Australian Government

**Australian Institute of
Health and Welfare**

National social housing survey: a summary of national results 2012

Summary

Housing plays a major role in the health and wellbeing of Australians by providing shelter, safety, security and privacy, as well as enabling participation in social and economic activities. Housing assistance remains important for many Australians experiencing difficulty in securing or sustaining appropriate housing in the private market. A significant component of housing assistance is social housing, which includes all rental housing owned and managed by government, or not-for profit community organisations, which can be let to eligible households.

The 2012 National Social Housing Survey (NSHS) is the most recent in a series of surveys designed to provide information on social housing tenants and their experiences. The survey sampled tenants of public housing, state owned and managed Indigenous housing (SOMIH) and community housing programs from May to July 2012. Indigenous community housing (ICH) was not covered in the 2012 survey. The survey's primary purpose is to collect data on the profile of social housing tenants in states and territories and their satisfaction with services provided and the amenity and location of their housing.

Almost two-thirds of public housing tenants were satisfied with the services provided by their housing organisation (down from almost 73% in 2010), as were 3 in 5 SOMIH tenants and 3 in 4 community housing tenants (down from 79% in 2010). Most tenants indicated that the amenity and location of their housing met the needs of their household. These tenants recorded 'benefits' from living in social housing — around 80% felt more settled and around two-thirds felt better able to cope with life events. In terms of dwelling condition, over 90% of all social housing tenants reported that their household has four or more working facilities, while 1 in 10 community housing tenants, 1 in 5 public housing tenants and 1 in 3 SOMIH tenants reported that their dwelling has three or more structural problems.

Around a quarter of household members of public and community housing participated in the labour force as did more than a third of SOMIH tenants. A higher proportion of tenants who had previously experienced homelessness were unemployed across all social housing programs. Although educational outcomes for households surveyed were lower than those seen in the general population, community housing households were more likely than either public housing or SOMIH households to have either post-school or tertiary qualifications.

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More than half of public and community housing households consisted of a single person living alone, as did a quarter of SOMIH households. Overall, public housing and SOMIH tenants had lived in their current home longer than community housing tenants, with twice as many community housing respondents having moved into their current home in the last 2 years. Around 1 in 10 public housing and SOMIH tenants reported that they had experienced homelessness at least once in the past 5 years, as had 1 in 5 community housing tenants. Across all social housing programs, tenants who had experienced homelessness reported they resided in short-term or emergency accommodation, while more than 1 in 4 had slept rough or in non-conventional accommodation.

The most common community and health services accessed by social housing tenants were health, medical services and mental health services, but these were among the least likely to be accessed by tenants with assistance from their housing providers. Of those tenants who did seek their housing provider's assistance in accessing services, residential care and supported accommodation were most commonly accessed.

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Introduction

Housing assistance remains important for many Australians who, for a variety of reasons, including low income, experience difficulty in securing or sustaining affordable and appropriate housing in the private market. Housing assistance grows in importance as pressure increases in the private rental market, where many low-income households compete for housing with those on higher incomes.

Housing assistance encompasses a range of programs aimed at providing assistance for low-income households in securing and sustaining housing. It also includes rental assistance to those in the private rental market, assistance to low-income households and other groups for purchasing a home, as well as initiatives aimed at increasing the supply of affordable housing to low-income households.

Social housing is a significant component of housing assistance and includes all rental housing owned and managed by government, or not-for-profit community organisations, which can be let to eligible households (AIHW 2011). It includes public rental housing (PH), state owned and managed Indigenous housing (SOMIH), mainstream community housing (CH) and Indigenous community housing (ICH).

The aim of this report is to present a national summary of the results from the 2012 National Social Housing Survey (NSHS), undertaken from May to July 2012. The 2012 NSHS is the most recent in a series of surveys that have been designed to gather information on tenants and their social housing experiences. In addition, the NSHS has been used to collect a range of other data of interest in association with housing issues. Tenants of PH, SOMIH, and CH are collectively referred to as 'social housing' throughout this report (see Box 1 for definitions).

Box 1: Social housing services covered by the 2012 NSHS

Public rental housing

Public housing, also known as public rental housing, includes 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 need of housing.

State owned and managed Indigenous housing

State owned and managed Indigenous housing is administered by state and territory governments but is specifically targeted to households with at least one Indigenous member. It also provides appropriate, affordable and accessible housing for low- to moderate-income households. Currently the only jurisdictions to offer SOMIH are New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia and Tasmania.

Mainstream community housing

Mainstream community housing differs from public housing because it is managed by not-for-profit organisations and receives capital or recurrent funding from government. It offers short-, medium- or long-term tenure for low-income individuals and families. Community housing models vary across jurisdictions and housing stock is owned by a variety of groups, including government.

ICH was not covered in the 2012 NSHS. It is hoped that future National Social Housing Surveys will provide coverage of ICH tenants, as well as public housing, SOMIH and mainstream community housing tenants' experiences.

Comparability with previous surveys

The collection methodology for the 2012 NSHS remained largely unchanged from previous surveys of PH and CH tenants, with data collected via mail-out self-completed paper questionnaires. Previous surveys of SOMIH tenants were via face-to-face interview.

The sampling approach for the 2012 survey differed from that used in previous years due to limitations on the time available for fieldwork. Additional survey forms were sent out to randomly selected top-up sample households until the required numbers of responses were achieved across housing programs and jurisdictions. In addition, follow-up mailings were sent to those households who did not respond to the initial mail-out. In previous years, a sample was selected and followed up with reminder mailings until the required number of responses was achieved.

The 2012 survey weighting was calculated as the number of households divided by the number of responses for each housing program type by accessibility/remoteness index of Australia (ARIA) across all jurisdictions except the ACT. For the ACT, weights were calculated by the same method by housing program type without ARIA. All population counts were provided by the jurisdictions to the AIHW, and those ARIA areas without completed surveys were excluded from weighting calculations. This approach differs from that used in 2010 when the region (as provided by each jurisdiction) was used for stratification and selection rather than ARIA.

As with 2010, the 2012 NSHS used the same survey instrument across all social housing programs. Prior to 2010 the content differed slightly across the programs, reflecting the different areas of interest in relation to each program. The approach used for the 2012 survey was undertaken in order to maximise data comparability across all social housing programs. Further, while there was some change to the survey questions between the two survey waves, the same topics were covered and content for key issues remained essentially the same.

Caution should be used if comparing 2012 results with 2010 due to changes in the survey methodology and substantially lower response rates in 2012. These may have affected comparability in survey responses and increased the survey's exposure to non-response bias compared with previous surveys. Particular care is advised when comparing estimates of customer satisfaction between 2010 and 2012 due to these changes.

Despite the changes in methodology between the 2010 and 2012 NSHS, the tenant profiles of respondents remained similar across all social housing programs.
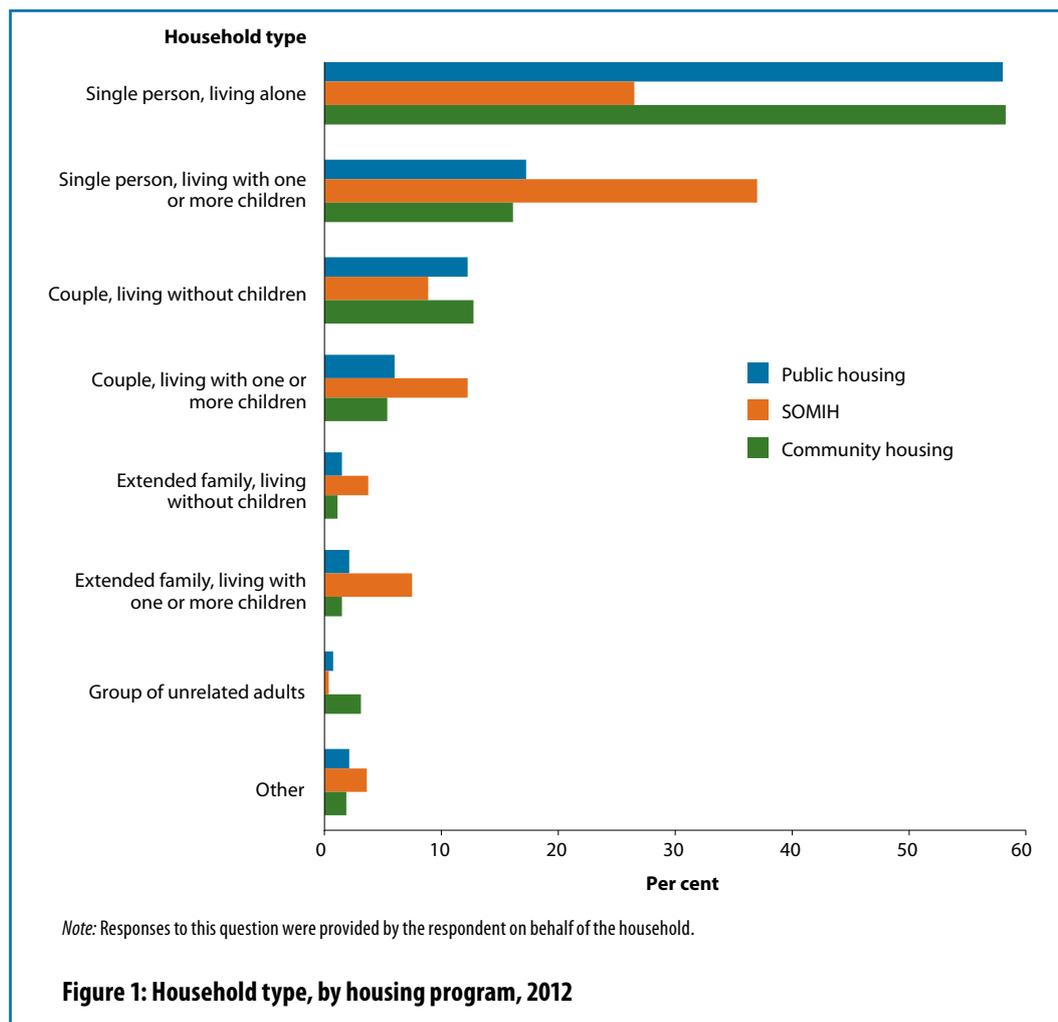
Further information regarding the approach to the 2012 NSHS, as well as a profile of the 2012 NSHS respondents, is provided in 'Appendix A: Survey methodology'.

