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Submission made on behalf of Brisbane Youth Service

42 McLachlan Street, Fortitude Valley

BRISBANE QLD 4006

20 October 2023

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission on the **National Housing and Homelessness Plan**.

Brisbane Youth Service (BYS) was founded in 1977 in response to the issue of youth homelessness. We holistically support vulnerable young people experiencing or at risk of homelessness aged between 12 and 25 years, and their children. Young people who access BYS typically experience a range of complex challenges such as past or current domestic or family violence; mental ill health; unsafe, overcrowded or unaffordable housing; and no or very low income. We assist young people to secure and maintain housing; address physical and mental health issues; establish safe relationships; connect with community; and access pathways to education and employment. Brisbane Youth Service is a Tier 3 community housing provider that also provides tenancy support services to young people based in Brisbane residing in public and community housing.

In the 2022-23 financial year, BYS supported 3,079 young people through brief crisis intervention and 1,797 young people and accompanying children through ongoing planned support. Almost half of all young people supported were homeless when they presented for support, and 77% were living in unsafe, unaffordable, overcrowded or temporary accommodation. More than one in four young people supported were couch surfing when they presented for support, a common form of 'hidden' homeless for young people. One in ten young people supported were sleeping rough and 8% were in boarding houses or crisis homelessness services. One in five were living with family, and one in five were in private/shared rentals. Just under one in ten young people presenting for support were living in public/community housing. Young people supported by BYS have a range of intersecting support needs including:

- 30% were Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander
- 20% had disability
- 26% were sexuality diverse
- 61% had mental health diagnoses
- 26% had a serious physical health issue
- 73% experienced past family violence
- 46% experienced past intimate partner violence (IPV)
- 27% were unemployed and looking for work

As a community-based organisation with a long history of supporting children and young people, we make the following points in response to the questions posed in the Issues Paper.

Summary of recommendations

Homelessness

Recommendation 1: Increase youth-specific homeless and housing service responses for young people living in regional and rural areas.

Recommendation 2: Decrease the numbers of children and young people presenting to the Specialist Youth Homelessness Sector by developing a National Child and Youth Housing and Homelessness Plan.

Recommendation 3: Include in the plan coordinated strategies to integrate services for young people across the social services sector, with a particular focus on the systems young people at risk of or experiencing homelessness have frequent contact with i.e., Services Australia, Child Protection including Out of Home Care (OOHC), Youth Justice, Primary and Mental Health, and the SHS system.

Recommendation 4: Review current homelessness system responses to young people to identify gaps and opportunities for the development of an integrated ecosystem of services and housing supports. This work should include a review and redesign of associated policies.

- This ecosystem of housing approaches should be underpinned by a long-term commitment to young people across their young adulthood (16 – 26 years)

Recommendation 5: Increase funding to early intervention and prevention programs in addition to the national Reconnect funded program.

Recommendation 6: Better evidence 'hidden' homelessness by tapping into existing data collection from Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) and Advance to Zero movements.

Homelessness Services

Recommendation 7: Include specific strategies to address the underlying causes of homelessness.

Recommendation 8: Inform the development of a National Housing and Homelessness Plan with a comprehensive systems-based analysis of the pathways into and out of homelessness for young people, to identify effective strategies for addressing the current challenges and limitations of the homelessness system.

Recommendation 9: Provide for housing models that deliver intensive wrap around support to build young people's transition to independence, which incorporate young people as active designers of services.

Social housing (including community housing)

Recommendation 10: Include strategies that improve the financial viability of social housing for young people so that the number of young people living in social housing increases.

Recommendation 11: Ensure greater flexibility in the allocation and reallocation of social housing to reduce social isolation and improve young people's access to opportunity.

Recommendation 12: Scale up evidence-informed, evaluated tenancy sustainment programs such as Sustaining Young Tenancies and Youth Housing First for every young person in social housing.

Homelessness

Challenges for people experiencing homelessness in urban, regional, and rural areas:

Recommendation 1: Increase youth-specific homeless and housing service responses for young people living in regional and rural areas.

