family breakdown and rejection.
- Services and supports that understand and effectively respond to the unique needs of LGBTIQ+ people in relation to mental health, AOD and family violence – some of the primary drivers into homelessness at an individual level and conditions that are often aggravated by experiences of housing insecurity and homelessness disproportionately experienced by this cohort.

The body of this submission focusses on those issues that are currently within the remit of the housing and homelessness strategy.

Submission overview

This submission includes two sections:

- Part One: a series of recommendations for the new national strategy and for the development of the strategy,
- Part Two: a brief overview of literature underpinning and supporting the recommendations.

These recommendations, in summary, encourage the department to show national leadership in ensuring that LGBTIQ+ people, particularly young people, transgender people and those with additional discriminated against identities, are identified as high-risk in terms of low housing security, homelessness and harm in homeless services. The Department should ensure, through national initiatives and federal funding and enforcement pathways, that appropriate preventative and responsive actions are identified, implemented and measured to ensure LGBTIQ+ people are no longer disproportionately burdened with housing insecurity and homelessness.

The submission begins with overarching recommendations. We believe these first three recommendations are foundational in ensuring the right to adequate living conditions inform an ambitious and creative strategy that will have an impact for those most affected by this issue. The subsequent recommendations address specific functions and mechanisms in housing and homelessness that should be considered.

Part One: Recommendations

Overarching recommendations

R1: The national strategy should commit, long-term, to the realisation of the right to an adequate standard of living as enshrined in the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* for all people in Australia. Article 2(1) of ICESCR states that a country is obliged to take steps '*to the maximum of its available resources, with a view to achieving progressively the full realisation*' of the rights recognised in ICESCR. This article also states that steps should be '*deliberate, concrete and targeted as clearly as possible towards meeting the obligations under the Covenant*'. Steps to this may involve¹:

- Strengthening the legislative footing for a right to an adequate standard of living by ensuring, through an appropriate governmental, strategic approach, that it is enshrined in Commonwealth legislation rather than only at state level.
- Through an appropriate legal infrastructure and instrument, creating obligations for the removal of the primary structural driver of homelessness and housing insecurity, namely, the lack of adequate housing stock.
- Any other steps as recommended by human rights and housing rights experts and bodies that prioritises the interests and needs of those experiencing and at risk of housing insecurity and homelessness.

R2: The national strategy should be underpinned by a principle of equality, explicitly recognising the disproportionate burden of housing insecurity and homelessness carried by minoritized communities (see appendix A for why the current framing is limited and requires revision). This principal should inform:

- the initial strategy development process including exploration of research and international good practice, strategy consultation frameworks and engagement plans.
- national vision, framing and context for the strategy.
- goals and outcomes, namely that there should be specific targets to address the disproportionate burden of homelessness for higher risk communities. This should include engagement and retention in services, progress through homeless/housing services and achievement and sustainment of housing security.

¹ <https://www.ag.gov.au/rights-and-protections/human-rights-and-anti-discrimination/human-rights-scrutiny/public-sector-guidance-sheets/right-adequate-standard-living-including-food-water-and-housing>

- an ambitious and creative approach to potential solutions and actions, namely, solutions and models for homelessness and social housing that tailor to the unique needs of cultural and minority groups, including LGBTIQ+ people, are explored and included.
- impact, outcomes, KPIs, measurement systems and reporting
- requirements for federal funding to national projects or to state governments should require incorporation of these principals and strategy measures to support the national vision.

R3: LGBTIQ+ people should be identified as a high-priority/high-risk group for national and state-level housing and homelessness prevention and response strategies, in particular young LGBTIQ+ people, trans and gender diverse people, Indigenous LGBTIQ+ people, older LGBTIQ+ people, and LGBTIQ+ people with intersecting identities such as disability or cultural / linguistic diversity. As detailed in the literature section, research directly with this population reveals disproportionately high levels of homelessness and housing insecurity and should be considered a primary source for data to establish this. There are limitations in data collection in services, and research demonstrating that populations with ‘concealable’ stigmatized identities (1), including LGBTIQ+ people (2), may choose to keep their identity hidden from homeless and housing providers as a protective measure arising from fear of discrimination or harm (3,4). This means that general research with homeless populations, or service data, may not provide accurate demographic information relating to sexuality and gender diversity in homeless and housing services.

