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Acronyms

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Wellbeing
CHP	Council to Homeless Persons
MI Fellowship	Mental Illness Fellowship Victoria
NAEH	National Alliance to End Homelessness (United States)
PTH	Pathways to Housing
REIV	Real Estate Institute of Victoria
SHS	Specialist Homelessness Sector
SHSS	Specialist Homelessness Service System
THM	Temporary Housing Management
SAAP	Supported Accommodation and Assistance Program

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Contents

Executive Summary

In recent years, international movements seeking to 'end homelessness' have changed the way we view homelessness service delivery. The 2008 White Paper on Homelessness *The Road Home* introduced a suite of new programs and approaches to service delivery. However, amidst this change, there has been little focus on the actual work of those delivering services to people experiencing homelessness and the interventions that successfully end homelessness.

In April 2014, CHP was awarded a grant by the Mercy Foundation to articulate the support interventions that assist people experiencing or at risk of homelessness to gain and sustain housing. The nature of support provided to people experiencing or at risk of homelessness influences their capacity to find and keep a home. While local and contemporary evidence of effective housing-focused interventions exists (see for example, Povey, 2010), to date this evidence has not been translated into a practice resource for the homelessness and social housing sectors. This research-to-practice project was developed to create an evidence-informed model of housing-focused support in order to improve the efficacy of current support responses to homelessness.

The project was carried out in the following phases:
- a meta-synthesis literature review
- focus groups and consultations with consumers and expert practitioners in the specialist homelessness sector
- qualitative analysis of the focus groups and consultations
- the development of five practice guides for delivering housing focused support
- the development of a housing-focused support training module
- trialing and refining the practice guide and training module with workers in the specialist homelessness sector.

Literature review

The rapid research meta-synthesis literature review examined local and international literature in order to determine the specific activities workers undertake to gain and maintain housing for people at risk of, or experiencing homelessness. The review examined traditional and contemporary approaches to housing-focused support to identify evidence of models that are effective and demonstrate good practice. The review begins with an overview of various housing models, before examining activities undertaken by workers implementing these models to both gain and sustain housing.

The review identified a number of overlapping and interdependent activity areas that workers undertake in order to deliver housing-focused support. These include:
- engagement
- housing-focused assessments
- finding housing
- resettlement and stabilisation

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Engagement

Engagement is the foundation upon which housing-focused support begins. Gronda et al (2011, p. 50) describe engagement as a 'unique and distinct step' towards both 'getting and keeping housing'. Engagement relates to consumers and service providers working together to assess and meet the consumer's needs. Depending on the client group, soft engagement strategies or more assertive outreach strategies may be needed. Assertive engagement strategies are seen as particularly effective for consumers with histories of rough sleeping. In addition flexible outreach strategies were found to be beneficial for young people (Jones & Costello, 2013). Engagement was successful when it was driven by the consumer, with workers understanding that engagement takes time. People entering homelessness for the first time may have limited knowledge of how the homelessness and housing sectors operate. As such, workers are required to have specialist knowledge of these systems and be able to articulate this knowledge in a manner that consumers understand.

Housing-focused assessment

Similar to engagement, undertaking assessment should be seen as a process. Assessment processes should focus on active participation by consumers in identifying their needs and goals. This section of the review looked specifically at assessment techniques that facilitate access to housing by identifying barriers to housing, and opportunities for gaining housing.

The key worker knowledge for undertaking assessment includes a developed understanding of the barriers to gaining housing. A detailed and comprehensive understanding of a consumer's housing history highlights causes of housing break down in the past, preparedness to rent, and history of stable tenancies. These elements are used to feed into to planning both current and future support needs.

A critical step for workers undertaking during assessment, involves determining with the consumer, the types of housing that are most appropriate for them, and matching their needs and preferences with realistic outcomes. Issues of affordability and financial sustainability are key, so it is important to work with consumers to assess and address current income and existing debt problems.

Finding housing

A range of interventions are employed by workers to assist people to find housing. This includes providing information, identifying suitable properties, assistance with applications and assistance to move in to a property. The review identified some consumer populations that may need additional support in accessing and understanding housing information, such as those with limited independent living experience, intellectual disability, language barriers and persistent mental health issues.

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The review found that workers providing information about how to apply for a property is helpful for consumers. This information includes modelling how to make a positive impression with private landlords, attending inspections with the consumer, assistance with applications, and workers liaising directly with landlords.

Financial support is a key method of removing barriers to obtaining housing. This includes clearing rental arrears, assistance with debt, financial incentives to agents, paying of bonds, removal costs and ongoing financial support throughout a tenancy. Workers can provide valuable support to consumers by assisting them to source and apply for financial assistance.

Once a property is found, some consumers will benefit from support in accepting a property offer and help to either move or secure possessions. Finally, assistance with connecting to utilities can be valuable, particularly for consumers with limited experience of independent living.

Resettlement and stabilisation

Resettlement and stabilisation refers to the support given to consumers in order to help them sustain housing in an ongoing way. This can include assisting a person to develop skills for daily living. The activities required in resettlement and stabilization move from activities that the worker 'does' for a client, to 'teaching skills', tenancy knowledge, and facilitating community engagement. It is important to note that the processes listed in the resettlement and stabilization section of the review will not always occur in a linear fashion. Some activities will occur concurrently, some will occur episodically – and all should be determined by the consumer. In addition, some individuals will require very little assistance to resettle and stabilise in housing, while others may need much more intensive support.

In order for consumers to be able to sustain their tenancies, the research found they often need supports in understanding rights and responsibilities. The research also found that providing advice and support to report repairs and maintenance issues helps to ensure appropriate housing conditions are maintained.

A key step in resettlement includes supporting consumers to develop the skills needed to sustain a tenancy. The research found that the key skill areas include money management, skills for independent living, links to employment and training, and support to transition to employment and training. Limited income and moving to a new area can result in boredom, loneliness and social exclusion. Workers and agencies can facilitate engagement in activities and can help reduce the barriers to inclusion such as limited finances or a lack of knowledge of available activities. Facilitating connection with a person's local area also helps them build informal and formal support networks. As such workers are required to have a knowledge of available services, referral pathways, and to make supports available for a consumer should the need arise.

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Focus groups and consultations

To complement the Literature Review, four focus groups (two with consumers and two with advanced practitioners) and six in-depth consultations were held to inform this project. Advanced practitioners were asked to reflect on how they built working relationships with consumers, how assessment inform housing searches and the specific activities they undertake to help consumers gain and maintain housing.

Consumers were asked how practitioners built rapport with them, the types of questions they were asked before they started looking for housing, and their experience in locating housing. Consumers were also asked about the support they received after finding housing.

An analysis of the focus groups and consultations found that interventions by practitioners echoed the themes identified in the literature review, but provided a much richer understanding of the attitudes and practices of workers who were able to deliver successful housing-focused support.

Engagement and building rapport

Practitioners and consumer agreed that the most effective forms of engagement are underpinned by workers' communication styles, transparent practice and their ability to provide information to consumers in an accessible manner. Practitioners noted that they tailor their engagement practices to individuals, and actively promote consumer involvement in the housing journey. Practitioners allowed consumers time to tell their story, and practice reflective listening while acknowledging consumers' lived experiences of housing crisis and homelessness.

Flexibility and choice are seen by consumers and practitioners as addressing power imbalances and reducing barriers to forming an effective working relationship. Active engagement strategies are undertaken with consumers who experience barriers to engagement. Workers, in particular those practicing outreach, spoke of a respect and the notion of guest-hood when entering a consumer's personal space.

Practitioners unanimously reported that their work is underpinned by being honest with and respectful towards consumers, while trying to manage their expectations. Key to this is transparency and setting boundaries. Consumers noted that effective communication involves practitioners showing them respect and compassion in a non-judgmental environment. Conversely, poor engagement relates to people feeling their lived experiences and histories are neither heard nor understood.

Practitioners and consumers see specialist worker knowledge in the engagement process as combining expert knowledge of the causes and impacts of trauma, housing crisis and homelessness. In addition, consumers understand that practitioners have expert knowledge about housing, homelessness and community sectors that they need

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to resolve their housing issues. As such, practitioners can assist consumers to navigate situations and systems that are either unfamiliar, stressful, or of which the consumer is wary.

Using assessments to inform practice

Practitioners stress the assessment process needs to be gradual and ongoing, evolving as the working relationship strengthens. A range of assessments are completed with consumers including housing histories, income, debt, mental health, health, employment histories, existing services and family or social supports. Practitioners stated that assessment identifies consumers' current needs and assists them to strategically plan housing options.