A profile of social housing households

Household types

More than half of public and community housing households (58% for both) comprised a single person living alone, compared with just over a quarter of SOMIH households (27%) (Figure 1). Around 1 in 10 of all social housing households comprised couples only (12% PH, 9% SOMIH and 13% CH).

Less than a quarter of public and community housing households contained one or more dependent children (23% and 22%, respectively). Consistent with 2010 findings, almost two-thirds (66%) of dependent children in public housing and almost three-quarters (70%) in community housing lived in a single parent household. In comparison, almost half of SOMIH households consisted of one or more dependent children (49%), with almost two-thirds (66%) of these dependent children residing in a single parent household.

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

Figure 1: Household type, by housing program, 2012

Country of birth and language spoken

More than two-thirds of public housing and community housing tenants were born in Australia (68% and 69%, respectively), as were 98% of SOMIH tenants. Of those born overseas, the largest group was classified as being born in European countries (59% of PH and 46% of CH—note that for the SOMIH population only 100 tenants were born outside of Australia and, as such, further analysis has not been undertaken). The proportion of overseas-born tenants was slightly higher than the proportion of the general population born overseas. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), at 30 June 2011, about a quarter (27%) of the estimated resident population of Australia were born overseas (ABS 2012c) compared with 31% of social housing tenants.

The majority of tenants spoke mainly English at home (88% for PH, 95% for SOMIH and 87% for CH). Of those public and community housing tenants who reported that they spoke a language other than English at home, the next two most frequently recorded languages were Vietnamese (12%) and Chinese (9%) for public housing tenants, and Arabic (13%) and Chinese (12%) for community housing tenants.

Indigenous status

Almost all SOMIH tenants (96%) recorded that at least one member of their household was of 'Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin', compared with less than 1 in 10 tenants for both public housing and community housing (8% and 9%, respectively).

On Census night 2011, Indigenous Australians represented around 2.5% of the Australian population, which suggests that they are over-represented in social housing (ABS 2012a).

Labour force status of household

Households sampled as part of the 2012 NSHS provided information on the labour force status of all individuals aged 15 and over living in that household.

Around a quarter of those in either public rental housing (25%) or mainstream community housing (28%) aged 15 or over were in the labour force in one of the following categories:

* employed full time (35 hours or more per week in all jobs)
* employed part time (less than 35 hours per week in all jobs)
* unemployed (not in paid employment but seeking work).

The remainder of those in public housing and community housing households were either studying, a volunteer or full-time parent or carer, retired or unable to work due to long-term illness or disability (Figure 2).

Notes

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

2. Categories are not mutually exclusive. More than one response could be provided by the respondent on behalf of each member of the household.

3. Homelessness in the last 5 years was self-reported and referred to times when respondents lived in emergency accommodation provided by a homelessness agency, stayed temporarily with friends or relatives because they had nowhere else to live, or have been totally without permanent shelter or lived in shelter that was unlawful such as forced to squat in derelict buildings.

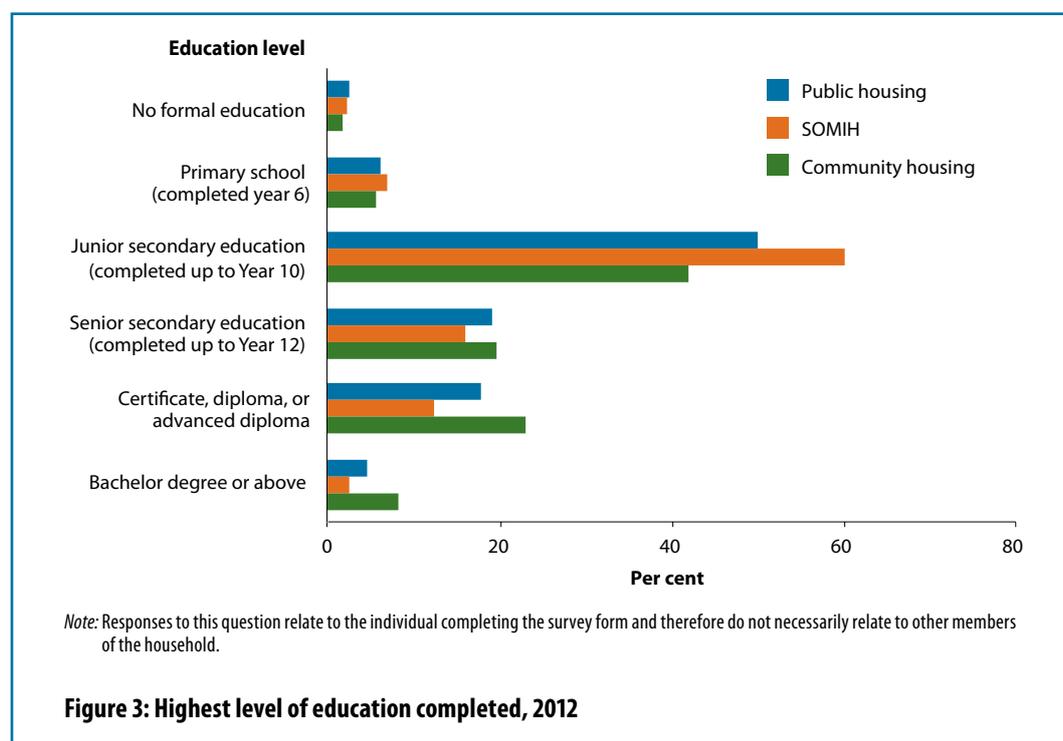**Figure 2: Labour force participation, individuals aged 15 and over, 2012**

In comparison, a higher proportion of those in SOMIH households were in the labour force (39%), but more SOMIH tenants were also currently unemployed (18%) than those in either public housing or community housing households (both at 11%). In addition, people in SOMIH households were less likely than those in either public housing or community housing households to be retired (9% SOMIH, 27% PH and 23% CH) or unable to work due to long-term illness or injury (22% SOMIH, 26% PH and 25% CH).

Of those tenants who reported that they had experienced at least one episode of homelessness in the last 5 years (Figure 2):

- a similar proportion were participating in the labour force compared with the NSHS population as a whole (this was the case across all social housing programs)

- a higher proportion of those who had previously been homeless were currently unemployed across all social housing programs

- a slightly higher proportion were currently studying, volunteering or engaged as a full-time parent or carer

- a lower proportion were currently retired than in the overall NSHS population

- those in public or community housing were more likely to report being unable to work due to long-term illness or disability, while SOMIH households were equally likely to the NSHS population to report this.

Education status of tenants

Half of public housing tenants indicated that their highest level of education was year 10 or its equivalent—junior secondary education (50%)—as did two-thirds of SOMIH tenants (60%). In comparison, less than half (42%) of community housing tenants reported that their highest level of education was year 10 or its equivalent. Across all social housing programs, around 2% of tenants reported that they had not completed any formal education (Figure 3).

Education level

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 3: Highest level of education completed, 2012

Almost a third of community housing tenants (31%) reported that they had completed post-secondary school qualifications (that is, certificate, diploma, advanced diploma and bachelor degree or above) compared with less than a quarter (23%) of public housing tenants and around 1 in 6 SOMIH tenants (15%).

Comparing the highest level of educational attainment in the general population (as measured through the ABS Education and Work, Australia, May 2012 survey (ABS 2012b), with that of respondents to the 2012 NSHS illustrates some differences between the two groups. Some of the differences between this general population and the comparable social housing population (i.e. 15–64 year olds) include:
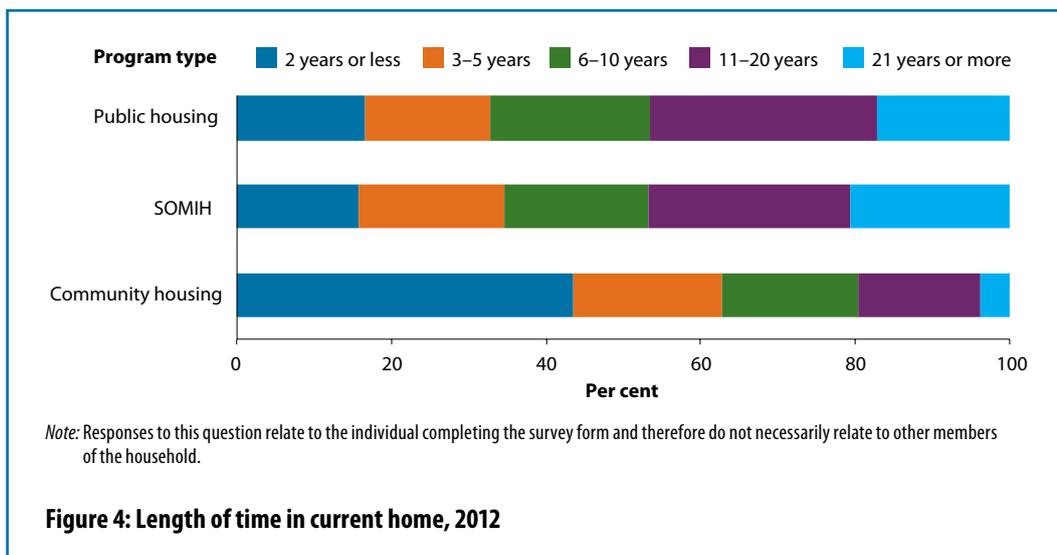
+ Those in the general population (25%) were around 3 times as likely to have achieved a highest level of education of bachelor degree or above than community housing tenants (8%), 5 times as likely as public housing tenants (5%) and more than 10 times as likely as SOMIH tenants (2%).