As an urban youth homelessness service, we can only comment on homelessness responses focused in urban rather than regional and rural areas and the impact on urban homelessness services. Government responses to the housing crisis have been centred in the city. During the COVID-19 pandemic and following the 2022 floods, many young people moved out of regional and remote areas and into urban areas for greater access to services, as much of the emergency housing funding was focused on cities. A lack of regional and rural responses to homelessness forces young people to migrate to locations where they think they can better access services. This puts more pressure on already stretched urban youth services like BYS as these young people need support to source housing and develop skills to safely live in a city environment.

Short, medium, and long-term actions governments take to help prevent homelessness or to support people who may be at risk of becoming homeless:

Recommendation 2: Decrease the numbers of children and young people presenting to the Specialist Youth Homelessness Sector by developing a National Child and Youth Housing and Homelessness Plan.

Unaccompanied children and young people deserve a standalone plan so that their needs and experiences are not reduced to one or two recommendations in an adult-focused strategy. National child and youth wellbeing strategies do not adequately address the issue of homelessness despite experiences of homelessness having serious and long-lasting negative impacts on young people's social, physical, and emotional development. In recognition of their overrepresentation in the homeless population, children and young people are a priority cohort in the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA). Yet, without a clear national youth-focussed Housing and Homelessness plan and accompanying strategies, children and young people will slip through the cracks.

For example, in 2022-23 BYS supported 200 unaccompanied children under 16 years old (11% of all people supported). Across Australia, services are left with no real direction as to how to address unaccompanied children and young people experiencing homelessness aged under 16 years. Often social service systems leave the responsibility to Child Safety, who limit their response to children and young people deemed at risk of significant harm. This narrow response leaves Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) like BYS to advocate for and support children under 16 years old.

Ideally, a National Child and Youth Housing and Homelessness Plan would empower each state to establish its own dedicated youth strategy for delivering on the plan with clear measures of success and a comprehensive and transparent reporting system. Funding to the Homelessness sector would be significantly increased and allocated federally and by each state to address local gaps in the current housing and homelessness system. This funding should ideally be outcomes-driven and decided in consultation or collaboration with service providers (rather than outputs-based that can be unnecessarily time consuming to report against and does not demonstrate impact). This funding approach would encourage service system innovation and the delivery of evidence-informed programs and interventions.

If a standalone plan for children and young people is not possible, then this broad national plan must have a specific chapter on unaccompanied children and young people that outlines a strategy for ensuring child and youth homelessness is brief, rare and non-recurring. A clear message needs to be sent by the federal government that homelessness is experienced by children and young people in their own right – not just as extensions of their family/caregivers.

The Issues Paper acknowledges that children and young people experiencing homelessness are also at increased risk of homelessness later in life. This is an important justification for greater investment into dedicated youth-focused services and interventions, which should be seen through the lens of prevention and early intervention to address chronic, intergenerational adult homelessness in the future.¹ Prioritising young people will decrease the pipeline of adults in the system as well as translate to significant long-term cost savings across multiple areas of government expenditure.

Recommendation 3: Any plan must include coordinated strategies to integrate services for young people across the social services sector, with a particular focus on the systems young people at risk of or experiencing homelessness have frequent contact with i.e., Services Australia, Child Protection including Out of Home Care (OOHC), Youth Justice, Primary and Mental Health, and the SHS system.

Systems integration (with supporting policy integration) is vital for enabling a comprehensive and coordinated approach to the delivery of service level interventions for vulnerable young people, as well as addressing the various factors that contribute to homelessness, such as DFV, mental health challenges, systems disadvantage, and childhood adversity. Integrated responses will also enable government and communities to proactively prevent homelessness and support young people at risk of homelessness.² The broader service system is a considerable challenge for young people to navigate, particularly for young people who experience complex and co-occurring support needs.

In response to a disjointed and siloed service system, youth services like BYS have developed their own integrated approach to ensure young people can access a range of essential services such as housing, medical support, mental health and psychosocial programs, counselling, and specialised domestic violence support from the one service. This model provides an intersectional and relational response that promotes engagement with young people. Yet the sustainability of youth services is challenged by a patchwork of government and philanthropic funding opportunities that they must spend considerable time stitching together if they are to fund service delivery and essential operational overheads (including workforce development and evaluation) so that young people receive quality services. Cross-departmental collaboration is essential to developing appropriate funding models that match the intersectionality of young people's needs.

