



Community housing tenants

Results from the 2007 National Social Housing Survey

Summary

Community housing is rental housing that is managed by non-profit community-based organisations such as local government, religious and charity groups. It provides a range of safe, secure, affordable and appropriate rental housing options for those whose needs are less able to be met by the private sector. A snapshot of those residing in community housing is conducted every 2 years through the National Social Housing Survey (NSHS).

This bulletin uses data from the NSHS to provide a profile of community housing tenants. It goes on to explore the issues of tenant workforce participation and tenant housing pathways.

The major findings of this bulletin are:

- Single persons without children accounted for over half of all households, and one-fifth comprised single-parent families.
- Females accounted for two-thirds of all responding tenants.
- Government payments and pensions were the primary income source for 78% of community housing tenants.
- Two-thirds of tenants were not available or not actively looking for work in the 4 weeks before completing the survey. Of these, 80% were unable to work because of old age, ill health, disability or a permanent medical condition.

(summary continued overleaf)

Contents

| | |
|-----------------------------------|----|
| Summary | 1 |
| Introduction | 2 |
| Tenant and household profile..... | 3 |
| Workforce participation | 5 |
| Tenant pathways | 6 |
| References | 11 |
| Further information | 11 |

- Only 26% of tenants worked full or part time. Of the tenants who were underemployed, the strongest influence on underemployment was the need for training, education or work experience.
- Nearly half (43%) of all tenants had been a tenant of their current community housing organisation for more than 5 years.
- Older tenants were more likely to come from private rental homes, whilst younger tenants tended to have previously lived with relatives or friends.
- Tenants who were previously homeless or in private boarding houses were more likely to have shorter tenures, whilst ex-public housing tenants were most likely to have been with their current community housing organisation for more than 10 years.
- The majority (86%) of tenants in boarding or rooming houses had been there for more than 6 months, of which a third have lived there for more than 5 years.
- The main benefits of living in community housing were reported by tenants as: feeling more settled; better able to manage money; and being able to keep living in the same area.

Introduction

At 30 June 2007, there were over 33,000 households in mainstream community housing.¹ These households were managed by over 1,000 separate community housing organisations across Australia (AIHW 2008). Community housing organisations include housing cooperatives, housing associations and other community service organisations.

Box 1: 2007 National Social Housing Survey of community housing

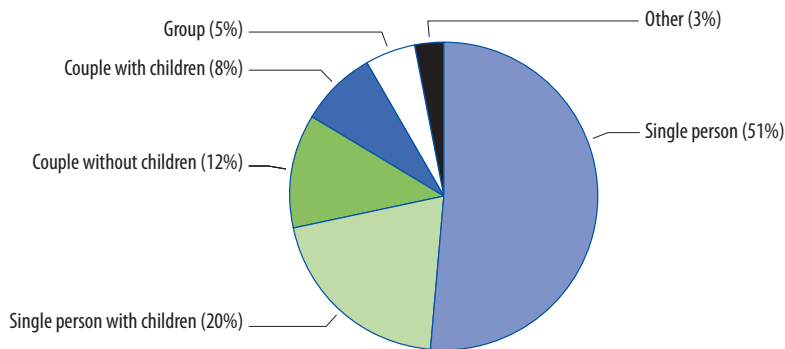
The National Social Housing Survey (NSHS) collects valuable information about the nature of the community housing sector through a biennial survey of its tenants. The analysis in this bulletin draws on the 2007 Community Housing NSHS, where the survey was mailed out to 9,986 randomly selected community housing tenants, of which 3,100 (31%) completed and returned the survey. Of the respondents, 2,874 (93%) were the head tenants who were primarily responsible for rental payments.

This bulletin presents only descriptive analysis of the survey data (weighted for better representation of the national population) from those who stated that they were the head tenant. This bulletin does not discuss the statistical significance of analyses presented and the response rate needs to be taken into consideration when interpreting the information presented.

¹ Mainstream community housing is that which is funded either partly or fully through the Commonwealth State Housing Agreement. It excludes Indigenous community housing, which is funded through the Australian Remote Indigenous Accommodation Program.

