



Young people and children in social housing

Executive summary

Young people and children make up a considerable proportion of residents within social housing. This bulletin looks at:

- ♦ how many young people and children are in social housing
- ♦ differences in demographics of different household compositions
- ♦ long term assistance for young people and children
- ♦ repeat periods of housing assistance
- ♦ inter-generational assistance in public rental housing and state owned and managed Indigenous housing (SOMIH).

The major findings of this bulletin are:

- ♦ Around 300,000 young people, including about 240,700 children were housed in public rental housing or SOMIH during 2008–09.
- ♦ In public rental housing and SOMIH combined, there was a disproportionate number of children and young people in age groups 19 years old and under, in comparison to the general Australian population.
- ♦ More than one in four community housing households surveyed in the 2007 National Social Housing Survey of community housing tenants were a household with children (27.7%).

(executive summary continued overleaf)

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- At 30 June 2009, households with young people and children and households with a young main tenant were more likely to have at least one household member identifying as Indigenous than all public rental housing and SOMIH households (23.3% and 30.3% compared to 10.8% respectively).
- A large proportion of households with a young main tenant and households with young people and children were sole parents (46.2% and 73.8% respectively), compared with 19.6% in the general public rental housing and SOMIH population. This varies from the general Australian population where 45.3% of the families captured in the 2006 census were couple with children family types (ABS 2006).
- At 30 June 2009, 17.1% of all young people housed had been in the same public rental housing or SOMIH household since birth. Around half of these young people were children aged 4 years or under.

Introduction

Young people and children represent an important group within those accommodated in social housing. During 2008–09, about 300,000 young people (people aged 24 years or under), including about 240,700 children (people aged 17 years or under), were housed in public rental housing or state owned and managed Indigenous housing (SOMIH). An additional 2,400 households in mainstream community housing had a main tenant aged 24 years or under.

This bulletin draws on a number of sources of data: national administrative data from the annual public rental housing and SOMIH data collections held in the National housing assistance data repository; national aggregate data from the annual mainstream community housing data collection; data collected via the most recent (2007) national social housing surveys of public rental housing, SOMIH and mainstream community housing tenants; and Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) administrative data. These data are used to outline various demographic factors in relation to young people and children in social housing, and to look at their experiences and journeys in social housing.

Overall, the analysis shows that young people and children make up a considerable proportion of residents within social housing. Many of these young people and children have resided in social housing for long periods. Children are identified as being at greatest risk of long term disadvantage in the early years (Australian Government 2010a) with early childhood a vital period in children's learning and development (Australian Government 2010b). Furthermore, recent research acknowledges that housing characteristics have varying effects depending on the developmental stage of a child (Dockery et al. 2010).

In order to understand the intergenerational assistance provided to households in public rental housing and SOMIH, this bulletin also presents information on young people in these programs who have moved from dependent status in a tenancy to being a main tenant.

Box 1: Data sources and interpretation

Social housing is rental housing that is either owned and/or managed by government (public housing) or non-government (community housing) organisations. In this bulletin, the term social housing encompasses public rental housing, state owned and managed Indigenous housing (SOMIH) and mainstream community housing. Data are limited for mainstream community housing due to gaps in complete and detailed information available; these are noted. Due to poor data quality, Indigenous community housing has been excluded from analysis in this bulletin. Analysis related to the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) is also presented. SAAP reflects an important area of housing need, particularly in terms of young people and children (see Box 2).

Figures quoted in text are sourced from the National housing assistance data repository.

The following definitions apply to this bulletin:

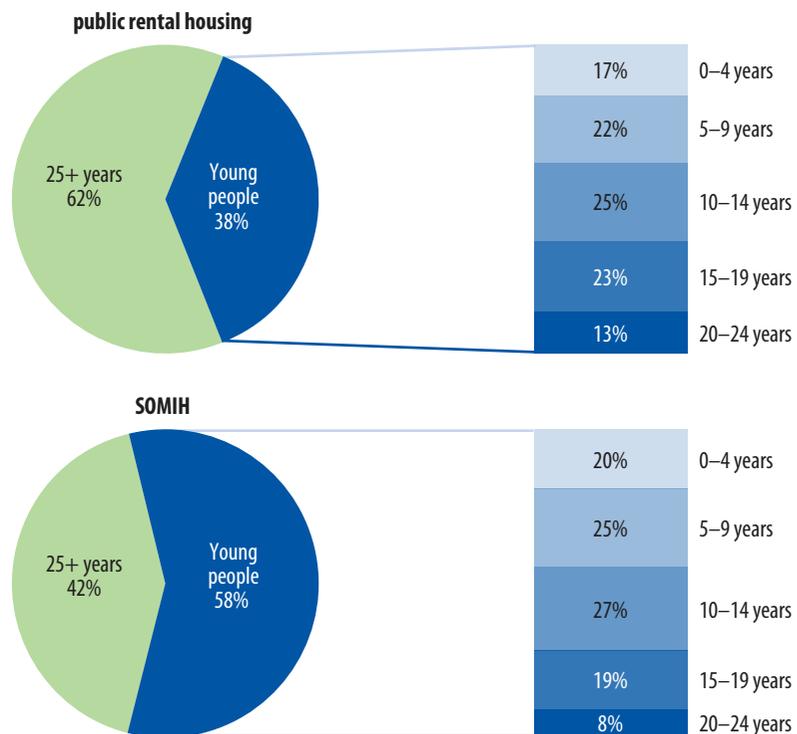
- *Children in public rental housing, SOMIH and SAAP are people aged 17 and under.*
- *Young people in social housing includes people aged 24 and under.*
- *Young people in SAAP can be defined by different age ranges. They may present on their own or accompany a parent or guardian. In this bulletin we refer to young people aged 15–19 years and children accompanying a client.*
- *Young main tenants in social housing refer to a person aged 24 or under who is party to the residential tenancy agreement.*

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the analysis:

- *All Indigenous breakdowns for New South Wales are sourced from the 2006 Census of Population and Housing, adjusted for Census undercounting of public housing households, rather than the National housing assistance data repository.*
- *Households allocated to public rental housing or SOMIH before 1999–2000 do not have greatest need status reported.*
- *Households allocated to public rental housing or SOMIH before 2004–05 do not have greatest need reason reported.*
- *Greatest need is not reported for SOMIH households in Tasmania.*
- *Queensland could not provide greatest need reason for 2008–09 due to a new housing needs assessment that commenced on 22 September 2008.*
- *Identifiers were used to identify people's movements in and out of public rental housing and SOMIH. While these identifiers are assumed to stay constant and unique, this cannot be assured and may have resulted in false positive matches of people over time, as well as a potential for false negative matches if new, different identifiers were assigned.*

How many young people and children are in social housing?

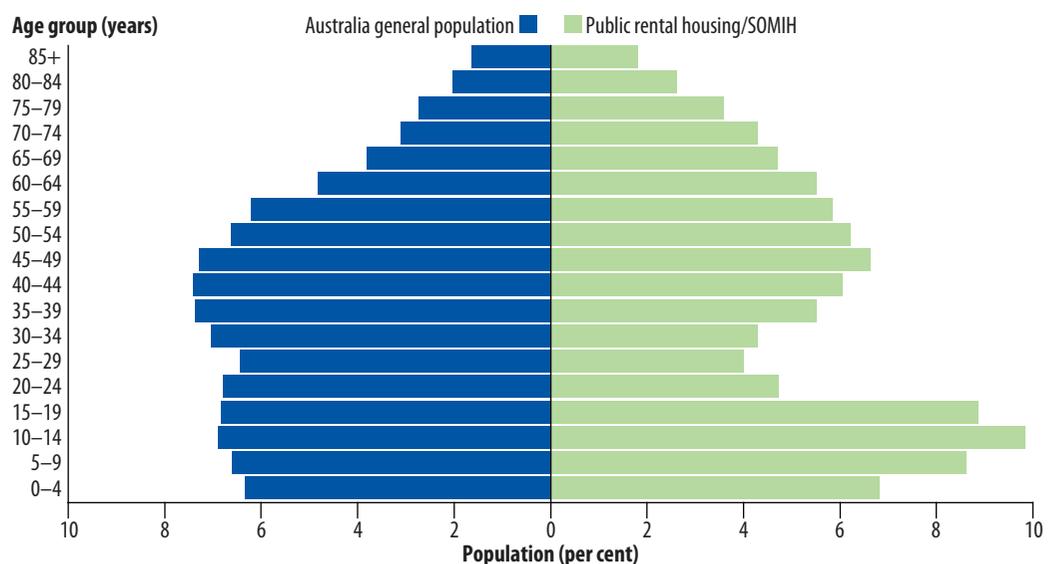
During 2008–09, young people (aged 24 years and under) represented more than one-third (37.7%) of all people housed in public rental housing (Figure 1). This proportion was even higher in SOMIH, where young people represented 58.2% of all people housed during the year. This proportion contrasts with the proportion in the general population in this age group, with 33.5% of the 2006 census population being aged 24 years or under (ABS 2006).



