



National Social Housing Survey

A summary of national results

Key points

- Respondents to the 2010 National Social Housing Survey (NSHS) were more likely to be female and be older when compared to the general public housing and community housing population.
- For households surveyed, unemployment rate is six times that seen for the general population.
- Educational outcomes for households surveyed, for both post-school and tertiary qualification, were lower than those seen in the general population.
- The majority (around 89%) of public housing and community housing survey respondents were either 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with living in public housing or community housing.
- There were only minor changes between the 2007 and 2010 NSHS in the levels of overall satisfaction with those services provided either by (or through) the relevant government department (for public housing) or housing organisation (for community housing).
- Most respondents indicated that the amenity and location of their housing met the needs of their household. These respondents also recorded experiencing 'benefits' from living in social housing—around 90% felt more settled and over two-thirds felt they enjoyed better health.
- These findings are particularly noteworthy given that social housing is typically targeted at groups such as low income earners, those who were previously homeless and people who are otherwise disadvantaged in the housing market.

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Overview

A primary purpose of the National Social Housing Survey (NSHS) has been to collect data on the profile of social housing tenants and their satisfaction with services provided and the amenity/location of their housing. The NSHS has also been used to collect other data of interest, both for national reporting and to meet specific jurisdictional requirements.

There have been considerable changes in the area of national housing policy since the previous NSHS was undertaken in 2007. The 2010 NSHS is the first of this series of surveys since the National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA) came into effect on 1 January 2009.

The results from the 2010 NSHS show that nine out of ten households sampled, for both public housing and community housing, were satisfied with their housing. Most survey respondents recorded that a range of housing aspects including amenity and location met the needs of their household. Many respondents also recorded experiencing benefits from living in social housing, such as feeling more settled and enjoying better health.

The 2010 NSHS results also give some indication of tenants' social and economic participation—both key concerns of Australian governments. A large majority of survey respondents recorded that they were satisfied with the proximity of their housing to facilities and services. Substantial proportions of respondents also recorded that living in social housing had helped them to start or continue education or to see an improvement in their job situation. Given the generally low educational attainment and low rates of labour market participation of those surveyed, these results indicate that social housing appears to be helpful to many seeking to undertake training or improve their work prospects.

Introduction

Housing assistance encompasses a range of programs that are targeted to provide assistance for low-income households in securing and sustaining housing. Social housing is a significant component of housing assistance and includes all rental housing owned and managed by government, or a not-for-profit community organisation, which can be let to eligible households (AIHW 2009). It includes public housing (also called public rental housing), state owned and managed Indigenous housing (SOMIH), community housing, Indigenous community housing (ICH) and crisis accommodation.

The aim of this report is to present a national summary of the results from the 2010 National Social Housing Survey (NSHS), which was undertaken from August to September 2010. The 2010 NSHS is the most recent in a series of surveys which have been designed to provide information on tenants' and their experiences of living in social housing. The 2010 NSHS sampled tenants of public housing and community housing—definitions of what is meant by 'public housing' and 'community housing' for the NSHS is presented in Box 1 below.

It should be noted that this survey only covered public housing and community housing. While SOMIH and ICH were not covered in the 2010 survey, it is intended that future National Social Housing surveys will provide coverage of SOMIH and ICH, as well as public housing and community housing.

Box 1: Social housing services covered by the 2010 NSHS

Public housing

Public housing encompasses the publicly owned or leased dwellings administered by state and territory governments. It provides affordable and accessible housing for largely low income households who are in housing need.

Community housing

Mainstream community housing is provided for low to moderate income or special needs households, managed by community-based organisations. Community housing models vary across jurisdictions and housing stock is owned by a variety of groups including government. (AIHW 2011)

Public housing (PH) and community housing (CH) are collectively referred to as 'social housing' in this report.

The 2010 NSHS used the same survey instrument across both public housing and community housing. In previous surveys the content differed slightly across the programs, reflecting different areas of interest in relation to each program. The approach used for the 2010 survey was undertaken in order to improve data comparability across public housing and community housing.

Responses to the 2010 NSHS

The information collected from members of social housing households in the 2010 NSHS related to demographic characteristics, needs and satisfaction with living in social housing. The questionnaire was mailed out to a randomly selected sample of 24,307 public housing and 11,284 community housing households. A summary of the profile of survey respondents to the 2010 NSHS can be found in Box 2 below.

Box 2: A profile of NSHS respondents

- A total of 9,681 public housing and 4,090 community housing respondents completed and returned the survey—this represents a response rate of 40% and 36%, respectively.
- Almost all respondents (97% for PH and 96% for CH) indicated that they were the person (or one of the people) who signed or co-signed the lease for their dwelling.
- About two-thirds of respondents (66% for PH and 64% for CH) were female.
- More than a third (39%) of public housing and almost a third (31%) of community housing respondents were aged above 65 years. More than a fifth (24%) of public housing respondents and a fifth (20%) of CH respondents were aged between 55 and 64 years. Less than 3% of respondents were aged below 25 years for both public housing and community housing.

