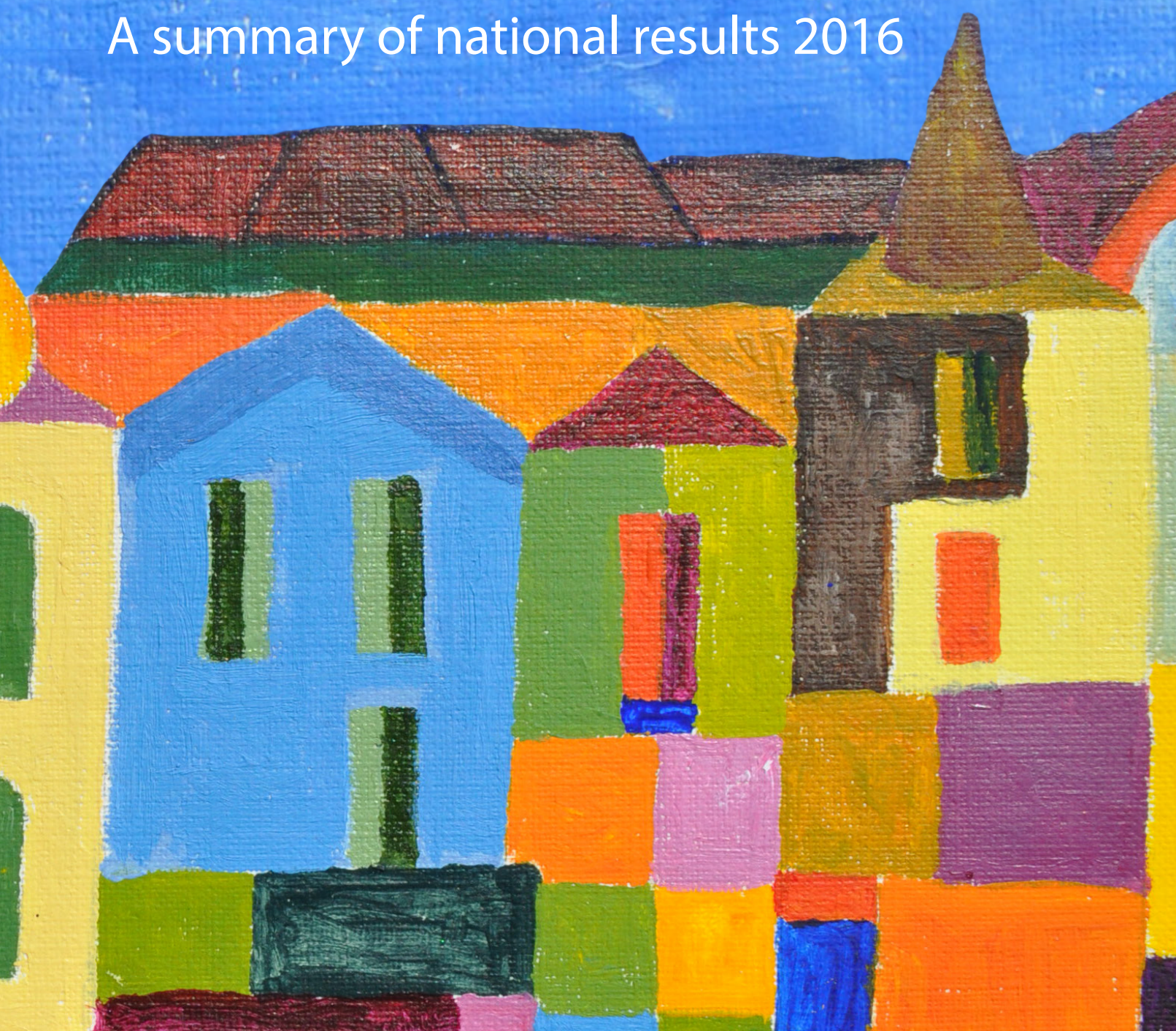
Australian Government
Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

National Social Housing Survey

A summary of national results 2016



National Social Housing Survey

A summary of national results 2016

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare is a major national agency that provides reliable, regular and relevant information and statistics on Australia's health and welfare. The Institute's purpose is to provide authoritative information and statistics to promote better health and wellbeing among Australians.

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ISBN 978-1-76054-112-5
ISBN 978-1-76054-113-2

Suggested citation

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2017. National Social Housing Survey: a summary of national results 2016. Cat. no. HOU 288. Canberra: AIHW.

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Published by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.

Report designed using artwork by Kate Payne.

Please note that there is the potential for minor revisions of data in this report. Please check the online version at <www.aihw.gov.au> for any amendments.

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Abbreviations

AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
CNOS	Canadian National Occupancy Standard
CH	Community housing
NSHS	National Social Housing Survey
PH	Public housing
SOMIH	State owned and managed Indigenous housing
VATI	Voice-activated telephone interviewing

Symbols

. .	not applicable
*	estimate has a relative standard error of 25% to 50% and should be used with caution
**	estimate has a relative standard error greater than 50% and is considered too unreliable for general use

Summary

The 2016 National Social Housing Survey (NSHS) is the most recent in a series of surveys of social housing tenants. The 2016 NSHS sampled tenants in public housing, community housing and state owned and managed Indigenous housing (SOMIH) between April and June 2016.

The majority of NSHS respondents (74%) reported that, overall, they were satisfied with the services provided by their housing organisation.

- Public and community housing tenants' satisfaction has remained stable since 2014, while the satisfaction of SOMIH tenants has increased.
- Tenant satisfaction with the services provided by their housing provider was lower among tenants who lived in dwellings with structural problems or who lived in dwellings that were considered overcrowded.
- Consistent with previous surveys, community housing tenants (80%) were more satisfied than public housing tenants (73%) or SOMIH tenants (68%) with the services offered by their housing providers.

The majority (81%) of respondents lived in a dwelling of an acceptable standard—with 4 or more working facilities and no more than 2 major structural problems.

- A small proportion (7%) of social housing dwellings were considered overcrowded, with overcrowding considerably more common in SOMIH households (23%).
- Underutilisation of dwellings was more common than overcrowding in public housing and community housing, but less common than overcrowding in SOMIH.

Overall, 60% of respondents of working age (15–64 years) in social housing were not in the labour force: 61% of those in public housing, 53% of those in SOMIH and 56% of those in community housing. More than 2 in 5 public housing (45%) and community housing (40%) tenants were unable or not intending to work, compared with 27% of SOMIH tenants.

- Of those who were unemployed, working part-time, or not in the labour force, the 3 strongest influences on employment status were financial concerns; the need for more training, education or work experience; and lack of jobs in their area.

Around 1 in 3 social housing households included at least 1 member with disability—that is, someone who 'always' or 'sometimes' requires assistance with self-care, body-movement or communication activities.

- Around 6 in 10 public housing (59%) and community housing (61%) households reported disability as the main reason for needing assistance, compared with one-third (34%) of SOMIH households.

A range of services were accessed by social housing tenants—including drug and alcohol counselling, aged care, information, advice and referral services as well as residential care and supported accommodation, and financial and material assistance.

- Tenants across all social housing programs used health and medical services most frequently, followed by mental health services.
- While most tenants did not require housing provider assistance to access services, assistance was most commonly provided when accessing residential care and supported accommodation services and domestic and family violence services.

9,738 completed surveys

8,720 via mail or online:

- 5,163 completed by public housing tenants
- 3,153 completed by community housing tenants
- 404 completed by state owned and managed Indigenous housing (SOMIH) tenants.

1,018 were face-to-face interviews with SOMIH tenants.

3 in 4 (74%)

tenants were satisfied with the services provided by their housing organisation.

Satisfaction levels for public housing and community housing tenants have remained stable; satisfaction for SOMIH tenants has increased from 58% to 68% since 2014.

81% lived in a dwelling of an acceptable standard

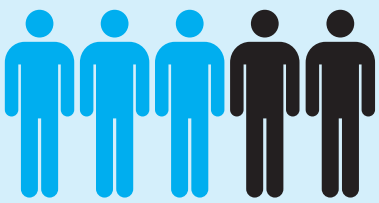
The proportion of SOMIH tenants in a dwelling of an acceptable standard has increased from 70% to 75%.

7% lived in overcrowded dwellings, while 15% lived in underutilised dwellings.

The level of underutilisation in social housing dwellings has decreased from 20% to 15%.

Around 1 in 10 (11%)

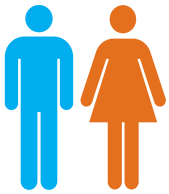
of social housing respondents had experienced homelessness in the 5 years prior to the survey.



3 in 5 (60%)

of social housing respondents aged 15–64 were either not in the labour force, or were not intending or unable to work.

Overview of NSHS respondents

	Public housing	State owned and managed Indigenous housing (SOMIH)	Community housing
 Gender	64% female	73% female	63% female
	36% male	27% male	37% male
Age profile	1% aged under 25	7% aged under 25	3% aged under 25
	43% aged 65 and over	15% aged 65 and over	37% aged 65 and over
Indigenous status	8% Indigenous	92% Indigenous	9% Indigenous
	92% non-Indigenous	8% non-Indigenous	91% non-Indigenous
Living arrangements	57% live alone	23% live alone	59% live alone
	25% live with 1 or more children	54% live with 1 or more children	23% live with 1 or more children
Prior homelessness	11% homeless in the 5 years prior to the survey	11% homeless in the 5 years prior to the survey	16% homeless in the 5 years prior to the survey

1 Introduction

Secure and affordable housing is fundamental to the wellbeing of all Australians, and access to housing is one of the most basic needs for all individuals and families. Governments play a key role in ensuring that all Australians have access to affordable, safe and sustainable housing. Housing assistance continues to remain important for many Australians who, for a variety of reasons (including low income), experience difficulty in securing or retaining affordable and appropriate housing in the private market.

Housing assistance encompasses a range of programs targeted to provide support to low-income households in securing and retaining housing, and a significant component of housing assistance is the provision or funding of social housing. Social housing includes all rental housing owned and managed by government, or by not-for-profit community organisations, which can be let to eligible households. It includes:

- public housing (also referred to as 'public rental housing')
- state owned and managed Indigenous housing (SOMIH)
- community housing (also referred to as 'mainstream community housing')
- Indigenous community housing.

The 2016 National Social Housing Survey (NSHS) was undertaken by Lonergan Research on behalf of the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW). The 2016 survey is the most recent in a series of biennial surveys designed to gather information on social housing tenants and their housing experiences. The primary purpose of the NSHS is to collect data on the profile of social housing tenants and to record their satisfaction with services provided by their landlords and with the amenity and location of their dwellings.

First undertaken in 1996 with public housing tenants, the NSHS has expanded to include mainstream community housing tenants (2001) and SOMIH tenants (2005). In 2016, the NSHS sampled tenants of SOMIH, public and community housing programs (collectively referred to as 'social housing' in this report). To date, Indigenous community housing, while an important form of social housing for Indigenous Australians, has not been covered in the NSHS. Details regarding previous iterations of the NSHS, including reports and survey methodology, are available on the AIHW website at <http://www.aihw.gov.au/housing-assistance/nshs/>.

The NSHS complements other data about social housing in Australia, especially administrative data collected by social housing providers and reported by the AIHW. These administrative data provide valuable information about social housing programs, including the stock of dwellings, the characteristics of tenants and the extent to which people in special needs groups are able to access social housing.

Box 1 provides further detail about social housing programs in Australia.

Box 1: Social housing programs

Public housing

Public housing encompasses the publicly owned or leased dwellings funded and administered by state and territory governments. It aims to provide appropriate, affordable and accessible housing, mainly for low-income households that have difficulty in obtaining and maintaining housing in the private market.

State owned and managed Indigenous housing (SOMIH)

State owned and managed Indigenous housing is administered by state and territory governments and is specifically targeted to Indigenous households (a household with at least 1 Indigenous member). It aims to provide appropriate, affordable and financially accessible housing for low- to moderate-income Indigenous households. Currently SOMIH operates in New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia and Tasmania.