Tenant and household profile

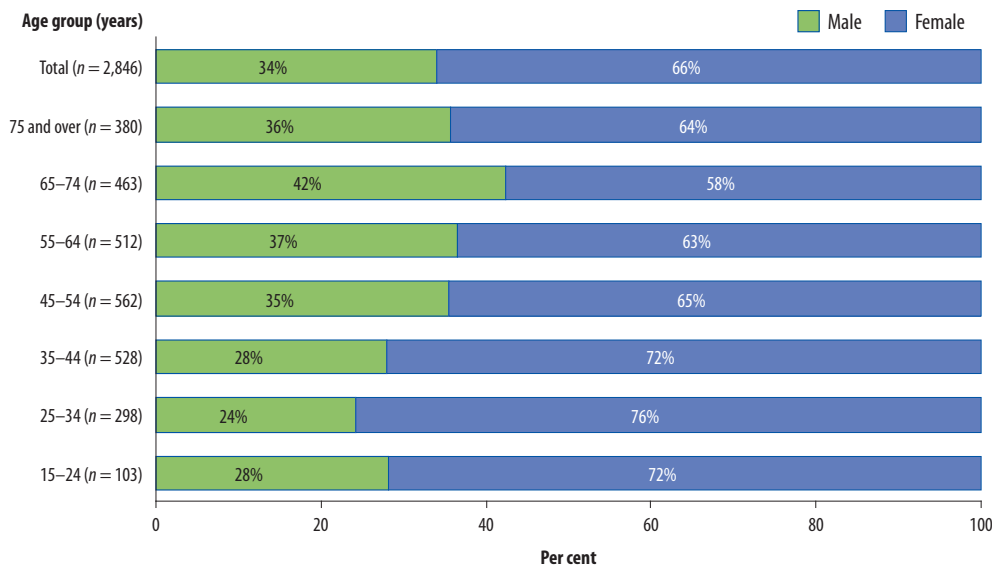
Community housing supports a range of household types, with half of households comprising single persons. One-fifth of households consisted of single-parent families and only 29% of households in total contained children (Figure 1).



Note: 'Other' household types contain either extended families with children or other mixed households with children. Respondents that did not supply household type were excluded (2% of the total head tenant sample). Figures may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

Figure 1: Profile of community housing household types

Those aged 45–54 were the largest head tenant age group (Figure 2). Females accounted for two-thirds of head tenants overall, but comprised over three-quarters (76%) of those in the 25–34 year age group. Generally, the proportion of males increased with age from 24% of those in the 25–34 years age group to 42% aged 65–74 years old. The drop in the number of males aged 75 years and over may be associated with their lower life expectancy.



Note: Respondents that did not supply age and/or sex were excluded (1% of the total head tenant sample).

Figure 2: Proportion of males and females by age group

Over 60% of all community housing tenants resided in fully- or semi-detached houses, followed by one-quarter living in flats or apartments (Table 1).

A decline in the proportion of community housing tenants living in separate or fully-detached homes is seen with age. Houses (fully and semi-detached) provide accommodation for nearly three-quarters (73%) of community housing tenants in the 35–44 year age group, whilst less than half (48%) for those aged over 75 years.

Only 10% of those aged 25–34 years live in boarding/rooming houses, however this proportion increases to 18% of those aged over 75 years.

Flat or apartments accommodate the largest proportion (41%) of younger tenants aged 15–24 years. This proportion then decreases with age to the 35–44 years age bracket before increasing with older age: only 16% of those aged 35–44 years lived in flats or apartments, increasing to nearly one-third (32%) of those over 75 years.