Respondents versus households

When considering the findings of the 2010 NSHS it is important to note that responses to survey questions can report either:

1. Information about the member of the social housing household who is completing the survey (the respondent), for example, age and gender.
2. Information provided by the respondent that is:
 - about individuals in the social housing household—for example, the number of adults in a household currently working full-time.
 - on behalf of all members of their household—for example, whether aspects of the location of their dwelling are rated as meeting the needs of the household.

The majority of NSHS questions relate to the household—that is, all individuals who make up that household—and this information is presented in terms of ‘households’ or ‘households sampled’. However, it is important to distinguish household-level responses from those questions that are specifically targeting the individual who completed the survey; this information is presented in terms of ‘respondents’ or ‘survey respondents’. In considering those questions relating to the individual completing the survey, it is reasonable to consider that the responses provided may not relate directly to all other members of the household.

It should also be noted that the survey respondents have provided information on behalf of other household members. Survey respondents were not asked about whether they had consulted with other household members in formulating these responses.

Presentation of NSHS results

This report does not present raw survey data. The estimates presented have been derived by applying ‘weights’ to the raw data (survey responses) to ensure that they represent the true population, as far as possible. Two adjustments have been made. Firstly, within each jurisdiction, an adjustment is made to ensure that each region is represented appropriately. This weight is calculated as the proportion in the population divided by the proportion in the sample for that region. Secondly, at jurisdictional level, an adjustment is made to ensure that each jurisdiction is represented appropriately. This weight is calculated as the total population in the jurisdiction divided by the total sample for that jurisdiction. In addition, non-response to the NSHS may have influenced the results and this should be considered when interpreting the results presented.

Is the NSHS sample representative of all social housing tenants?

An analysis was undertaken comparing the demographic characteristics of NSHS respondents from the 2010 survey with the equivalent demographic information contained in the national administrative data collections for public housing and community housing. The purpose of this is to provide some indication as to whether social housing tenants surveyed as part of the NSHS are representative of the broader social housing population.

The analysis found that there are some differences in the demographic profile of NSHS respondents when compared to information from the national administrative data collections, for example:

- The gender profile for both public housing and community housing tenants is more equal (about half each).
- Less than a fifth of public housing and community housing tenants were aged over 65 years.
- About one in ten public housing and community housing tenants were aged between 55 and 64 years.

It should be noted that the analysis of the administrative data was based on all members of the social housing household and was not restricted to the main tenant (or leaseholder). That being said, analysis of the NSHS found that about 95% of survey respondents indicated that they were either the person, or one of the people, who signed or co-signed the lease.

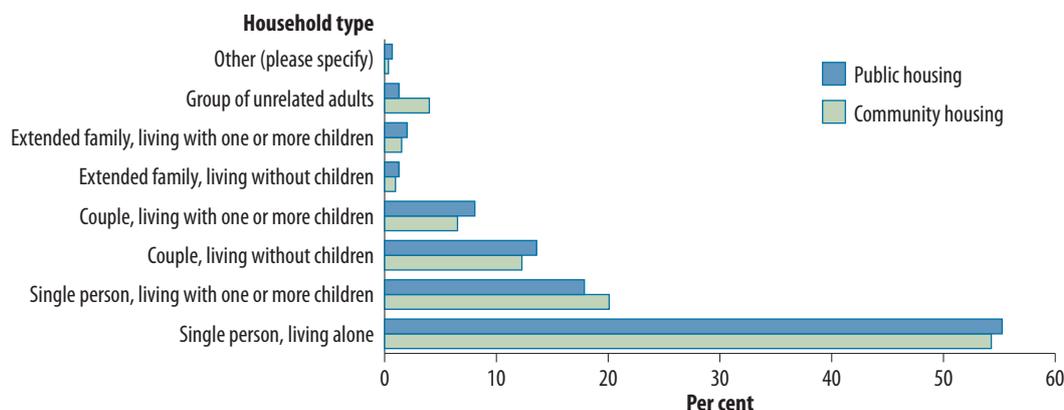
From these findings it can be seen that there are two main differences in the demographic profile of NSHS respondents compared to that for social housing tenants from the national administrative data collections. Firstly, NSHS respondents are more likely to be female, and secondly, they were generally older.

Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that the findings of the NSHS may have been affected by the demographic profile of respondents.

A profile of social housing households

Household types

Over half of households sampled (55% for PH and 54% for CH) comprised a single person living alone and more than one in ten (14% for PH and 12% for CH) were couple only households (Figure 1). Less than a third (28%) of both public housing and community housing households contained one or more dependent children. Almost two-thirds (64%) of these dependent children in public housing and almost three quarters (71%) in community housing lived in a single parent household.



Note: Responses to this question relate to all individuals who are part of the household.

Figure 1: Household type, August–September 2010.