Practitioners use their specialist knowledge when undertaking assessment to understand how a consumer's history has affected previous tenure, how it may affect future housing and the supports that will be needed to maintain a tenancy. The information captured during assessment is fed into case management plans. This assists practitioners to understand initial barriers people face in gaining housing, as well as providing a picture of which housing options are be appropriate to pursue with clients. Specialist knowledge of local housing markets is used by practitioners to identify housing options.

Advanced practitioners are keenly aware of the need to provide suitable and sustainable accommodation for consumers, while acknowledging that housing affordability issues make this a particularly challenging task. They reported that engaging consumers in this process and promoting choice can assist them to resolve the tension between what consumers want and what they can sustain. Consumers similarly noted that without specialist knowledge workers can direct them to unrealistic housing options. In addition involvement in this process is reported by consumers as being empowering.

Assisting consumers to gain access to housing

A range of approaches are used by advanced practitioners to prepare consumers to undertake a housing search. Many practitioners provide one-on-one support in relation to social and private rental housing applications. Some practitioners run private rental preparation workshops which include information about rights and responsibilities, applying for a property, presenting at an open for inspection and paying rent. This can occur in groups or one-on-one. Consumers who received proactive support in locating housing – such as being assisted to attend viewings and/or applying for housing - reported far more positive experiences.

Consistent with the literature review, practitioners who were assisting consumers to secure housing in the private rental sector noted that they used a range of techniques to build relationships with real estate agents including financial incentives. This facilitated access to the private rental market for people who would otherwise have been excluded.

Consumers and practitioners highlighted the specialist knowledge required of practitioners in relation to offers of housing from social housing providers. Consumers feel empowered when practitioners are able to advocate with the consumer, or on their behalf, when an unsuitable property offer is made.

Some consumers receive significant support in both moving into their and establishing their new home. This includes assistance with moving, the provision of furniture, utility connection and other material aid. Consumers feel this was an important part in setting up for successful tenancy.

Resettlement and stabilisation

Advanced practitioners noted that linking consumers into their local community is very important, and a key practice that assists people to sustain their housing. This is done to reduce loneliness and boredom, and to foster the consumer's sense of belonging to a particular community. Practitioners use their local knowledge to link people to opportunities.

Ensuring successful tenancy sustainment requires practitioners to move from 'doing for' to 'doing with' consumers. Despite programmatic limitations, advanced practitioners noted that consumers do return to them when experiencing further cases of housing crisis, or during pivotal times in their tenancy, for example, when leases are due for renewal. At this point workers provide a brief intervention (like advice), or refer the consumer to an appropriate service if long term support is likely to be needed. Often practitioners rely on well-developed networks and knowledge of available support services to facilitate consumers' engagement with other services. All practitioners recognized that providing this brief intervention is essential, as it can prevent another experience of homelessness. While many consumers said they would not return to an agency if they experienced housing crisis again, this was not always because of poor practice. For some consumers, the support they had received by their worker meant that they now had developed their own support and social networks on which they can rely on.

Development of practice guides and training module

The information gathered during the literature review and the qualitative consultations formed the basis of the practice guides:

- An overview of homelessness
- Engagement and building rapport
- The role of assessment in housing-focused support
- Supporting consumers to access housing
- Supporting resettlement and stabilisation

An accompanying training module was developed to reflect the content of the Guides. The Guides also provide activities and exercises to assist workers to develop their skills

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in providing housing-focused support, and to reflect on their current practice. This module was trialed with practitioners in the Victorian SHS, and both the guides and the training were refined following this exercise.

Conclusion

This project was informed by research, consumers with lived experience of homelessness, and leading practitioners from around Victoria. It has assisted CHP to articulate the specialist skills and knowledge that underpin effective practice in the homelessness service system.

Interventions that successfully assist consumers to both gain and maintain housing rely on a sophisticated interaction between worker capabilities, specialist knowledge, and the ability to engage with consumers to work through resolving their homelessness and housing crises.

This resource aims to assist practitioners and service providers across the country to implement practices that are both evidence-informed and focused on achieving housing outcomes.

Background

'With limited resources and persistent need it is imperative that we use evidence-based, cost effective interventions to get people stably housed and that we disseminate these practices as widely as possible' (Casey, et al 2013, p. S183)

The role of support

Support is an integral aspect of an effective homelessness response. This is because homelessness often occurs at the intersection between constrained housing markets, low incomes and personal vulnerabilities that can make it difficult to maintain a home.

International literature and practice expertise shows that people who have experienced or are at risk of homelessness can gain and sustain housing through a number of interconnected processes; access to affordable and appropriate housing; engagement in housing-focused support; economic and social participation; and engagement with specialist health services as required (Gronda et al, 2011).

While local and contemporary evidence of effective housing-focused interventions exists (see for example, Povey, 2010), to date this evidence is dispersed, and a consolidated practice resource for the homelessness and social housing sectors does not currently exist.

What is housing focused support?

For the purposes of this project, housing-focused support refers to the range of activities and interventions undertaken by homelessness practitioners, that directly assist individuals and households experiencing or at risk of homelessness to gain and sustain housing. These could include supportive tenancy management approaches or activities that enable households to develop essential living skills or to establish private rental tenancies. Housing-focused support can be differentiated from allied, mainstream or specialist health supports, which base eligibility on criteria other than homelessness and are geared towards achieving outcomes other than gaining and sustaining housing (but which may, nevertheless, assist an individual to sustain a home). Housing-focused support is also time limited.

Housing-focused interventions are critical, because people experiencing or at risk of homelessness often have financial or health difficulties that may result in ongoing tenancy challenges (Culhane & Metraux, 2008). Further, for people who have

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experienced chronic homelessness, the shift to a stable home may also represent a significant shift in social roles and daily routines (Gronda et al, 2011).

According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare's (AIHW) Specialist Homelessness Services Collection, 43 per cent of people who received assistance from the SHS in 2013-14 were experiencing homelessness at the beginning of their first episode of support. At the end of support, 35 per cent were still considered homeless. A range of new programs implemented under the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness have demonstrated a greater focus on homelessness prevention and ending chronic homelessness, which has introduced a new way of working for the SHSS.

Why a housing focused support guide is needed

Spinney's (2013) report on workforce training for the homelessness sector confirmed that there is a disjunction between established practice models and the skills required to deliver on the nation-wide policy imperatives to prevent and end experiences of homelessness. Existing training fails to address skill and knowledge gaps in relation to effective housing-focused interventions, which require a specialist understanding of both housing *and* welfare issues. Mismatches also exist between academic research and SHS professional development programs.

Compounding these challenges, the University of Queensland has found that 55 percent of Australia's homelessness workforce has less than five years' experience in the sector, and 60 percent were recruited into their current job from a different field (Martin, et al. 2012). Moreover, the majority of people working across the SHS have relevant, but generic, community service qualifications, which lead the authors to conclude that '[a]chieving the objectives of national homelessness reforms requires new approaches to service delivery and therefore a workforce with different and higher level skills' (Martin et al, 2012, p. xiv).

Participants in the Swinburne University study repeatedly noted that existing education and professional development programs are not specific enough to the homelessness and social housing sectors to effectively build workforce capacity (Spinney, 2013). These conditions highlight a need for the articulation and implementation of a housing-focused support model.

Literature review

The aim of the literature review is to examine local and international evidence in order to determine the specific activities workers undertake in order to gain housing for people at risk of, or experiencing homelessness, and the activities they undertake in order to assist consumers to maintain their housing. It aims to identify good and best practices in providing housing-focused support to those experiencing or at risk-of homelessness.

Methodology

The study uses a rapid research meta-synthesis methodology, aimed at finding 'the contextual conditions and mechanisms (or means by which) a social policy intervention produces a particular outcome' (Foster et al, 2011, p.1). The metasynthesis approach involves 'analysing and synthesizing key elements in each study, with the aim of transforming individual findings into new conceptualizations and interpretations (Polit & Beck, 2006, as cited in Cronin et al, 2008).

Both social science and 'grey' literature relating to housing-focused and housing related support were identified through a range of social science databases (Psych, CINAHL, ProQuest, Google Scholar as well as Google for grey literature).

Broad search terms were used alone and in combination including 'housing first', 'housing support', 'housing related support', 'housing focused support', 'tenancy', 'tenancy management', 'tenancy stabilization or stabilization' and 'eviction'. Studies are included for review if their focus was on individuals or families who were homeless or at-risk of homelessness.

The review examines traditional and contemporary approaches to housing-focused support to find evidence of models that are effective and demonstrate good practice. The review begins with an overview of various housing models, before examining activities undertaken by workers in these models to both gain and sustain housing.

An overview of models that deliver housing-focused support

Linear housing models

Australian Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) - as well as UK, European and historic US models - have operated under what has been termed as a linear housing model – also known as a continuum of care, or the 'staircase' model (Johnsen & Teixeira, 2010). The models transition people experiencing homelessness through a series of time-limited housing options, such as emergency or transitional housing, before a permanent home is secured (Waegemakers Schiff & Rook, 2012).