Table 1: Dwelling type by age group

| Dwelling type | Age group (years) | | | | | | | Total (per cent) |
|---|-------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------------|------------------|
| | 15–24 (per cent) | 25–34 (per cent) | 35–44 (per cent) | 45–54 (per cent) | 55–64 (per cent) | 65–74 (per cent) | 75 and over (per cent) | |
| Separate/fully detached house | 17 | 51 | 56 | 45 | 36 | 35 | 22 | 40 |
| Semi-detached house, row or terrace house, town house | 28 | 19 | 17 | 17 | 26 | 20 | 26 | 21 |
| Flat or apartment | 41 | 20 | 16 | 26 | 24 | 30 | 32 | 25 |
| Boarding/rooming house unit | 13 | 10 | 11 | 11 | 13 | 13 | 18 | 12 |
| Other | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 2 |
| Total (per cent) | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| Total (number) | 104 | 297 | 524 | 560 | 510 | 461 | 383 | 2,839 |

Note: Respondents that did not supply age group and/or dwelling type were excluded (1% of the total head tenant sample). Figures may not add up to 100% due to rounding

Government payments and pensions were the primary income source for over three-quarters (78%) of community housing tenants (Table 2). Overall, disability support (27%) and age pensions (26%) were the two main pension types received.

The proportion of tenants receiving a disability support pension increased with age from 17% of 15–24 year olds to 49% of 45–54 year olds. This decreases slightly to 45% in the 55–64 year age group, then drops almost to zero for those aged 65 years or over, when tenants reach the age threshold to become eligible for the aged pension.

The greatest income source for 15–24 year olds is 'other government pension'. It is not clear of what types of pensions this comprises but may include youth-related pensions such as Austudy or Youth Allowance.

Table 2: Main source of income by age group

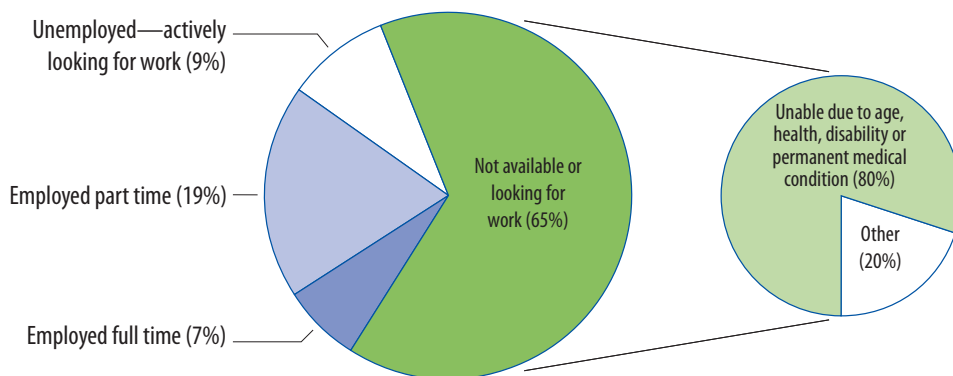
| Main source of income | Age group (years) | | | | | | | Total (per cent) |
|----------------------------|-------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------------|------------------|
| | 15–24 (per cent) | 25–34 (per cent) | 35–44 (per cent) | 45–54 (per cent) | 55–64 (per cent) | 65–74 (per cent) | 75 and over (per cent) | |
| Wages/salary | 24 | 26 | 21 | 26 | 19 | 4 | 1 | 17 |
| Disability support pension | 17 | 23 | 29 | 49 | 45 | 4 | 1 | 27 |
| Age pension | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 12 | 85 | 80 | 26 |
| Unemployment benefit | 12 | 7 | 11 | 10 | 9 | 0 | 0 | 7 |
| Other government pension | 46 | 40 | 34 | 11 | 11 | 2 | 10 | 18 |
| Other/none | 2 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 7 | 5 |
| Total (per cent) | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| Total (number) | 101 | 296 | 525 | 562 | 511 | 447 | 367 | 2,809 |

Note: Respondents that did not supply age group and/or main source of income were excluded (2% of the total head tenant sample). Overall, over 1% of respondents stated their main source of income as 'other' and over 3% had no income. Figures may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

Workforce participation

The workforce participation pie-charts in Figure 3 reflect the high level of targeting of community housing to those most in need. Nearly two-thirds of tenants were not available, or not actively looking, for work in the 4 weeks before completing the survey. The majority (80%) in this situation cited reasons of their age, ill health, disability or a permanent medical condition that required ongoing treatment. Only 26% of community housing tenants were working full or part time, with another 9% unemployed but actively looking for work.