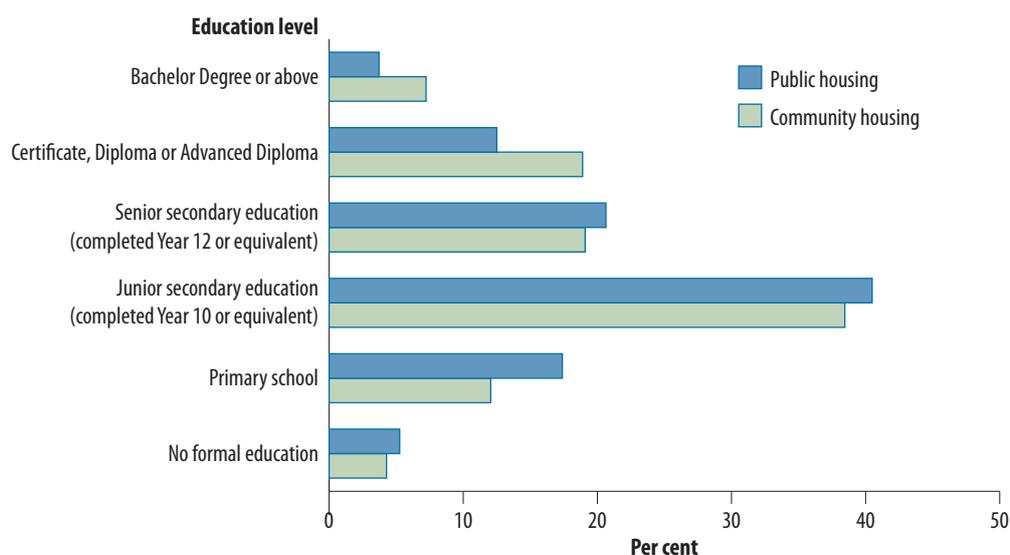
Highest education level

Over a third of both public housing and community housing survey respondents indicated that they had completed year 10 or its equivalent (41% and 38% respectively) and a fifth (20%) had completed year 12 or its equivalent. About one in twenty (5%) respondents from both public housing and community housing recorded no formal education (Figure 2).

Community housing respondents were more likely than those from public housing to hold post-secondary school qualifications (around 26% compared with 17%).

The levels of education achieved in the general population differs from those recorded by respondents to the NSHS. The data which was used to make this comparison is from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) *Education and work, Australia* (ABS 2010), which was undertaken in May 2010. However, it should be noted that the ABS survey collected level of education achieved for 15 to 64 year olds, while the NSHS collected this data for all respondents irrespective of age. Some of the differences which were seen between the general population and NSHS respondents include:

- The rate of achieving a bachelor degree or above in the general population is more than five times that seen of public housing and more than three times that of community housing respondents.
- The rate of achieving other post-secondary school qualifications in the general population was about two and a half times that seen of public housing and about one and a half times that of community housing respondents.
- The rate of junior secondary education being the highest level achieved in the general population was about half that of both public housing and community housing respondents.



Note: Responses to this question relate to the individual completing the survey form and therefore do not necessarily relate to other members of the household.

Figure 2: Highest level of education completed, August–September 2010.

Employment

Labour force status

Households sampled as part of the 2010 NSHS provided information on the labour force status of all individuals living in that household.

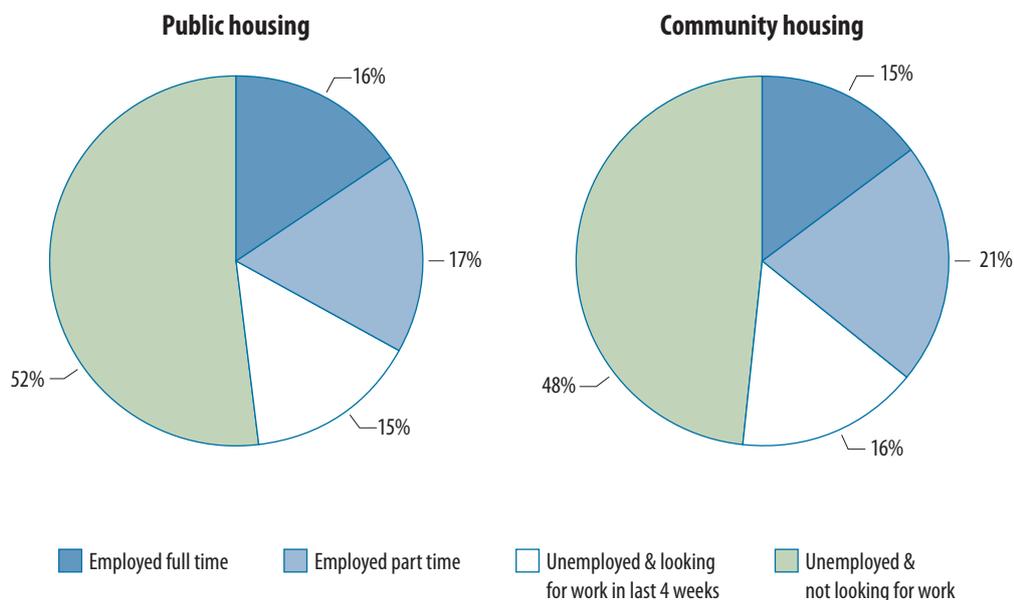
Around half of all people in the households sampled, in either public housing or community housing, aged 18 years or older, were in the labour force (48% and 52% respectively) in one of the following categories:

- employed full-time (35 hours or more per week in one or more jobs)
- employed part-time (less than 35 hours per week in all jobs)
- unemployed and looking for work in the last four weeks (Figure 3).