Community housing

Mainstream community housing is managed by not-for-profit organisations and is covered in the NSHS where those organisations receive capital or recurrent funding from government. Community housing offers short-, medium- or long-term tenure for low-income individuals and families, or those with particular needs not well catered for by the private market. Currently the community housing program is operating in all jurisdictions, apart from the Northern Territory.

Indigenous community housing

Indigenous community housing refers to housing that Indigenous communities own and/or manage for the provision of housing services to Indigenous Australians.

Note: Indigenous community housing is out of scope for the 2016 National Social Housing Survey.

Comparability with previous surveys

Overall, the 2016 NSHS is comparable to previous surveys—but over time, modifications have been made to the questionnaire and the survey methodology, which should be kept in mind when comparing data between years.

Like previous surveys, data for the 2016 NSHS for tenants of public housing and community housing were collected via mail-out self-completion paper questionnaires, with an online completion option also available. In 2016, as for the 2014 survey, data collection approaches for SOMIH tenants varied, with 2 jurisdictions (South Australia and Tasmania) collecting data via mail-out self-completion paper questionnaire or online completion, and 2 jurisdictions (New South Wales and Queensland) collecting data via face-to-face interview. Prior to 2014, all participating jurisdictions used the same approaches to surveying SOMIH tenants—face-to-face interviews in 2005 and 2007, and mail-out self-completion paper questionnaires in 2012.

While the sampling approach has remained largely consistent throughout survey iterations, it is important to note a change in sampling methodology in 2012. In 2012, top-up sampling was adopted, due to limitations on the time available for fieldwork and the need to achieve a minimum number of completed surveys for each housing program in each jurisdiction. That is, additional surveys were sent out to randomly selected households in order to top up the sample, until the required number of responses was received. This approach was repeated in 2014 and 2016, when weekly fieldwork reviews identified the likelihood of not meeting the minimum required sample sizes. In 2016, this occurred in New South Wales for public housing tenants and in Victoria for both public housing and community housing tenants. Prior to 2012, a sample was selected and then followed up with reminder mailings until the required number of responses was received.

To maximise engagement and maintain strong response rates, additional reminder mechanisms employed in the 2014 survey were continued in 2016. In those jurisdictions where telephone numbers were available, Lonergan Research used voice-activated telephone interviewing (VATI) to send automated reminder calls to tenants. In addition, where mobile numbers were available, SMS reminders were sent to tenants. SOMIH tenants participating in the 2016 NSHS via face-to-face interview received a cash incentive of $10 upon completion of their interview, which was consistent with the approach used in 2014. These mechanisms were not used prior to 2014.

The 2016 NSHS used the same survey instrument across all social housing programs. Prior to 2010, the survey content differed slightly across programs, reflecting different areas of interest in relation to each program. Since 2012, the adoption of more consistent survey instruments has enabled greater data comparability across social housing programs. While some minor changes were made in relation to survey questions in 2016, the same topics were covered and content for key issues remained unchanged.

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

Further information regarding the approach to the 2016 NSHS, including detailed response rates, is provided in Appendix A: Survey methodology.

Note: For the remainder of this report, 'tenants' refers to the respondent in the household who completed the survey on behalf of the household.

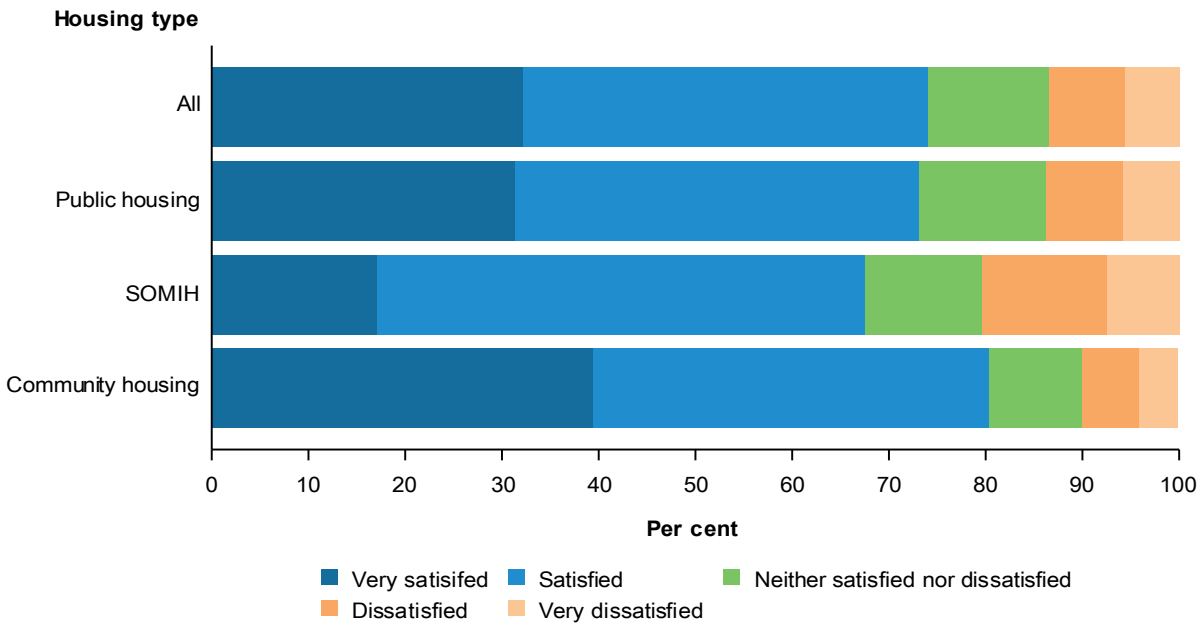
2 National Findings

2.1 Overall satisfaction

Key findings

- The majority (74%) of social housing tenants were satisfied with the services received from their housing provider (ranging from 68% of those in SOMIH to 80% of those in community housing).
- Tenant satisfaction with the services received from their housing provider has remained stable for public housing and community housing tenants since 2014, and has increased for SOMIH tenants (from 58% in 2014 to 68% in 2016).
- Indigenous tenants were less likely than non-Indigenous tenants to be satisfied with their housing providers.
- The structural standard of a dwelling was a greater determinant of satisfaction among social housing tenants than was the standard of facilities.
- Tenant satisfaction was higher for those living in underutilised dwellings (78%), compared with those living in overcrowded dwellings (63%); and for those living in dwellings with no structural problems (86%), compared with those living in dwellings with 3 or more structural problems (48%).

The majority of NSHS respondents across public housing, SOMIH and community housing indicated that they were satisfied with the overall services provided by their housing provider (73% for public housing, 68% for SOMIH, and 80% for community housing) (Figure 1).



Note: Responses to this question are the views of the person in the household who completed the survey form on behalf of their household.
Source: Table S1.

Figure 1: Satisfaction with services provided by housing organisation, by housing program type, 2016 (%)

This represents an increase in the satisfaction rate for SOMIH tenants (up from 58% in 2014), while satisfaction levels for both public housing and community housing tenants have remained stable (at 73% for public housing and 80% for community housing in 2014).

Generally, satisfaction was highest across all social housing programs (Table 1) for:

- non-Indigenous tenants—although satisfaction rates for Indigenous tenants in SOMIH has increased since 2014 (from 58% to 68%), and remained relatively unchanged for Indigenous tenants in public housing (64% to 62%) and community housing (74% to 73%)
- tenants who had not been homeless in the 5 years prior to the survey
- tenants in dwellings with no structural problems
- tenants in dwellings with occupancy classed as 'adequate' or 'underutilised'.

Table 1: Proportion of tenants satisfied with services provided by housing organisation, by Indigenous status, prior homelessness, number of structural problems, and dwelling utilisation, 2016 (%)

Characteristic	Public housing	SOMIH	Community housing	All
Indigenous status				
Indigenous	63.9	67.4	75.0	66.2
Non-Indigenous	72.9	70.9	80.6	74.0
Homelessness				
Had been homeless in the 5 years prior to the survey	70.8	64.1	76.7	71.8
Had not been homeless in the 5 years prior to the survey	73.4	68.0	81.1	74.3
Structural problems				
3 or more structural problems	48.4	38.2	52.7	48.3
1 or 2 structural problems	67.6	63.8	74.0	68.2
No structural problems	86.0	86.0	87.2	86.2
Dwelling utilisation				
Overcrowded	61.8	64.1	70.9	63.0
Adequate	72.9	70.2	81.1	74.1
Underutilised	78.7	64.2	79.2	78.2

Notes

1. Responses to this question are the views of the person in the household who completed the survey form on behalf of their household.
2. 'Satisfied' includes those who reported being 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied'.

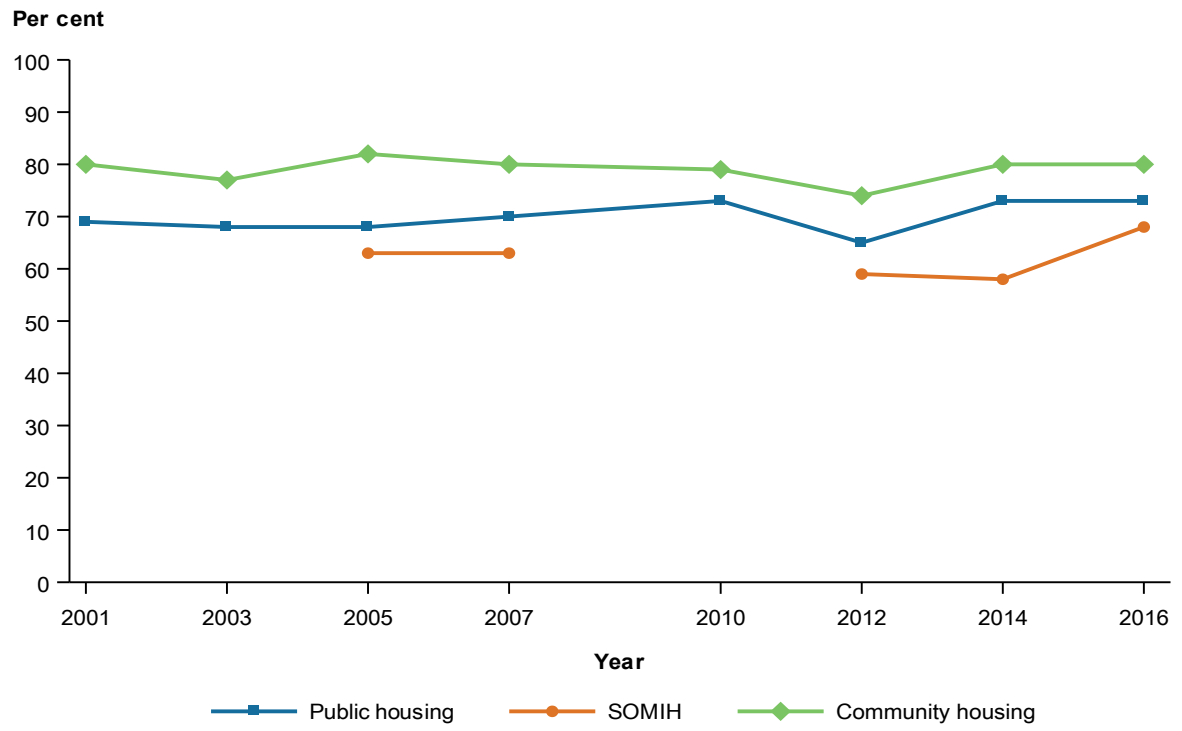
Satisfaction over time

Throughout the life of the survey, social housing tenants have been asked to rate their satisfaction with the overall services provided by their housing provider.

In surveys undertaken since 2001, two-thirds or more of public housing tenants and three-quarters or more of community housing tenants reported they were satisfied with the overall services provided by their housing provider (Figure 2).

Historically, satisfaction for SOMIH tenants has been lower, with around two-thirds or less of this tenant group satisfied with the overall service delivered by their housing provider.