- The proportion achieving any post-secondary school qualifications (that is, certificate, diploma, advanced diploma and bachelor degree or above) in the general population was lower (28%) than that seen for community housing tenants (31%), yet higher than that for public housing (23%) and SOMIH tenants (15%).

- The proportion for whom senior secondary education (up to year 12) was the highest level of education completed was similar for both the NSHS sample (19% for PH, 16% for SOMIH and 20% for CH) and the general population (20%). The proportion for whom junior secondary education was the highest level of education completed was much higher for the NSHS sample (50% for PH, 60% for SOMIH and 42% for CH) than for the general population (13%).

Tenants' housing histories
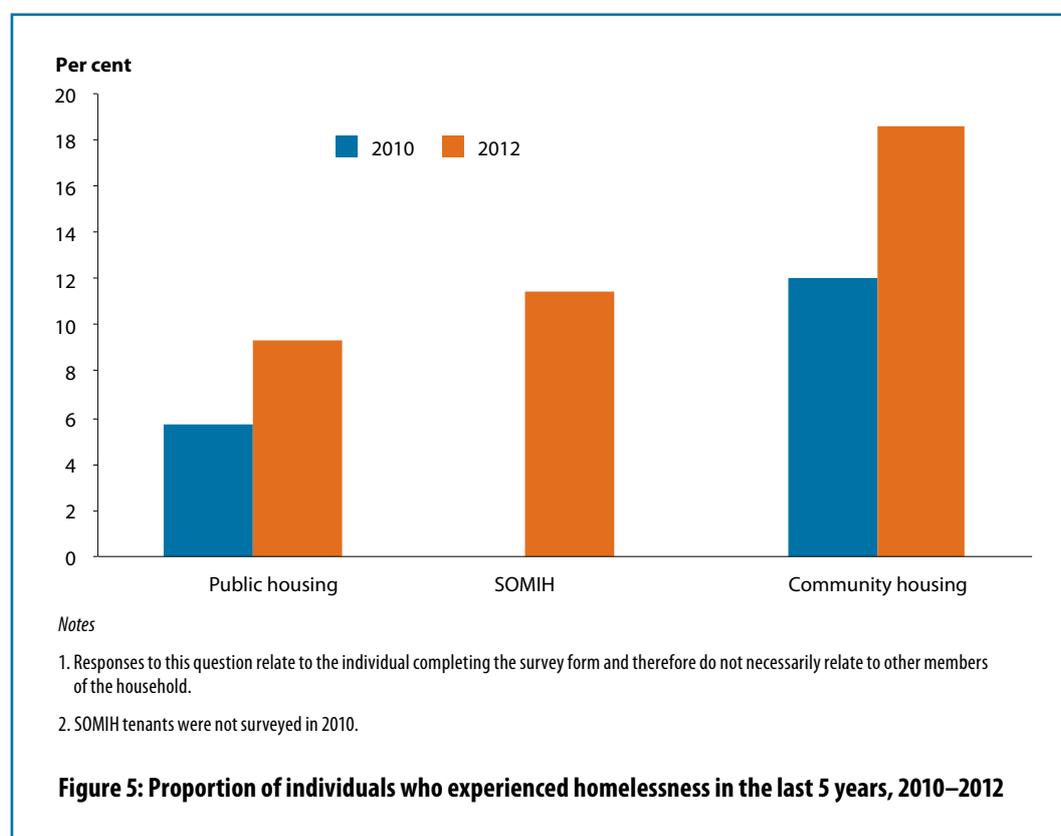
Time in current home

Overall, public housing and SOMIH tenants had lived in their current home longer than community housing tenants (Figure 4). This partly reflects the fact that community housing has been available in Australia for a shorter amount of time than public housing (around 30 years compared with more than 60 years) and has grown at a faster rate than public housing since its introduction. Community housing tenants (43%) were more likely to report having moved into their current home within the last 2 years than either public housing (17%) or SOMIH (16%) tenants. In comparison, almost half of public housing and SOMIH tenants (47% for both) had been in their current home for more than 10 years compared with only 1 in 5 (20%) community housing tenants.

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 4: Length of time in current home, 2012

Previous homelessness

In the 2012 NSHS, being 'homeless' refers to times when the tenant had to live in emergency accommodation provided by a homelessness agency, had stayed temporarily with friends or relatives because they had nowhere else to live, had been totally without permanent shelter or had lived in shelter unlawfully such as squatting in derelict buildings.

Around 1 in 10 (9%) public housing tenants recorded that they had experienced homelessness in the past 5 years (up from 6% in 2010). Similarly, 1 in 10 SOMIH tenants recorded that they had been homeless in the past 5 years (12%). In comparison, 1 in 5 (19%) community housing tenants recorded that they had been homeless in the last 5 years (up from 12% in 2010) (Figure 5).

Notes

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

2. SOMIH tenants were not surveyed in 2010.

Figure 5: Proportion of individuals who experienced homelessness in the last 5 years, 2010–2012

Those who had been homeless in the past 5 years were asked to indicate whether they were living in non-conventional accommodation, non-private dwellings or short-term or emergency accommodation. Most commonly, tenants across all social housing programs who had experienced homelessness reported that they had resided in short-term or emergency accommodation, ranging from 72% for community housing tenants to 84% for SOMIH tenants (Table 1). More than 1 in 4 social housing tenants who had been homeless in the last 5 years reported that they had slept rough or in non-conventional accommodation, ranging from 25% of SOMIH respondents to 31% of public housing tenants.

Table 1: Proportion of individuals who experienced homelessness in the last 5 years, 2012 (per cent)

	Public housing	SOMIH	Community housing
Sleeping rough or in non-conventional accommodation	31.2	25.2	26.7
Short-term or emergency accommodation	73.0	84.3	71.7
In a private boarding house	14.9	6.0	17.4
Hotel/motel, caravan park, or other temporary accommodation	25.9	16.4	21.8

Notes

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

2. Respondents could select more than one response.

Around 4 in 10 public housing and community housing tenants who reported that they had experienced homelessness in the past 5 years also reported that they had experienced more than one episode of homelessness in the last 5 years (41% for PH and 44% for CH) (Figure 6). In comparison, of those who had previously experienced homelessness, nearly 6 in 10 (58%) SOMIH tenants had experienced repeat periods of homelessness in the past 5 years, with almost 1 in 10 (9%) experiencing homelessness more than 10 times in the past 5 years.