The other half of the people in households sampled were either not employed or not actively seeking employment.

Overall, labour force status was similar for both public housing and community housing:

- About one in six adults were employed full-time.
- About one in five were employed part-time.
- About one in six were unemployed and looking for work.



Note: Responses to this question were provided by the respondent on behalf of the household.

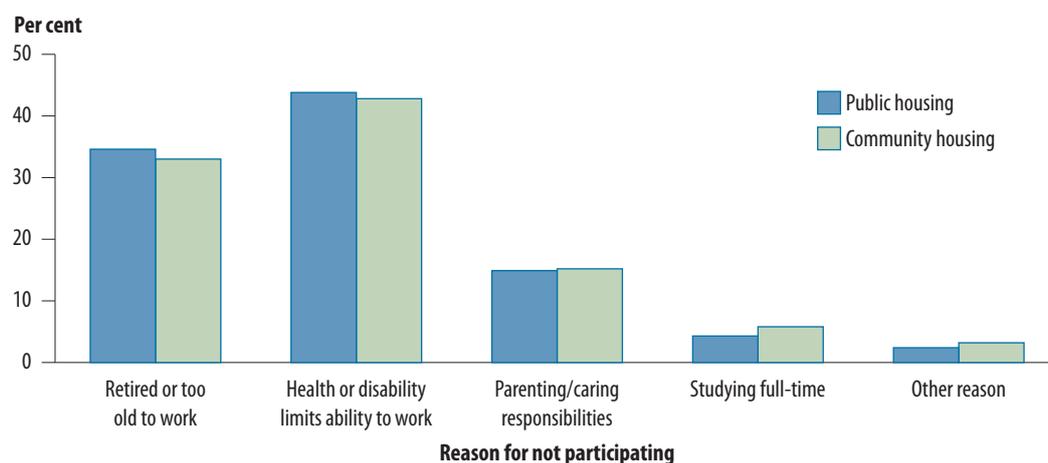
Figure 3: Labour force participation, individuals aged 18 years and over, August–September 2010.

Labour force participation in the general population differs from that recorded by respondents to the NSHS. The data used to make this comparison is from the ABS report *Labour Force, Australia* (ABS 2011a) for the corresponding period (September 2010). However, it should be noted that the ABS presents rates for people aged 15 years and over while the NSHS presents labour force status for those people aged 18 years and over. Some of the differences between the general population and NSHS respondents include:

- The proportion of the general population in full-time employment is about three times higher than for NSHS respondents (45% compared to 16% in PH and 15% in CH).
- For those people working part-time, the proportion seen in the general population is about the same as NSHS respondents (18% compared to 17% in PH and 21% in CH).
- For those people in the labour force (either employed or looking for work), the unemployment rate in the general population is six times lower than for NSHS respondents (5% and 31% respectively). (ABS 2011a, AIHW 2011).

Reasons for not participating in labour force

The majority of households sampled, where no individuals aged 18 years and over were recorded as being in the labour force, indicated either that 'disability or ill health' limited their ability to work (44% for PH and 43% for CH) or that they were 'retired or too old to work' (34% for PH and 33% for CH) (Figure 4). Of the other reasons recorded, almost a sixth (15%) for both public housing and community housing were parenting or caring and about one in twenty were studying full-time.



Note: Responses to this question were provided by the respondent on behalf of the household.

Figure 4: Reason for not participating in the labour force, individuals aged 18 years and over, August–September 2010.

Younger members of households were recorded as more likely to be studying—about two-thirds of people aged below 18 years in public housing and community housing were currently enrolled in education (69% and 65% respectively). Of people aged 18 years and over, about one in ten (8% for PH and 11% for CH) were currently enrolled in education.

Country of birth, language spoken and Indigenous status

Over two-thirds of public housing and community housing survey respondents (67% for both) were born in Australia. Of the one-third (33%) who were born overseas, the largest group was born in England (making up 17% of PH and 14% of CH). The proportion of overseas-born respondents to the NSHS was slightly higher than that seen in the general population. According to the ABS, at 30 June 2010 about a quarter (27%) of the estimated resident population of Australia was born overseas (ABS 2011b).