Because of changes to survey methodologies, some results across time are not directly comparable and the trend line for SOMIH between several survey points has been omitted.



Notes

1. Responses to this question are the views of the person in the household who completed the survey form on behalf of their household.
2. The results for SOMIH tenants between 2005 and 2007 are comparable, as the questionnaire and methodology were unchanged.
3. From 2012 onwards, SOMIH estimates are not directly comparable with previous estimates, due to changes in survey design.
4. 'Satisfied' includes those who reported being 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied'.

Source: Table S6.

Figure 2: Satisfaction with services provided by housing organisation over time, by housing program type, 2001–2016 (%)

2.2 Satisfaction with amenities

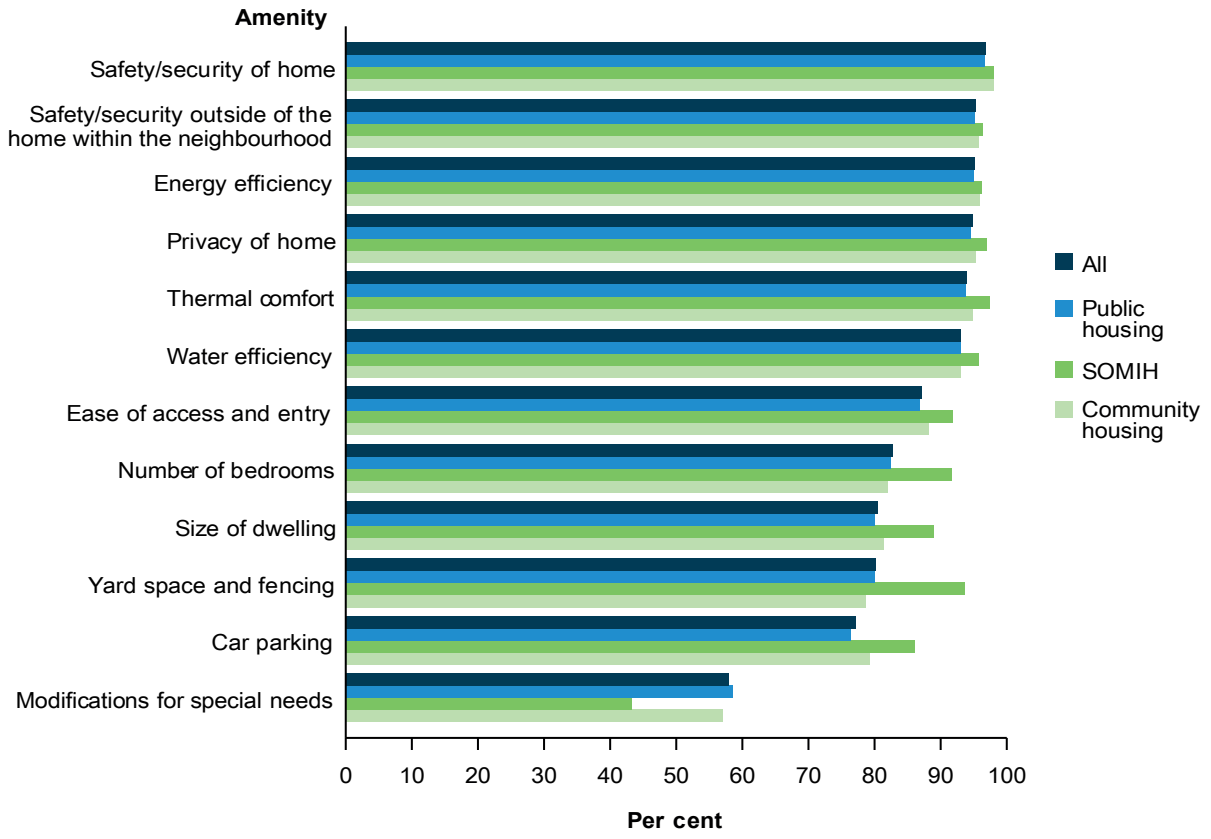
Key findings

- The majority of social housing tenants, across all programs, indicated that the amenities listed in the survey were important to their household.
- Compared with public or community housing tenants, SOMIH tenants rated almost all amenities higher in importance. The exception was for 'modifications for special needs', which was rated highest for public housing tenants.
- Of those who rated amenities as important to their household, the majority also indicated that their household's needs were met. This was generally highest for community housing tenants.

Importance of amenities

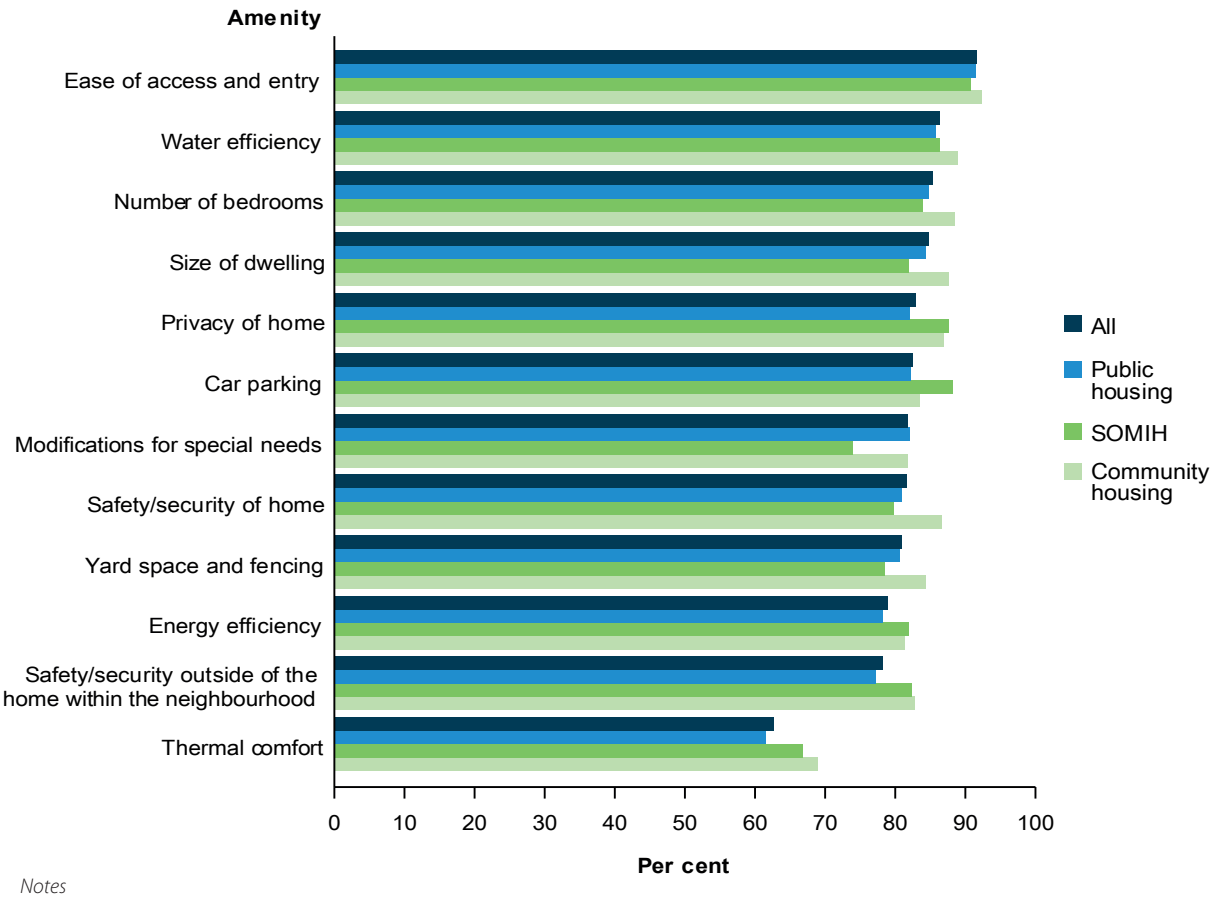
Social housing tenants were provided with a list of amenities and asked whether or not they were important to their household, and whether their household's needs had been met.

Apart from 'modifications for special needs', three-quarters or more of social housing tenants surveyed indicated that the selected amenities were important to their household (Figure 3); and of those who rated these amenities as important, the majority indicated that their households' needs were met (Figure 4).



Note: Responses to this question are the views of the person in the household who completed the survey form on behalf of their household.
Source: Table S7.

Figure 3: Amenities rated as important by social housing tenants, by housing program type, 2016 (%)



Notes

1. The proportion of households rating the particular amenity as meeting the needs of the household was based on households that indicated that the particular amenity was 'important' to that household.
2. Responses to this question are the views of the person in the household who completed the survey form on behalf of their household.

Source: Table S8.

Figure 4: Amenities rated by social housing tenants as important and meeting household needs, by housing program type, 2016 (%)

Selected amenities were rated highest in terms of importance for:

- safety and security of the home (97% for public housing, 98% for SOMIH and 98% for community housing)
- safety and security outside of the home within the neighbourhood (95% for public housing, 96% for SOMIH and 96% for community housing)
- energy efficiency (95% for public housing, 96% for SOMIH and 96% for community housing)
- privacy of the home (95% for public housing, 97% for SOMIH and 95% for community housing).

Selected amenities that were rated lower (although still high in terms of importance) were:

- modifications for special needs (59% for public housing, 43% for SOMIH and 57% for community housing)
- car parking (76% for public housing, 86% for SOMIH and 79% for community housing).

Meeting the needs of households

Despite its importance to tenants (rated at 94% overall), thermal comfort remains the amenity rated lowest in terms of meeting the needs of the household. The proportion of respondents who were satisfied that thermal comfort met the needs of the household has, however, remained stable or improved across all social housing programs since 2014 (Table 2).

Table 2: Proportion of tenants satisfied with thermal comfort, 2016 (%)

	Public housing	SOMIH	Community housing
2014	63	60	68
2016	62	67	69

Notes

1. Responses to this question are the views of the person in the household who completed the survey form on behalf of their household.
2. 'Satisfied' includes those who reported being 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied'.

Compared with public housing or SOMIH tenants, community housing tenants were more likely to report that various amenity needs were met.

SOMIH tenants were the least likely to report that their amenity needs were met— particularly for 'modifications for special needs'.

It is important to note that 'modifications for special needs' is rated higher in terms of importance and of meeting the needs for those households with a disability or long-term health condition lasting 6 months or more (refer to Table 14 for further details).

Overall, there was little change across the various aspects of amenity between survey iterations for all social housing tenants.