In Australia, the delivery of support for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness has been informed by a combination of various policy contexts and emerging homeless populations. From 1985 - 2008, the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) was the primary funding source for agencies delivering homelessness services (Coleman & Fopp, 2014). Over time, the aims and objectives of SAAP changed. They from providing short-term accommodation with a view to gaining independent accommodation, to a transitional housing model (medium to long term) with a view to independent accommodation. Between 1994-1999, a proviso was added that supported accommodation may not necessarily lead to independent accommodation (Coleman & Fopp, 2014).

As Fopp (2002, p. 57) noted, SAAP transformed 'from a program which provided the support required to move clients on to independent living to a program of transitional arrangements in SAAP for clients who could not be moved on because there were no place for them to go'.

The final 2004 evaluation of the SAAP program noted that the strength of the SAAP program was the provision of crisis support and accommodation (although some programs provided access to medium and longer-term housing). However, the evaluation noted, that is did 'less well in preventing homelessness and in early intervention' it went on to say that '[t]he extent to which it is successful in assisting clients to achieve independence is also not beyond doubt' (Erebus Consulting Partners, 2004 p. 5).

Criticism of crisis and temporary housing models has related to lack of exits from homelessness, as well as of the prescriptive assumptions that people need to move through stages in order to be suitably housed (Busch-Geertsema & Salin, 2007). As Busch-Geertsema & Salin (2007, p. 76), have noted, the 'the fact that people are homeless does not reflect that they are not "housing ready"'.

Busch-Geertsema & Salin (2007) advised that shelters, or, in the Australian context crisis accommodation and refuges are still needed in an ideal service system in five areas. These include the need for temporary emergency accommodation,

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accommodation for people fleeing violence, for vulnerable young people developing their independent living skills, where consumers indicate a desire to stay in a 'protected environment' and for people with complex alcohol and other drug issues.

With 35 per cent of consumers still homelessness at the end of their support period (AIHW, 2014), services internationally, and more recently in Australia, have begun to move away from only providing linear housing models, introducing 'Housing First' programs.

Housing First

The Housing First philosophy focuses on moving people experiencing homelessness to safe and secure long term housing as quickly as possible. Housing First models are applicable to both individuals and families with either recent or long term experiences of homelessness. The approach quickly provides rehousing, alongside offers of ongoing supports, matched to each consumer's needs and preferences. Unlike linear housing models, the housing offer is not contingent on engagement with support services.

How Housing First is delivered, differs based on the client group, location and housing market, however, programs will typically have the following elements:

- In depth assessment and targeting of Housing First services
- Assistance locating housing, lease negotiation and developing relationships with landlords/agents in the private rental sector
- Provision of financial assistance – such a deposits, rent in advance or a long-term housing subsidy
- A housing placement that is not time-limited
- Time limited or long term case management to coordinate with other services (NAEH, 2006).

A number of programs have used the Housing First approach to target individuals and families experiencing homelessness, and these models can be broadly defined as either providing permanent supported housing or Rapid Rehousing.

Permanent supported housing

Permanent supported housing programs work with individuals who are homeless and who have complex issues around substance misuse, mental health and/or cognitive impairment. There is a substantial body of literature around the effectiveness of housing first models. Pathways to Housing (PTH), originating in New York, is believed to be the first Housing First model developed and evaluated extensively. PTH is a clinical model that was developed for rough sleepers with concurrent mental health and substance use issues. In this, and indeed all subsequent housing first models, housing is obtained regardless of perceptions of readiness for housing and regardless of an individual's engagement with clinical services. Housing first has been found to have positive outcomes across a range of domains including housing stability, reduced

use of hospitals and emergency rooms, mental health and recidivism (Tsemberis et al, 2012). In addition, Tsmeberis et al (2004) found that 80 per cent of participants retained housing 24 months after being housed. Another study found up to 84 per cent of people retained housing (Tsemberis et al (2012).

In the PTH model, housing is provided in scattered sites (individual apartments) with outreach support, where properties are head-leased to remove barriers to acquiring private rental. Other housing first models are delivered in congregate sites (or apartment complexes) where supports are provided on-site. An example of congregate site housing is Common Ground. In this model, an individual will sign a lease with the housing provider directly. as opposed to an agency head-leasing the property. Both PTH and Common Ground models provide 24-hour support for consumers if and when required.

The following elements are central to the success of permanent supportive housing approaches:
- targeted to people with significant health issues and housing challenges
- proactive engagement
- permanent and affordable housing
- a choice in housing options
- immediate access to permanent housing
- voluntary engagement with individualised supports and
- housing-focused support for tenancy sustainment.

Rapid rehousing

There is substantial international and emerging Australian evidence that rapid re-housing programs are effective in ending homelessness for many households. These programs help households to find and secure housing, either in the social or private rental market. It then assists them to address any issues that may put that tenancy at risk.

Predominantly focused on family homelessness, but increasingly being extended to other groups – such as youth and individuals - these programs have greatly reduced homelessness in many communities in the US. In some communities, family homelessness has been reduced by 39 per cent (National Alliance to End Homelessness (NEAH), 2014). Rapid rehousing models have a focus on quickly giving homeless individuals and families access to affordable housing, and assistance both in moving into housing and in retaining it (NAEH, 2009). The target population is people who have previously lived independently in permanent housing for some time, at some point in their housing journeys. One program in Hennepin County found that of 1,714 families assisted, 85 per cent remained stably housed at the two-year follow-up point (Shinn et al, 2005).

Australian research suggests that private rental support programs in Australia are effective in assisting households to secure, but not maintain, tenancies in the private market (Jacobs et al, 2005). However, the programs evaluated do not have many of the key features of rapid rehousing programs. In addition, Jacobs et al (2005) did not evaluate more recent and intensive assistance for households in the private rental market. The research identified key gaps in these programs including supporting living skills and budgeting, and eligibility restrictions.

The key components of a rapid rehousing model are:
- The recipient is currently homeless. (The NAEH model defines homelessness as people living in a shelter (crisis accommodation) or accessing the homeless assistance system)
- The recipient is moved into permanent housing as quickly as possible (though it notes there is no deadline or time limit that defines 'rapid')
- Financial and practical assistance is given to secure housing (Including understanding barriers to obtaining housing, and provision of financial supports and brokerage). Rapid re-housing guidelines in the US provide up to 18 months of rent subsidy, including the payment of up to six months of rent arrears (HUD, 2013). However many programs achieve success with much less
- Assistance is temporary. (That is, interventions are not permanent support, however household needs will vary both in intensity and duration, and may involve referral to other services)
- Assistance is given to retain housing. (This includes financial help, support services to set up a house, tenancy rights and responsibilities, avoiding conflict with others – again time limited and dependent on need).

Housing-related support

Across the UK, since 2003, the *Supporting People* program has been used to provide housing related support to vulnerable tenants. Supporting People is a central government funded program, with a focus on promoting independence (and independent living) for vulnerable populations. Across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland *Supporting People* has different aims, and the guidelines defining housing-related supports are intentionally broad.

However, as Fyson et al (2007) note, without a clear definition of 'housing-related support', there are wide variations in relation to that tasks local authorities considered eligible.

Price's (2011) review of housing-related support intervention proposed that housing related support may include:
- Direct housing-related support, for example, help with finding and securing appropriate accommodation
- Financial support, including direct financial support (for example rent deposit schemes) and help developing money management skills

- Practical support including help with gardening, decorating and learning to cook
- Social and emotional support, ranging from, listening to providing counselling, family therapy and mediation and parenting skills training
- Advocacy/linking including registering with a GP, accessing specialist healthcare and accompanying clients to appointments, liaising with other agencies and service providers.

In 2010, 17 Local Authorities and the Welsh government formed an Outcomes pilot group, which highlighted eleven outcomes against which to measure the success of the Supporting People programs (Aylward et al 2010).

The eleven outcomes are:
- feeling safe
- contributing to the safety and wellbeing of themselves and of others
- managing accommodation
- managing relationships
- feeling part of the community
- managing money
- engaging in education/learning
- engaging in employment/voluntary work
- physically healthy
- mentally healthy
- leading a healthy and active lifestyle.

Despite positive sector feedback in relation to the nature of the outcomes to be collected, and the simplicity of the measures (outcome met, outcome partially met, outcome not met), some Local Authorities condensed or adapted these outcomes, which did not allow for consistent review. In 2014, following changes to legislation, the Welsh Government began rolling out a national outcomes framework for people who need care and support, and carers who need support.

Some local authorities across the UK have developed guidelines defining the activities included in a housing-related support. These range from a series of dot points (see for example, City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council), to more complex documents showing the activities included and/or excluded in housing-related support (see for example Gwent Local Authorities, Wales), and in some cases, the linking of activities to an outcomes framework (Cumbria County Council).