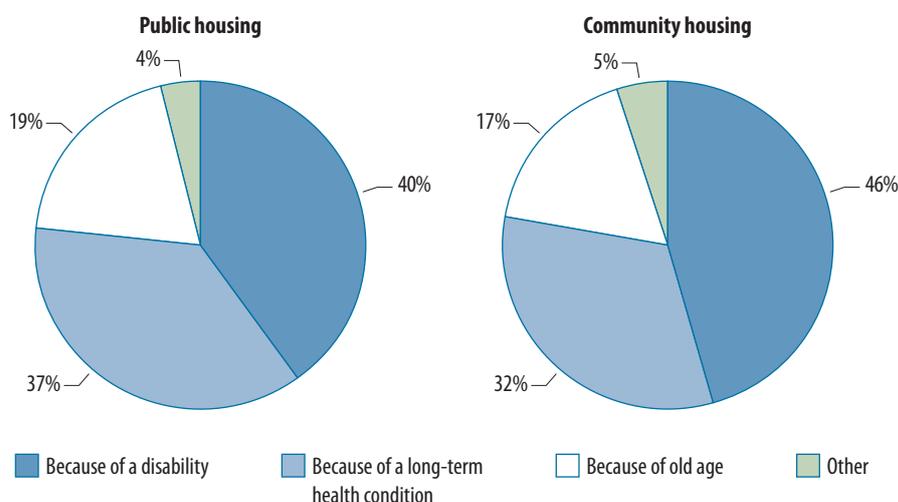
The majority of respondents spoke mainly English at home (86% for PH and 85% for CH). Arabic and Spanish were the next two most frequently recorded languages (between 1 and 2% for both PH and CH).

Less than one in ten respondents for both public housing and community housing (7% and 5% respectively) recorded that at least one member of their household was of 'Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin'. On Census night 2006, Indigenous Australians represented around 2.5% of the Australian population which suggests that they are proportionally over-represented in both public housing and community housing.

Need for assistance with activities of daily living

Almost a fifth of public housing and community housing households (19% and 18% respectively) contained at least one person who needed assistance with self-care, body movement or communication activities.

Disability was the most frequently recorded reason for needing assistance (40% for PH and 46% for CH) followed by 'a long-term health condition' lasting six months or more (37% for PH and 32% for CH). About a fifth of people in public housing and a sixth in community housing needed assistance with activities of daily living due to old age (19% for PH and 17% for CH) (Figure 5).



Note: Responses to this question were provided by the respondent on behalf of the household.

Figure 5: Reason for needing assistance with activities of daily living, August–September 2010.

Tenants' housing histories

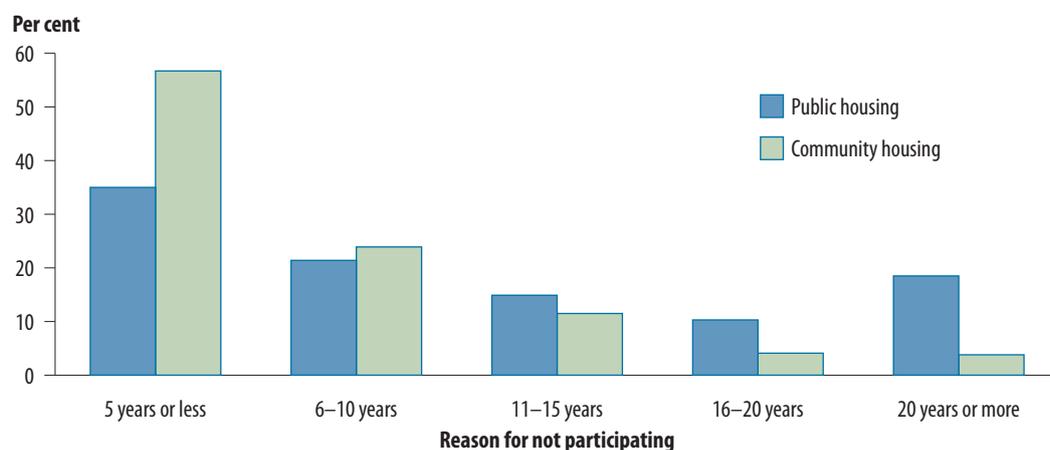
Time in public or community housing

Almost three-quarters of community housing survey respondents had lived in community housing for 10 years or less—the largest proportion (26%) had lived there for between 6 and 10 years in total. In contrast, public housing respondents were more likely to have lived in public housing for more than 10 years—with one-third having lived for more than 20 years in public housing.

However, it should be noted that these patterns may be explained, in part, by the fact that public housing has been available in Australia for a longer period of time than community housing.

Time in current home

Overall, public housing survey respondents had lived in their current home longer than community housing respondents (Figure 6). In both public housing and community housing, the largest group of respondents was those who had moved into their current home within the last five years—more than half (57%) of community housing respondents and more than one-third (35%) of public housing respondents. Almost one in five public housing respondents had been in their current home for 20 years or more.



Note: Responses to this question relate to the individual completing the survey form and therefore do not necessarily relate to other members of the household.

Figure 6: Length of time living in current home, August–September 2010.

Prior tenure

Over a third of survey respondents who had moved into their current home within the last five years recorded renting privately before moving into social housing (37% for PH and 39% for CH). About a third (32%) of public housing respondents had been in another public housing property before moving into their current home, and almost a fifth (18%)

of community housing respondents had been in a different community housing dwelling. Around a sixth (16%) of public housing and community housing survey respondents recorded that they had previously lived with friends or relatives.