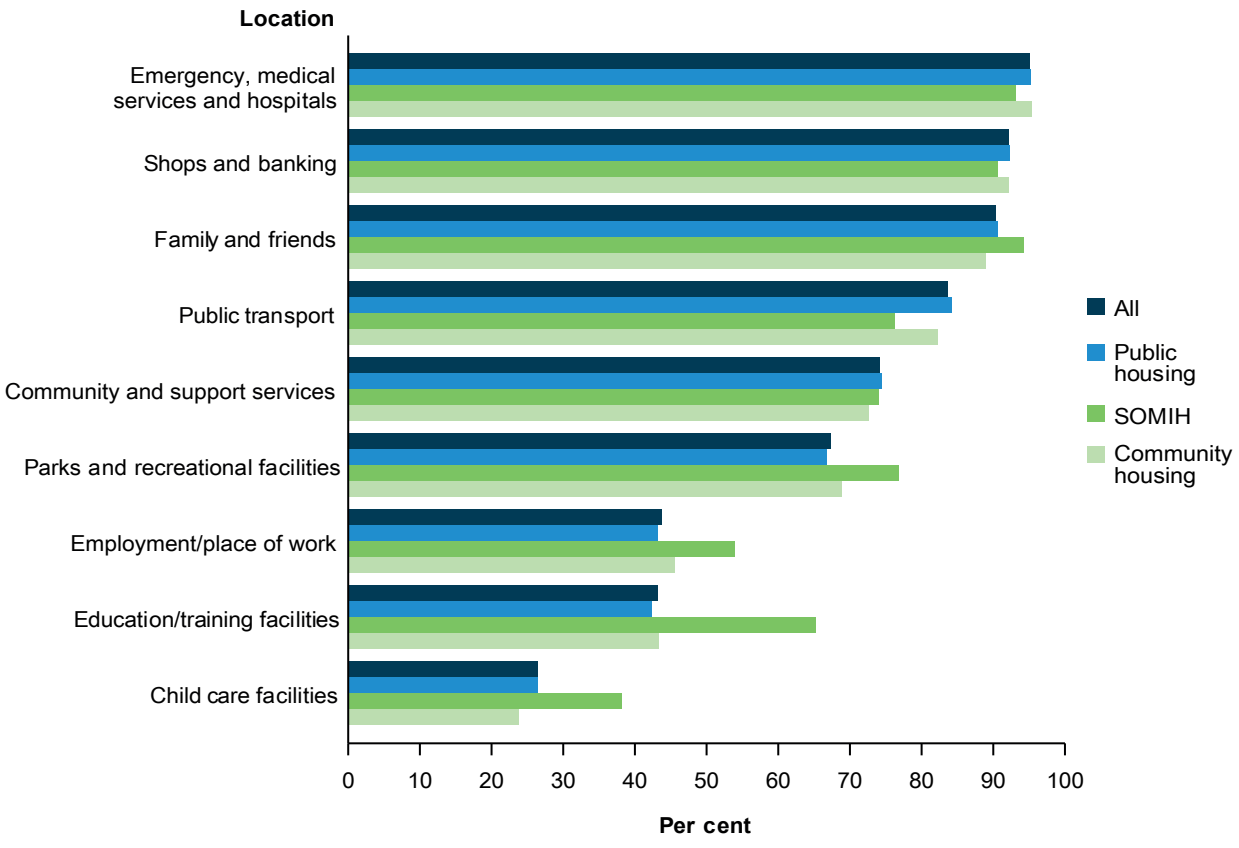
2.3 Satisfaction with location (proximity to facilities and services)

Key findings

- In 2016, the rating given to 'location' (in terms of proximity to specific facilities and services) was highly variable, ranging from a low of 26% of social housing tenants who rated proximity to child care facilities as important, to a high of 95% of social housing tenants who rated proximity to emergency services, medical services and hospitals as important.
- Social housing tenants consistently rated proximity to emergency services, medical services and hospitals; shops and banking; and family and friends highest in terms of importance.
- In terms of their own dwelling, social housing tenants rated location of their dwelling highly in meeting the needs of their household.

Importance of location

Consistent with previous surveys, the majority of social housing tenants indicated that being located close to a range of facilities and services was important for their household (Figure 5).



Note: Responses to this question are the views of the person in the household who completed the survey form on behalf of their household.
Source: Table S9.

Figure 5: Location (proximity to facilities and services) rated by tenants as important to the household, by housing program type, 2016 (%)

The importance of proximity to facilities or services was rated highest for:

- emergency services, medical services and hospitals (95% for public housing, 93% for SOMIH and 95% for community housing)
- shops and banking facilities (92% for public housing, 91% for SOMIH and 92% for community housing)
- family and friends (91% for public housing, 94% for SOMIH and 89% for community housing).

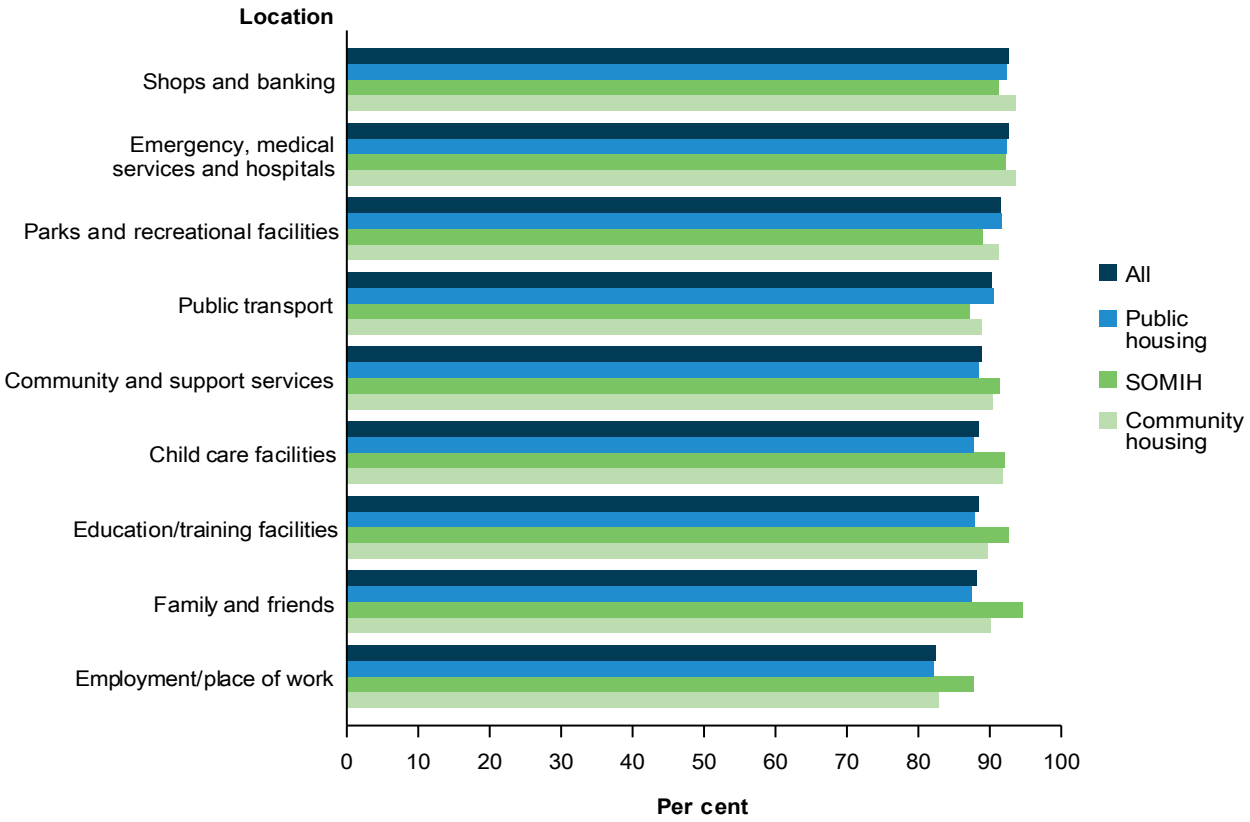
These trends are similar to those reported in 2014.

Consistent with responses in 2014, public housing and community housing tenants rated the importance of proximity to facilities and services lowest for 'child care facilities', education and training facilities' and for 'employment or place of work'. While these ratings remained low for SOMIH tenants, a higher proportion rated proximity to these facilities as important, compared with 2014.

The importance of proximity to services could be explained by the difference in the age of tenants in the different social housing programs and the presence or absence of dependent children. SOMIH tenants were more likely to rate proximity to employment or place of work higher than public housing or community housing tenants, which can be partly explained by the higher proportion of SOMIH tenants of working age (83% compared with 57% for public housing and 62% for community housing). Their rating for proximity to child care facilities can be partly explained by the higher proportion of SOMIH households with children (54% compared with 25% for public housing and 23% for community housing).

Meeting the needs of households

The vast majority of social housing tenants who rated proximity to facilities and services as important, rated their proximity to those facilities and services as meeting the needs of their household (Figure 6).



Notes

1. The proportion of households rating location (proximity to selected facilities and services) as meeting the needs of the household is based on those households that indicated the particular facility or service was important to that household.
2. Responses to this question are the views of the person in the household who completed the survey form on behalf of their household.

Source: Table S10.

Figure 6: Location (proximity to facilities and services) rated by tenants as importance and meeting the needs of the household, by housing program type, 2016 (%)

2.4 Satisfaction with maintenance services

Key findings

- Satisfaction with maintenance services was consistently high across all social housing programs, with satisfaction higher with emergency maintenance services than with day-to-day maintenance services.
- Satisfaction with maintenance services was highest for community housing tenants and lowest for SOMIH tenants, though satisfaction for SOMIH tenants has increased since 2014.

Overall satisfaction

In 2016, 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.

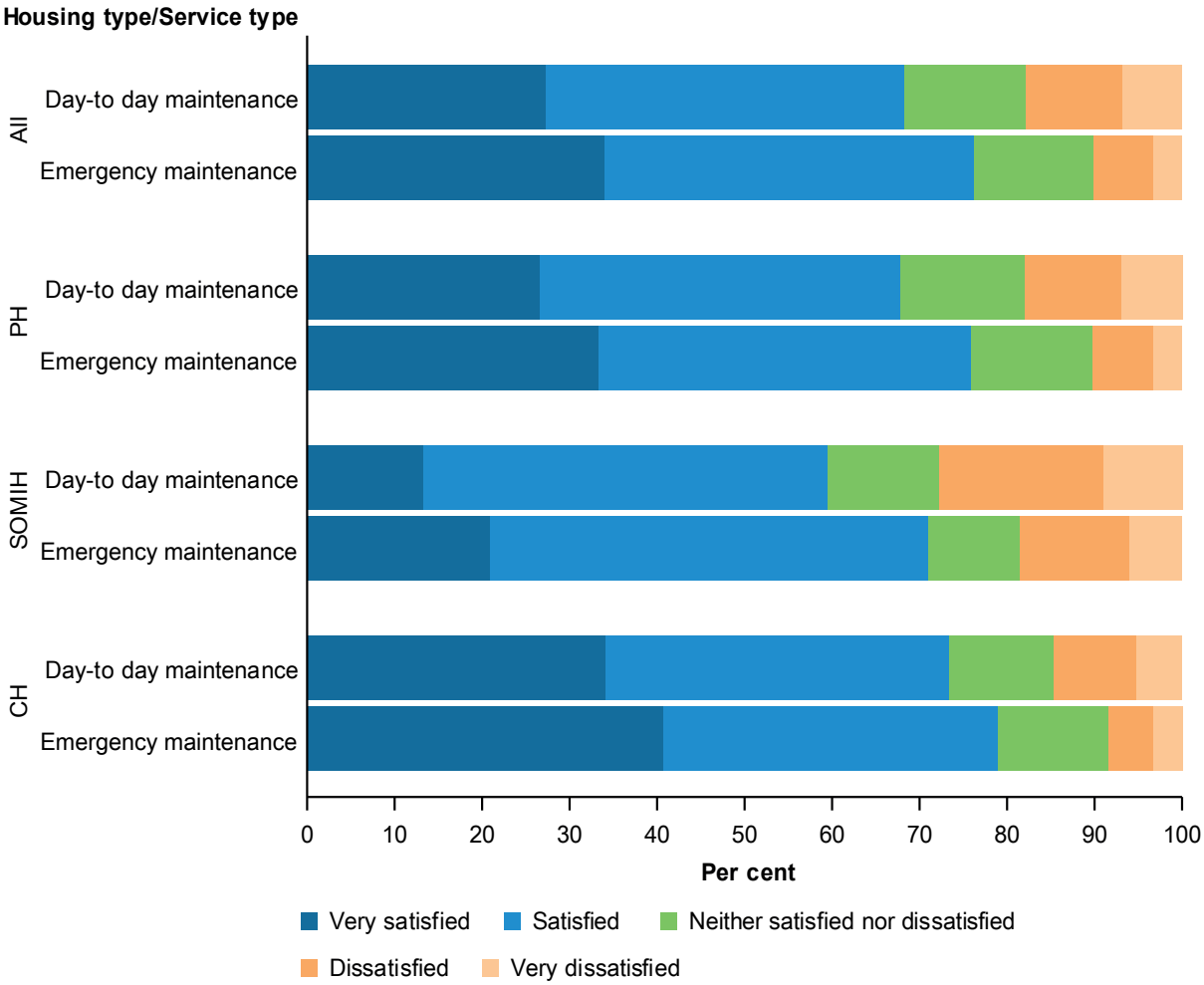
Nationally, just over two-thirds of all social housing tenants (68%) were satisfied with the day-to-day maintenance services provided by their housing organisation, although the level of satisfaction varied across housing programs:

- 68% of public housing tenants were 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with day-to-day maintenance services (66% in 2014)
- 60% of SOMIH tenants were 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with day-to-day maintenance services (48% in 2014)
- 73% of community housing tenants were 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with day-to-day maintenance services (74% in 2014).