Government involvement is also instrumental to collaboration among different government and community agencies. For example, **improvement could be made to the rules-based punitive Centrelink system** that often cuts young people off from their payments multiple times when they don't understand or can't comply with their mutual obligations. Better training of staff regarding the

¹ Flatau, P., Conroy, E., Spooner, C., Edwards, R., Eardley, T & Forbes, C. (2013). Lifetime and intergenerational experiences of homelessness in Australia. *AHURI Final Reports No. 200*. Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute: Melbourne, Australia. <https://researchdirect.westernsydney.edu.au/islandora/object/uws:22670/datastream/PDF/view>

² Spinney, A., Beer, A., MacKenzie, D., McNelis, S., Meltzer, A., Muti, K., Peters, A., & Valentine, K. (2020). *Ending homelessness in Australia: A redesigned homelessness service system*. AHURI Final Report No. 347. Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute: Melbourne, Australia. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3740239

specific needs of vulnerable young people, and more Community Engagement officers/expansion of the Community Partnerships Pilot to more community organisations is required.

Co-location of services in Hubs or ‘one stop shops’ is a way of overcoming the siloing of services that limit vulnerable young people’s ability to access holistic and coordinated support. In the 2022-23 financial year, 26% of young people supported by BYS were young parents. For young pregnant women experiencing homelessness, navigating housing, welfare, health, and Child Safety systems is complex and fraught with barriers.³ When a young person is homeless, they are often unable to access antenatal support from the hospital as they do not have an address in any hospital catchment. For young people eligible for Centrelink payments, the increased parenting payment is not accessible until their child is born. For young pregnant women who are not Australia citizens, government financial assistance and housing may not be available.

One promising example of co-located services for young people, including housing, is the **Youth Hub in Christchurch, Aotearoa New Zealand**. This youth-centric and accessible village will connect socially supportive organisations under one roof to deliver a holistic one-stop model of wrap-around services including mental health, medical, education, employment and training, transitional housing, recreation, creativity, and social entrepreneurship. See: <https://www.youthhubchch.org.nz/>

Safe, suitable, and affordable housing is key to ending cycles of homelessness for young people and providing a nurturing environment for their children. Although pregnant women may once have been prioritised for urgent housing, Queensland has seen an increase in the number of people on Social Housing waitlists and a dramatic decrease in the number of suitable affordable rentals for young people on the Youth Allowance and single parents on parenting payments. While the Queensland State Government Immediate Housing Response for Families (IHR-F) has stepped in to fill the need for crisis accommodation, there are few options for young people to transition to once accommodated in motel by IHR-F. Homelessness is also a key trigger for pre-birth notifications to Child Safety and children being taken into care at birth.

Government-funded (sometimes community funded) systems ‘navigators’ or ‘connectors’ are gaining traction here in Australia⁴ and in countries like New Zealand.⁵ These roles connect people with services, build service system knowledge and awareness of available support, and provide advice across multiple systems such as housing and homelessness, income support, legal and justice, and primary and mental health systems. Development of Systems Navigators with a particular focus on helping young people navigate the Specialist Homelessness Service, Centrelink, OOHC, Child Safety, NDIS, mental health, DFV, and Youth Justice systems is a short to medium term action that governments can take while service integration improves and other long-term solutions to prevent and address homelessness begin to achieve their intended impact. Systems Navigators can also facilitate young people’s supported exit from systems or institutions such as OOHC or youth

³ Mann, C., Vichta-Ohlsen, R., and Baker, L. (2022). Young Women Navigating Pregnancy and Homelessness: Pathways into and Barriers Out of Homelessness. *Parity*, 35(5), 17-19. <https://brisyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Young-women-navigating-homelessness-and-pregnancy-Pathways-into-and-barriers-out-of-homelessness.pdf>