Previous homelessness

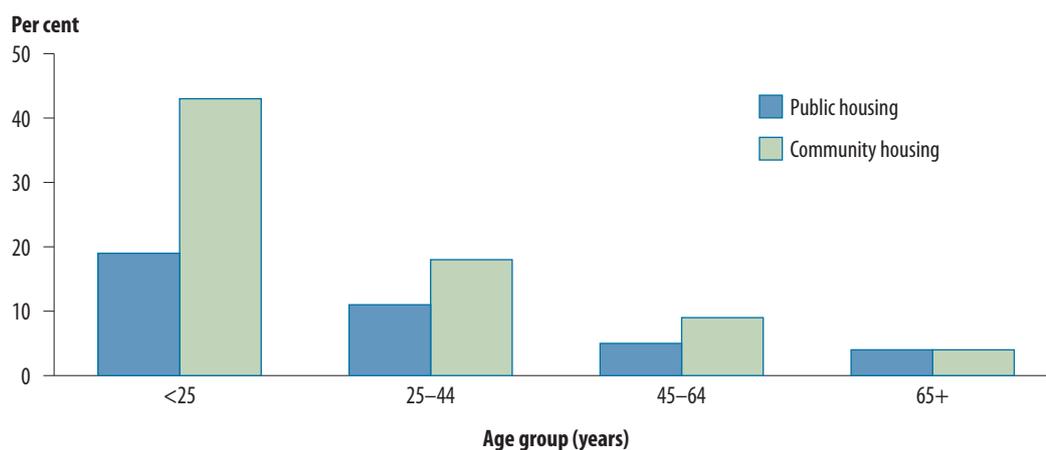
About one in five (21%) public housing survey respondents recorded that they had experienced homelessness¹ in the past. Of those who had been homeless, more than a quarter (28%) had been homeless at some time in the past five years.

In comparison, almost a third (31%) of community housing survey respondents recorded that they had been homeless. Among this group, over a third (40%) recorded at least one episode of homelessness during the previous five years.

Moving out of social housing

About one in twenty (6%) survey respondents recorded that they were planning to leave public housing in the next five years compared to about one in ten (11%) for community housing.

More than twice as many community housing respondents under the age of 25 indicated that they were planning to move out of social housing over the next five years compared to public housing respondents (43% and 19% respectively) (Figure 7). The proportion of respondents indicating their intention to move out of social housing over the next five years decreased steadily with age. The rate for community housing was higher than public housing for all age groups except for the over 65 group where public housing was marginally higher than community housing (6% and 4% respectively).



Note: Responses to this question relate to the individual completing the survey form and therefore do not necessarily relate to other members of the household.

Figure 7: Intention to leave social housing in the next five years by age group, August–September 2010.

1. Homeless situations covered in the survey were: living in emergency accommodation, staying with friends or relatives because there is nowhere else to live, and living in derelict buildings or without any permanent shelter.

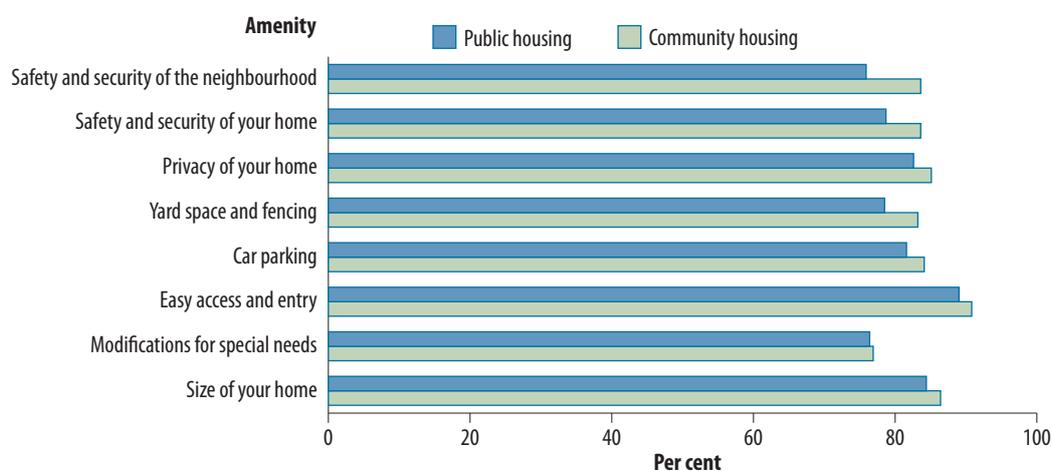
Satisfaction

Social housing tenants were asked to rate their level of satisfaction with services provided either by (or through) the relevant government department (for public housing), or housing organisation (for community housing). The level of satisfaction for both public housing and community housing respondents was almost three-quarters (73% and 79% respectively). In comparison with the previous NSHS (from 2007), the rate of satisfaction with services provided was essentially unchanged for public housing respondents (72%) and slightly lower for those in community housing (83%). However, it should be noted that there are limitations to the comparability of findings between surveys due, for example, to variability in the timing, coverage and response rate for the different surveys.