Housing-related support includes interventions that directly relate to assistance for a person to gain housing. This can include advice and advocacy, as well as activities that assist a person to be able to sustain that housing (budgeting, modeling life skills, referrals to other specialist services, attending appointments with the view of promoting future independence). However, clinical interventions (for example

specialist therapeutic interventions), personal care (cleaning, personal hygiene, cooking) and activities where long-term support and assistance is needed (such as shopping) are excluded. Where workers identify needs for long-term support, clinical interventions or personal care, they are expected to provide the consumer with an appropriate referral. Some councils, such as Houndslow, note that workers can engage in '"doing-with" not "doing for"' activities (such as cleaning, shopping and cooking), in a limited capacity.

Commonalities of the models

In the models outlined above and in a range of other models not discussed, the focus is on getting people housed, regardless of housing readiness. However, how this occurs can differ based on the client group. Traditional housing first models such as PTH rely on assertive outreach to link with hard to engage individuals, with complex needs, who are likely to need ongoing permanent support. Rapid rehousing models were originally designed to help individuals and families experiencing short term financial crisis to exit and not return to crisis accommodation. While now expanded to target other populations, the support provided (both practical and financial) is time limited.

All models attempt to remove barriers to accessing housing either by head leasing properties - thereby removing risks for landlords, or through working closely with individuals and families to make them housing application ready as distinct from housing ready. Responding to housing barriers is discussed in 'Housing histories and rent preparedness assessment' on page 26.

All models provide financial support to access housing (as well as some reliance on welfare payments to ensure housing remains affordable – to the extent possible). This may include short or long term rent subsidies and/or the provision of brokerage to establish tenancies.

The models are based on client choice and collaboration – that is, working with the client to identify options and preferences. Ongoing supports are tailored to promote independence. However, the provision of housing is not based on an individual's uptake of available supports. All of the models work with individuals to facilitate social inclusion, as this is a key element in tenancy sustainment.

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Delivering housing focused support

This area of the literature review examines common elements of practice that have been found to assist people experiencing or at risk of homelessness, to gain and sustain housing.

Delivering housing focused support relies on workers having a range of specific and expert knowledge. This can be demonstrated in Seal's (2005) Model of Resettlement Knowledge (MRK), reproduced below. In the model Seal highlights the worker knowledge required to effectively house and resettle an individual. These include knowledge of homelessness (cause and impacts), knowledge of homelessness systems and service provision as well as knowledge of cognitive, practical and emotional interventions.
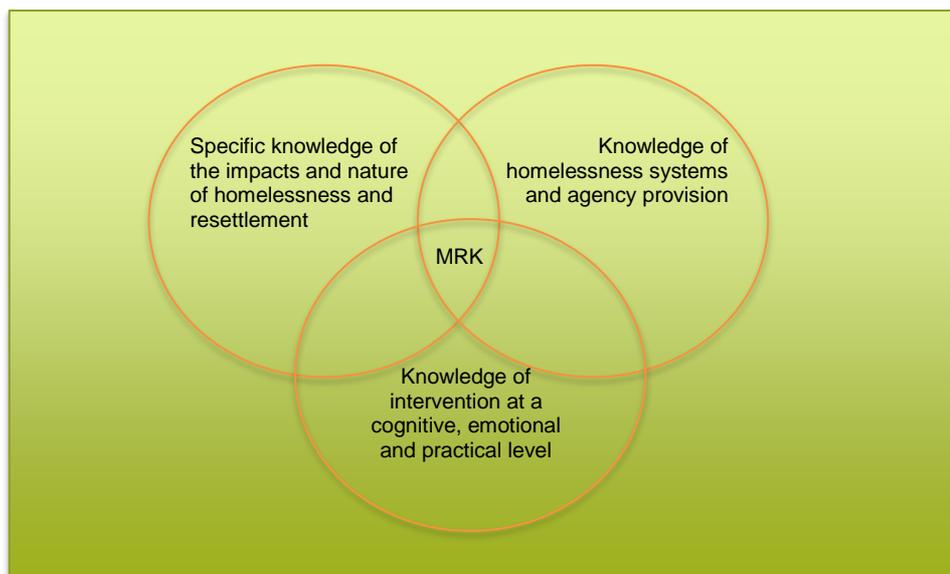
Modelling resettlement knowledge (MRK), Seal (2005)

With this model in mind, the following sections of the literature review have attempted to break down what Gronda (2011, p. 50) describes 'housing work' – 'the intervention required to assist someone experiencing or at risk of homelessness to access suitable housing'.

The key strategies explored in this section have been identified under the following classifications:

- engagement - a 'unique and distinct step' in providing housing focused support (Gronda, 2011, p. 50)
- housing-focused assessment
- finding housing - effective housing work 'provides timely access to appropriate housing options' (Gronda, 2011, p. 56)

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- resettlement and stabilization - ' moving people into more permanent… accommodation' (Homeless Link, 2012, p. 2)
- tenancy sustainment - support to sustain people in their tenancies (Homeless Link, 2012, p. 2).

It is important to note that these areas of work will not necessarily occur in a linear fashion. As Seal (2005) noted, engagement and assessment can be a means of building a working relationship with someone, however, he stresses 'it is an illusion to think that we can make any meaningful intervention after knowing the client for a matter of hours, or even minutes' (p. 107).

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Engagement

'Without choice and control, … neither autonomy nor self-determination – nor, ultimately citizenship – can be achieved' (Glendinning, 2008, p. 459)

Housing-focused support begins well before a tenancy is gained, and engagement should be seen as the foundations on which housing focused support sits. Gronda et al (2011, p. 50) describe engagement as a 'unique and distinct step' in both gaining and accessing housing. Engagement relates to consumers and service providers working together to assess and meet the consumer's needs. It is a process of establishing rapport and building a trusting relationship, which will allow a worker to assess needs, define goals, and link people to other services(Erickson & Page (1999, in Olivet et al (2010)),

Interpersonal connection or 'individual relationship level' engagement (Gronda et al, 2011, p. 51) is critical throughout the consumer-worker relationship to both maintaining an individual's involvement in services, as well as determining the effectiveness of those services (Stanhope 2008, as cited in Black and Gronda 2011).

Engagement strategies can differ based on the client group. While this review aims to provide evidence of specific activities workers undertake to engage consumers, this is necessarily different for each individual. When people are reluctant to engage with services, more assertive engagement activities may be required. Outreach and assertive outreach relies on workers establishing a relationship with individuals who are unlikely to make contact with services, and who may have an inherent mistrust of services (Olivet et al, 2010).

Evidence suggests that people who have histories of chronic homelessness benefit from assertive outreach (Phillips & Parsell 2012). In Australia, assertive outreach differs from street outreach as its primary focus is to end homelessness (Phillips & Parsell, 2012). Key to its success is worker practice that is 'flexible and tailored to the needs and circumstances of the individual' (p. 62). The specific actions in an ideal assertive outreach process for engagement includes meeting people in public spaces, the provision of information about the potential services available and dealing with priority needs. The workers ability to actively communicate with a consumer, and to prioritize the consumers 'worldviews and values… to foster an environment where the resources on offer could be accessed' was highlighted (Phillips & Parsell (2012), p. 62).

Flexible outreach for young people ia beneficial, as it allows workers to meet with consumers in an environment which is familiar and in which they feel comfortable (Jones & Costello, 2013). In addition, Catherine Holmes Consulting (2010) found

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Aboriginal communities in Darwin express a preference for outreach service delivery as they find it hard to travel to services with limited money, limited transport, poor health, and having to secure their belongings.

Effective engagement with consumers is increasingly linked to advocating for and promoting consumer choice (Hansen Lofstrand & Juhila, 2012; Tsemberis, 2010). Consumer choice is described as 'fundamental to achieving citizenship, social inclusion and human rights' (Glendinning, 2008, p. 459). A noted earlier, consumer choice underpins the housing first philosophy, where access to housing and support is not based on enrolling with other services (such as mental health services, drug and alcohol services etc). A PTH research study, demonstrated a direct link to decreased homelessness and perceived choice in housing options (Greenwood et al, 2005). Glendinning (2008) notes that disability, age, and literacy issues can limit a consumer's ability to exercise choice. Hence, workers must possess a variety of skills to communicate options and information to consumers.

Seal (2005) points to the importance of listening to consumers, noting that initially, they may be unwilling to divulge areas of concern, or may only be willing to engage with issues they see as pressing. The worker should respond to the issues identified by the consumer, even 'if it feels like, or turns out the be a red-herring or an avoidance of the 'real' issue, we have to take it as a starting point (p. 112). By resolving these initial issues, it creates what Egan (1998, in Seal 2005) define as leverage – 'tackling one particular problem which is key to resolving some of the other problems… and will build [consumers] confidence' (p. 112). Similarly, Phillips & Parsell (2012, p. 62), found that allowing people who were rough sleeping to 'exercise their agency and express their wishes' directly contributes to whether a person will eventually accept a housing offer.