⁴ Housing Connectors in QLD <https://statements.qld.gov.au/statements/98449>

⁵ Duckworth, S., and Smith, L., (2022). The Intensive Case Manager and Navigators Initiatives Evaluation Report. Litmus: Wellington. Available: <https://www.msd.govt.nz/documents/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/evaluation/intensive-case-management-and-navigator-initiatives/icm-evaluation-report.pdf>

detention, especially as lack of support on exit has repeatedly shown to be a pathway to homelessness.⁶

The Queensland State Government Immediate Housing Relief for Families (IHR-F) initiative, which commenced at BYS in July 2022, has offered a much-needed immediate response for young parenting and pregnant families. IHR-F has allowed BYS to support 165 families to access emergency motel accommodation to date, with 36 families being supported into new social housing tenancies, and 13 families being supported to move into new private rental tenancies. The remaining families have either disengaged, returned to couch surfing arrangements, moved out of region/interstate, or entered refuge. While 30% of young families exiting homelessness is impressive during a housing crisis, the numbers clearly demonstrate the lack of options for families to move on to, despite intensive supports from the service sector. The remaining families have either disengaged, returned to couch surfing arrangements, moved out of region/interstate, or entered refuge.

Whilst IHR-F has been a well-received initiative there has been a bottle neck created by the lack of new social housing opportunities. The rental market is financially out of reach of many young families due to affordability, not being able to compete with waged families, and having no or very little tenancy histories. Many families supported by BYS have been in motel for over six months. The motels that are willing to provide accommodation to BYS homeless youth are few, and those that will are also providing accommodation to other NGOs under the same initiative. The motel options that we use to accommodate approximately 35 families in any month are not child-friendly environments: motel rooms do not have kitchens, laundries, or safe play spaces. They are the same low-cost motels that are frequented by other cohorts with complex needs, including people recently released from incarceration. This has led many motels to become places where crime, prostitution, drug use and trafficking are rife. Many of the young families accommodated in motels have also either recently fled DFV or are currently navigating DFV, DFV incidents are common occurrence in motels, which are not fit-for-purpose, secure environments to respond to such complexity and safely house children.

How can the homelessness system more effectively respond to those at risk of or already experiencing homelessness?

Recommendation 4: Review current homelessness system responses to young people to identify gaps and opportunities for the development of an integrated ecosystem of services and housing supports. This work should include a review and redesign of associated policies.

An effective homelessness system is one that provides an ecosystem of responses to young people based on their presenting needs. The ecosystem would respond to young people when they first experience homelessness to support their eventual exit into stable and secure long-term housing. An effective integrated homelessness ecosystem would enable young people to transition more easily from crisis accommodation, transitional housing, and supportive housing models like Youth Foyer, to

⁶ Mendes, P., McCurdy, S. (2020). Policy and practice supports for young people transitioning from out-of-home care: An analysis of six recent inquiries in Australia. *Journal of Social Work*, 20(5), 599-619. doi: 10.1177/1468017319852702

social or community housing, into the private rental market, and ultimately lead to homeownership later in life.⁷ Striking a balance to ensure there are no bottlenecks or gaps in the system is important.

This ecosystem of housing approaches should be underpinned by a long-term commitment to young people across their young adulthood (16 – 26 years) and be supported by funding models that allow for a young person-centred response – not a siloed issue-based response to the barriers young people face in accessing and sustaining housing i.e. young people having to go to one service to access DFV support, another to access housing support, and another to access income support and so on. To create a well-functioning ecosystem of housing responses for young people, the following is needed:

- More youth-centred therapeutic family work to prevent family breakdown leading to homelessness.
- More crisis accommodation for young people, including specialised youth DFV refuges and safe options for gender and sexuality diverse young people.
- More short-term transitional options for young people including trauma-informed residential models run by community that are staffed 24 hours a day by skilled and knowledgeable youth workers; and informed by a service delivery model with a clear transition pathway to other housing when the young person is ready. BYS runs three such houses for 16 to 18-year-olds, which offer young people an opportunity to build confidence, gain independent living skills, and accomplish their goals.
- More transitional options for pregnant/parenting young people that are fit to meet the housing needs of children.
- More therapeutic housing models for young people growing their independence who require mental health and AOD supports. Analysis of seven years of BYS data showed that young people we support who have mental health diagnoses were much more likely to use AOD and identify this use as having a negative impact on their life compared to those without mental health diagnoses. Unfortunately, housing for young people with dual mental health and AOD support needs is rare and hard to access.
- Investment in more Youth Foyers for young people developing their independence, which integrate learning and accommodation. See <https://foyer.org.au/>.
- Tenancy sustainment programs for young people living in social housing (see the Sustaining Young Tenancies program below).
- Development and expansion of rental subsidy programs for young people accessing private and affordable housing options and a review and increase of Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA), which currently does little to relieve young people's rental stress.⁸
- More funding for street-based assertive outreach to engage young people with the ecosystem of housing supports.