Source: National housing assistance data repository

Figure 1: Public rental housing and SOMIH tenants by age group, 2008-09

The disproportionate number of children in the younger age groups in the public rental housing and SOMIH population is illustrated in Figure 2. The proportion of young people aged 20-24 in the public rental housing and SOMIH population, is considerably lower than the proportion of the Australian population, 4.7% compared to 6.8% respectively.



Source: ABS 2006; National housing assistance data repository.

Figure 2: Distribution of the 2006 general Australian population compared with the public rental housing and SOMIH 2008-09 population

A number of young people in social housing were the main tenant of their household at 30 June 2009, with 2.8% of public rental households, 5.8% of SOMIH households, and 6.4% of mainstream community housing households having a main tenant who was aged 24 years or under. Additional demographic information on all tenants in mainstream community housing across Australia is currently not available.

At 30 June 2009, there were 90,210 households with young people and children in public rental housing and SOMIH, accounting for about one in four households (26.5%). The proportion was considerably higher in SOMIH (53.5%), compared with public rental housing (25.6%).

In households newly allocated for 2008–09, about 22,500 young people and children were housed in either public rental housing or SOMIH. This represented 50.9% of newly allocated persons in public rental housing and 68.4% of newly allocated persons in SOMIH.

Young people and children also represent a large group of tenants in community housing, with more than one in four households surveyed in the 2007 National Social Housing Survey of community housing tenants being a household with children (27.7%) (AIHW 2008a).

Box 2: Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) and National Affordable Housing Agreement

From 1985 to 31 December 2008, the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) was the largest of the many government programs to support people experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness in Australia. The aim of SAAP was to provide people who were homeless with transitional supported accommodation and support services, to help them achieve the greatest self-reliance and independence possible. Since 1 January 2009, the government response to homelessness has been administered under the National Affordable Housing Agreement, with the aim of ensuring people who are homeless achieve sustainable housing and social inclusion.

Services to the homeless and those at risk

Children are also often assisted through SAAP. In 2008–09, clients presented with accompanying children in about one-quarter (26%) of all support periods, with 79,100 children accompanying clients. This is consistent with the fact that more than one in four homeless people in Australia on Census night 2006 were members of a homeless family with children. Further, the largest group of clients in SAAP in 2008–09 were young people aged 15–19 years (18%).

During 2008–09 the number of clients accessing SAAP services in Australia represented:

- 1 in every 65 people aged 15–19 years in Australia (22,800)
- 1 in every 50 females aged 15–19 years in Australia (14,200).

The number of accompanying children represented:

- 1 in every 63 children in Australia (79,100)
- 1 in every 39 children aged 0–4 years in Australia (35,100).

About one-quarter of these accompanying children were Indigenous (25%); five times the proportion of Indigenous children in the Australian population (5%) (AIHW 2010).

Do households with a young main tenant, households with young people and children and all households differ?

Table 1 shows that at 30 June 2009, public rental housing and SOMIH households with a young main tenant, households with young people and children, and households in general vary widely on many characteristics. Nearly two thirds of households with a young main tenant that reported a greatest need¹ value were classified as being in greatest need at the time of allocation (63.2%). This was higher than the proportion of public rental housing and SOMIH households in general (49.7%), and households with young people and children (53.2%). Of those households at 30 June 2009 with a greatest need reason reported, more than half (58.0%) of households with a young main tenant had a greatest need reason of homelessness at the time of allocation, higher than the proportion of public rental housing and SOMIH households in general (44.9%), and households with young people and children (47.0%) (Table 1).