Satisfaction with emergency maintenance services was higher across all social housing programs than satisfaction with day-to-day maintenance services (Figure 7). Nationally, three-quarters of all social housing tenants (76%) were satisfied with the emergency maintenance services provided by their housing organisation, compared with around two-thirds satisfied with day-to-day maintenance—although the level of satisfaction varied across housing programs (as it did with day-to-day maintenance):

- 76% of public housing tenants were 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with emergency maintenance services (no change from 2014)
- 71% of SOMIH tenants were 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with emergency maintenance services (up from 64% in 2014)
- 79% of community housing tenants were 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with emergency maintenance services (no change from 2014).

While satisfaction with both day-to-day and emergency maintenance services has remained relatively stable since 2014, satisfaction levels for SOMIH tenants have increased.



Note: Responses to this question are the views of the person in the household who completed the survey form on behalf of their household.
Source: Table S11.

Figure 7: Satisfaction with day-to-day and emergency maintenance services, by housing program type, 2016 (%)

2.5 Perceived benefits of living in social housing

Key findings

- Social housing tenants reported a range of benefits from living in social housing, with around 8 out of 10 tenants identifying multiple benefits of living in social housing.
- The most common benefits reported by social housing tenants were 'feeling more settled' and being 'able to manage rent/money better' (both at 95%). SOMIH and community housing tenants also rated being 'able to continue living in this area' highly (both at 93%).
- The least common benefit reported by social housing tenants was 'feel more able to improve job situation' (65%) followed by 'feel more able to start or continue education/ training' (71%). SOMIH tenants were more likely to report these benefits than either public housing or community housing tenants, which may reflect the fact that SOMIH tenants were more likely to be of working age.

Benefits of social housing

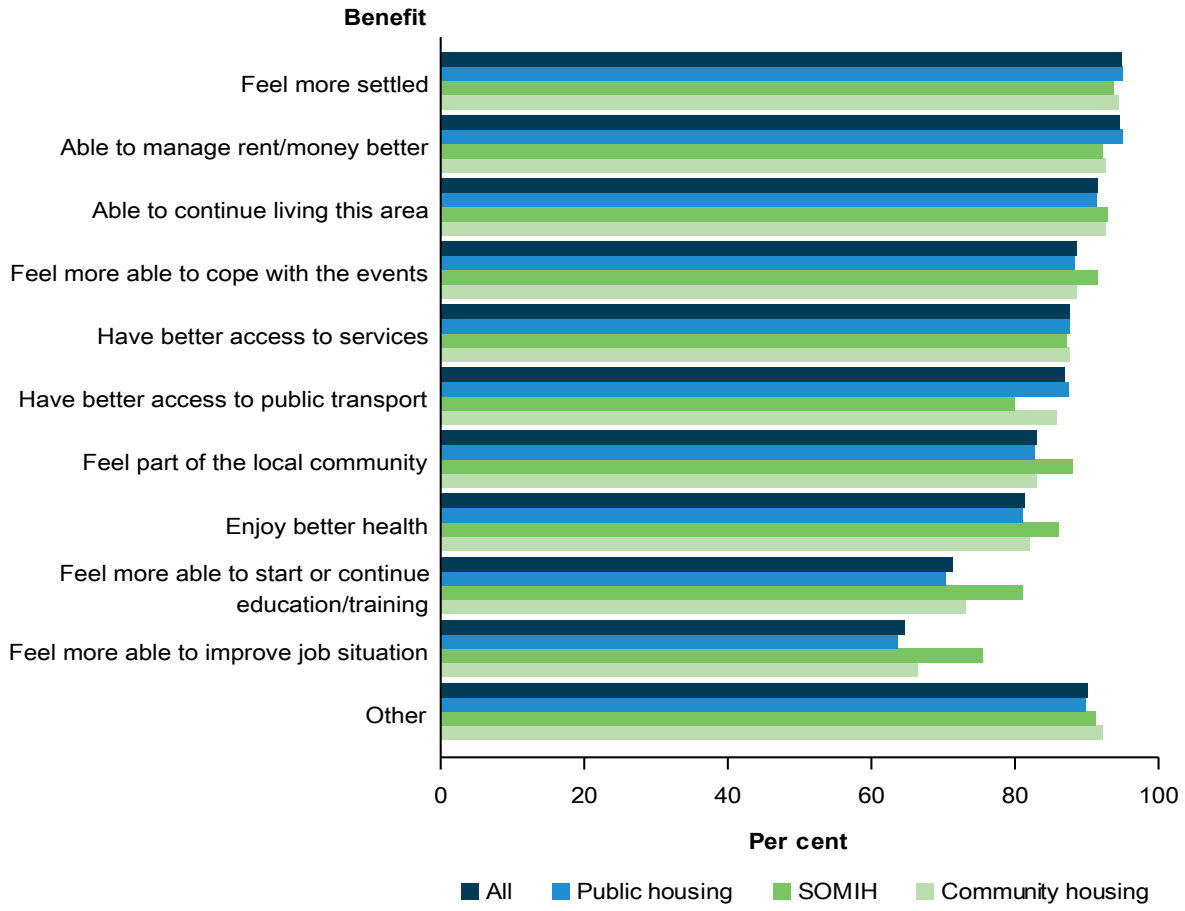
Social housing tenants surveyed in the 2016 NSHS reported a range of benefits from living in social housing (Figure 8).

The benefits most commonly reported from living in social housing were:

- 'feeling more settled' in general (95% for public housing, 94% for SOMIH and 95% for community housing)
- 'able to manage rent/money better' (95% for public housing, 92% for SOMIH and 93% for community housing)
- 'able to continue living in this area' (91% for public housing, 93% for SOMIH and 93% for community housing).

The benefits least commonly reported from living in social housing were:

- 'feel more able to improve job situation' (64% for public housing, 76% for SOMIH and 66% for community housing)
- 'feel more able to start or continue education/training' (70% for public housing, 81% for SOMIH and 73% for community housing).



Notes

1. Responses to this question are the views of the person in the household who completed the survey form on behalf of their household.
2. Respondents were allowed to select more than 1 option.

Source: Table S12.

Figure 8: Self-reported benefits gained by tenants living in social housing, by housing program type, 2016 (%)

2.6 Dwelling condition and utilisation

Key findings

- 'Dwelling condition or standard' is assessed by the number of working facilities the dwelling has (regardless of ownership), as well as by the number of major structural problems present. A dwelling is considered to be of an 'acceptable' standard if it has 4 or more working facilities and no more than 2 major structural problems. Box 2 details the meaning of 'dwelling condition' in social housing.
- The majority of social housing respondents lived in a dwelling of an acceptable standard (from 75% of SOMIH tenants to 88% of community housing tenants).
- Based on the Canadian National Occupancy Standard (CNOS), around three-quarters of social housing dwellings were considered to be adequate in size for the household.
- Only a small proportion of social housing dwellings were overcrowded and this was more common for SOMIH households than for either public housing or community housing households.
- Underutilisation was more common than overcrowding in social housing households. This was most common in public housing and SOMIH households, with around 1 in 5 dwellings underutilised, compared with around just over 1 in 10 community housing households.

Dwelling condition

In order to assess dwelling condition, tenants were asked what facilities their dwelling had and whether these facilities were in working order. Tenants were also asked to report the number of structural problems present in their dwelling. It is important to note that, as results are based on self-reporting, structural problems may be under-reported, as the tenant may not have been able to accurately identify these.

Box 2: Dwelling condition

A dwelling is considered to be of an acceptable' standard if it has 4 or more working facilities, and if it has no more than 2 major structural problems.

In order to assess dwelling condition, tenants were asked to indicate what facilities their dwelling had and whether they were in working order. The facilities listed include:

- stove/oven/other cooking facilities
- fridge
- toilet
- bath or shower
- washing machine
- kitchen sink
- laundry tub.

It is important to note that the NSHS does not identify who owned or supplied the facility.

Major structural problems listed on the survey by social housing tenants included:

- rising damp
- major cracks to 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.

Facilities

From the list provided (apart from cooking facilities in SOMIH households), 95% or more of all social housing tenants reported that their dwelling had the specific facility and that it was currently in working order (Table 3).

The most common facility that households either did not have or that were not currently in working order was 'stove/oven or other cooking facilities' (6% for public housing, 11% for SOMIH and 3% for community housing).

Table 3: Working facilities within the household, by housing program type, 2016 (%)

Facility	Public housing	SOMIH	Community housing	All
Stove/Oven/ Other cooking facilities	94.3	89.1	96.8	94.5
Fridge	98.9	98.9	98.8	98.9
Toilet	97.7	95.2	98.5	97.8
Bath or shower	97.7	94.2	98.7	97.8
Washing machine	97.7	97.5	98.2	97.7
Kitchen sink	98.0	97.4	99.0	98.1
Laundry tub	98.2	98.3	98.8	98.3

Notes

1. Responses to this question are the views of the person in the household who completed the survey form on behalf of their household.
2. Respondents were not asked to specify if they provided the facilities or the landlord provided the facilities.
3. Facilities were not ranked in order of importance.

Structure

Over half (53%) of all social housing tenants reported that their dwelling had no structural problems, ranging from a low of 43% for SOMIH to a high of 66% for community housing (Table 4).

In terms of the number of structural problems a dwelling has:

- almost half of public housing tenants reported that their dwelling had no structural problems (51%), while fewer than 1 in 5 (16%) reported their dwelling had 3 or more structural problems
- SOMIH tenants were least likely to report their dwelling had no structural problems (43%), although 1 in 4 reported that their dwelling had 3 or more structural problems (24%)
- almost two-thirds of community housing tenants reported that their dwelling had no structural problems (66%), while almost 1 in 10 (9%) reported their dwelling had 3 or more structural problems.

Of those tenants who reported that their dwelling had at least 1 structural problem, the most common structural problems identified were:

- major cracks in walls/floors (21% for public housing, 28% for SOMIH and 14% for community housing)
- rising damp (20% for public housing, 21% for SOMIH and 13% for community housing).