Recommendations for improvement of existing services

R4: All housing and homeless services in receipt of funding through federal-state agreements should be required to develop LGBTIQ+ inclusive practice policies or plans that address identified barriers and harms for sexuality and gender diverse people across the continuum of care, as enshrined in the Rainbow Standards. Care should be given to ensure that services in outer suburban and rural areas are working in line LGBTIQ+ affirmative standards of practice.

R5: Housing and homeless services in receipt of through federal-state agreements should be supported to comply with evidence-based good practice guidance for LGBTIQ+ inclusive practice in human services, such as the Rainbow Tick Framework, through the release of resources for training, capacity building and implementation support.

R6: A long-term strategy is developed to ensure that homeless and housing services move to address infrastructural barriers such as the provision of gender inclusive accommodation, changing and bathroom facilities as well as data collection and reporting systems, in line with identified international good practice.

Recommendations relating to LGBTIQ+ specific homeless service and housing models

R7: Specific funding streams should be ringfenced and released to create tailored, targeted pathways for trans and gender diverse people (or that states are required to create them as a condition of their funding). This may include for example targeted private rental access programmes, targeted housing first programmes, alternative housing co-operative pilots, gender inclusive crisis and transitional accommodation services etc.

R8: Examine, identify promote and support community-lead co-operative housing models or similar for LGBTIQ+ people and in particular older LGBTIQ+ people and develop incentives or obligations for state-governments to progress options in this regard. Multi-generational options may provide not only a sense of community, but may provide an alternative option for young LGBTIQ+ people who are at a much higher risk of early homelessness and youth homelessness than their cisgender or heterosexual peers. LGBTIQ+ communities should be engaged in targeted consultation and research to identify appropriate community lead co-operative (or similar) models and required supports.

Recommendations relating to research and data

R9: Data collection systems in homeless services, as well as bodies responsible for social housing applications and allocations, should record and report on sexuality and gender diversity data in line with emerging best practice in data collection on this population. This should be accompanied by training and data collection policies sensitive to the potentially triggering experiences of sensitive data collection for LGBTIQ+ people (relating to sharing their gender/sexuality/intersex identity). Statutory requirements in relation to gender and sexuality data should avoid targets on the data itself, but rather be focussed on data collection systems (CMS / forms) being inclusive in terms of gender and sexuality, and staff being trained in safe data collection. The ABS Standard for collection of data on sex, gender, sexuality and innate variations in sex characteristics should be adopted whenever possible. Where there are statutory targets that require significant systems change in

terms of data collection (e.g., policy suites, CRM systems etc.), this should be accompanied by resources (e.g., small one-off grants) to support this.

R10: A research agenda is developed to better understand the pathways, experiences and outcomes of LGBTIQ+ people through housing insecurity and homelessness including sub-populations of the LGBTIQ+ group, as well as LGBTIQ+ people with intersecting identities. This should be used to inform on-going funding and policy decisions.

Part Two: Supporting Literature

Supporting literature

A note on the literature

This section is not intended to provide a comprehensive or detailed review of the literature relating to LGBTIQ+ people and housing/homelessness, but rather to point towards examples of evidence as rationale for the recommendations. As previously detailed, we encourage the Department to undertake a robust review of the evidence relating to this population to ensure the strategy, and the actions arising from it, best serve those most affected by this issue.

A) LGBTIQ+ People, Housing and Homelessness

LGBTIQ+ people experience, independent of homelessness, many risk factors and negative outcomes attributed to homelessness:

- LGBTIQ+ people already carry a significant burden in terms of many of the negative impacts attributed to or ameliorated by homelessness, such as poorer self-rated health and mental health difficulties(5), experiences substance use (5–7) harassment, discrimination and abuse (5,7) and higher levels of unemployment, particularly among transgender people(5). This means that homelessness and many other difficult life experiences has a compounding impact on this already disadvantaged group in terms of health, social, emotional and economic outcomes and this vulnerability must be considered in homeless and housing policy(8).