Recommendation 5: Fund early intervention and prevention programs in addition to the national Reconnect funded program.

Funding for early intervention continues to be called for but not provided by state or federal governments. Across all types of interventions, cross government coordination of pooled funding is required if interventions are to address the intersecting causes of homelessness. Funding cycles for

⁷ MacKenzie, D., Hand, T., Zufferey, C., McNelis, S., Spinney, A., & Tedmanson, D. (2020). *Redesign of a homelessness service system for young people*. AHURI Final Report No. 327. Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute: Melbourne, Australia. doi: 10.18408/ahuri-5119101

⁸ Azize, M. (2023) *Reforming Rent Assistance: Ending Rental Stress Across Australia*. Anglicare Australia: Canberra.

new pilot programs should be for 5 years minimum, with sufficient budget for evaluation and the dissemination of knowledge arising from evaluation activities.

We note that the only specific government commitment to young people named in the National Housing and Homelessness Plan Issues Paper is delivery of the Reconnect Program. While this is welcome, the program only supports young people aged 12 to 18 years and focusses on family repair and reconnection. Given the prevalence of domestic and family violence (DFV) experienced by young people in the homelessness system, it is often not safe for many young people to remain living with their family of origin. In addition, Reconnect is not designed to address intimate partner violence (IPV). Of the young people BYS supported in the 2022-23 financial year:

- 46% had experienced past relationship violence.
- 19% were currently experiencing family violence.
- 11% were currently in a violent relationship.
- 26% told us that violence was a crisis or serious concern in their lives.

IPV, alongside family violence, is a primary driver of homelessness for young people and continues to characterise their experience of homelessness.⁹ The broad range of young people's experiences of violence need to be reflected in any National Housing and Homelessness Plan strategies and actions.

Effective prevention and early intervention models that respond to young people at risk of homelessness that could be expanded and replicated elsewhere include:

- **BYS Safe and Connected Futures** program, which works with young people and their families to prevent homelessness (see <https://brisyouth.org/services/other-support/>).
- **The Ruby's Reunification Program** that provides intensive therapeutic support and respite housing to keep young people out of the homelessness system. (<https://www.unitingcommunities.org/service/rubys-reunification-program>)
- **The Kids Under Cover Studio Program** that builds one or two bedroom studios with a bathroom, in the backyards of a family or carer's home (see: <https://www.kuc.org.au/what-we-do/how-we-help/studio-program/>)

Evidencing 'hidden' or 'invisible' homelessness (e.g., couch surfing, living in a car, and overcrowding)?

Recommendation 6: Better evidence 'hidden' homelessness by tapping into existing data collection from Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) and Advance to Zero movements.

'Hidden' and 'invisible' homelessness experienced by young people can best be captured with screening tools in the SHS sector as well as in health, child protection and school systems. BYS reviewed our intake data and found that 63% of young people who were couch surfing when they presented for support were still attending school/university/training regularly.¹⁰ This highlights the crucial role education systems can play in identifying young people who are experiencing homelessness.

⁹ Martijn, C., & Sharpe, L. (2006). Pathways to youth homelessness. *Social Science & Medicine*, 62, 1-12. doi: 10.1016/j.socscimed.2005.05.007

¹⁰ Mann, C. (2022). Attending school while homeless: Emerging evidence from young people in Brisbane. *Parity*, 35(4), 25-27. <https://brisyouth.org/research/attending-school-while-homeless-emerging-evidence-from-young-people-in-brisbane/>

In addition to this, the By-Name list from Brisbane Zero, used to provide a response to every person experiencing homelessness, is another way for government to capture 'hidden' homelessness.¹¹ The By-Name list allows services to track episodes of homelessness for young people and the risk screening tool (The Australian Homelessness Vulnerability Triage Tool) captures detailed contextual information about current living situation in the week prior to seeking support.