Table 4: Number of structural problems the household has, by housing program type, 2016 (%)

Number of structural problems	Public housing	SOMIH	Community housing	All
House with 3 or more structural problems	16.4	23.9	8.9	15.6
House with 1 or 2 structural problems	32.2	33.4	24.8	31.2
House with no structural problems	51.3	42.7	66.3	53.3

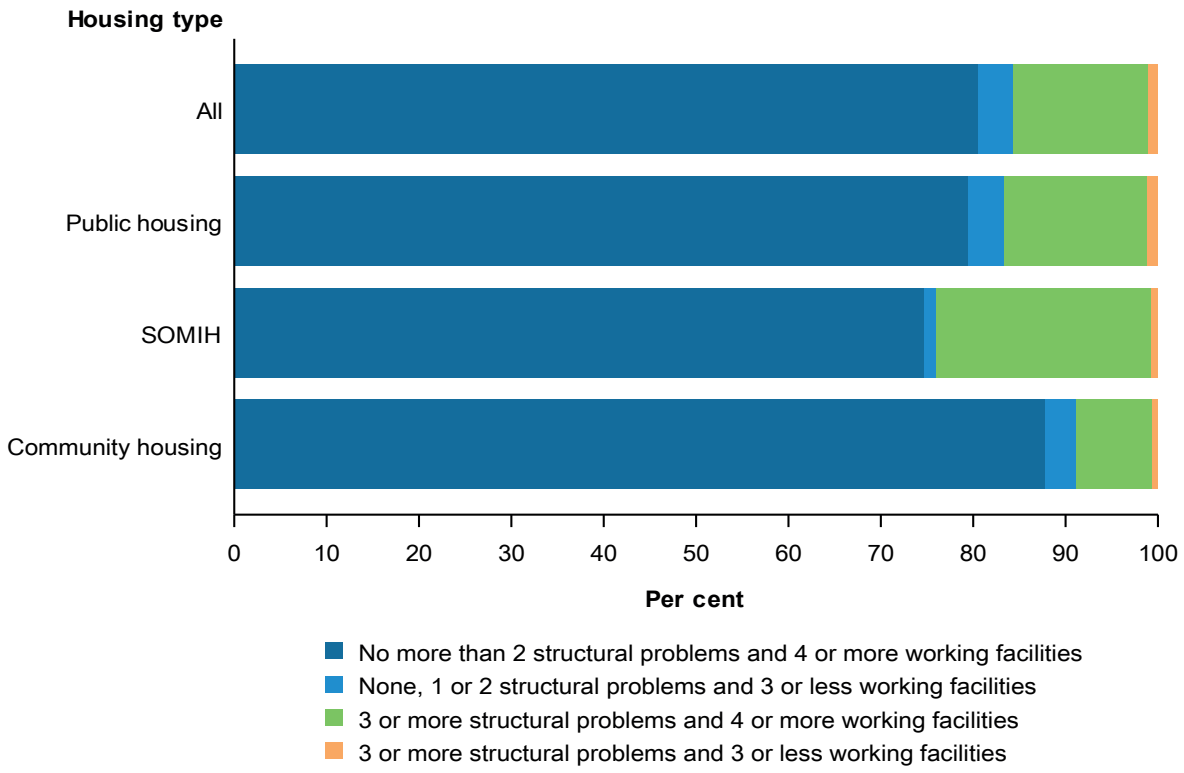
Note: Responses to this question are the views of the person in the household who completed the survey form on behalf of their household.

Dwelling standard

The majority of social housing tenants were living in homes of an 'acceptable standard', as defined by respondents reporting that they had at least 4 working facilities and no more than 2 major structural problems (80% for public housing, 75% for SOMIH and 88% for community housing) (Figure 9).

It is interesting to note that the proportion of respondents living in dwellings of an acceptable standard has remained steady for both public housing and community housing, yet has increased for SOMIH since the last survey:

- steady at 80% for public housing
- up from 70% in 2014 to 75% in 2016 for SOMIH
- steady at 88% for community housing.



Note: Responses to this question are the views of the person in the household who completed the survey form on behalf of their household.
Source: Table S16.

Figure 9: Dwelling standard, by housing program type, 2016 (%)

Dwelling utilisation

'Dwelling utilisation' refers to the match between the size of the dwelling and the size of the household living in it. Matching the size of a dwelling to the size of the household ensures that existing dwelling stock is used to capacity and that households are housed according to their requirements. The currently accepted standard by which the dwelling size requirements of a household are measured is the Canadian National Occupancy Standard (CNOS) (Box 3).

Box 3: Canadian National Occupancy Standard (CNOS)

The CNOS measures the bedroom requirements of a household based on the number, sex, age and relationships of household members. For a household not to be considered overcrowded, it specifies that:

- no more than 2 people share a bedroom
- parents or couples may share a bedroom
- children under 5, either of the same sex or opposite sex, may share a bedroom
- children under 18 of the same sex may share a bedroom
- a child aged 5–17 should not share a bedroom with a child under 5 of the opposite sex
- single adults aged 18 and over and any unpaired children require a separate bedroom.

According to the CNOS, a dwelling requiring at least 1 additional bedroom is considered 'overcrowded', while a dwelling is considered to be 'underutilised' when it consists of 2 or more bedrooms surplus to its needs.

Source: AIHW 2012.

For social housing providers, achieving a match between dwelling size and household composition is not straightforward. Factors to be considered include the:

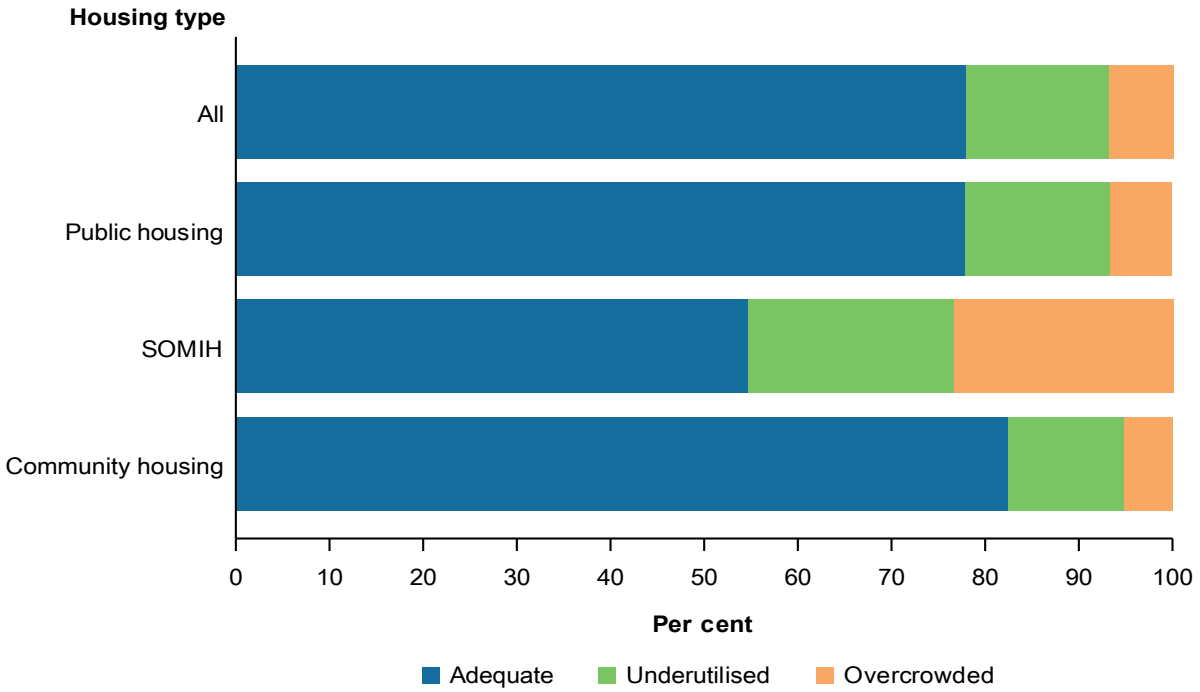
- availability, state of repair and location of existing dwellings
- availability of options to relocate existing tenants to alternative accommodation
- willingness of tenants to relocate
- cost of rehousing existing tenants.

'Overcrowded' or 'underutilised' are terms used to describe a dwelling whose size is not well matched to the household occupying it. 'Overcrowding' occurs when the dwelling size is too small for the size and composition of the household living in it. 'Underutilisation' occurs when the dwelling is larger than that needed to adequately house the household.

In order to determine whether the size of the dwelling matches the size and needs of the household, tenants were asked 2 questions:

- how many bedrooms their home has
- who shares bedrooms in their home, if anyone.

Based on the CNOS standard, the majority (78%) of social housing dwellings were considered to be 'adequate' in size for the household, with 7% considered overcrowded (needing 1 or more bedrooms)—up from 5% in 2014. Dwellings that were underutilised (with 2 or more surplus bedrooms) made up 15%, down from 20% in 2014 (Figure 10).



Notes

1. Responses to this question are the views of the person in the household who completed the survey form on behalf of their household.
2. Dwelling utilisation has been calculated based on the CNOS.

Source: Table S18.

Figure 10: Dwelling utilisation, by housing program type, 2016 (%)

2.7 Household characteristics

Key findings

- Public housing and SOMIH tenants have been in their current home for longer, compared with community housing tenants.
- Public housing and SOMIH tenants have also been in social housing longer than community housing tenants. This is partly a reflection of the fact that community housing has been around for less time than public housing or SOMIH.
- Prior to entering social housing, the vast majority of social housing tenants were private renters who were living in a house, townhouse or flat.
- Around half of those social housing tenants who had experienced homelessness in the 5 years prior to the survey, had experienced more than 1 episode of homelessness.

Time in current home

Public housing and SOMIH tenants had lived in their current home longer than community housing tenants, partly reflecting the fact that community housing has been available in Australia for less time and has grown at a faster rate since its introduction (Table 5).

- Community housing tenants (26%) were more likely to have moved into their current home within the preceding 2 years, compared with public housing (16%) or SOMIH (20%) tenants.
- Almost half (47%) of public housing tenants and more than one-third (39%) of SOMIH tenants had been in their current home for 11 years or more at the time of the survey, compared with one-quarter (26%) of community housing tenants.

Table 5: Length of time in current home and in social housing, by housing program type, 2016 (%)

	Public housing		SOMIH		Community housing	
Length of time	Current home	Social housing	Current home	Social housing	Current home	Social housing
2 years or less	16.3	10.8	20.4	9.7	26.0	19.0
3–5 years	17.6	12.4	20.6	12.8	28.0	22.3
6–10 years	19.0	16.4	20.4	18.3	20.1	21.1
11–20 years	26.7	27.2	21.5	24.7	18.1	23.2
21+ years	20.4	33.2	17.1	34.5	7.8	14.4

Note: Responses to this question are the views of the person in the household who completed the survey form on behalf of their household.

Time in social housing

Consistent with the findings for 'time in current home', public housing and SOMIH tenants have been in social housing for longer than community housing tenants (Table 5).

- Six in 10 (60%) public housing tenants had been in social housing for 11 years or more, as had 59% of SOMIH tenants.
- Community housing tenants were more likely to be new to social housing, with 4 in 10 (41%) living in social housing for 5 years or less, and 38% living in social housing for 11 years or more.

Prior living situation

In 2016, social housing tenants were asked what type of dwelling they were living in prior to moving to their current home (Table 6) and what their occupancy status was (Table 7).

Table 6: Dwelling type prior to moving into social housing, by housing program type, 2016 (%)

Prior dwelling	Public housing	SOMIH	Community housing
House/townhouse/flat	84.4	89.6	81.3
Caravan/cabin/boat/mobile home	3.4	1.4	4.2
No dwelling/Improvised dwelling/ motor vehicle/tent	2.4	1.8	2.9
Temporary accommodation (refuge/crisis or supported accommodation/hotel/motel)	8.0	6.9	9.6
In an institution	1.1	**	1.5
Other (please specify)	0.6	**	*0.5

* Estimate has a relative standard error of 25% to 50% and should be used with caution.

** Estimate has a relative standard error greater than 50% and is considered too unreliable for general use.

Note: Responses to this question are the views of the person in the household who completed the survey form on behalf of their household.

Table 7: Tenure type prior to moving into social housing, by housing program type, 2016 (%)

Prior tenure	Public housing	SOMIH	Community housing
A home owner/paying off a mortgage	1.6	*0.9	2.8
Paying rent/board/fees–private housing	39.6	27.1	42.4
Paying rent/board/fees–public or community housing	39.2	55.4	31.6
Paying rent/board/fees–other	11.5	8.7	14.4
Living rent free–with a relative	4.3	5.5	5.3
Living rent free–other	3.7	2.5	3.5

* Estimate has a relative standard error of 25% to 50% and should be used with caution.

Note: Responses to this question are the views of the person in the household who completed the survey form on behalf of their household.