Amenities

The satisfaction of social housing tenants with their housing was explored in the NSHS through questions about amenities, such as the size of the dwelling and privacy of the home. Survey respondents were asked to indicate if certain amenity features were important to their household. The majority (over 70%) of public housing and community housing respondents indicated that the selected features (as presented in Figure 8) were important to their household.

Those households which rated these amenities as ‘important’ were then asked to indicate if their current home met the needs of the household for each of these features. More than three-quarters of respondents indicated their household’s needs for these features were met (Figure 8)—with community housing generally having a higher rate of meeting the needs of the households than public housing. Comparing this with findings from the previous NSHS, there has been little change seen overall across the various aspects of amenity between 2007 and 2010.



Note:

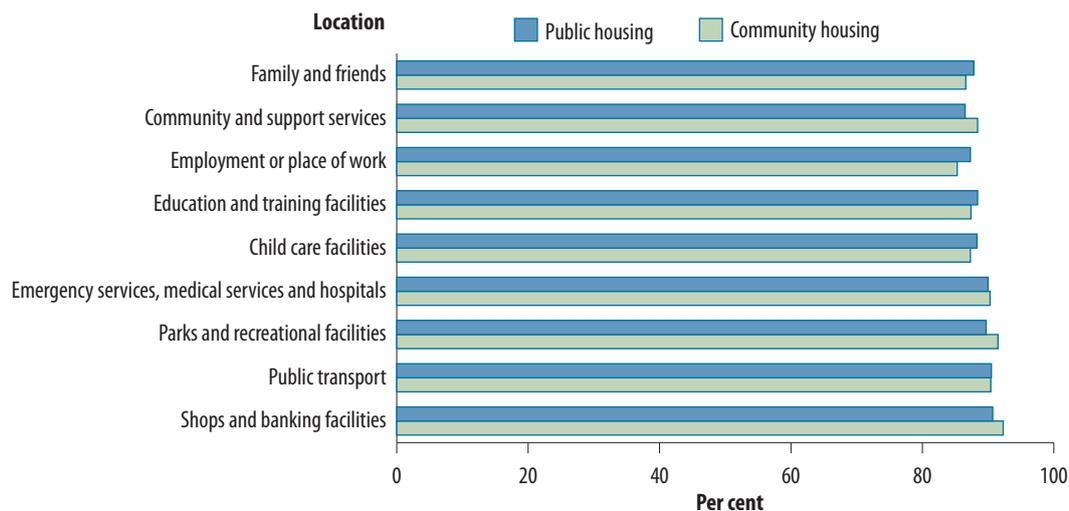
1. The proportion of households rating the particular amenity as meeting the needs of the household is based on those households that indicated that the particular amenity was important to that household
2. Responses to this question were provided by the respondent on behalf of the household.

Figure 8: Amenities rated as meeting the needs of the household, August–September 2010.

Location

The majority of public and community housing tenants indicated that being located close to facilities and services was ‘important’ for their household, with some variation depending on the service in question. For example:

- The highest rating facilities or services, in terms of importance, were being close to emergency services, medical services and hospitals (94% for PH and 92% for CH) followed by shops and banking (90% for both PH & CH).
- Location close to a child care facility was of lowest importance to households (44% for PH and 45% for CH) with the next least important facility or service being location near parks or recreational facilities (63% for PH and 66% for CH).
- Which services were rated as important by households can be explained, in part, by the age distribution of NSHS respondents. Almost two-thirds of respondents to the 2010 NSHS were aged 55 years or older.



Note:

1. The proportion of households rating the particular amenity as meeting the needs of the household is based on those households who indicated that the particular amenity was important to that household
2. Responses to this question were provided by the respondent on behalf of the household.

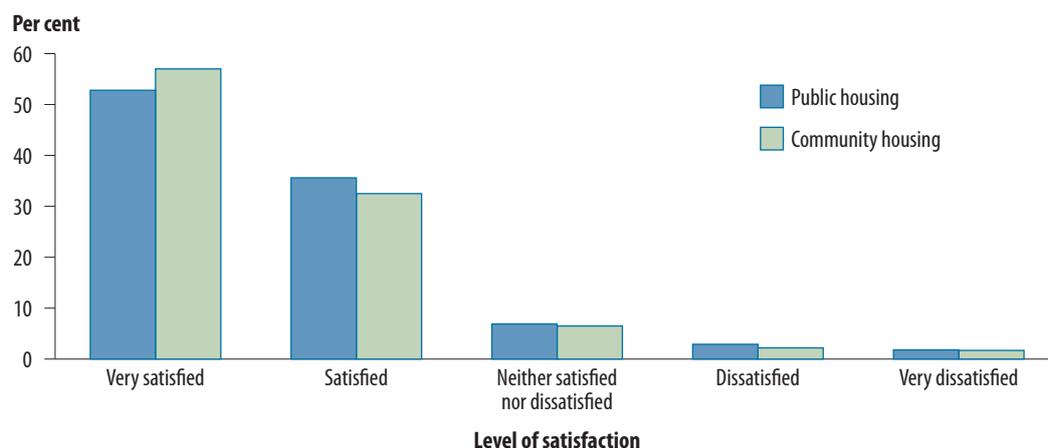
Figure 9: Location rated meeting the needs of the household, August–September 2010.