Homelessness services

Main challenges in addressing chronic and repeated homelessness.

Areas of the homelessness service response where people who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness are not getting the support they need.

Recommendation 7: Include specific strategies to address the underlying causes of homelessness.

While young people may not have had repeated episodes of homelessness due to their young age, that does not mean their experience of homelessness is not chronic. Homelessness cannot be addressed without addressing the underlying causes of homelessness e.g. lack of trauma-informed child safety responses, early developmental trauma in children, poor access to mental health supports for vulnerable young people and families, and domestic and family violence.

Recommendation 8: development of the National Housing and Homelessness Plan needs to be informed by a comprehensive systems-based analysis of the pathways into and out of homelessness for young people, to identify effective strategies for addressing the current challenges and limitations of the homelessness system.

The main challenge faced by youth services and the SHS sector is the provision of responses to young people in the absence of coordinated, appropriate and accessible support from adjacent systems e.g. housing, welfare, hospital, child protection. Lack of systems integration means many young people do not get the support they need.

Additional key challenges in addressing homelessness experienced by young people (some of which could be addresses by better system integration) include:

- Lack of appropriate safe affordable housing
- Lack of housing supply
- Lack of therapeutic supports for young people with complex needs e.g. DFV, AOD, disability.
- Lack of funding for supportive housing
- Lack of housing models that support young people to pursue education and training
- Lack of access to mental health services and appropriate housing for people with complex mental health, which leads to repeated episodes of homelessness.
- Homelessness services manage young people in complex and high risk Domestic and Family Violence (DFV) circumstances and are often doing the work of other services (i.e. housing supports are doing family work or domestic violence advocacy). While experiences of DFV hugely contribute to the risk of homelessness for young people, young people do not routinely access mainstream DFV Specialist supports. Investment is needed in DFV systems advocacy to allow DFV specialist supports to be offered in Youth Homelessness support services.

¹¹ Brisbane Zero. (2023). *Reducing Homelessness*.

<https://www.brisbanezero.org.au/reduce#:~:text=Brisbane%20By%2DName%20List%20is,%2C%20health%2C%20and%20housing%20needs.>

- There are limited NDIS supports for psychosocial disability and limited Supported Independent Living services (SILs) who support young people with mental health conditions. Often, co-occurring substance use issues mean young people are ineligible for SILs.
- There is a lack of crisis accommodation options for young people experiencing or at risk of homelessness with boarding houses, motels and hotels filling this gap.
- There are inconsistencies with different homelessness systems across the country highlighting the need for a national approach to ending homelessness. In New South Wales, there is more crisis accommodation for young people but very limited options to transition young people. In Queensland, there is more transitional accommodation but limited crisis accommodation for young people.
- The OOHC, public health emergency departments and corrections systems regularly exit young people into homelessness without robust transition planning. No young people should exit these support systems into homelessness, yet our experience shows us they regularly do.

Housing or dwelling models that provide appropriate options for people experiencing chronic and repeat homelessness.

Recommendation 9: Develop housing models that provide intensive wrap around support to build young people’s transition to independence, which incorporate young people as active designers of services.

Housing or dwelling models for young people experiencing chronic or repeat homelessness need to be designed to provide intensive wrap around support for young people, which bases the intensity of intervention on a holistic assessment of young people’s needs. Existing adult housing models need significant adaptation to fit young people’s unique developmental stages. Youth-specific therapeutic models are needed to target the most vulnerable young people experiencing homelessness: young parents and their babies, youth DFV refuges, and emergency housing specifically designed by young people.