In terms of prior dwelling:

- The vast majority of all public housing (84%) and community housing tenants (81%) were living in a house, townhouse or flat prior to moving into social housing, as were 90% of SOMIH tenants.
- Around 1 in 10 social housing tenants were living in temporary accommodation, including 'refuge, crisis or supported accommodation/hotel or motel' (8% for public housing, 7% for SOMIH and 10% for community housing).
- Few social housing tenants were living in an improvised dwelling, motor vehicle or tent, or did not have a dwelling prior to moving into social housing (2% for public housing, 2% for SOMIH and 3% for community housing).

In terms of occupancy status:

- the vast majority of respondents were paying rent prior to moving into social housing (90% for public housing, 91% for SOMIH and 88% for community housing)
- fewer than 1 in 10 were living rent free (8% for public housing, 8% for SOMIH and 9% for community housing)
- very few were a home owner or paying off a mortgage (2% for public housing, 1% for SOMIH and 3% for community housing).

Prior homelessness

In the 2016 NSHS, being 'homeless' refers to times when the respondent 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. In the 5 years prior to the survey (Table 8):

- 11% of public housing tenants had experienced homelessness (12% in 2014)
- 11% of SOMIH tenants had experienced homelessness (no change from 2014)
- 16% of community housing tenants had experienced homelessness (18% in 2014).

Table 8: Proportion of respondents who experienced homelessness in the 5 years prior to the survey, by housing program type, 2010–2016 (%)

Year	Public housing	SOMIH	Community housing
2010	6	. .	12
2012	9	12	19
2014	12	11	18
2016	11	11	16

Notes

1. Responses to this question are the views of the person in the household who completed the survey form on behalf of their household.
2. SOMIH tenants were not surveyed in 2010.

Repeated experiences of homelessness were not uncommon. Of those respondents who had experienced homelessness in the 5 years prior to the survey (Table 9):

- around half had experienced more than 1 episode of homelessness in those 5 years (47% for public housing, 52% for SOMIH and 50% for community housing)
- around 1 in 10 public housing tenants had experienced homelessness more than 10 times in the 5 years prior to the survey, compared with 5% of SOMIH tenants and 4% of community housing tenants.

Table 9: Repeat homelessness for those respondents who have experienced homelessness in the 5 years prior to the survey, by housing program type, 2016 (%)

Repeat homeless	Public housing	SOMIH	Community housing
Once	52.9	47.9	50.0
Twice	20.4	22.0	23.4
3–5 times	14.1	17.1	19.2
6–10 times	*3.8	*8.1	*3.1
More than 10 times	8.9	*4.9	*4.2

* Estimate has a relative standard error of 25% to 50% and should be used with caution.

Note: Responses to this question are the views of the person in the household who completed the survey form on behalf of their household.

2.8 Labour force

Key findings

- Six in 10 (60%) social housing tenants reported that they were not currently in the labour force—that is, they are neither working nor currently looking for work—or they were not intending or were unable to work. This ranged from 53% of SOMIH tenants to 61% of public housing tenants.
- Of those tenants in the labour force, 7% were employed full-time, 15% were employed part-time and 18% were unemployed but currently looking for work.
- Of those tenants who were unemployed, working part-time or currently outside of the labour force, the strongest influences on their current employment situation included the need for more training, education or work experience; a lack of jobs either in the area where they live or want to work; and concern over rent increases or pay being too low to meet their needs.

Labour force participation

In the 2016 NSHS, between one-half and two-thirds of all social housing respondents of working age (aged between 15 and 64) reported that they were not currently in the labour force (61% of public housing, 53% of SOMIH, and 56% of community housing)—that is, they were not working, were not intending to work or were unable to work (Table 10). This is despite a large proportion of respondents, across all social housing programs, being of working age (57% of public housing, 85% of SOMIH and 63% of community housing respondents). This high proportion of respondents who are outside of the labour force reflects the targeting of social housing to people who are vulnerable and/or disadvantaged and who may have difficulty in entering the labour force.

Between one-quarter and one-half of social housing respondents between the ages of 15 and 64 (39% of public housing, 47% of SOMIH and 44% of community housing respondents) were in the labour force in 1 of the following categories:

- employed full-time (usually working 35 hours or more each week): 7% of public housing, 11% of SOMIH and 7% of community housing respondents
- employed part-time (usually working less than 35 hours each week): 14% of public housing, 10% of SOMIH and 18% of community housing respondents
- unemployed (not currently employed but actively looking for work): 18% of public housing, 26% of SOMIH and 19% of community housing respondents.

Table 10: Labour force status of respondents aged 15–64, by housing program type, 2016 (%)

Labour force status	Public housing	SOMIH	Community housing	All
Employed full-time	6.6	10.8	6.8	6.8
Employed part-time	14.3	9.9	17.9	14.7
Total employed	***20.9***	***20.7***	***24.7***	***21.5***
Unemployed	18.0	25.9	18.9	18.4
Not intending or unable to work	45.0	26.2	40.2	43.5
Not in the labour force	16.1	27.2	16.1	16.6
Total not in the labour force	***61.1***	***53.4***	***56.3***	***60.1***

Notes

1. Responses to this question are the views of the person in the household who completed the survey form on behalf of their household.
2. Respondents were asked to select 1 option only.

Of those tenants aged between 15 and 64 and not in the labour force:

- between one-quarter and one-half reported that they were not intending or unable to work because they are retired or have a long-term illness or injury (45% for public housing, 26% for SOMIH and 40% for community housing respondents)
- between 16% and 27% were not in the labour force because they are engaged in home duties, full-time study or have caring responsibilities (16% for public housing, 27% for SOMIH and 16% for community housing).

Influences on current employment situation

In the 2016 NSHS, tenants aged between 15 and 64, who were employed part-time, unemployed, or not in the labour force, were asked about influences on their current employment situation, as well as the strength of those influences. The influences listed in the survey included employment barriers or disincentives to work such as job shortages; lack of experience or training; childcare issues; and the financial impact of working on rent assessments and income support payments (Table 11).

Those who were employed full-time, or who were not intending or unable to work, were not asked about employment barriers or disincentives.

The strongest influences on a respondent's employment status across selected employment categories were:

- for the unemployed: the need for more training, education or work experience (33%); concern that the rent might go up (27%); and a lack of jobs where they live (24%)
- for those in part-time work: concern that the rent might go up (25%); concern that the pay might be too low or benefits might be reduced (18%); or concern they would have to leave their current housing (17%)
- for those not in the labour force: want/need to stay home to take care of children (60%); the need for more training, education or work experience (38%); or concern that rent might increase (28%).

Factors nominated by social housing tenants as having no influence on their current employment situation across selected employment categories were:

- for the unemployed: child care is too expensive or unavailable (77%); transport difficulties (76%); or concern they would have to leave their current housing (58%)
- for those in part-time work: child care is too expensive or unavailable (84%); transport difficulties (83%); or want/need to stay home to take care of children (68%)
- for those not in the labour force: transport difficulties (79%); concern they would have to leave their current housing (64%); or child care is too expensive or unavailable (59%).

Table 11: Influences on current employment situation of social housing respondents aged 15–64, selected groups with capacity for work, 2016 (%)

Reason	Influence	Unemployed	Part-time employed	Not in labour force
There are no jobs where I live	A lot	23.6	14.9	23.8
	Somewhat	47.7	38.0	31.8
	Not at all	28.6	47.1	44.3
Need training, education and work experience	A lot	33.4	11.8	38.2
	Somewhat	45.8	28.6	39.3
	Not at all	20.8	59.6	22.4
If I work, my rent might go up	A lot	26.9	25.2	28.1
	Somewhat	38.7	37.8	30.0
	Not at all	34.4	37.0	41.9
Might have to leave current housing	A lot	16.3	17.4	17.2
	Somewhat	25.4	24.0	18.9
	Not at all	58.4	58.6	64.0
Pay might be too low/benefits reduced	A lot	21.3	17.9	18.6
	Somewhat	36.1	34.1	33.5
	Not at all	42.6	48.0	47.9
Child care is too expensive or unavailable	A lot	11.8	*6.9	23.2
	Somewhat	11.3	*9.2	17.5
	Not at all	77.0	84.0	59.3
Want/need to stay home to take care of children	A lot	18.6	*7.4	59.7
	Somewhat	24.2	24.3	16.3
	Not at all	57.3	68.3	24.0
Transport difficulties	A lot	7.5	**	5.8
	Somewhat	16.5	*12.7	15.0
	Not at all	76.1	83.4	79.2
Other	A lot	40.5	47.8	69.5
	Somewhat	20.5	*7.3	*9.3
	Not at all	39.0	44.9	21.2

* Estimate has a relative standard error of 25% to 50% and should be used with caution.

** Estimate has a relative standard error greater than 50% and is considered too unreliable for general use.

Notes

1. Responses to this question are the views of the person in the household who completed the survey form on behalf of their household.
2. Respondents were asked to answer each of the specified reasons as 'a lot', 'somewhat' or 'not at all'.
3. 'Not in the labour force' refers only to this specific response option on the questionnaire. The response option included the words 'e.g. home duties, full-time study and carer responsibilities'.

2.9 Disability and the need for assistance

Key findings

- Across all social housing programs, around one-third of households included at least 1 member who 'always' or 'sometimes' requires assistance with self-care, body-movement or communication activities.
- Between one-third and two-thirds of all social housing households reported 'disability' as the reason for this need for assistance (with disability, including long-term health conditions, lasting 6 months or more). This needs to be considered in the context of the age profile of social housing tenants which includes a high proportion aged 65 and over.

Need for assistance

The 2016 NSHS gathered information about respondents' and households' need for assistance with self-care activities, body-movement activities and communication activities. The survey also asked why this assistance was needed. These questions have been used to derive a measure of the proportion of social housing households where there is at least 1 tenant with disability (Box 4).

Box 4: Measuring households with disability in social housing

In order to derive a measure of households where there is at least 1 tenant with disability, respondents were first asked to indicate if they or others in their household (including babies and/or young children) required assistance with:

- self-care activities such as eating, showering, dressing or toileting
- body-movement activities such as getting out of bed, moving around at home or at places away from home
- communication activities such as understanding or being understood by others (for example poor hearing or poor English).

Secondly, respondents were asked to indicate why that assistance was needed:

- short-term health condition (lasting less than 6 months)
- long-term health condition (lasting more than 6 months)
- disability (lasting 6 months or more)
- old or young age
- difficulty with the English language
- other reasons.

Those households with at least 1 member requiring assistance because of a 'long-term health condition' or 'disability' were defined as a 'household with disability'.

Across all social housing programs, around 1 in 3 households included at least 1 member (including babies and young children) who 'always' or 'sometimes' needed assistance with self-care activities, body-movement activities or communication activities (Table 12):

- Almost 1 in 3 (29%) of households had at least 1 member who 'always' (15%) or 'sometimes' (14%) needed assistance with self-care activities.
- Almost one-third (32%) of households had at least 1 member who 'always' (13%) or 'sometimes' (19%) needed assistance with body-movement activities.
- A slightly lower proportion (27%) of households had at least 1 member who 'always' (13%) or 'sometimes' (14%) needed assistance with communication activities.

These proportions should be considered in the context of the proportion of respondents aged 65 and over (43% for public housing, 15% for SOMIH and 37% for community housing) and are likely to have age-related difficulties with movement and self-care.

Table 12: Proportion of households with a need for assistance, 2016 (%)

Assistance with	Always	Sometimes	Never
Self-care	15.2	14.1	70.7
Body-movement activities	12.7	19.1	68.2
Communication activities	12.7	14.0	73.3

Disability

Of those households who report a need for assistance with self-care, body-movement or communication activities, around 6 in 10 public housing (59%) and community housing (61%) households reported disability (which includes a long-term health condition lasting 6 months or more) as the main reason for needing assistance, compared with one-third (34%) of SOMIH households (Table 13).

Less common reasons for needing assistance reported by households included:

- old or young age (28% of public housing, 30% of SOMIH and 23% of community housing)
- difficulty with the English language (17% of public housing, 33% of SOMIH and 15% of community housing)
- 'other' causes (6% of public housing, 3% of SOMIH and 7% of community housing).