More than one-third of all public rental housing and SOMIH households (37.6%) at 30 June 2009 had at least one member with disability, the highest proportion of all household types. Households with young people and children, and households with a young main tenant were less likely to have at least one household member with disability (24.2% and 19.4% respectively).

At 30 June 2009, households with young people and children (23.3%) were twice as likely as all public rental housing and SOMIH households (10.8%) to have at least one household member identifying as being of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin. Households with a young main tenant were three times as likely to have at least one household member identifying as Indigenous (30.3%) (Table 1). The proportion of Indigenous households in public rental housing (7.6%) generally was also much higher than the proportion of Indigenous households in the general population, with 2.3% of the 2006 census population being Indigenous (ABS 2006).

At 30 June 2009, households with a young main tenant had the lowest proportion of households with a main income source of wages compared with households with young people and children and all public rental housing and SOMIH households; less than 1 in 10 had wages as the main income source. Almost 9 in 10 households with a young main

¹ A low-income household is seen to be in greatest need if at the time of allocation they were subject to one or more of the following circumstances:

- they were homeless
- their life or safety was at risk in their accommodation
- their health condition was aggravated by their housing
- their housing was inappropriate to their needs
- they had very high rental housing costs

tenant had a main income source of government payment, higher than both households with young people and children and all households in social housing (Table 1). Of about 8,800 households with a young main tenant receiving government payment as their main income source, only 900 (9.6%) households were receiving a main income source of youth allowance, or another allowance for students or the unemployed. Approximately one in ten households (11%) with a young main tenant were receiving Newstart allowance. By comparison, a considerable proportion of total households living in public rental housing or SOMIH were receiving the age or disability support pension as their main income source (25.2% and 27.4% respectively).

Household composition is a key point of difference between all public rental housing and SOMIH households, households with a young main tenant and households with young people and children. Almost half (46.2%) of households with a young main tenant and nearly three in four households with young people and children were sole parents, compared with 19.6% in the general public rental housing and SOMIH population. This varies from the general Australian population where the most common family type is couple with children, representing 45.3% of the families captured in the 2006 census (ABS 2006).

Table 1: Demographics of different household compositions in public rental housing and SOMIH, at 30 June 2009

	Households with young people and children	Households with a young main tenant	All households
Number	90,210	9,865	340,318
Households in greatest need at the time of allocation ^(a) (per cent)	53.2	63.2	49.7
Greatest need reason of homelessness at the time of allocation ^(b) (per cent)	47.0	58.0	44.9
At least one household member with disability (per cent)	24.2	19.4	37.6
At least one household member identifying as being of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin (per cent)	23.3	30.3	10.8
Tenancy composition (per cent)			
Sole parent households	73.8	46.2	19.6
Couple parent households	26.2	11.2	6.9
Single households	n.a.	26.5	49.6
Main income source of wages (per cent)	19.7	9.3	13.7
Main income source of government payment (per cent)	78.5	89.6	83.8

Note: Excludes 2,427 mainstream community housing households with a young main tenant.

(a) For households that had a greatest need value reported.

(b) For households that had a greatest need reason reported.

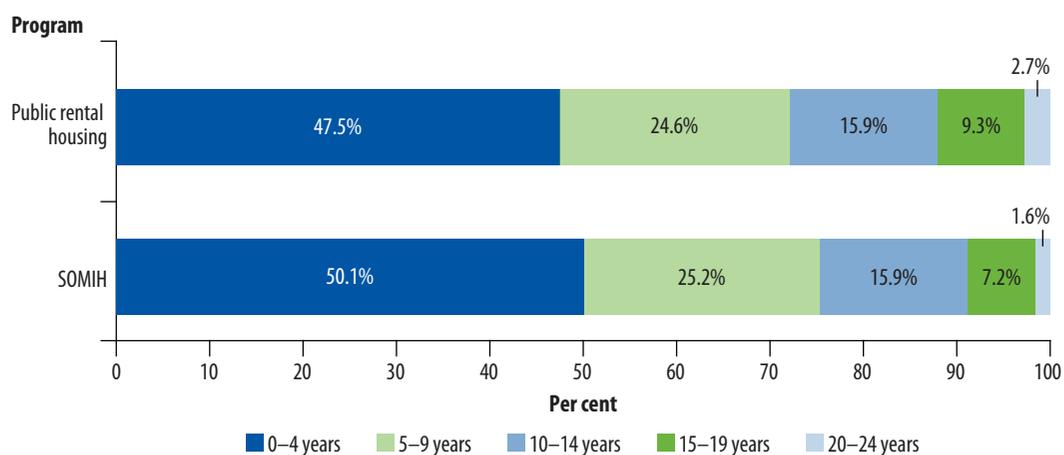
Source: National housing assistance data repository.