Housing models that have been developed specifically for young people with proven outcomes include:

- **Youth Foyers** based on a fully integrated housing, education and employment service model for young people aged 16 – 24 years.¹²
- **Stepping Stone House**, a 24/7 model of wrap around, intensive support for young people at-risk and experiencing homelessness. Young people who completed the Stepping Stone House program had a 44% increase in knowing how to secure, stable, long-term accommodation and a 37% improvement in ability to find, apply for and secure employment.¹³
- **First Response Youth Service** implemented by Hope Street Youth and Family Services incorporates assertive mobile outreach, a ten-bed youth refuge and community capacity building providing support with housing and wrap-around support. Key outcomes include

¹² Coddou, M., Borlagdan, J., and Mallett, S, (2019). *Starting a future that means something to you: outcomes from a longitudinal study of Education First Youth Foyers*. Brotherhood of St Laurence & Launch Housing: Melbourne. Retrieved from: https://foyer.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Coddou_etal_Starting_a_future_Education_First_Youth_Foyers_outcomes_2019.pdf

¹³ Stepping Stone House. (2020). *Stepping Stone House Social Impact Report: Improving the wellbeing of at-risk youth*. Huber Social: Australia. Retrieved from: https://steppingstonehouse.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Stepping-Stone-House-Social-Impact-Report-2019_20.pdf

61% of young people exiting into safe and stable accommodation, 22% were employed and 34% engaged in education and training.¹⁴

Social housing (including community housing)

Recommendation 10: Include strategies that improve the financial viability of social housing for young people so that the number of young people living in social housing increases.

While social housing aims to provide safe and secure housing to low-income Australians in the medium to long term, young people, some of the lowest income Australians, are currently missing out. In 2022, only 2.8% of social housing tenants were young people (aged 15-24 years).¹⁵ This is despite 50% of young people in the 2021 Census earning less than \$300 a week (compared to 18% of all people aged 15 years and older)¹⁶ and young people making up 23% of the homeless population.¹⁷ This work should include setting targets on the number of tenancies available to young people in new social housing builds. BYS recently partnered with Brisbane Housing Corporation to secure 5 homes out of 32 for young people in a new community housing build.¹⁸ The National Housing and Homelessness plan needs to encourage these types of partnerships.

Rental subsidies for Community Housing providers who house young people and/or a review and increase of Commonwealth Rent Assistance for young people who live in social and affordable housing is also needed. Without affordable rental accommodation, provided by either the private market or by social housing, young people will enter the homelessness sector. Currently, the rental income that can be raised from a person on the Youth Allowance is less than someone on an adult Disability Support Pension. This disincentivises the allocation of community housing to young people. There is also a perception that providing public housing to young people will create a life-long dependency on the social housing sector. This does not need to be the case; with the right supports young people have the potential to increase their income over time and move on from social housing. Local and state governments, social housing providers, and youth services like BYS can work collaboratively to allocate housing and develop different public housing models that don't create dependency. Such models could include youth-specific transitional housing that facilitates independence building. In this case, a 'transitional' social housing lease for young people may mean a 5-year period, allowing young people to prepare for and complete education, training, and employment related goals.

Allocating social housing and ensuring social housing is built in the right locations:

Recommendation 11: Ensure greater flexibility in the allocation and reallocation of social housing to reduce social isolation and improve young people's access to opportunity.

When allocating social housing, it is important to get the mix right between young people and other tenants. Analysis of our own intake data that has tracked the demographics and presenting needs of

¹⁴ Rogers, N., Planigale, M., Goldzieher, M., & Shafaei, A. (2022). *Hope Street Youth & Family Services: Evaluation of First Response Youth Service: Final Evaluation Report*. Lirata Consulting: Melbourne, Australia. Retrieved from:

<https://www.hopest.org/publications/papers?download=2243:first-response-youth-service-in-melton-evaluation-report>

¹⁵ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2022). *Data tables: Social housing households 2022*. Retrieved from:

<https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/housing-assistance/housing-assistance-in-australia/data>

¹⁶ Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). (2022). *Census of Population and Housing: Income and work data summary, 2021*.