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: Number of times homeless in last 5 years, for those tenants who previously experienced homelessness, 2012
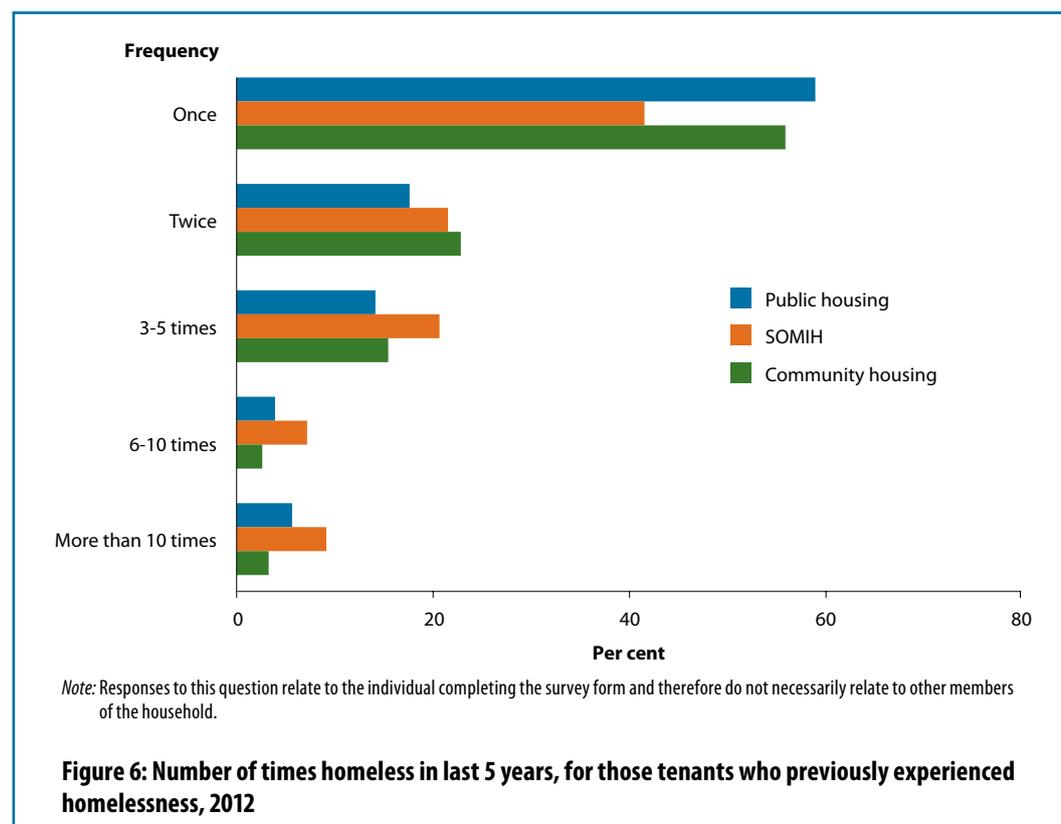
A similar pattern exists for Indigenous tenants across all social housing programs. Of those who had previously experienced homelessness, Indigenous tenants were around 1.4 times more likely to experience repeated episodes of homelessness than non-Indigenous housing tenants (Table 2).
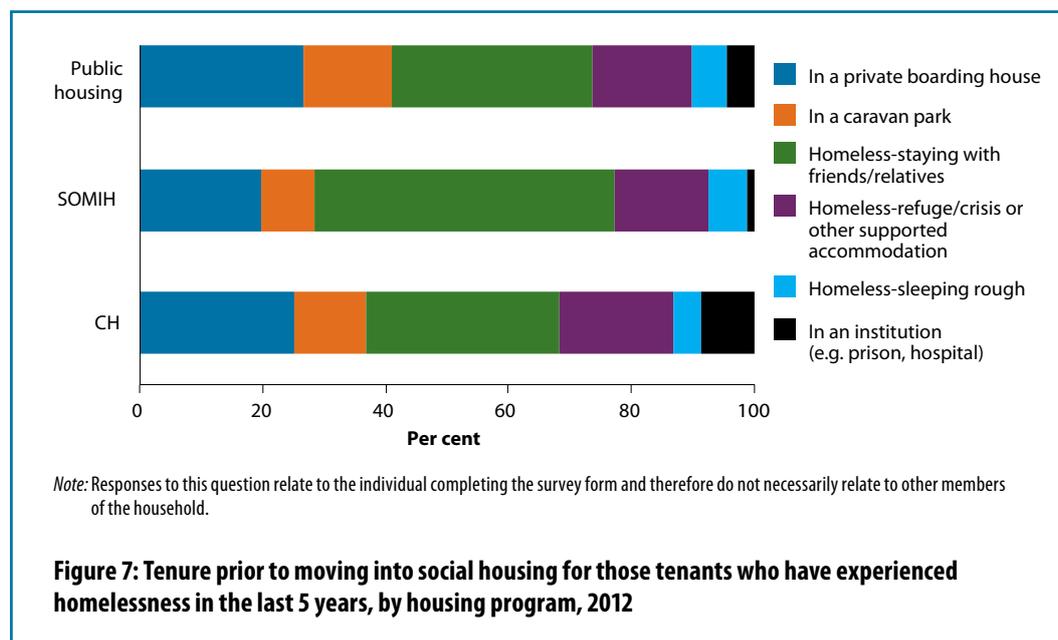
Table 2: Number of times homeless in last 5 years, for those tenants who had previously experienced homelessness, by Indigenous status, 2012 (per cent)

	Public housing		SOMIH		Community housing	
	Indigenous	Non-Indigenous	Indigenous	Non-Indigenous	Indigenous	Non-Indigenous
Once in the last 5 years	45.2	60.1	38.8	n.p	39.0	60.1
Experienced repeat homelessness in last 5 years	54.8	39.9	61.2	n.p	61.0	39.9

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.

Prior tenure

Social housing tenants who reported that they were homeless prior to moving into their current home were most likely to describe their previous situation as 'homeless—staying with friends/relatives' (33% for PH, 49% for SOMIH and 31% for CH), followed by 'residing in a private boarding house' (27% for PH, 20% for SOMIH and 25% for CH) (Figure 7).
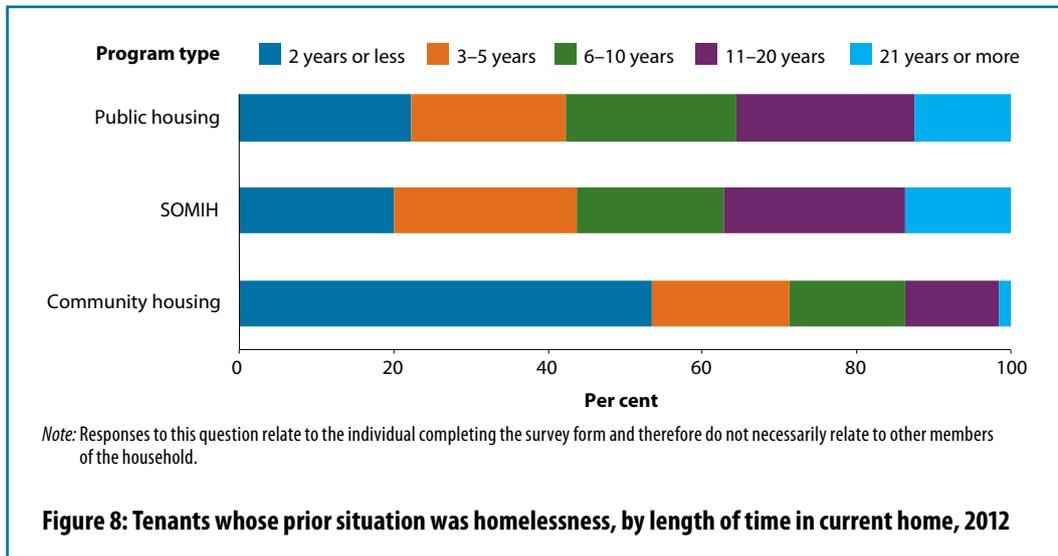

Note: Responses to this question relate to the individual completing the survey form and therefore do not necessarily relate to other members of the household.

Figure 7: Tenure prior to moving into social housing for those tenants who have experienced homelessness in the last 5 years, by housing program, 2012

One of the outcomes committed to under the National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA) is that people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness achieve sustainable housing (COAG Reform Council 2012). According to those surveyed in 2012, approximately 3 in 10 social housing tenants were homeless prior to moving into their current home (26% for PH, 33% for SOMIH and 31% for CH). Of these, 78% of PH tenants, 80% of SOMIH tenants and 47% of CH tenants had been living in their current home for 3 years or more (Figure 8).
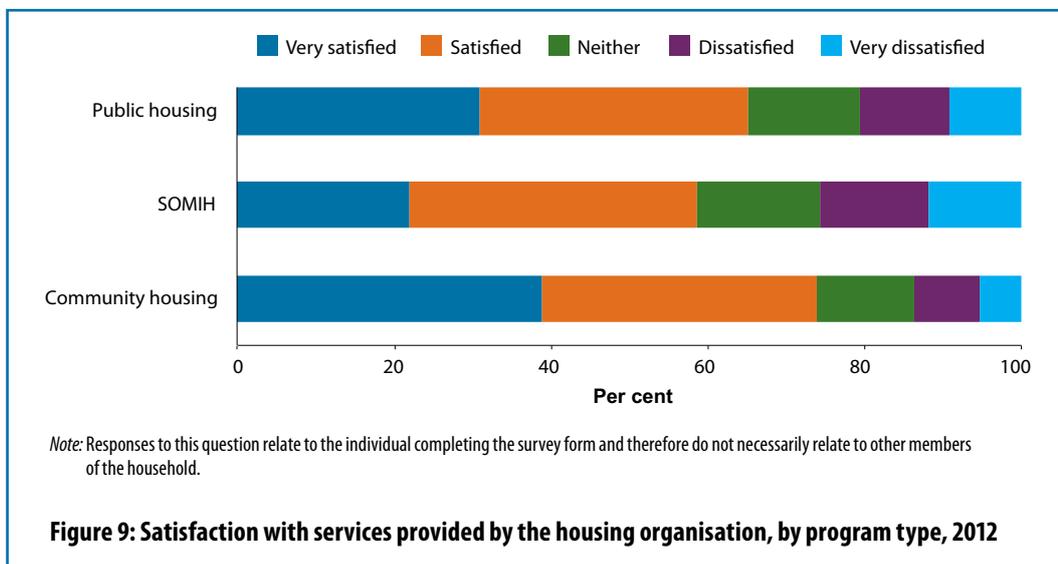
Note: Responses to this question relate to the individual completing the survey form and therefore do not necessarily relate to other members of the household.

Figure 8: Tenants whose prior situation was homelessness, by length of time in current home, 2012

Tenant satisfaction

Overall satisfaction

Social housing tenants were asked to rate their satisfaction with the services provided by their housing organisation. Almost two-thirds (65%) of public housing tenants were satisfied with these services (down from 73% in 2010) as were almost 3 in 5 (59%) SOMIH tenants. Among community housing tenants, 3 in 4 (74%) were satisfied with the services provided by their housing organisation, down from 79% in 2010 (Figure 9).

There are limitations to the comparability of findings between NSHS surveys due to changes in question wording, as well as variability in the timing, coverage and response rates for the different surveys.

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 9: Satisfaction with services provided by the housing organisation, by program type, 2012

Satisfaction was highest across all social housing programs:

* among non-Indigenous tenants (Table 3)
* for tenants in dwellings with no structural problems (Table 4)
* for tenants in dwellings classed as adequate or underutilised (Table 5).