Promotion of choice, can also level (real or perceived) power imbalances experienced between workers and consumers (Glendinning, 2008). Seal (2002, in Seal, 2005) points out that workers themselves often do not acknowledge this power imbalance.

People entering the homelessness system for the first time may have limited knowledge of how specialist homelessness and housing sectors operate (Smith et al, 2014; Westmore & Mallett, 2011, Seal, 2005). As such, workers are required to have specialist knowledge of these systems, making expert housing information essential to facilitating engagement and promoting consumer choice (Planigale & Stebbins, 2013; Luby & Gallagher; 2012). However, possessing knowledge in itself is not sufficient. Planigale & Stebbins (2013, p. 60) stressed that 'crucial' to housing and housing related support is workers' ability to 'to explain the material and support clients to assimilate the information'.

The process of engaging with consumers is not immediate and can take time to develop. Gronda (2009) has suggested that full engagement between a worker and a consumer can take up to six months to develop. However, active engagement will

assist effective case management, which is characterised by a persistent, reliable, intimate and respectful relationship that delivers comprehensive and practical support (Gronda 2009).

Housing focused assessment

This section examines the methods of assessment that help to identify interventions that support people to gain and maintain housing. As Bevan (1998, in Seal, 2005) notes, assessment should always be seen as a process, rather than an event. As noted in the previous section, assessment should focus on active participation by consumers in identifying their needs and goals. This section on assessment is not intended to review or supersede existing program and agency assessments. Instead, it is intended to analyse the key and/or additional elements of practice which facilitate access to housing, identify barriers to housing, and identify opportunities to gain housing.

Understanding barriers to gaining housing

In their rapid rehousing model, the NAEH (2009, p.6) notes that key to successful rehousing is a worker 'understanding the individual's barriers to getting and keeping housing – and finding ways to eliminate or compensate for those barriers'.

They key barriers to securing housing for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness identified in the literature are summarised below.

Financial barriers:
- low income (TUV, 2008; Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, 2012)
- debt (Slesnick & Erdem, 2012; Schetzer & StreetCare, 2013).

Discrimination
- criminal records, particularly for people leaving prison (Willis & Makkai, 2008; Slesnick & Erdem, 2012; Schetzer & StreetCare, 2013).
- age - older people (Westmore & Mallett, 2011; Batterham et al, 2012) and young people(Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, 2012)
- lack of employment (Slesnick & Erdem, 2012; TUV, 2008).

Poor housing histories:
- history of anti-social behavior (Povey, 2010)
- prior evictions (Slesnick & Erdem, 2012).

These barriers may not be discrete and often overlap. For example, people trying to access the private rental market when on a low income, face discrimination, even when the rent is affordable (TUV, 2008; Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, 2012).

Housing histories and rent preparedness assessment

A person's housing history can provide insight into the barriers to both gaining and maintaining tenure. For example, consumers may have had a history of secure tenures, but faced either an unexpected decrease in income (redundancy, relationship breakdown, illness) or a substantial expense which moved them into crisis (Haig Friedman et al, 2007). Timely support combined with stabilization services can often

help these individuals and households to resume stable housing. In other instances, people may have had a lifetime of disrupted and insecure housing, which may require longer term or more intensive assistance.

Luby & Gallagher (2012) promote a needs based approach in their guidelines for assisting individuals leaving correctional facilities to find accommodation. Their guidelines promote assessing tenancy management and sustainment skills, money management, income and affordability, ability to share a house (including risk to self and others) and ongoing support needs, in combination with developing a housing action plan.

Harris (2008) found that a key step in successfully housing women escaping family violence was establishing 'a relevant housing and employment related history' (Harris, 2008, p. 8). This is prepared with a worker prior to contacting real estate agents and includes relevant information on women's employment histories, existing skills that may boost employability and, therefore, their income potential and previous histories of home ownership and/or successful tenancies. The history is used when approaching agents to show past successes in housing and future goals.

A detailed housing history and an assessment of preparedness to rent, can highlight areas of ongoing need for a consumer, and be used by a worker to refer on to appropriate services (May, 2000).

Assessing housing preferences and needs

A critical step that SHS workers perform, involves determining with the consumer, the type of housing that is most appropriate. This includes matching the consumers personal preferences with realistic outcomes (Slesnick & Erdem, 2012; Luby & Gallagher; 2012).

A range of housing options may be available to individuals and families which may include:
- remaining in existing housing with interventions (see page 39 – Tenancy stabilisation and sustainment).
- access to social housing (either through community housing or public housing)
- access to affordable housing (consumer pays up to 80 per cent of market rent) through a community housing provider.
- access to the private rental sector as a sole occupier
- permanent supportive housing
- share housing in the private rental sector
- rooming houses
- returning to the family home.

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Discussions with consumers should focus on choice, affordability and sustainability. Luby et al. (2012) suggested in their toolkit for assisting young people into the private rental sector that conversations around options may include:

- how much money people will have left after rent (through assessment of income and budget)
- other costs such as travel, bills and food
- whether share housing is an option
- expectations of share housing (social aspects, guests, cleaning).

Assessing current income and existing debt

'The first form of exclusion is access to adequate income, whether from employment or from social benefits. Whether people can afford housing is a joint function of housing costs and income, so people with lower incomes are at greater risk of homelessness' (Shinn, 2010, p. 30).

A US study found that the key determinants of housing stability were entitlement-income (welfare payments) and housing subsidies (Zlotnick et al, 1999). Ensuring individuals are receiving the correct benefits is essential, and workers should facilitate priority interventions for consumers if required (Mackenzie et al, 2007). Ensuring an individual is ready-to-rent requires assessment and support around income entitlements and responding to existing debt and/or arrears (see for instance; Zierler et al, 2013; Mackenzie et al; Crane et al, 2011; Batterham et al, 2012; Westmore & Mallett, 2011).

In an early intervention HOME Advice project, resolving Centrelink issues was a case-goal for 81 per cent of families. With specialist advice and support, this goal was achieved for 93 per cent of families (MacKenzie, 2007). Building collaborative relationships with Centrelink workers has been shown in to facilitate greater access to appropriate payments, respond to debt and access to Commonwealth Rental Assistance (Planigale & Stebbins, 2013; Mackenzie et al, 2007).

In a review of the Law and Justice Foundation's Legal Needs Survey 2003, Forrell et al (2005) found an overwhelming number of people who were homeless had housing-related debt issues in the preceding 12 months (rent arrears, damage to property and outstanding debt). Workers can assist consumers to identify existing debt (Jones & Costello, 2013), to respond to debt (Mackenzie et al, 2007; Jones & Costello, 2013) and where necessary, make referrals to specialist financial counselling services (Mackenzie et al, 2007).

In these responses, the role of specialist homelessness workers differs from that of financial counsellors and (in the Australian context) Centrelink workers. SHS workers

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provide advice and support and assist individuals to link to specialist income support and advice.

Finding housing

Locating a property

The initial assessment of housing needs and preferences should highlight tenure, locational and price considerations in consumers' preferences for housing. A range of interventions are employed by workers when assisting people to find properties. These include providing information about web-based property locators, web based share housing options, the names of real estate agents, printed information about local rentals, right through to assistance to apply directly for properties as well as assistance in moving in. Planigale & Stebbins (2013) recommend that housing information should be clear and concise, delivered consistently as a prepared resource, provide a quick guide to housing options and direct clients to where to obtain further information.

Particular groups who may need additional housing information include:

- people inexperienced in independent living or with limited independent living skills (see for example, Jones & Costello, 2013)
- people with intellectual disabilities who may need assistance in understanding and filling out forms (see for example, Beer et al, 2011)
- people with persistent mental health issues who may need advocates to assist them to secure accommodation (see for example, SANE, 2008)
- older people experiencing homelessness for the first time who may need assistance navigating service systems (see for example, Westmore & Mallett, 2011; Batterham et al, 2012)
- people from non-English speaking background and refugees who may need translator advice, and assistance in understanding tenancies agreements (see for example, Settlement Council of Australia, 2012).

A recent study into the use of mobile phones for people who are homeless, found 34 per cent use the technology to find accommodation, with 27 per cent of people using the internet on their phone to find accommodation (Humphry, 2014). The study also found that mature adults are less likely to have a mobile phone, and 40 per cent reported never using the internet. While providing information about online and paper based property searches can be useful for consumers who use this technology, it should be joined with advocacy and assistance by workers. In addition, workers need to use other methods to support consumers who are not familiar with information technology. Harris (2008), found that key support work in locating a property included the worker identifying and providing information on suitable properties based on an assessment, and actively following up with consumers within two days, to firstly determine progress, and secondly to assess whether they needed further help beginning the property search.