Retrieved from: <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/earnings-and-working-conditions/income-and-work-census/latest-release>

¹⁷ ABS. (2023). *Estimating Homelessness: Census*. Retrieved from:

<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/housing/estimating-homelessness-census/latest-release>

¹⁸ See: <https://bhcl.com.au/new-mixed-tenure-development-officially-opens/>

young people over the last 7 years has shown that gender diverse and sexuality diverse young people are significantly less likely to be living in public/community housing when seeking support from BYS. Exactly why this is the case is not clear, although one reason may be lack of safety, especially when living in unit complexes predominately occupied by adults. Specific allocation to meet the needs of these young people is needed, with attention paid to the mix of tenants in particular locations. If possible, small youth-only social housing complexes could be developed.

More flexibility in the social housing sector and the allocation and re-allocation of properties is also required. Movement between social housing properties should be easier for tenants so that they do not lose their housing when their circumstances change and staying in their current housing is not feasible; or if maintaining their tenancy means foregoing other opportunities e.g., a person gets a job further away. Currently, tenants can swap properties but must facilitate this process themselves. Young people are mobile, and as they develop into adulthood and build their social and economic capital are likely to move several times. Social housing should be able to accommodate this mobility. In addition, given the prevalence of experiences of past and current DFV, young people may need to relocate for safety reasons. While this is certainly possible, it is not easily achieved and requires support and advocacy from services like BYS.

Social housing for young people needs to be located within close proximity to services, employment opportunities, education, community supports and transport options. The co-location of services within social housing buildings is vital to ensure young people can easily access the support they need from different services. Social housing should be close to supermarkets, common green spaces, childcare, bars, cafes. New developments should have a mix of owners, renters, subsidized renters and social housing tenants to build supportive integrated communities. Moving out of homelessness or an unsafe living situation and into a 1-bedroom unit is, on the surface, a great outcome. Yet many young people report that living on their own is isolating. Indeed, living in social housing maybe the first time a young person has lived alone. Social housing developments need to be designed to reduce social isolation and increase social inclusion. On-site management, regular community building activities e.g., a monthly community BBQ, or a social-checking system where tenants are encouraged to support one another are all ways social inclusion can be facilitated in social housing developments.

Improving outcomes for tenants by providing wrap-around supports to help young people in social housing maintain their tenancies, including effective models that could be scaled up.

Recommendation 12: Scale up evidence-informed, evaluated tenancy sustainment programs such as Sustaining Young Tenancies and Youth Housing First for every young person in social housing.

A key intervention for young people to end the homelessness cycle is tenancy sustainment programs. Tenancy programs implement strategies to sustain tenancies long-term, including supporting tenants to develop independent living skills, property maintenance skills, providing ongoing practical and emotional supports, and exploring long-term housing options and linkage to other services. Common outcomes for tenancy sustainment programs include improved wellbeing, and physical and mental health.

Young people often require more intensive tenancy sustainment supports and face different housing barriers in comparison to older tenants. Tenancy sustainment programs empower young people to

overcome these barriers and maintain their accommodation long-term.¹⁹ The BYS tenancy sustainment program Sustaining Young Tenancies (SYT) supports young people with complex needs including mental health diagnoses, disability and substance use to build the skills they need to sustain their tenancies long-term as well as providing wraparound case management support for all of their presenting needs. An evaluation of SYT by the Australian Housing and Research Institute (AHURI) found that:

- The program was effective in sustaining the tenancies of young people in social housing.
- The program used effective strategies for early intervention and prevention.
- Pre-existing relationships and collaboration with housing providers were critical to the sustainment of young people tenancies and prevention of tenancy breaches or arrears.
- The SYT service model is replicable, and housing providers identified the need for similar tenancy sustainment programs in other geographic locations.²⁰

Thank you for providing this opportunity to give feedback on the development of a National Housing and Homelessness Plan.

¹⁹ Vallesi, S., Quinn, D., & Wood, L. (2021). *An evaluation snapshot: Youth experiences of housing first*. University of Western Australia: Perth, Australia. Retrieved from: https://www.ruah.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Youth_Snapshot_Report_Final_August-2021.pdf

²⁰ Brackertz, N. (2018). *Evaluation of the Sustaining Young People's Tenancies Initiative*. Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute: Melbourne, Australia. Retrieved from: <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/research-papers/evaluation-of-the-sustaining-young-peoples-tenancies-initiative>