Table 3: Proportion of tenants satisfied or very satisfied with services provided, by housing organisation, by Indigenous status, 2012 (per cent)

	Public housing	SOMIH	Community housing
Indigenous	56	58	67
Non-Indigenous	65	60	74

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.

Table 4: Proportion of tenants satisfied with services provided, by housing organisation and dwelling condition, 2012 (per cent)

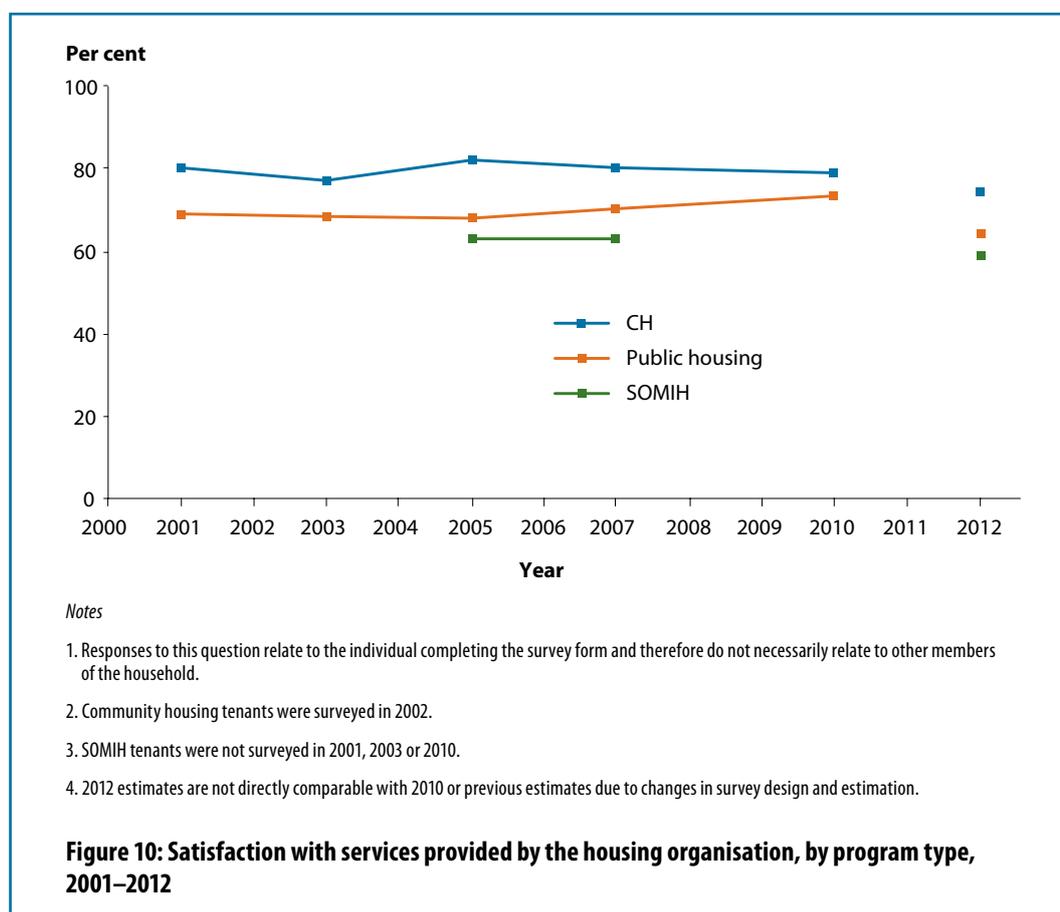|	Public housing	SOMIH	Community housing
3 or more structural problems	33	34	49
1 or 2 structural problems	59	62	64
No structural problems	85	86	85

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.

Table 5: Proportion of tenants satisfied with services provided by housing organisation, by overcrowding, 2012 (per cent)

	Public housing	SOMIH	Community housing
Overcrowded	47	48	66
Adequate	66	59	74
Underutilised	68	62	76

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.

In 2012, social housing tenants were also asked why they were satisfied or dissatisfied with the services provided by their housing organisation. The most common reasons reported by tenants for satisfaction with their housing organisation include the speed of repairs, tenants having no problems (so no reason to contact their housing organisation), and the friendly and professional nature of non-maintenance staff. The most common reasons cited for dissatisfaction were repairs requested by tenants not being done, repairs were done too slowly and poor service received from the housing service contact/worker.

Satisfaction over time

Historically, social housing tenants have been asked to rate their overall satisfaction with their housing provider. It is important to note that, over the varying survey periods, the wording of the question tracking this item has changed and comparisons should be made with caution.

In surveys undertaken since 2001, two-thirds or more public housing tenants and three-quarters or more community housing tenants report they are satisfied with the service provided by their housing provider. In addition, around two-thirds of SOMIH tenants are satisfied (Figure 10). The proportion of those satisfied with their social housing provider fell slightly in 2012.

Notes

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

2. Community housing tenants were surveyed in 2002.

3. SOMIH tenants were not surveyed in 2001, 2003 or 2010.

4. 2012 estimates are not directly comparable with 2010 or previous estimates due to changes in survey design and estimation.

Figure 10: Satisfaction with services provided by the housing organisation, by program type, 2001–2012
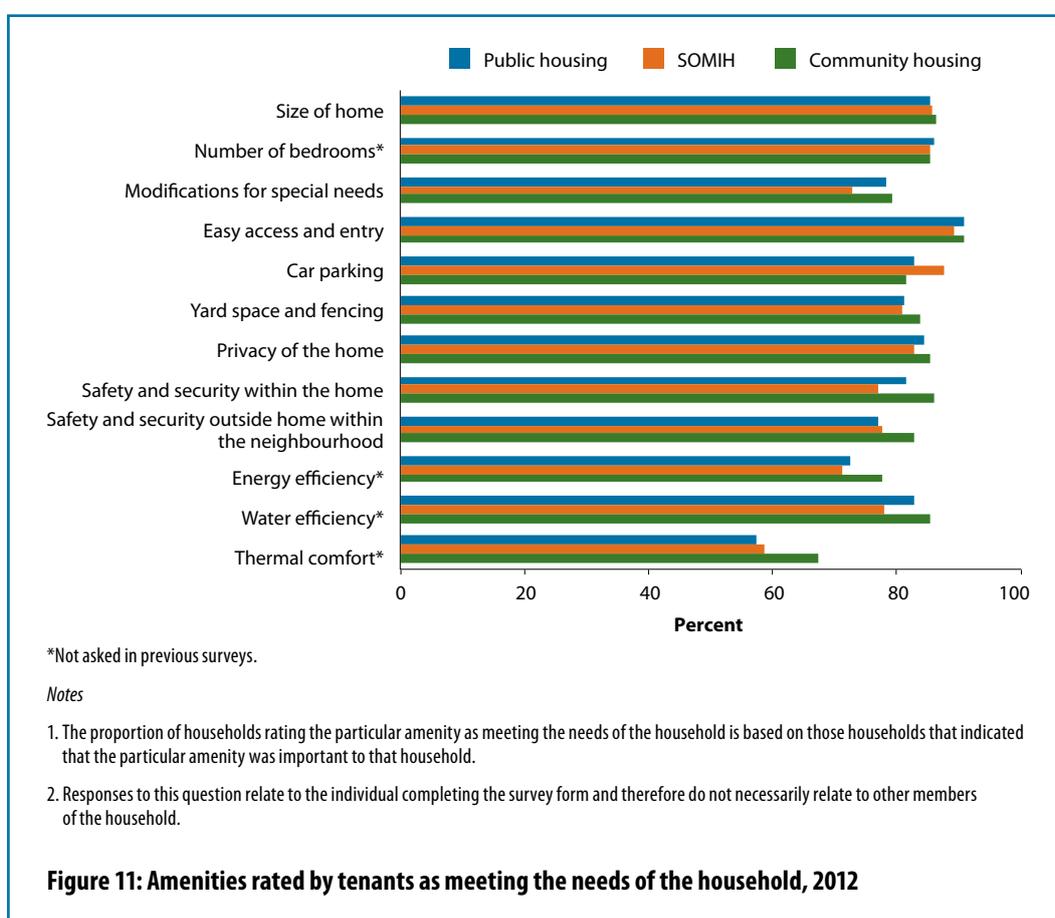
Amenities

The 2012 NSHS also explored tenant satisfaction with their housing through questions about amenities, such as the size of the dwelling, easy access and entry to the dwelling, and privacy of the home. The majority (70% or over) of public housing, SOMIH and community housing tenants indicated that selected amenity features were important to their household.

Households that had rated these amenities as 'important' were asked to indicate if their current home met the needs of their household for these features. With the exception of 'thermal comfort', two-thirds or more of social housing tenants indicated their household's needs for these features were met (Figure 11). Less than 3 in 5 public housing and SOMIH tenants indicated their home met their household's needs in terms of thermal comfort (57% and 59%, respectively) compared with 67% of community housing tenants.

As was found in 2010, community housing generally better met the needs of households in terms of the amenities provided than public housing and there has been little change seen overall across the various aspects of amenity between 2010 and 2012.

*Not asked in previous surveys.

Notes

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 relate to the individual completing the survey form and therefore do not necessarily relate to other members of the household.