Although just over one-quarter of community housing tenants were employed in some form, only 17% of tenants' main source of income were from wages (Table 2).



Note: Respondents that did not supply their employment situation were excluded (5% of the total head tenant sample).

Figure 3: Workforce participation

Overall, tenants who were underemployed in the workforce accounted for 28% of all head tenants. Tenants who were underemployed were defined as:

- working part time, but would prefer to work more hours (6%)
- unemployed but actively looking for work (9%)
- not currently in the workforce (but not because they were unable to work) (13%) (RMR 2007).

Of these tenants, the three strongest influences for underemployment was the need for more training, education or work experience, there were no jobs in the area in the type of work that the tenant wanted and the need to look after children (Figure 4).

About one-third of men and women also noted that if they were to work, the potential pay they would receive would be too low or their benefit might be reduced.

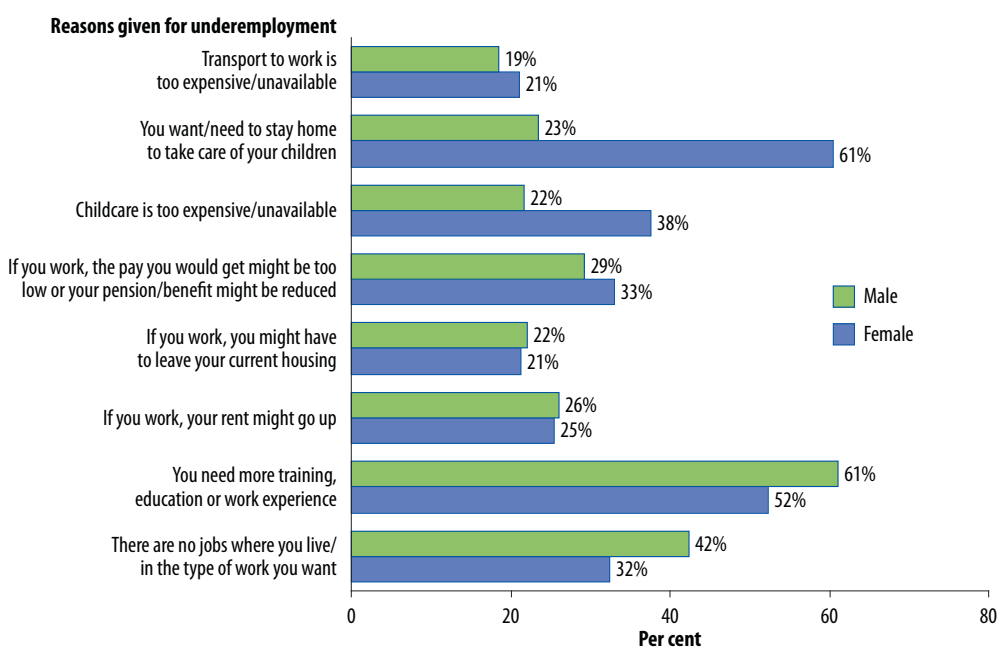


Figure 4: Strong influences on underemployment by sex

Tenant pathways

Overall, community housing tenants were most likely to have resided in a private rental home (43%) before moving into community housing (Table 3).

Older tenants were more likely than their younger counterparts to come from more secure forms of tenure such as their own homes or public housing. However, private rental was still the most likely form of tenure before moving into community housing for those aged 65 years and over.

Younger tenants tended to come from less secure forms of tenure including caravan parks, private boarding houses, homes of friends or relatives and those who were homeless or sleeping rough. Of those aged 15–24 years, 51% were living in insecure housing, including 38% who were previously living with friends or relatives. Many were likely to be moving out of the family home for the first time. Nearly one-quarter of those in this same age group came from another community housing organisation. This may be an indication of those looking for accommodation to better suit their needs.

