

**Submission to the Australian Government Department of Social Services
Developing the National Housing and Homelessness Plan
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Australia is highly multicultural. One in two Australians were born (or had a parent born) overseas (1), a proportion higher than many other Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries (2). Despite this, Australian health and social policies (including housing and homelessness) are not adequately meeting the needs of migrants from culturally and linguistically diverse (CaLD) backgrounds (referred to hereafter as migrants).

Migrants may experience factors pre-, during or post-migration that increase health and social inequities and vulnerabilities (3, 4). The current rental crisis contributes to these vulnerabilities, with migrants experiencing challenges accessing housing, including housing that is culturally appropriate and experiencing discrimination in their experiences in the housing market. Navigating resettlement factors including language, employment, income, racism, and discrimination (5-7) can increase housing stress. Housing stress affects mental and physical health (8-12).

Shelter is a human right (13, 14) and a social determinant of health, recognised as a pre-requisite for health (15). Research suggests that some migrants experience higher rates of homelessness than people born in Australia (6). In 2016, approximately one-third of people experiencing homelessness in Australia were migrants; 38% were born overseas (16).

Homelessness is more than just 'rooflessness' (17) and incorporates lack of suitable accommodation, inadequate housing conditions, unstable tenure, and lack of space for social interactions (18). A widely accepted 'cultural' definition of homelessness captures concepts of primary homelessness, constituting lack of "conventional accommodation" (19), including sleeping rough, in addition to secondary and tertiary homelessness, which encompass transient accommodation arrangements, living with others or in emergency accommodation, couch surfing, and living in single rooms without private amenities or housing security (19). Evidence shows that secondary and tertiary homelessness is more commonly experienced by migrants than primary homelessness (6). Cultural expectations to provide housing may also contribute to overcrowding and housing instability (20).

Migration and housing research suggests that drivers of homelessness are primarily macro-level factors such as housing market characteristics rather than micro-level factors such as individual characteristics and behaviour (21). Recent projections¹ around major increases in migration into Australia highlights that there will be additional pressures on an already struggling housing system with new arrivals to Australia who will be challenged to find somewhere to live. **Australian policies must ensure that if we are encouraging people to migrant to Australia that we are able to support basic standards of living, including adequate housing.**

¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2023/jan/13/australia-on-track-for-2023-migration-boom-as-arrivals-dwarf-treasury-forecasts-ex-official-says>
<https://theconversation.com/whats-behind-the-recent-surge-in-australias-net-migration-and-will-it-last-203155>

Migrant housing security data masks diversity and cultural nuance, creating 'hidden homelessness', housing insecurity and service access barriers (22, 23). Findings also suggest:

- existing cultural indicators and data on specific population groups and their needs are lacking and not fit for purpose (24);
- culturally tailored housing interventions based on housing first principles are required (25);
- peer-led services are important to build community resilience and social capital (22, 26-28);
- health and social service organisations need support to enhance multicultural readiness to support secure housing (6).

We suggest that strategies to ease pressure for renters need to consider cultural and linguistic diversity and migrant heterogeneity. This includes addressing discrimination in tenancy, supporting culturally responsive advocacy and advice and considering the impact of visa status and other settlement issues on secure tenancy for new and temporary migrants. One approach that may have promise to address some of the issues identified is the use of community navigators, to act as a bridge between a community (or individual) and services. Navigators have been used to assist individuals and groups to overcome barriers to accessing health and social services through advocacy, community mobilisation and support to navigate resources, systems and services (29). The use of navigators has demonstrated utility with migrants (30), which may be useful in the context of stigma, cultural barriers, and systemic service barriers (31). A review of the use of community navigators to improve migrant healthcare reported substantial improvement in health outcomes (28). While economic literature is sparse, analysis of community capacity models found potential public savings costs (27). For example, a UK economic analysis indicated that every £1 (AUD 1.83) invested in community navigators returned £4.44 (AUD 8.10) to the public purse (26).

Service providers and policy stakeholders have an essential role in shaping the experiences of migrants when accessing services and housing (7, 32-34). With little cultural responsiveness guidance, service providers may consider their service users as homogenous applying a one size fits all approach. These approaches may not recognise structural barriers or the need for diverse ways of working, which call for greater service tailoring towards diversity-sensitive responses (35, 36). **Enhancing the cultural responsiveness of service providers can improve the health and housing outcomes of migrants (35, 37). A paucity of specific guidelines and policy for this population suggest the need for greater awareness of migration and ethnic, language and cultural factors (35, 38).**

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