LGBTIQ+ people experience disproportionate levels of homelessness

- That LGBTIQ+ people have disproportionately high experiences of homelessness is well established in literature. In Australia, 22% of LGBTIQ+ adults have ever experienced homelessness, with this figure being higher (one third, approximately) for transgender and non-binary people (5), which is significantly higher than the general adult population, with the Australian Bureau of Statistics stating that 11% of Australians over 15 have ever experienced homelessness (9)
- It is well established both in Australia (7,9) and in international literature (10,11) that LGBTIQ+ young people are significantly more likely to be represented in homeless populations than cisgender or heterosexual young people, and to enter homelessness at a younger age (6,12). Research has also identified that people who first experience homelessness at a young age are more likely to experience persistent homelessness (12), thus putting young LGBTIQ+ people at increased risk of persistent homelessness compared to their peers.
- There is diverse experiences within LGBTIQ+ subpopulation; for example bisexual people experience earlier homelessness, and more frequent homelessness than other subpopulations (6)
- Among young homeless people, trans and gender-diverse young people, individuals who identified with sexual identity labels other than lesbian, gay or bisexual, racially-minoritized persons, disabled persons and individuals from a religious family or household are more likely to experience homelessness compared to their respective counterparts (7), much of which is also reflected in adult populations (13).
- In terms of housing precarity, older LGBTIQ+ people are less likely to be homeowners, and more likely to live in private rented into their elder years. This is particularly true of trans and gender diverse older people to rent and live alone. (13)

LGBTIQ+ people experience discrimination at all points on the pathway into, through and exiting homelessness:

General

- LGBTIQ+ people in Australia have experienced barriers to accessing homelessness or housing services because of their gender or sexuality; 16% due to sexual orientation and 30% due to being trans or gender diverse (5)
- LGBTIQ+ people may conceal their identities in accessing services in order to ensure access and avoid discrimination (4)

Private rented and social housing

- Family rejection is one of the most significant drivers of LGBTIQ+ youth homelessness (6,14)
- LGBTIQ+ people experience discrimination in the private rented sector including in efforts to access rental housing, and while in shared private rented accommodation (6,15–18)
- LGBTIQ+ people avoid raising concerns with housing inadequacies in private rented for fear of discrimination and eviction (13)
- Transgender people experience difficult in accessing private rented accommodation that require rental histories where their name may be different to one previously used (13)
- Older LGBTIQ+ people may avoid engaging in supported housing due to fear of, or lived experience of discrimination and exclusion, which is compounded for those with intersecting identities such as Indigenous and ethnic/cultural. Where they do engage in mainstream housing for older people (16)
- Despite evidence of increased exposure to violence and harassment, homeless support services do not currently operate under referral policies where trans and gender diverse people may be prioritised for safer crisis accommodation². While in some instances where a fear for safety or life is a viable criteria by which someone can be categorised as higher priority(19), without adequate training and awareness for referral / selection staff, the danger posed to trans and gender diverse people and other LGB+ people may not be readily considered in the decision-making process without specific identification of this risk factor.

Homelessness

- Research shows that LGBTIQ+ people experience disproportionate levels of unsafety, distress and violence when accessing services, which is perceived to be ameliorated and compounding for those with additional discriminated against facets of their identities (17,20).
- LGBTIQ+ may avoid accessing services due to previous experiences of discrimination, or expectations of discrimination, abuse or harassment in services, including in faith-based services (6)
- Transgender people experience difficulties in accessing and engaging with homeless services due to their gender binary nature of service provision, choosing not to attend, or being refused access because they are transgender (21,22)

² <https://www.housing.vic.gov.au/social-housing-eligibility>

B) Data and Research

Research

There is a body of both peer reviewed and grey literature (many examples referenced in this submission) that supports a more nuanced understanding of the experiences and needs of young LGBTIQ+ people in homelessness. While there is significantly more needed to identify how to effectively prevent and address LGBTIQ+ youth homelessness, there also remains a significant gap for other populations including LGBTIQ+ adults and sub-populations of LGBTIQ+ adults (there is prevalence data, but a lack of more in-depth qualitative research, a lack of data on progress through services and outcomes, a lack of information on the experiences of LGBTIQ+ adults in social housing etc.), as well as those with intersecting identities (23). It is important that a considered and robust research agenda is implemented to effectively inform policy and service provision in the short, medium and long-term.

Service data

- Many services and systems do not currently collect accurate data on gender and sexuality (3) and it is likely this is the case in housing and homelessness services. A brief scan of, for example Housing Victoria's forms and systems reveal that even in relation to priority applications for housing³, that gender fields are outdated, limited and sexuality data is not collected.
- Many homeless services do not collect demographic data in relation to gender diversity and sexuality, and where they do LGBTIQ+ people are less likely to come out in environments that are perceived to be unsafe, including homeless services (3,24)

C) Innovation

There are innovative solutions that may benefit LGBTIQ+ people in terms of promoting safety in services and housing security. These examples can inform an exploration of ambitious and innovative solutions that could be progressed through this national strategy.