Figure 11: Amenities rated by tenants as meeting the needs of the household, 2012

Location

As with 2010, the majority of all social housing tenants indicated that being located close to the selected facilities and services was important for their household, with some variation depending on the service in question. For example:
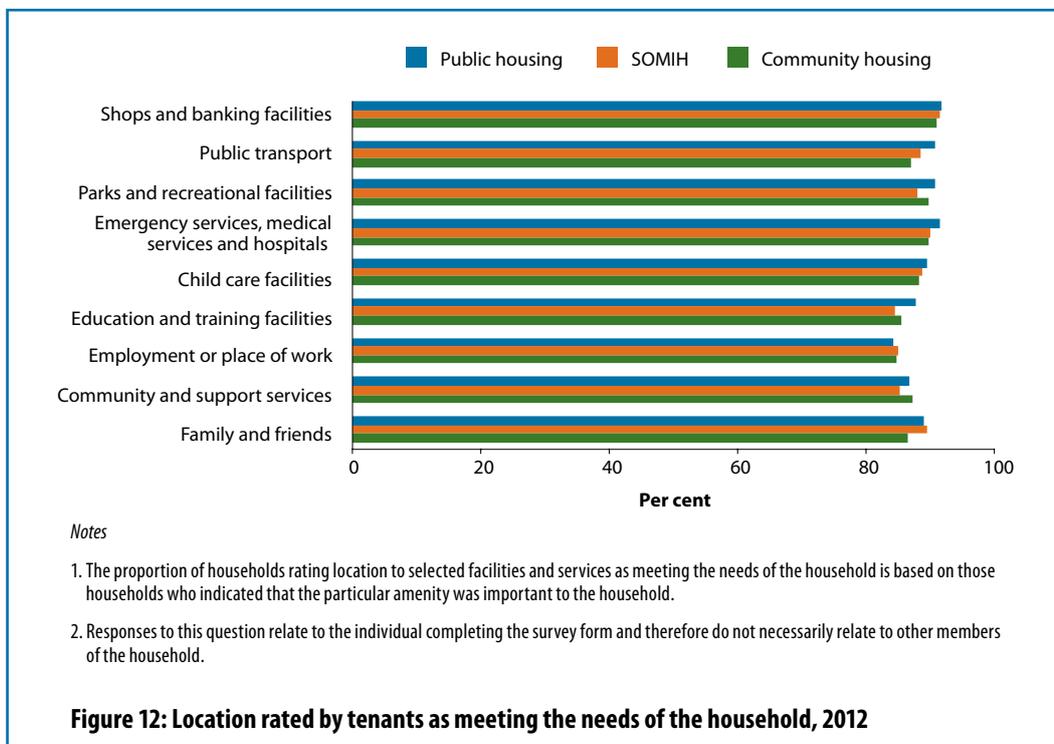
- Being close to emergency services, medical services and hospitals was rated highest (96% for PH, 94% for CH and 93% for SOMIH). This was closely followed by shops and banking facilities (92% for PH, 93% for CH and 87% for SOMIH) and family and friends (92% for both PH and CH and 90% for SOMIH).

- Location close to a child-care facility was of lowest importance to households (44% for PH, 42% for CH and 60% for SOMIH). The next least important facility or service was location near education and training facilities (60% for both PH and CH and 71% for SOMIH).

The services rated as important by households can be partly explained by the age distribution of NSHS respondents, as well as the presence or absence of dependent children. Different services are favoured by different ages. As almost two-thirds of NSHS respondents (64%) are aged 55 or older, particularly in PH and CH households, a higher importance is attached to the location of emergency services, medical facilities and hospitals. SOMIH households are characterised by a younger age profile, with a higher percentage containing dependent children. As such, SOMIH households are more likely to rate proximity to child care, education and training facilities as important.

Households indicating that proximity to various facilities or services was important were asked to indicate if their current home met the needs of the household. Across all social housing programs 84% or more of tenants indicated that their household's needs in terms of their location were met (Figure 12). There was little difference between public housing, community housing and SOMIH tenants.

In comparing this finding with the previous NSHS surveys, there has been little change overall across the various aspects of location.

Notes

1. The proportion of households rating location to selected facilities and services as meeting the needs of the household is based on those households who indicated that the particular amenity was important to the household.

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

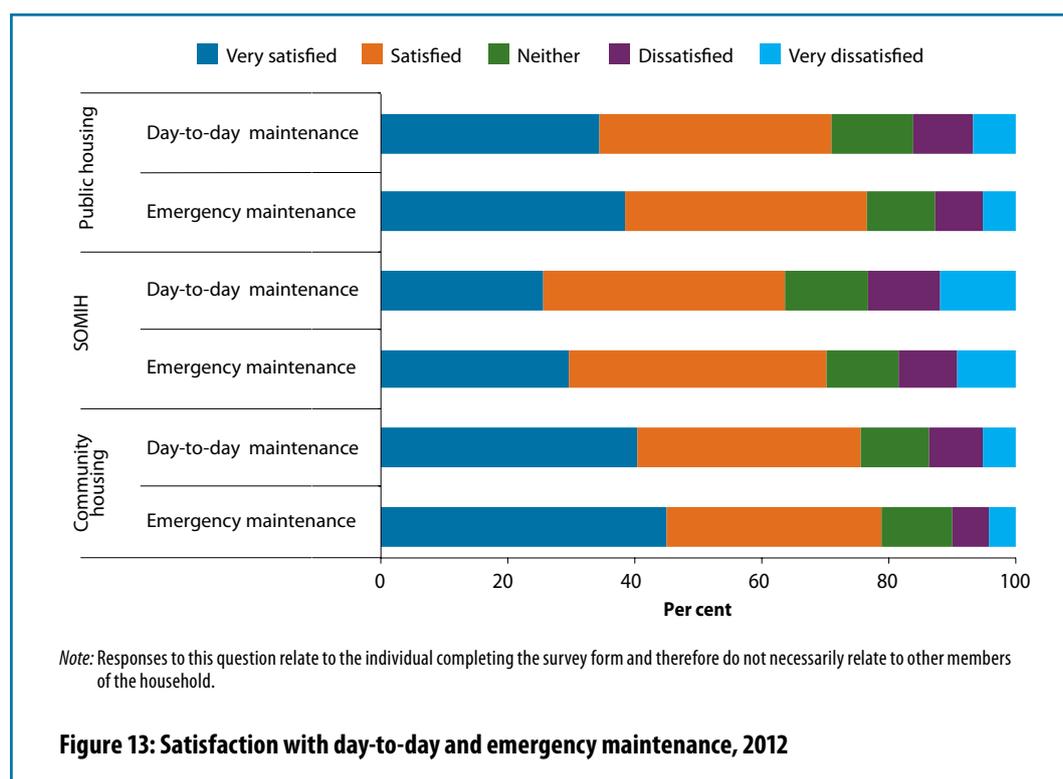**Figure 12: Location rated by tenants as meeting the needs of the household, 2012**

Maintenance

Social housing tenants were asked to rate their level of satisfaction with both day-to-day and emergency maintenance services. Day-to-day maintenance included such services as fixing slow-dripping taps, faulty internal door locks, or single power points or lights not working. Emergency maintenance included fixing a blocked or broken toilet system, burst water service or main, gas leaks, flooding, electrical faults, or storm or fire damage.

The level of satisfaction with day-to-day maintenance services was around three-quarters for public housing tenants (71%) and community housing tenants (76%). In comparison, almost two-thirds (64%) of SOMIH tenants were satisfied with day-to-day maintenance (Figure 13).

The level of satisfaction with emergency maintenance services was slightly higher than that observed for day-to-day maintenance services. Three-quarters of both public and community housing tenants were satisfied with emergency maintenance services (77% and 79%, respectively); while more than two-thirds of SOMIH tenants were satisfied (70%) (Figure 13).

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 13: Satisfaction with day-to-day and emergency maintenance, 2012

Social housing tenants were asked their reasons for satisfaction or dissatisfaction with maintenance services. The most common reasons offered by tenants for satisfaction with maintenance services included the speed of repair (particularly for emergency maintenance) and the professional manner of those providing maintenance services. The most common reasons for dissatisfaction centred on the lack of responsiveness to requests for assistance and the slowness of repairs in regards to day-to-day maintenance.
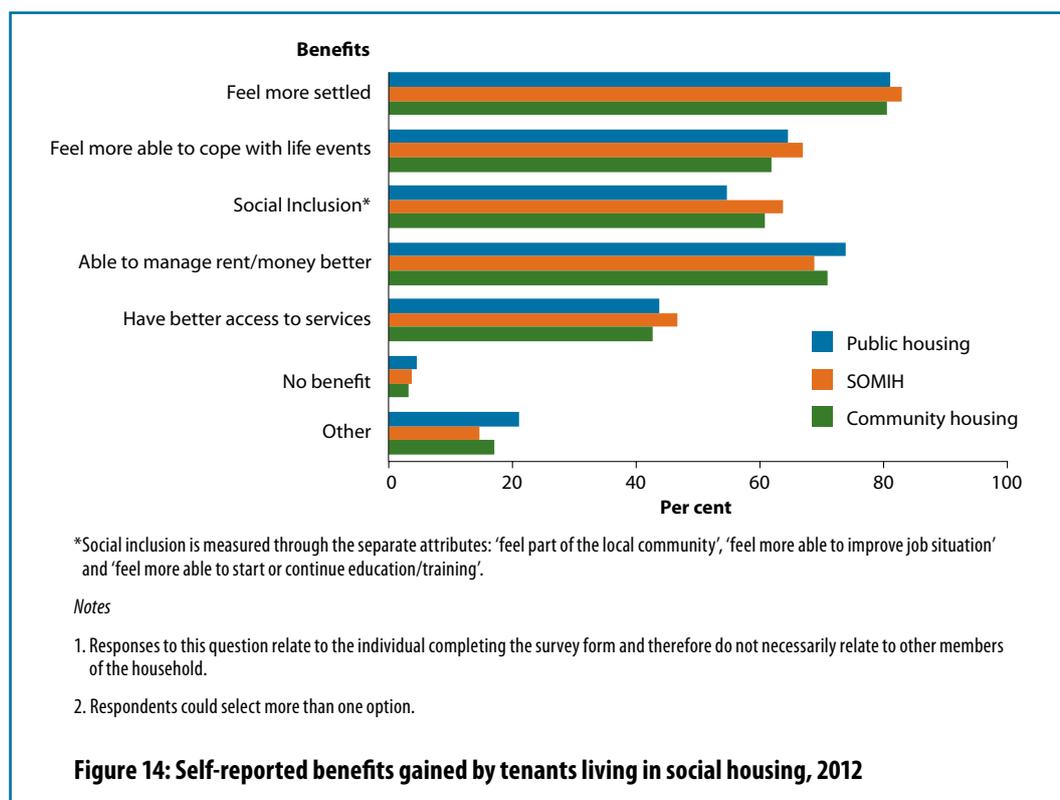
Benefits