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A number of studies have stressed the importance of making a good impression when viewing and applying for properties (TUV, 2008; Luby & Gallagher, 2012). Workers attending inspections with consumers can assist the individual to develop skills in liaising with landlords and making a positive first impression (Harris, 2008). In addition, by attending inspections with consumers, workers can also provide an introduction to the local neighborhood (Crane et al, 2011; Slesnick & Erdem, 2012).

Liaising with landlords

Workers proactively investing time in building relationships with landlords is a key component of rapid re-housing and other private rental housing models and assists an agency and worker to build lasting, mutually beneficial relationships with landlords.

This approach both reduces barriers to people accessing housing and provides landlords with an ongoing commitment to supporting tenants either practically and/or financially (Slesnick & Erdem, 2012; Harris; 2008). Smith et al (2014), examined success factors in housing establishment and identified the importance of formal support from homeless agencies in establishing tenancies, including liaising with landlords.

The NAEH (2013) suggest the following key actions when engaging landlords locally:
- developing a plan for recruiting landlords
- identifying incentives a program can provide when recruiting landlords (for example follow-up case management, financial assistance, and on ability to help fill units quickly).
- identifying the staff taking the responsibility for housing search and landlord recruitment.
- Ensuring housing search and landlord engagement is an ongoing process. It is important not wait to recruit landlords until the person needing housing is in front of you. Successful rapid re-housing providers have a list of landlord partners that they can contact as soon as a new client enrolls in the program.

Responding to any negative perceptions of landlords and agents towards people on low-incomes has been shown to be beneficial in assisting people to gain access to private rental properties (TUV, 2008; Luby & Gallagher, 2012). An evaluation of NSW's long-term housing and support service model, showed that some agencies use innovative approaches to engage real estate agents. The North Coast Accommodation Project (NCAP) has developed an extensive marketing strategy to promote the program, and recruiting workers with both case management experience and marketing skills. This allows the workers to gain the confidence of agents, and to demonstrate an ability to provide ongoing support to consumers. Agents are made aware that the workers will be assisting clients with support to apply for properties, and in supporting tenancies. This was highlighted as a key success factor for the model (Ardis, 2013).

Harris (2008) found that successful work with landlords and property managers involves setting clear boundaries from the outset – which includes ongoing support for

the tenant if there are significant issues with the tenancy, but property managers liaise directly with the tenant regarding standard tenancy issues (late rent, repairs, complaints).

The Doorway project, of the Mental Illness Fellowship Victoria (MI Fellowship), successfully partnered with 27 real estate agencies to provide a Housing First program. The project initially sought expert advice from the Real Estate Institute of Victoria (REIV) to engage with landlords. REIV sent out a letter of introduction and an endorsement of the project (Nous Group, 2014b). Following this formal engagement, workers focused on providing information about the supports provided to both agents and the landlords.

The intensive time and effort workers spent developing relationships with landlords created a level of engagement that was beyond that initially expected. In some cases, agents provided consumers with character references, waived requirements for particular items of paperwork required for applications, or helped to identify suitable cheaper accommodation options in the context of the Doorway pilot program ending (Nous Group, 2014b).

Using financial support to remove housing barriers

A range of brokerage models operate throughout Australia which aim to assist low-income families to access housing in the private rental sector. Throughout the literature, there is evidence of brokerage being successfully used to pay bonds and rent, to establish a household and to assist with moving costs (Jones & Costello, 2013; Harris, 2008).

Workers can provide valuable support to consumers by assisting them to source and apply for brokerage (Smith et al, 2014; Jones & Costello, 2013).

The use of brokerage may be required not just early in tenancies, but potentially throughout the tenancy. The MI Fellowship Doorway project also used brokerage to cover landlord insurance and to provide a guarantee of funds to be used if and when repairs were required at the end of the tenancy (Nous Group, 2014b). In addition, consumers were provided with a twelve month rental subsidy (based on the area in which they were living and on their level of income) (Nous Group, 2014).

The Victorian Homelessness Strategy Pilot Housing Options for Women Experiencing Family Violence (HOW) pilot assisted 42 women into the private rental sector during 2006-2007 (41 of whom sustained their tenancy). The project outlined three timeframes over which financial support can be provided – all based on women's level of income and their capacity to support their tenancy on an ongoing basis. Some women may need significant initial funding (such as six weeks rent in advance), others may require medium term support (for instance rent in advance and weekly support over a few months) or longer term support (ongoing financial help for six months) (Harris, 2008).

Some creative methods that have been used overseas to minimize barriers to housing, including:

- In a study of working with substance using mothers, a US study successfully negotiated utility-arrears brokerage provided to landlords to accept what otherwise may be seen as higher risk families (Slesnick & Erdem, 2012).
- Providing additional financial deposits or incentives for landlords to accept consumers – including first and last month's rent in advance (NAEH, 2009).

Applying for a property

Applying for a property can be daunting. Research has shown some key ways in which workers can assist households and individuals to apply for housing. Of particular benefit is ensuring individuals had all the relevant information ready to apply for a property, and assistance in filling in applications – this applies both to private and social housing (SANE, 2010; Crane et al, 2011; Westmore & Mallett, 2011, Smith et al, 2014).

In the instance that a person has a poor rental history, or no rental history, there are potential benefits of providing character references to landlords (Macy-Hurley et al, 2010; Luby & Gallagher, 2012; Luby, Gallagher& Clark, 2012; Nous Group, 2014). For those with poor rental histories, character references were seen to show owners or agents that the 'prospective renter has taken responsibility for past indiscretions or problems' (Macy-Hurley et al, 2010, p. 5). Macy-Hurley et al's (2010) practice guide, noted that this approach is most effective when combined with advocacy from the worker or service. Additionally advocacy letters from workers can assist agents and landlords to help better understand a consumers circumstances.

Receiving and accepting a property offer and moving in

Receiving and accepting a property offer is the next key component of securing accommodation for individuals and families who are homeless. Some barriers to a person being able to accept a property include a lack of access to bonds and rent (TUV, 2008). For this reason, financial support needs to be readily accessible when a property offer is made (see above).

Once a property offer is accepted, clients should be offered assistance in moving in (Lucas & Morrissey, 2013; Slesnick & Erdem, 2012; McKenzie et al 2007; Neuburger, 2003). This mitigates the high costs associated with moving house, particularly when bond and rents have been paid.

In other instances, people may have no possessions to move. Ensuring clients have furniture is essential to resettling a person or household (Hennessy et al, 2005; Crane et al, 2011; Slesnick & Erdem, 2012; Smith et al, 2014). Warnes et al (2010) reported than in the FOR-HOME project, a longitudinal study working with 400 formerly homeless single people being transitioned into permanent housing, 94 per cent were

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relocated to unfurnished accommodation. Of these 57 per cent had no bed and 67 per cent had no oven. While 73 per cent of people remained housed after 15/18 months, the lack of furnishings had a significant impact on individuals. Some people had to purchase essentials with credit or other forms of loans, which placed them immediately back in debt. Others had very little money left over for day-to-day expenses, which affected quality of life.

In the NSW review of the MISHA project, household packages were provided to all participants when they moved into a property – these included basics such as bedding, white goods and kitchen equipment. However televisions and radios had to be purchased by the participants (Conroy et al, 2014). In the MI Fellowship Doorway project, consumer choice in furnishing their homes (such as colour and variety of whitegoods) contributed to participants not feeling feel institutionalised (NousGroup 2014b).