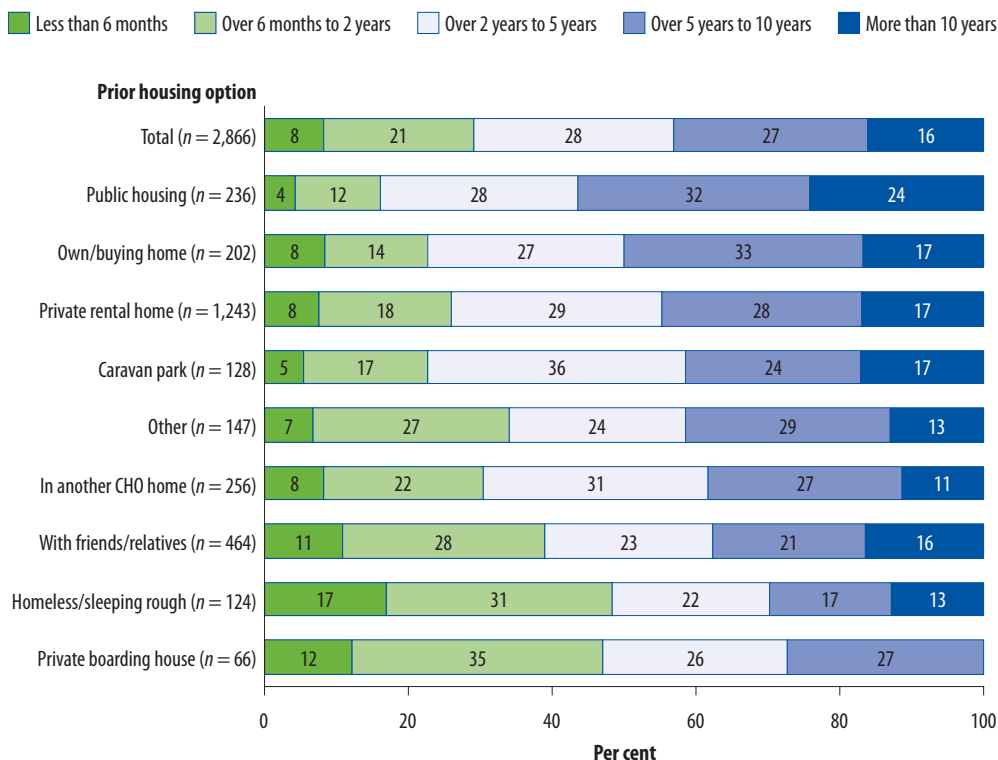
Table 3: Prior housing option by age group

| Prior housing option | Age group (years) | | | | | | | Total (per cent) |
|--------------------------------|-------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------------|------------------|
| | 15–24 (per cent) | 25–34 (per cent) | 35–44 (per cent) | 45–54 (per cent) | 55–64 (per cent) | 65–74 (per cent) | 75 and over (per cent) | |
| Own/buying home | 0 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 5 | 12 | 24 | 7 |
| Private rental home | 18 | 31 | 44 | 47 | 50 | 52 | 32 | 43 |
| Public housing | 2 | 6 | 8 | 11 | 9 | 9 | 6 | 8 |
| Another community housing home | 23 | 13 | 10 | 8 | 8 | 6 | 7 | 9 |
| Caravan park | 3 | 3 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 6 | 5 |
| Private boarding house | 4 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| With friends, relatives | 38 | 29 | 18 | 13 | 11 | 9 | 18 | 16 |
| Homeless | 7 | 8 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 2 | 2 | 4 |
| Other | 5 | 9 | 6 | 5 | 5 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Total (per cent) | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| Total (number) | 103 | 304 | 539 | 561 | 515 | 465 | 386 | 2,873 |

Note: Respondents that did not supply their prior housing option and/or age group were excluded (less than 1% of the total head tenant sample).

Overall, 43% of tenants had been with their current community housing provider for over 5 years (Figure 5). This ranged from 56% of former public housing tenants to 27% of former private boarding house tenants.

Those with very long tenures were most likely to have come from public housing, with 24% of these tenants being with their providers for more than 10 years. In contrast, those with the shortest tenures (less than 6 months) were most likely to have been homeless before entering community housing. This may indicate that this group has high and complex needs, including those who are unable to manage their finances and those with mental illness or drug and alcohol problems, all of which may impact on those people's housing success.