Homelessness and supported housing services:

- There are a broad variety of guides, resources, capacity building supports and training for service providers to help them create safe and inclusive services for LGBTIQ+ people⁴

³ <https://www.housing.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/201808/Priority-access-application.pdf>

⁴ For example: <https://rainbowhealthaustralia.org.au/research-resources/>
<https://rainbowhealthaustralia.org.au/rainbow-tick>

- A number of pilot initiatives have explored targeted initiatives within existing services that could support LGBTIQ+ people in homelessness including, for example a pilot exploring the role of peers in supporting LGBTIQ+ people to navigate housing services (25).
- LGBTIQ+ specific accommodation services have been established in a number of states:
 - o LGBTIQ+ specific family violence accommodation in Melbourne provided by Thorn Harbour Health
 - o LGBTIQ+ youth homelessness service in Victoria provided by the Family Access Network⁵
 - o Twenty10 LGBTIQ+ youth homeless medium-term accommodation (NSW)⁶
 - o The Gender Centre transitional homeless service for trans and gender diverse people (NSW)⁷

Social Housing

- There are LGBTIQ+ led non-profit housing cooperatives in many jurisdictions including Canada ⁸, the United States ⁹ and the United Kingdom ¹⁰
- There are LGBTIQ+ specific retirement housing projects in the United Kingdom¹¹
- There is an intergenerational cooperative housing project for older and younger LGBTIQ+ people in Berlin¹², and in Madrid ¹³
- Consultation with older LGBTIQ+ people has identified a strong appetite for such intergenerational models (16)

⁵ <https://www.fan.org.au/homeless-support-services/>

⁶ <https://twenty10.org.au/youth-services-housing-and-case-management/>

⁷ <https://gendercentre.org.au/services/accommodation>

⁸ <https://abiwincooperativeinc.wildapricot.org/>

⁹ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/mollysprayregen/2021/02/25/this-co-op-is-tackling-homelessness-with-its-own-house-for-queer-people-of-color/?sh=15a983cd12af>

¹⁰ <https://bhclt.org.uk/local-housing-groups/sea-city-housing-co-op/>

¹¹ <https://www.tonichousing.org.uk/about-tonic>

¹² <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/oct/28/lesbian-gay-housing-project-berlin>

¹³ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/jan/02/spains-first-gay-retirement-home>

Conclusion

We thank the Department for the opportunity to make this submission and for their time and consideration. We are happy to provide further information, evidence and ideas in line with our remit, and welcome any further engagement on this strategy.

Yours sincerely,

[Redacted signature]

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Appendix: 'Issues Paper' framing of disadvantage and target groups

The Issues Paper informing this consultation provides some insight into how the relationship between certain socio-economic groups and housing/homelessness might currently be considered or understood as illustrated in the introduction section:

However, there is strong evidence many disadvantaged and vulnerable people experience individual and complex challenges accessing housing. In particular, women and children impacted by family and domestic violence, people exiting institutions, people who have recently transitioned from the Australian Defence Force to civilian life, people with disability, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, younger Australians including young people leaving out-of-home care, and older women.

While understanding this is not intended as a policy statement or indication of strategic direction, it provides a useful reference point from which the issue of marginalisation and disadvantage can be explored. Some considerations include:

- The framing of the disproportionate burden of housing insecurity and homelessness must address the structural factors that puts some groups at higher risk than others of housing insecurity and homelessness. This does not undermine the importance of the provision of targeted, individualised supports to cohorts living with increased individual risk factors for homelessness, but rather compels us to ensure that systems-level and structural barriers and drivers are also identified and addressed in prevention and response strategies (23) for higher-risk groups
- The framing of the problem as an access issue does not encompass the barriers and blocks minoritized communities experience at all points on pathways into, through and out of homelessness and housing insecurity, as well as in accessing housing.
- The list of cohorts considered 'priority' is limited and would benefit from an up-to-date review of the evidence to ensure over-represented higher risk groups are included in priority lists, with appropriate responses identified. The data source for who is over-represented must not rely on access figures only, as many minoritized populations with 'concealable' stigmatized identities (1), including LBGITQ+ people, may choose to keep their identity hidden from homeless and housing providers as a protective measure arising from fear of discrimination or harm.

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