Ensuring that utilities are connected when a person moves in to their home is an important, but sometime overlooked step in resettlement. Individuals may need assistance in this area, particularly if they have not previously had experience with utility connection (Neuburger, 2003; Smith et al, 2014).
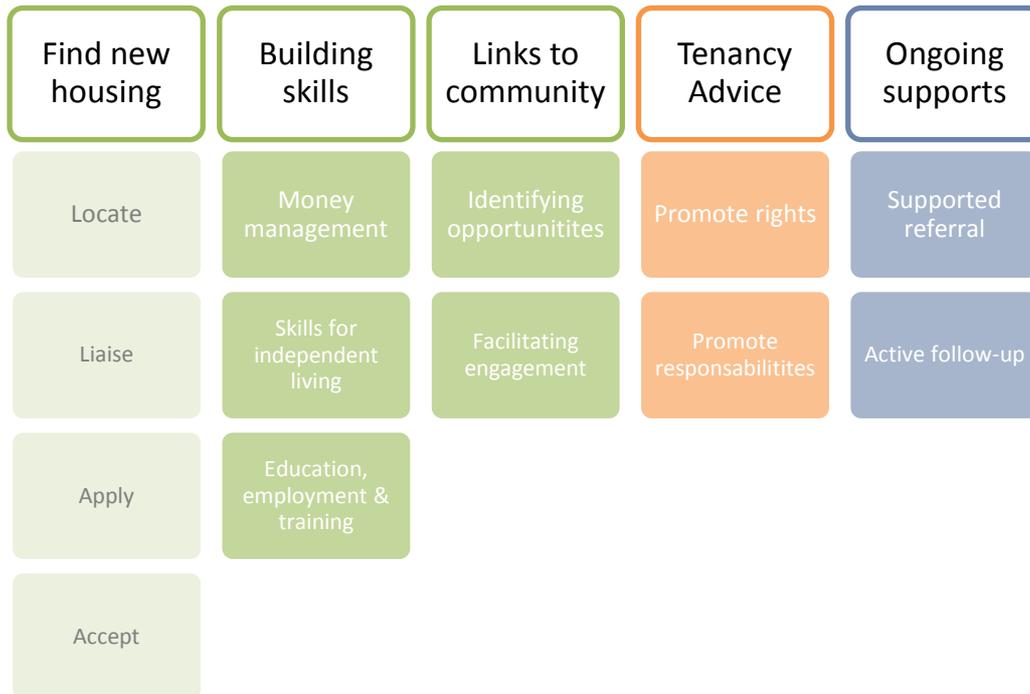
Resettlement and stabilisation

Resettlement and stabilisation are the processes that move a person who is homeless into 'more permanent, often independent, accommodation…and includes the support that is provided to sustain people in their tenancies' (Homeless Link, 2012, p.2). As noted by Parkinson (2004, p. viii), there can be challenges and constraints in providing support once someone has secured 'permanent' housing 'based on a system assumption that once housing crisis is resolved, clients are no longer in need of support to maintain their tenancy'. Resettlement services and support, provide 'practical, emotional and financial help' to assist formerly homeless individuals and families 'to make an effective transition to a new home ' (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2003, p. 20). It moves from core activities that the worker 'does' for a client, to 'teaching skills', tenancy knowledge, and facilitating community engagement with the client. It is important to note that the processes listed in the resettlement and stabilisation section of this review will not always occur in a linear fashion. Some activities outlined will occur concurrently, some will occur episodically – and all will be determined by the individual. In addition, some individuals will require very little assistance to resettle and stabilise in housing, while others may need much more intensive support.

For people who are presenting to services at risk of homelessness, the focus of the work will be on stabilizing current accommodation, either while more appropriate accommodation can be found, or with a goal of sustaining the tenancy long-term.

The most significant body of work on resettlement and stabilisation has been documented in the UK, and formed part of the UK government's 2002 agenda to tackle homelessness. It should be noted here, that in many UK models resettlement also includes locating a property; however, this step is addressed separately in this project.

UK research has examined the experience of resettling single homelessness people into mainstream housing (private and public tenancies without long term support). In preparation for resettlement, workers assisted with independent living skills, debt, mental health and substance use issues and, with engaging in education, training or employment (Crane et al, 2011).

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Resetlement and stabilisation

Find new housing	Building skills	Links to community	Tenancy Advice	Ongoing supports
Locate	Money management	Identifying opportunitites	Promote rights	Supported referral
Liaise	Skills for independent living	Facilitating engagement	Promote responsabilitites	Active follow-up
Apply	Education, employment & training			
Accept				

Building Skills

Money management

Throughout the literature, budgeting skills are identified as essential to tenancy management (Luby & Gallagher, 2012; Jacobs et al, 2007). In addition to assisting people to gain housing, provision of financial literacy skills is shown to assist people in insecure tenancies to sustain their housing.

The FOR-HOME study examined the resettlement experience and outcomes of 400 single men with complex histories entering private rental. Over 15 to 18 months, 73 per cent had retained their original tenancy, and eight per cent had moved to a new tenancy (Crane et al, 2011). Key challenges to independent living were found to relate to financial management and paying bills. Of those in the study, only 50 per cent had access to a tenancy support worker after being housed (Crane et al, 2011). Those who did receive help were less likely to have rent arrears both at the time of interview, and in the previous nine to 12 months. Key work included claiming benefits, organizing payment of rent and utility bills, responding to repairs and emotional support.

Warnes et al (2010) reported than less than half the FOR-HOME participants were provided with advice or training about managing money prior to moving. While many participants did not believe this was relevant to them, people did later experience

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problems. Young people were the largest group refusing help who later reported financial problems. Assisting people to stabilise their income prior to entering a tenancy, as well as providing information about local services that can provide financial counselling, may help prevent people entering financial crisis.

The HOME Advice project for families at risk of homelessness found families often needed longer support with financial management issues than offered by traditional case management services (Mackenzie et al, 2007). In this study, the worker assisted the family with around six months of support. Supports included budgeting, referral to financial counselling and advice, assisting families to negotiate with real estate agents and with housing authorities to maintain tenancies and prevent evictions. Agencies also provided resources to pay for rent arrears, utility bills and transportation costs and provided material aid. During the period of support, 86 per cent of families maintained adequate housing. A follow-up study six to twelve months after support ended, found 72 per cent of families had not experienced any further incidence of homelessness.

Key work for the specialist homelessness worker relates to the initial and ongoing assessment of income and debt, provision of basic budgeting skills, and referral to financial counselors if required.

Skills for independent living

Skills for independent living such as cooking, cleaning and maintaining social networks are essential for sustaining a tenancy.

A 'life skills intervention' was tested in a sample of convenience of homeless adults with mental illnesses in America. Helfrick & Frogg (2007) saw improvements in participants who received training modules about home, food, money, self-care management and staying safe in the community. Improvements were found immediately after training, but also three and six months following the completion of training. In addition, participants in the study reported using their life skills manuals and other resources provided when they encountered difficulties.

The NSW Misha Project worked with rough sleepers and single homeless men with complex needs. Workers provided help with living skills where the need arose. If a client needed support with skills such as cooking and cleaning, the worker visited more frequently to monitor and assist with hygiene issues and household cleanliness. For clients with particularly high needs in this area, the workers organized home care services. (Conroy et al 2014). The key here was to find the balance between 'intervention and encouragement of self-reliance' (Conroy et al 2014, p. 32).

A Canadian study looked for the key life skills which would assist someone to sustain a tenancy and found service users and consumers identified the following needs:
- Service navigation
  - respectful relationships

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- o self-advocacy.
- Tenancy
  - o The Residential Tenancy Act
  - o being a good tenant and neighbor
  - o cooking and home maintenance.
- Financial management
  - o budgeting
- Stress and anger management
- Mental health management
- Communication
- Assertiveness
- Employment readiness
- Insight building. (Kamloops Homelessness Action Plan (HAP), 2013, p. 29)

The study also highlighted barriers to participation in life skills training. These included persistent mental health issues, transportation issues, and barriers to navigating service systems. Recommendations that can be used by housing-focused support workers to assist people to participate in life skills training include provision of transport tickets, onsite child care and community information resources (Kamloops, HAP, 2013).

Employment, education and training

The relationship between housing instability, homelessness, and unemployment is well established in the literature. People with low levels of education or who are unemployed have been found in the research to be more likely to be living in unsuitable housing (Mallett et al, 2011). Crane et al (2011) found a strong relationship between debts, eviction threats and intermittent employment.

For individuals and families of working age, employment can provide an effective buffer from entering homelessness and repeated homelessness. However, housing instability is also shown to impede a person's ability to both find and maintain employment. Mavromaras et al (2011, p. 23) noted that 'a period of housing instability often results in the deterioration of established (and perhaps more useful) networks and relationships' which could assist someone to find employment.

This highlights an important role workers can play in linking people to education, employment and training opportunities. Jones and Costello, (2013, p. 3) referred to 'housing focused, but not housing constrained' financial supports to help young people remain engaged in education and training activities. Financial support can help with the cost of courses (Jones & Costello, 2013), including debt from studying (Garden et al, 2014) and things such as the cost of transport (Garden et al; 2014, Mavromaras et al 2011). The provision of material and financial incentives during the transition to work also assisted people to not enter rental arrears (Hough et al, 2013).

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In addition to gains in financial stability, employment is seen as increasing a person's self-worth, assisting them to rebuilding relationships, form new relationships and enhance feelings of contribution to local community (Hough et al, 2013).

To promote employment options, jobseekers need a range of assistance including housing, medical, food and legal services. Coordination of these services was found to be a key success factor in employment outcomes and may help ensure that people aren't trapped in a 'cycle of continuous training, service provision, hope and frustration' (Mavromaras et al, 2011, p.44). Shaheen & Rio (2007) stressed the need to create a culture of personal empowerment which recognizes the consumer's personal strengths and existing survival skills. This together with referrals to job services may assist people who, through housing insecurity and homelessness have lost valuable networks.