Social housing tenants recorded a range of benefits from living in social housing (Figure 14). Around 70% or more recorded that they, or their household, had benefitted by:

* feeling more settled in general (70% for PH, 73% for CH and 78% for SOMIH)

* being able to manage rent or money better (76% for PH, 71% for CH and 69% for SOMIH).

Around half of tenants recorded that they, or their household had benefitted by:

* feeling more able to cope with life events (46% for PH, 50% for CH and 53% for SOMIH)

* an improved sense of social inclusion (43% for PH, 50% for CH and 57% for SOMIH), including feeling part of the local community, feeling more able to improve their job situation and feeling more able to start or continue education.

Around a third of tenants recorded that they, or their household, had benefitted by having better access to services (36% for PH, 37% for CH and 44% for SOMIH), while around 1 in 5 tenants reported they received 'other benefits' from living in social housing. These benefits included a greater feeling of security and stability and a greater sense of independence.

*Social inclusion is measured through the separate attributes: 'feel part of the local community', 'feel more able to improve job situation' and 'feel more able to start or continue education/training'.

Notes

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

2. Respondents could select more than one option.

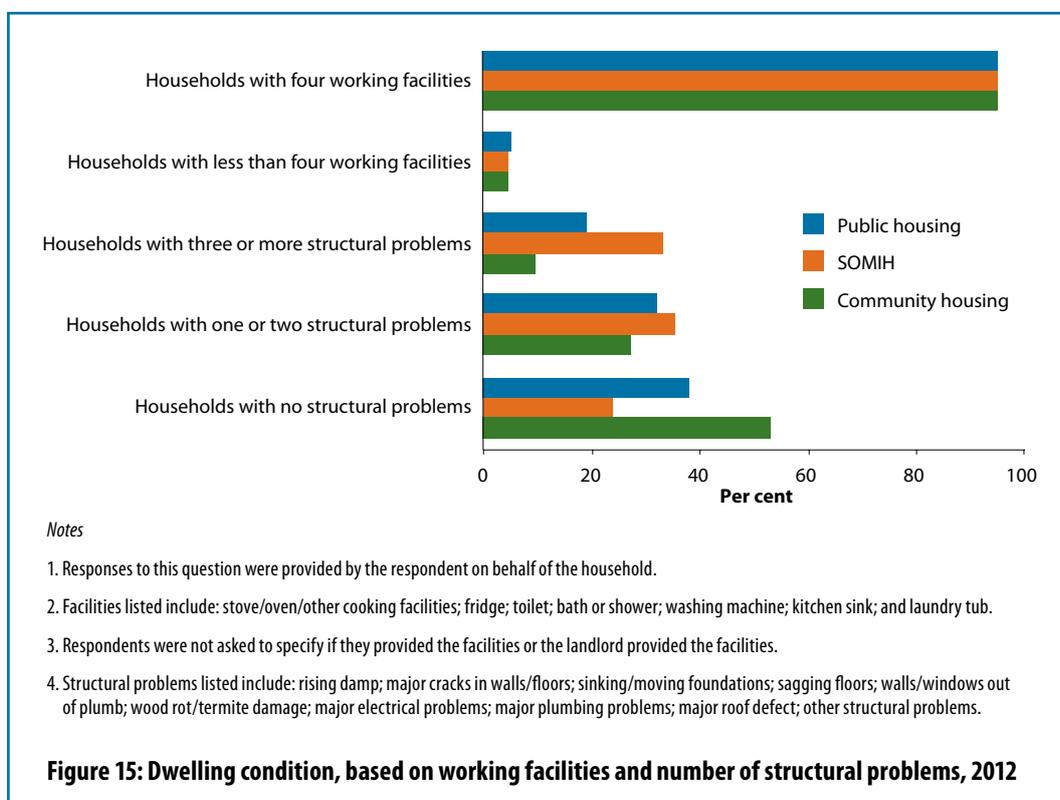**Figure 14: Self-reported benefits gained by tenants living in social housing, 2012**

Social housing tenants who had been homeless at some point in the last 5 years were more likely to record a range of benefits from living in social housing. Most notably, these included:

+ feeling more settled in general (82% for PH, 81% for CH and 83% for SOMIH)

+ feeling more able to cope with life events (65% for PH, 62% for CH and 67% for SOMIH)

+ improved sense of social inclusion (55% for PH, 61% for CH and 64% for SOMIH)

+ better access to services (44% for PH, 43% for CH and 47% for SOMIH).

Dwelling condition

Over 90% of all social housing tenants reported that their household has four or more working facilities from those listed (95% each for PH, CH and SOMIH) (see Figure 15). Facilities that the household either does not have or that are not currently working include:

+ washing machine (11%) and laundry tub (7%) for public housing tenants

+ stove (12%) and washing machine (9%) for SOMIH tenants

+ washing machine (12%) and fridge (7%) for community housing tenants.

Notes

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

2. Facilities listed include: stove/oven/other cooking facilities; fridge; toilet; bath or shower; washing machine; kitchen sink; and laundry tub.

3. Respondents were not asked to specify if they provided the facilities or the landlord provided the facilities.

4. Structural problems listed include: rising damp; major cracks in walls/floors; sinking/moving foundations; sagging floors; walls/windows out of plumb; wood rot/termite damage; major electrical problems; major plumbing problems; major roof defect; other structural problems.

Figure 15: Dwelling condition, based on working facilities and number of structural problems, 2012

Community housing tenants were most likely to report their dwelling has no structural problems (53%), followed by public housing tenants (38%) and SOMIH tenants (24%), while around 1 in 3 social housing tenants reported that their dwelling currently had one or two structural problems. A third (33%) of SOMIH tenants reported that their dwelling currently has three or more structural problems, followed by 1 in 5 (19%) public housing tenants and 1 in 10 (10%) community housing tenants.

The most commonly reported structural problems for social housing households were major cracks in walls/floors (24% for PH, 33% for SOMIH and 14% for CH) and rising damp (18% for PH, 25% for SOMIH and 12% for CH).

Use of other community services

Social housing tenants were asked about their, or anyone in their household's, use in the last 12 months of various health and community services. Of primary interest was whether these services were accessed with or without their housing provider's assistance.

Household need for, and use of, other community and health services

The most common community and health services used by social housing tenants were health/medical services (53% for PH, 46% for SOMIH and 54% for CH) and mental health services (12% for PH, 11% for SOMIH and 16% for CH) (Table 6). Community and health services were most commonly accessed by community housing tenants—a higher proportion of CH tenants than PH or SOMIH tenants had accessed 9 out of the 12 services.

Table 6: Proportion of households using community and health services in the past 12 months, 2012 (per cent)

	Public housing		SOMIH		Community housing	
	Access service	Housing provider assisted[a]	Access service	Housing provider assisted[a]	Access service	Housing provider assisted[a]
Drug and alcohol counselling	3.1	8.3	4.5	14.7	4.0	14.7
Psychological services	11.4	3.3	7.6	10.5	16.2	6.5
Psychiatric services	8.1	4.0	4.5	12.7	10.8	9.6
Mental health services	12.4	5.4	10.7	8.7	16.2	10.5
Health / medical services	52.6	3.5	45.6	5.9	54.0	6.4
Life skills / personal development services	4.6	5.8	5.5	13.1	8.7	17.0
Aged care	8.5	10.5	9.1	19.9	9.0	23.2
Information, advice and referral services	9.8	12.6	9.6	20.8	13.2	21.8
Day-to-day living support services	9.4	10.1	9.2	18.2	12.4	20.5
Residential care and supported accommodation services	3.0	28.4	3.0	46.3	7.3	44.8
Services that provide support for children, family or carers	6.7	8.3	9.8	14.0	6.6	11.6
Training and employment support services	7.1	5.6	10.2	8.4	9.0	12.7
Financial and material assistance	7.1	10.9	6.5	16.1	10.3	23.5
Other support services	7.2	12.3	7.5	18.0	8.2	18.4
None of the above	36.1		41.0		31.6	

(a) Base is those who indicated they had accessed a service in the past 12 months.