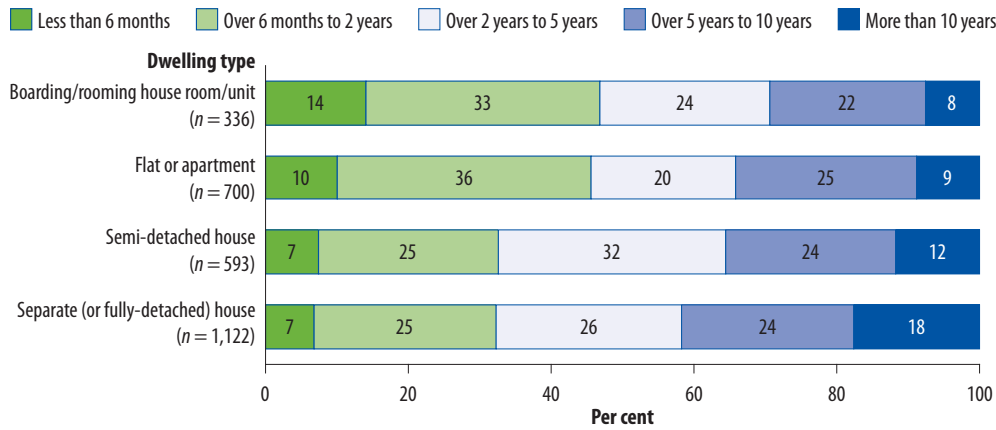
Notes

1. May not sum to 100% due to rounding. Respondents that did not supply their length of tenure with their current community housing organisation and/or prior housing option were excluded (1% of the total head tenant sample).
2. CHO = community housing organisation.
3. Those who have been with their current community housing organisation for more than 10 years and previously resided in a private boarding house have been grouped with those in the 'Over 5 years to 10 years' category due to the small sample

Figure 5: Length of tenure with current community housing organisation by prior housing option

Community housing residents in larger dwellings tended to have resided at their current address longer than those living in smaller forms of accommodation such as boarding or rooming houses and flats or apartments (Figure 6). Nearly half (42%) of those in separate or fully-detached houses had lived at their current address for more than 5 years, with close to one-fifth (18%) of those tenants residing in that dwelling type for more than 10 years.

Whilst boarding or rooming house tenants were more likely to have shorter tenures, a concerning point is the proportion of longer residing tenants in this dwelling type. According to accepted Australian standards (Chamberlain and MacKenzie 2008), people who live in boarding houses for 13 weeks or longer are considered to be experiencing tertiary homelessness. Over three-quarters (86%) of boarding/rooming house tenants had resided at their current address for more than 6 months, with 30% of those tenants living there for more than 5 years.



Note: Other dwelling types and respondents that did not supply their length of tenure with their current address and/or dwelling type were excluded (4% of the total head tenant sample).

Figure 6: Length of tenure with current address by dwelling type

In addition to providing affordable housing, social housing aims to provide a high level of security of tenure. Tenants were asked where they saw themselves living in 5 years time and nearly two-thirds (65%) stated that they would continue to reside either in community housing or in public housing. Only 9% could see themselves buying their own property to live in (Table 4).

The proportion of tenants who saw themselves residing in community housing in 5 years time increased the longer they had been with their current community housing organisation. For those who had been with their current organisation for less than 6 months, only 38% still saw themselves residing in community housing. This increased to 69% of tenants of more than 10 years standing.