Long term assistance for young people and children

A group of particular interest to policy makers are those young people and children who have received assistance through social housing for long periods. To provide some insight into this issue, this analysis discusses young people and children who had lived in public rental housing or SOMIH for their entire lives. With current data sources, it is not possible to include those assisted in mainstream community housing in this analysis.

At 30 June 2009, there were 45,407 young people who had been in the same public rental housing or SOMIH household since birth. This represents 17.1% of all young people housed at 30 June 2009, not including young people who have transferred within public rental housing or SOMIH. Around half of the young people assisted in each program were young children aged 4 years or under (47.5% in public rental housing and 50.1% in SOMIH), and about one-quarter were aged 5–9 years (24.6% in public rental housing and 25.2% in SOMIH). A further one-quarter were aged 10–19 years (25.2% in public rental housing and 23.1% in SOMIH), and the remaining 2.7% of these young people in public rental housing and 1.6% in SOMIH were aged 20–24 years (Figure 3).

This final 2.7% in public rental housing and 1.6% in SOMIH represented nearly 1,200 young people who had lived in the same public rental housing or SOMIH household for at least 20 years.



Source: National housing assistance data repository.

Figure 3: Ages of young people and children in public rental housing and SOMIH since birth, 30 June 2009

Of all these young people living in public rental housing or SOMIH since birth with a greatest need value reported, more than one in two lived in a household classified as being in greatest need at the time of allocation (54.2%). Of those households with a greatest need reason reported, more than one in two had a greatest need reason of homelessness at the time of allocation (58.6%).

Almost one in four of these young people lived in households with at least one household member with disability (23.1%). Most commonly these young people lived in sole parent families (42.4%), with the majority of these young people being a child of the main tenant

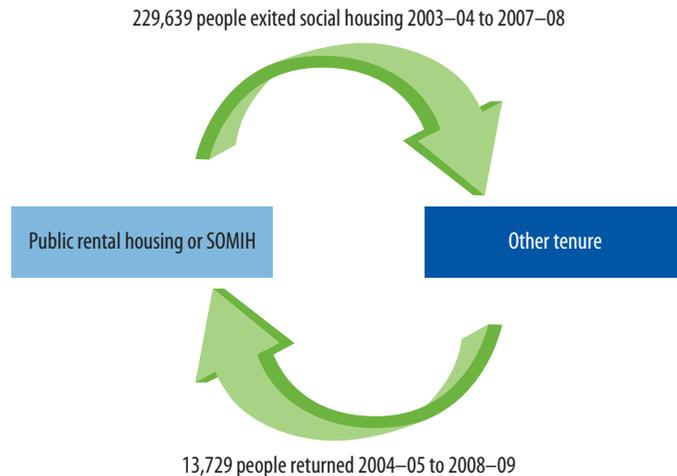
rather than the main tenant (85.3%). The majority of these young people lived in separate houses (72.2%), and most commonly reside with three other people (24.6%).

More than three quarters of these young people lived in households that reported receiving government payments as their main income source (78.0%).

Repeat periods of assistance

Public rental housing and SOMIH tenants' movements were analysed from 2003–04 to 2008–09 using unique person identifiers within each jurisdiction, to better understand their profile of assistance. This analysis showed that a number of tenants cycle in and out of social housing. Between 2003–04 and 2008–09, 13,729 people left public rental housing or SOMIH and returned in a later year. This represents 6.0% of all people exiting between 2003–04 and 2007–08 (Figure 4).