Those households which indicated proximity to the various facilities or services as being important were then asked to indicate if their current home met the needs of the household. More than 85% of respondents indicated that their household’s needs in terms of location were met (Figure 9)—there was little difference seen between public housing and community housing households.

Comparing this with findings from the previous NSHS, there was little change seen overall across the various aspects of location between the 2007 and 2010 surveys.

Overall satisfaction with living in social housing

The majority of responses indicated that households were either satisfied or very satisfied with living in either public housing or community housing (88% and 90% respectively). About one in twenty households (5% for PH and 4% for CH) responded that they were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with living in either public housing or community housing (Figure 10).



Note: Responses to this question were provided by the respondent on behalf of the household.

Figure 10: Satisfaction with living in social housing, August–September 2010.

Respondents were asked to rate their households overall satisfaction with living in social housing. The responses were compared to both the length of time in current home and total length of time in social housing. The results showed that the majority of tenants remained satisfied living in social housing. While there was some movement from the ‘very satisfied’ to ‘satisfied’ groups for tenants who had lived in social housing for longer periods, more than three-quarters of tenants were satisfied with their housing regardless of the duration of their tenancy.

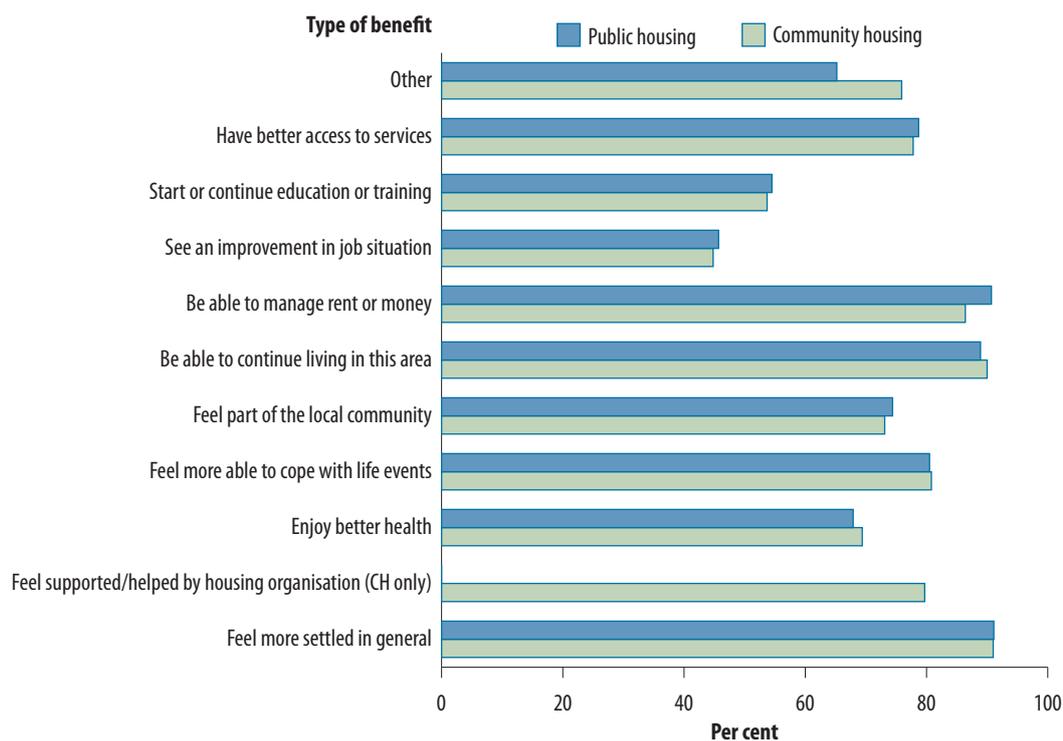
Benefits

Survey respondents recorded a range of benefits from living in public or community housing (Figure 11). Over 80% recorded that they, or their household, had benefited by:

- ♦ feeling more settled in general (91% for both PH and CH)
- ♦ feeling more able to cope with life events (80% for PH and 81% for CH)
- ♦ being able to manage rent or money better (91% for PH and 86% for CH).

About three-quarters of households recorded having better access to services (79% for PH and 78% for CH) and felt part of their local community (74% for PH and 73% for CH). Over two-thirds attributed better health to their social housing tenure (68% for PH and 69% for CH).

About half of respondents indicated that they, or their household, felt that living in social housing had either helped them to start or continue education (54% for both PH and CH) or to see an improvement in their job situation (46% for PH and 45% for CH). The lower rates seen for these categories may, in part, be due to the age profile and/or disability status of survey respondents.



Note: Responses to this question were provided by the respondent on behalf of the household.

Figure 11: Benefits gained by living in social housing, August–September 2010.

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