Notes

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

2. Respondents could select more than one option.

Housing provider assistance in obtaining services

Of those who had accessed community services in the past 12 months, tenants were asked if they had accessed this service with assistance from their housing provider. Residential care and supported accommodation services were most commonly accessed with assistance from the tenant's housing provider (28% for PH, 46% for SOMIH and 45% for CH), but this was one of the services least accessed by tenants. Although health/medical services were most commonly accessed by social housing tenants, these services were among the least likely to be accessed with assistance by housing providers (4% for PH, 6% for SOMIH and 6% for CH).

A considerably lower proportion of public housing tenants received assistance from their housing provider when accessing community and health services.

Appendix A   Survey methodology

The collection methodology used for the 2012 NSHS was mail-out self-completed paper questionnaires for all social housing programs. In terms of public housing and mainstream community housing tenants, this methodology is consistent with what has been done in previous years. The collection method for SOMIH tenants, however, was different from previous surveys where data were collected via face-to-face interviews.

Although the collection methodology for the survey remained largely consistent with previous years, there was a change to the sampling method. In 2012, top-up sampling was adopted due to limited time being available for fieldwork—that is, additional surveys were sent out to randomly selected top-up samples until the required number of responses was achieved. In previous surveys, a sample was selected from the stratified tenant population and followed up with reminder mailings and/or telephone calls until the required number of responses was achieved.

As with 2010, the 2012 NSHS used the same survey instrument across all social housing programs. Before 2010, the content differed slightly across the programs, reflecting the different areas of interest in relation to each program. The approach used for the 2012 survey was undertaken in order to maximise data comparability across social housing programs.

The information collected from tenants of social housing households in the 2012 NSHS related to overall satisfaction, dwelling condition, needs of tenants and demographic characteristics. The questionnaire was mailed to a randomly selected sample of 55,101 PH, 9,504 SOMIH and 17,570 CH households. A summary of the profile of survey respondents to the 2012 NSHS can be found in Box 2.

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Box 2: A profile of NSHS respondents

- A total of 8,984 PH, 1,346 SOMIH and 3,051 CH respondents completed and returned the survey—this represents response rates of 16%, 14% and 17%, respectively.

- Around three-fifths of PH and CH respondents were female (63% and 62%, respectively), as were almost three-quarters of SOMIH respondents (74%).

- Two in five (43%) PH respondents were aged 65 and over, as were more than a third (36%) of CH respondents. One-fifth (20%) of SOMIH respondents were aged 65 and over. More than one-fifth of all social housing respondents were aged between 55 and 64 (23% PH, 21% CH and 23% SOMIH). Less than 3% of all respondents were aged below 25 for all three social housing programs.

- Almost a quarter of PH respondents (23%) had completed some form of tertiary education, as had 1 in 3 (31%) community housing respondents. Less than 1 in 5 (16%) SOMIH respondents had completed some form of tertiary education. Few respondents from all three social housing programs reported that they had received no formal education (2% PH, 2% CH and 2% SOMIH).

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Survey response rates

The overall response rate for the 2012 NSHS was 16.3%, and ranged from a low of 11.7% for Queensland SOMIH tenants, to a high of 34.8% for Tasmania's CH tenants (Table A1). This represents a drop in the overall response compared with the 2010 NSHS (reported as 36% for CH and 40% for PH).

Table A1: Detailed survey response rates

	Total sample mailed	Returned surveys[a]	Total responses	Response rate 2012 (per cent)	Response rate 2010 (per cent)	Difference (per cent)
PH						
NSW	32,759	212	5,082	15.5	44.2	−28.7
VIC	3,802	37	526	13.8	35.2	−21.4
QLD	2,990	16	665	22.2	37.8	−15.6
SA	2,308	17	506	21.9	50.3	−28.4
ACT	2,691	21	665	24.7	n/a	n/a
WA	3,352	224	517	15.4	32.8	−17.4
TAS	2,662	18	486	18.3	38.9	−21.0
NT	4,537	90	537	11.8	25.4	−13.6
CH						
NSW	6,577	226	1,119	17.0	39.2	−22.2
VIC	2,395	274	376	15.7	38.3	−22.6
QLD	2,488	141	399	16.0	31.4	−15.4
SA	2,139	55	372	17.4	41.4	−24.0
ACT	544	8	109	20.0	n/a	n/a
WA	2,608	330	391	15.0	37.6	−22.6
TAS	819	133	285	34.8	49.1	−16.0
SOMIH						
NSW	4,284	127	658	15.4	n/a	n/a
QLD	3,154	202	370	11.7	n/a	n/a
SA	1,733	66	213	12.3	n/a	n/a
TAS	333	2	105	31.5	n/a	n/a

(a) Includes both blank surveys received as well as 'return to sender' survey packs.

Issues for consideration

There were several factors that may have contributed to the fall in response rates:

+ Different criteria for sample selection may have been used between 2010 and 2012.

+ To achieve a representative sample (by ARIA and area) in 2012, jurisdictions and housing programs with lower response rates had sample top-ups.

+ In 2012, other tenant surveys were being conducted at the same time as the NSHS.

+ With the exception of NSW SOMIH, pre-approach letters were not sent to tenants in the 2012 NSHS. Pre-approach letters were used during the 2010 NSHS for New South Wales, Queensland and Northern Territory public rental housing tenants, and New South Wales and Queensland mainstream community housing tenants.

- Supplementary Computer Assisted Telephone Interviews (CATI) were not undertaken in 2012. When minimum sample sizes were not achieved for NSW PH in 2010, a number of CATI interviews were undertaken in order to achieve quota and this may have improved response rates

- Deadline dates of 14 days were highlighted in the covering letter in 2012—this may have been a disincentive for tenants in remote areas to complete and return the survey

- A steady stream of returns continued to be received after the survey end date.

NSHS sample representativeness

When considering response rates to a survey, it is important to take into consideration the representativeness of the final sample.

No sample will ever be completely representative of the population, but samples should be reasonably representative. Known population benchmarks for selected demographic characteristics may be used to assess the representativeness of the sample. Analysis was conducted comparing the demographic characteristics of NSHS respondents from the 2012 survey with the equivalent demographic information contained in the national administrative data collections for public housing, SOMIH and community housing. This provides 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 with information from the national administrative data collections, and these differences are consistent with those observed in 2010. For example:

- The gender profile in the administrative database across the social housing programs is more equal (44% male and 56% female PH, 46% male and 50% female CH, 43% male and 57% female SOMIH in the database) than that achieved in the 2012 NSHS (37% male and 63% female).

- The age profile in the administrative database across the social housing programs is younger than that observed in the NSHS sample. Although less than 20% of public and community housing tenants and around 5% of SOMIH tenants on the administrative database are aged over 65, around 43% of public housing tenants, 21% of SOMIH tenants and 35% of community housing tenants responding to the NSHS are aged 65 and over.

- A higher proportion of public housing tenants responding to the 2012 NSHS lived in single adult (58%) and couple-only households (12%) than is observed in the administrative database (52% and 9%, respectively), while fewer lived in household types defined as 'other' (2%). A higher proportion of community housing tenants responding to the 2012 NSHS lived in couple-only households (13%) than is observed in the administrative database (7%) , while fewer lived in household types defined as 'other' (2% compared with 11%).

- Tenure length was longer for public housing tenants responding to the NSHS, with a higher proportion having lived in their current home for more than 10 years (47%) than is observed in the administrative database (38%).

It is important to note that 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). It was not possible in the 2012 NSHS to distinguish if a survey respondent was the person, or one of the people, who signed or co-signed the lease.

From these findings, it can be seen that there are several differences in the demographic profile of NSHS respondents compared with that for social housing tenants from the national administrative data collections. NSHS respondents are more likely to be female and they are generally older. In addition, a higher proportion of NSHS respondents lived in single-adult households and had lived in their current home for longer.

Therefore the findings of the NSHS may have been affected by the demographic profile of respondents.

Respondents verses households

Responses to NSHS can report either:

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

In each instance, this is noted under the relevant chart or table throughout the report.

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'. It is important to distinguish household-level responses from those questions that are specifically targeting the individual who completed the survey and this information is presented as 'respondents' or 'survey respondents'.

When considering those questions relating to the individual completing the survey, the responses provided may not apply 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 whether they had consulted with other household members in formulating these responses.

Survey weighting and non-response

This report does not present raw survey data. The estimates presented here have been derived by applying 'weights' to the raw data (survey responses) to ensure that the estimates presented represent the total population, to the extent possible. With the exception of the ACT, the weighting for the 2012 NSHS survey was calculated as the number of households divided by the number of responses, with calculations performed at the jurisdiction level by housing program type (PH, SOMIH or CH) by Accessibility/ Remoteness Index of Australia (ARIA) level. For ACT, weights were calculated by the same method at the housing program type (PH or CH) level (not including ARIA). This is the first time responses have been weighted by ARIA—in previous years, region, rather than ARIA, was used for stratification and weighting. In addition, non-response to the NSHS may have influenced the results and this should be taken into consideration when interpreting the results.

Further information about the methodology and response rates will be provided in the detailed findings report, which is scheduled for release on the AIHW website in the second half of 2013.

Abbreviations

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
ARIA	Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia
CATI	Computer assisted telephone interview
CH	Community housing
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
ICH	Indigenous Community Housing
NAHA	National Affordable Housing Agreement
NSHS	National social housing survey
n.p.	Not published
PH	Public rental housing
SOMIH	State Owned and Managed Indigenous Housing

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