About half of people returning were aged 24 years or under (50.6%), and more than 1 in 10 were living in a household where the main tenant was aged 24 years or under (14.5%). Of those people returning as a main tenant, 16.2% were young people aged 24 years or under.



Source: National housing assistance data repository.

Figure 4: People exiting and returning to public rental housing or SOMIH, 2004–05 to 2008–09

Inter generational assistance in public rental housing and SOMIH

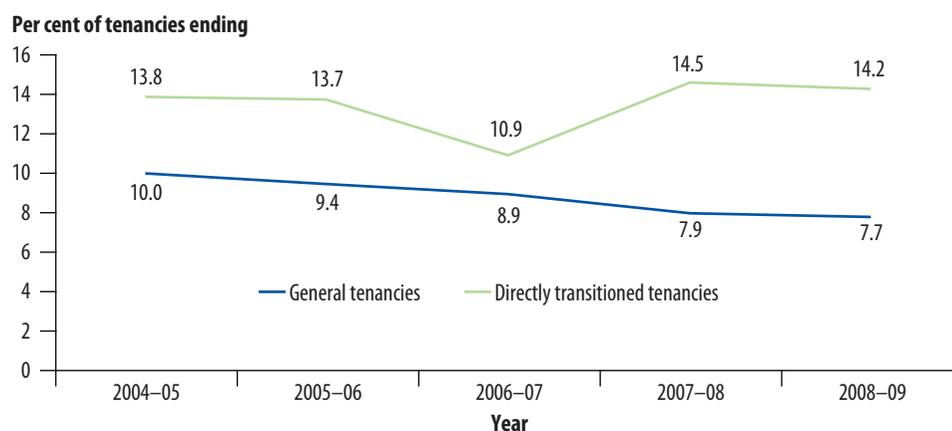
In analysing the status of young people within a household, it was identified that a number of young people who had initially been housed as dependents in public rental housing or SOMIH had since made the transition to become the main tenant to which a lease was assigned. Many of these had made this transition from dependency to main tenancy

without leaving public rental housing or SOMIH. Between 2003–04 and 2008–09, about 1,600 transitions occurred where a dependent living in public rental housing and SOMIH transitioned to being a main tenant by the following year.

Just over one in four of these transitions were reported as being in greatest need (25.6%) at the time of allocation. Of those households with a greatest need reason reported, around one in two were classified as greatest need due to homelessness (51.2%) at the time of allocation. Further analysis showed:

- ✦ almost one in five of these transitions involved a household with at least one household member with disability (17.1%)
- ✦ more than one-third of these transitions were single person households (36.0%)
- ✦ more than one in four households were sole parents with children (29.3%).

These households were more likely to end in the same year of commencement compared to general households in all years from 2004–05 to 2008–09 (Figure 5). It should be noted that this measure does not capture those who move into private rental or other tenures and may understate the proportion of households continuing to sustain secure housing.



Source: National housing assistance data repository.

Figure 5: Proportion of all tenancies and directly transitioning tenancies, ending in the same year as commencement, 2004–05 to 2008–09

Discussion

This bulletin has shown that young people and children make up a significant component of social housing tenants. There are a number of young people who have received long term assistance through social housing including some who have received assistance for their entire lives. Among the tenant cohort assisted on multiple occasions, young people are over-represented. Finally, through linking records and capturing the tenant status of young people assisted over time, it has been possible to describe young people who are initially assisted as a dependent in public rental housing or SOMIH and later become a main tenant.

The higher proportions of households with children and young people recorded as being in greatest need demonstrate the application of priority allocation policies in states and territories. It is also possible that the need for assistance among this group indicates the limited opportunities young people have in the housing market (Johnson et al. 2010), however without comparable data in the private rental market this assessment cannot be made. In light of this, it would be valuable to look at where social housing tenants exit to, to try to determine whether they have any success sustaining housing in the private market.

There are also a number of data limitations identified in this bulletin which should be addressed to improve the coverage and reliability of the results and produce more robust analysis. In particular, the limited capacity of community housing data to be analysed longitudinally or at a person level means that this bulletin was restricted in many cases to looking at children and young people housed in public rental housing or SOMIH. Given the recent and continuing growth in the community housing sector, it will be important for policy makers to be in a position to understand tenants assisted through these programs, particularly populations of interest such as children and young people.

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