Table 13: Reasons assistance needed, by housing program type, 2016 (%)

Reason	Public housing	SOMIH	Community housing
Disability (including long-term health condition lasting 6 months or more)	59.0	34.0	60.9
Short-term health condition (lasting less than 6 months)	5.0	*2.3	4.7
Old or young age	28.3	29.9	23.2
Difficulty with the English language	17.0	32.5	14.8
Other cause	5.9	3.3	6.9

* Estimate has a relative standard error of 25% to 50% and should be used with caution.

Notes

1. The 'need for assistance' is defined as those who responded 'Yes, always' or 'Yes, sometimes' when asked if members of their household need help with self-care activities, body-movement activities, or communication activities.
2. Respondents can choose more than 1 reason.

Importantly, across all social housing programs, the majority of households with a disability indicated that 'modifications for special needs' were important to them and that this need had generally been met (Table 14).

- Satisfaction with modifications for special needs was highest in public housing when assistance was required with self-care or body movement.
- Satisfaction with modifications for special needs was lowest in SOMIH, however around two-thirds of SOMIH households were satisfied that their needs had been met.

Table 14: Households with disability, satisfaction with modifications for special needs, by housing program type, 2016 (%)

	Public housing	SOMIH	Community housing
Assistance with	Needs met	Needs met	Needs met
Self-care	76.6	64.0	76.2
Body movement	76.0	66.7	74.2
Communication	73.0	63.5	76.1

Notes

1. 'The need for assistance' is defined as those who responded 'Yes, always' or 'Yes sometimes' in needing help with self-care activities, body-movement or communication activities.
2. Only includes households who needed assistance because of 'disability' or 'long-term health condition' lasting 6 months or more.
3. Includes those households who indicated 'modifications for special needs' was important.

2.10 Use of support services

Key findings

- Of all the support services listed, tenants across all social housing programs used health and medical services most frequently, followed by mental health services.
- In general, community housing tenants were more likely to access support services than either public housing or SOMIH tenants.
- Social housing tenants most commonly accessed these services without the assistance of their housing provider.
- While most tenants did not require housing provider assistance to access services, assistance was most commonly provided when accessing residential care and supported accommodation services, and domestic and family violence services.

Assistance for social housing tenants

Social housing and financial housing assistance are not the only types of assistance that governments provide to people facing housing difficulties. A range of other services are offered—where, for example, people may be:

- living on very low incomes
- experiencing domestic violence or conflict with neighbours
- struggling with a health issue.

Governments provide a range of health and welfare services that social housing tenants may access, including financial counselling, mental health support workers, domestic violence services, mediation services, and alcohol and other drug treatment services. Social housing tenants were asked about their use of various health and community services, or use of these services by anyone else in their household, in the 12 months prior to the survey. Of primary interest was whether these services were accessed with or without their housing provider's assistance.

Household need for, and use of community and health services

Across all social housing programs, the most frequently used services were (Table 15):

- health and medical services (70% for public housing, 79% for SOMIH and 70% for community housing)
- mental health services (20% for public housing, 14% for SOMIH and 24% for community housing)
- information, advice and referral services (12% for public housing, 8% for SOMIH and 15% for community housing).

Around one-quarter of all social housing respondents (24%) had not used any of the services listed, though this varied by housing program: 25% of public housing tenants, 16% of SOMIH tenants and 22% of community housing tenants had not used any of the services listed.

Table 15: Proportion of households accessing community and health services in the past 12 months, by housing program type, 2016 (%).

	Public housing		SOMIH		Community housing		All	
Community and health services	**Access service**	**Housing provider assisted**	**Access service**	**Housing provider assisted**	**Access service**	**Housing provider assisted**	**Access service**	**Housing provider assisted**
Drugs and alcohol counselling	4.2	13.2	5.5	*9.3	6.0	19.0	4.5	14.1
Mental health services	19.7	9.0	13.6	*3.1	24.1	13.0	20.1	9.6
Health/medical services	69.8	4.8	79.1	2.0	70.1	6.8	70.1	5.0
Life skills/personal development services	6.4	15.8	5.5	*4.9	8.6	25.2	6.7	17.3
Aged care	8.3	18.9	5.7	*13.2	8.4	24.1	8.3	19.6
Information, advice and referral services	12.2	12.9	7.7	11.9	15.1	24.1	12.5	14.8
Day-to-day living support services	10.5	15.6	8.2	*11.9	13.1	23.7	10.8	16.9
Residential care and supported accommodation services	3.5	29.0	2.2	*17.8	7.1	36.6	4.0	30.8
Services that provide support for children, families or carers	6.7	13.5	10.8	*7.8	7.2	17.0	6.9	13.8
Training and employment support services	8.4	8.9	14.4	*2.8	10.4	12.0	8.8	9.1
Financial and material assistance	7.7	17.8	6.4	16.8	8.4	23.1	7.8	18.6
Domestic and family violence services	3.3	30.9	5.0	*8.4	3.6	22.7	3.4	28.8
Other support services	8.4	13.1	7.7	*8.6	9.6	15.1	8.5	13.3
None of the above	24.8	. .	15.5	. .	21.6	. .	24.1	. .

* Estimate has a relative standard error of 25% to 50% and should be used with caution.

Notes

1. Respondents could select more than 1 option.
2. The category 'Mental health services' includes 'Psychological services', 'Psychiatric services' and 'Mental health services'.

Housing provider assistance in obtaining services

Social housing tenants who had accessed community and housing services in the 12 months prior to the survey were asked if they (or anyone in their household) had accessed this service with assistance from their housing provider (Table 15).

- Overall, community housing tenants were more likely than either public housing or SOMIH tenants to access services with the assistance of their housing provider.
- Tenants were most likely to receive assistance from their housing provider to access alternative housing arrangements (residential care and supported accommodation services) and for domestic and family violence services—although these were some of the less-frequently accessed services.
- In general, social housing tenants were most likely to access support services without the assistance of their housing provider.

Appendix A: Survey methodology

Scope

The NSHS is a national survey encompassing a range of tenancies by geography and remoteness. In 2016, the NSHS was conducted across 3 social housing programs: public housing, SOMIH and community housing. Indigenous community housing was out of scope for the 2016 survey.

All tenants were eligible to participate in the survey, and participation was voluntary.

Overview of methodology

The 2016 NSHS was conducted by Lonergan Research on behalf of the AIHW. Like previous survey iterations, data for the 2016 NSHS for tenants of public housing and community housing were collected via mail-out self-completion paper questionnaire. In 2014 and 2016, data collection for SOMIH tenants varied, with 2 jurisdictions (South Australia and Tasmania) collecting data via mail-out self-completion paper questionnaire, and 2 jurisdictions (New South Wales and Queensland) collecting data via face-to-face interview. In 2005 and 2007, SOMIH tenants were surveyed in all jurisdictions via face-to-face interview and via mail-out self-completion paper questionnaires in all jurisdictions in 2012.

The sampling approach has remained largely consistent throughout survey iterations. It is important to note, however, that in 2012 and 2016 there was a change in sampling methodology. In 2012, top-up sampling was adopted due to limitations on the time available for fieldwork and the need to achieve the minimum required number of completed surveys for each housing program in each jurisdiction. Additional surveys were sent out to a randomly selected top-up sample until the required number of responses were received. In 2016, where Lonergan Research identified a likelihood of underachieving minimum required sample sizes in certain housing programs and jurisdictions, boost mailing packs were sent to a fresh sample. Prior to 2012, and for the 2014 survey, a sample was selected and followed up with reminder mailings and voice-activated telephone interviewing (VATI) reminder calls to tenants, until the required number of responses were received.

The 2016 NSHS used the same survey instrument across all social housing programs. Prior to 2010, the survey content differed slightly across programs, reflecting different areas of interest in relation to each program. Since 2012, the adoption of consistent survey instruments has enabled maximum data comparability across social housing programs. While some minor changes were made in relation to survey questions in 2016, the same topics were covered and content for key issues is unchanged.

Survey response rates

The overall response rate for the 2016 NSHS was 34% for the mail-out surveys and 59% for the face-to-face interviews. Response rates for mail-out surveys ranged from a low of 21% for SOMIH tenants to a high of 46% public housing tenants (in South Australia in both instances).

Table A.1: Detailed survey response rates, mail-out surveys

	Total sample mailed	Blank surveys returned	Return to sender (RTS)	Total responses	Online responses	Paper responses	Response rate (%)
PH							
NSW	1362†	2	8	560	93	467	41.4
VIC	2214†	2	12	554	78	476	25.2
QLD	1436	2	11	630	135	495	44.2
SA	1134	3	10	519	84	435	46.2
ACT	2049	4	15	732	172	560	36.0
WA	2016	2	139	785	157	628	41.8
TAS	1762	4	12	704	164	540	40.2
NT	2222	6	91	679	109	570	31.9
CH							
NSW	1914	7	41	597	107	490	31.9
VIC	1412†	0	40	417	65	352	30.4
QLD	1285	2	81	387	77	310	32.1
SA	1641	2	57	583	140	443	36.8
ACT	763††	1	2	211	33	178	27.7
WA	1612	0	50	390	72	318	25.0
TAS	1875	0	46	568	160	408	31.1
SOMIH							
SA	1691	1	70	341	70	271	21.0
TAS	219	0	2	63	16	47	29.0

† Additional booster surveys were sent to NSW public housing (22), VIC public housing (613) and VIC community housing (238) to maximise the chance of meeting sample requirements within the fieldwork deadline.

†† ACT community housing includes only 165 households. The remaining 598 letters were mailed to the community housing organisations for distribution (as indicated by ACT government and/or housing organisations).

Table A.2: Detailed survey response rates, SOMIH face-to-face interviews

	Total attempts	Refused to participate	No response	Other‡	Total responses	Response rate (%)
QLD	874	52	222	87	513	60.8
NSW	922	16	320	81	505	56.6

‡ 'Other' includes: 'Tenant away for an extended period'; 'Vacant lot or abandoned property'; 'Locked gate or unable to access property'; 'Danger (such as dogs or open drug use)'; and requests for call-backs.

Respondents verses households

Responses to the NSHS can include information about the social housing tenant who is completing the survey (the respondent), such as age and gender. The respondent can also provide information that is about individuals in the social housing household (such as the number of adults in the household currently working full-time), or on behalf of all members of the household (such as whether aspects of the location of their dwelling are rated as meeting the needs of their household).

In each instance, this is noted under the relevant chart or table (including supplementary tables) throughout the report.

The majority of NSHS questions relate to the household—that is, all individuals who make up the 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. Survey respondents were also asked to provide information on behalf of other household members—but 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. The weighting for the 2016 NSHS was calculated using a cell-weighting methodology. Cells were created across 3 variables: housing type, jurisdiction (state or territory) and Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia (ARIA). This created a total of 59 cells.

On 4 occasions, cells were merged:

- when a cell was having an adverse impact on weighting efficiency compared with others in the same jurisdiction/housing type (that is, the weight was high compared with others)
- the cell had a small number of completed surveys (the largest was 27).

On these occasions, a cell was merged with its nearest neighbour (that is, an adjacent ARIA code). Population counts were provided by jurisdictions, and reflect the total number of households each jurisdiction is responsible for—except for the Northern Territory, which excluded the majority of public housing ARIA 3 and 4 (*Remote* and *Very remote* areas) from the sample, and included most of ARIA 2 (*Outer regional* areas). The weights reflect the database provided by the Northern Territory.

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 survey methodology will be available in the detailed findings report and the accompanying methodological report. Both will be available on the AIHW website in the second half of 2017.

This report presents a national summary of the results of the 2016 National Social Housing Survey (NSHS), and reports findings from public housing, community housing and state owned and managed Indigenous housing tenants. The report shows that the majority of tenants are satisfied with the services provided by their housing organisation, with community housing tenants the most satisfied. Tenants report a range of benefits from living in social housing and the majority live in dwellings of an acceptable standard.