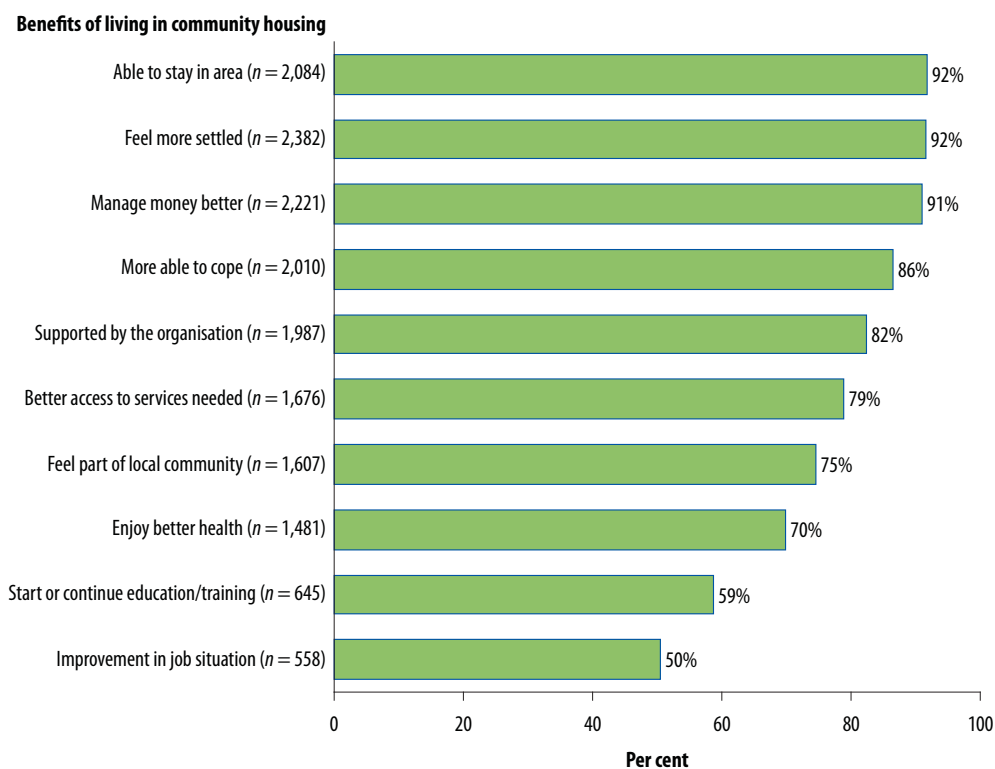
The reasons for this are not clear, but are likely to include that other tenures are less suited to tenants' needs and are increasingly unaffordable.

Table 4: Where tenants see themselves living in 5 years by length of tenure with current community housing organisation

| Where tenants see themselves living in five years time | Length of tenure with current community housing organisation | | | | | Total (per cent) |
|--|--|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------|
| | Less than 6 months (per cent) | Over 6 months to 2 years (per cent) | Over 2 years to 5 years (per cent) | Over 5 years to 10 years (per cent) | More than 10 years (per cent) | |
| Community housing | 38 | 44 | 57 | 59 | 69 | 56 |
| A house or unit they own or are buying | 14 | 10 | 8 | 10 | 4 | 9 |
| Public housing | 15 | 14 | 8 | 5 | 6 | 9 |
| Private rental home | 9 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 3 |
| Don't know/other | 24 | 28 | 24 | 23 | 20 | 24 |
| Total (per cent) | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| Total (number) | 225 | 568 | 769 | 747 | 440 | 2,749 |

Note: Respondents that did not supply their length of tenure with their current community housing organisation and/or future dwelling expectations were excluded (4% of the total head tenant sample).

The benefits of living in community housing may provide some indication of why tenants want to remain there. The vast majority of tenants said that by living in community housing they would be able to keep living in the same area (92%), felt more settled (92%) and could better manage their money (91%) (Figure 7). Of those in the workforce, half said that they saw an improvement in their job situation.



Note: Respondents were asked to tick all that apply.

Figure 7: Benefits achieved through living in community housing

References

- AIHW (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare) 2008. Community housing 2006–07: Commonwealth State Housing Agreement national data reports. Housing assistance data development series. Cat. no. HOU 172. Canberra: AIHW.
- Chamberlain C. & MacKenzie D. 2008. Counting the homeless 2006. ABS cat. no. 2050.0. Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistics.
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Further information

For more information about the 2007 Community Housing NSHS, including state and territory level information, go to <www.aihw.gov.au/housing/assistance/nshs/index.cfm>.

bulletin 68

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Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

Board Chair
Hon. Peter Collins, AM, QC

Director
Penny Allbon

Any enquiries or comments on this publication should be directed to:

Housing Assistance Unit
Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
GPO Box 570
Canberra ACT 2601
Phone (02) 6244 1000

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