In the evaluation of the Homeless and Drug Dependent Trial, Rayner (2004) outlines the activities and benefits of an intensive work related program delivered in-house. 'Start Here' worked with consumers for a month with a suite of offerings including personal development, the provision of information about employment services and available courses, the provision of a computer lab, advice on resumes, confidence building and self-esteem work, and recruitment to work on 'The Big Issue'. As well as increased opportunities to participate, Rayner reported reduced boredom and improved engagement between staff and consumers.

Other activities found in the literature that assist work readiness include engaging in courses, voluntary work and work placements (Hough et al, 2013). These build confidence, as well as prepare people for changes in routine. Participants who are ready for work should also be given information about implications of working, including impacts on entitlements. A New Zealand study found that people who accepted casual or intermittent employment found it hard to effectively budget, and this in turn could increase economic instability (Garden et al, 2014).

Mavromaras et al (2011) found that while ongoing full time employment is both desired and desirable, it may not be always achievable. They recommended flexible pathways be established both within and outside of mainstream employment, noting that casual and subsidized work in may in fact be the successful outcome. This may be particularly relevant for people who do not have 'the social capital needed to attain or maintain successful integration into work' (Mavromaras et al, 2011, p.6).

It has been suggested that long term support, in relation to employment should be conducted by government (or specialist employment) agencies, while assistance related to accommodation and work should be conducted by support workers (Hough et al, 2013). The study found that without ongoing support from their workers after commencing employment, some participants in the study felt abandoned. While the study worked mainly with people in crisis accommodation, it found that for people who had moved on to other forms of accommodation the support received from their

key worker, was 'invaluable to coping during the transition into independent living and work'.

Tenancy stabilisation and sustainment

Tenancy stabilization and sustainment services provide 'practical assistance, advice, information and community links... to enable people to access the range of services they need to keep their homes and settle into the local community... They also help people develop their capacity to manage their tenancies and access services for themselves' (Neuburger, 2003). Organizations therefore should include tenancy stabilization services when rehousing individuals.

Neuburger (2003), listed the following suite of services that families could access through tenancy sustainment services. In general, these services are available for around 12 months, and were delivered in a client-directed way, through regular visits to families in their own homes. These included:

- advice and advocacy in other key areas including housing repairs, access to health services, school places for children and community care;
- social and emotional support through positively seeking to engage families, regular contact and listening and responding to identified needs;
- supporting children in their development, education, health, behaviour and play and also providing support to parents with their children;
- referrals to specialist agencies where necessary or wanted, such as drug or alcohol counselling, social services, health and school or other counselling for children with behavioural problems.

Promoting rights and responsibilities

Promoting rights and responsibilities in tenancies, is a positive step in assisting a person to maintain a tenancy. It allows an individual to not only know what is expected of them, but also about the responsibilities of their landlord. As the NAEH (2009) notes, effective rapid rehousing models 'do not assume that tenants understand either their leases or the "unwritten rules" in new housing'.

Fryson et al (2007) examined *Supporting People* initiatives in the UK, focusing on programs for people with an intellectual disability. The study found that many of the clients interviewed had limited knowledge of their legal rights and responsibilities as a tenant. Only three of the 31 people interviewed knew they had a tenancy agreement. The day-to-day support workers, who were responsible for assisting tenants to exercise their rights, similarly had very limited legal knowledge and often did not conceptualize a tenants rights as relating to their tenancy. By comparison, local authority housing workers and housing association officers were seen as having a well-developed awareness of residential tenancies and were 'keen to emphasise the rights accorded to individuals via tenancy agreements' (p. 24).

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The need to receive and understand information about tenancy law is particularly important. The Law Foundation on NSW, examining the needs of homeless people in NSW, found that throughout the populations they worked with, there was a lack of understanding about legal rights. In many ways, workers are required to supply consumers with this knowledge. In examining the contribution of housing support workers to joined-up services, as part of the Supporting People Health Pilot program, Cameron et al (2010) found that workers required knowledge of housing issues including housing legislation and tenancy rights.

Some novel strategies used for assessing and developing knowledge of rights and responsibilities include ideas such as:
- testing knowledge of rights and responsibilities through routine quizzes, and, if knowledge is limited, providing formal or informal advice and guidance (NAEH, 2009)
- running group programs for potential renters (such as the NESAY Renters program, which provides pre and post workshop evaluations - Refugee Council of Australia (2013)).

The MI Fellowship's Doorway model pairs each participant with a Housing & Recovery Worker (H&RW) as well as a Peer H&RW. The model has clients developing tenancy management skills as a key program outcome. While the H&RW actively monitors tenancies, and advocates for clients, the model is designed to allow participants to progressively deal one-on-one with landlords and real estate agents (NousGroup 2014b). However, workers are on hand throughout the program to discuss with participants their tenancies. Consistency of workers is seen as a key benefit of the program, and facilitates increased engagement with the program, and an increased ability for workers to troubleshoot problems arising from tenancies.

Repairs & Maintenance
Often, people who have experienced homelessness or housing crisis are reluctant to report maintenance issues. This is particularly true for people in the private rental sector and rooming houses, as they fear that the landlord or agent will either increase their rent, or evict them if they complain.

Poor conditions in properties can have a direct impact on both health and wellbeing (Mallett et al, 2011). In addition, dissatisfaction with the condition of a property can make individuals reluctant to stay, perpetuating homelessness (Neuburger 2003). Particular conditions that have impacted on decisions to stay have included the condition of the property (particularly damp and mould), and problematic and/or unresponsive landlords (Smith et al, 2014).

Foundations (UK) have provided a good practice guide for Home Improvement Agencies (HIA) working with vulnerable tenants in the private rental sector. HIA's help vulnerable populations maintain independence in their own home. The guide focuses on assisting workers to promote tenants' rights and responsibilities, and to either take

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a lead role in advocating for them, or take responsibility for administrative follow-up – based on tenant choice. Key aspects of good practice for these services include:

- Helping people access their tenancy agreement (if they do not already have one)
- Understand and explaining to tenants who is responsible for what
- Supporting tenants to write letters to notify of repairs
- Gaining permission from tenants to progress complaints if repairs have not been undertaken within nominated time-frames
- Promote an awareness within HIA's that some landlords will ask tenants to leave if they complain about conditions
- The worker collects evidence, and documents all contact if necessary.

Particularly pertinent to the provision of housing-focused support when consumers do not feel capable or are unable to advocate on their own behalf, workers, with consumer consent, will assist.

Preventing evictions

Robyn Kennedy Consultants (2013) reviewed three NSW services with programs aimed at preventing evictions in social housing and private rental. The services worked with clients for up to 16 weeks. All services reported a 97 per cent or higher success rate. The review examined housing supports that prevented evictions as well as non-housing supports. A key success factor in two of the programs was the development of partnerships with local real estate agents – and service's ability to provide financial support in responding to rental arrears. The remaining service was unable to assist with rental arrears and the formal evaluation found this was a key barrier to establishing relationships with real estate agents. Flexible tailored financial assistance that promotes client contribution to the resolution of presenting issues was also found to be important.

The other supports outlined in this section on stabilisation and sustainment may also supplement financial assistance provided and help to prevent evictions over the long term.

Links to community

'A socially inclusive society is defined as one where all people feel valued, their differences are respected, and their basic needs are met so they can live in dignity. Social exclusion is the process of being shut out from the social, economic, political and cultural systems which

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contribute to the integration of a person into the community' (Cappo (2002) in VicHealth(2005))

Pleace & Quilgars (2013, p. 24) define social integration as the ability for disadvantaged individuals to be able to 'live, work, learn and participate in their communities to the extent that they wish to, and with as many opportunities as other members of the wider community'. Pleace & Bretherton (2014) noted loneliness, and boredom could result in recurrent homelessness. Bowpitt & Harding (2008) also found that a key element of tenancy sustainment was assisting people to participate in their local community as this tackles isolation and gives people 'a valued social network... and it further enhances their self-image as local citizens'.

Facilitating engagement in communities

Bowpitt & Harding (2008, p. 8) believe workers have a key role in assisting people to have an interest 'not only in their homes, but also in the neighborhoods they were rehoused'. This both responds to social exclusion and assists individuals to form additional, beneficial support networks. Once again, consumers' choices and preferences should drive identification of opportunities in the community.

The MOSS (2005, p. 15) study examined factors that help people sustain long-term tenancies. They noted that participants felt frustration in terms of the limited access to 'crucial information, supports, resources and their disconnection from community'.

Longitudinal studies working with the long-term homeless have noted that facilitating social connection and social support is incredibly challenging. Johnson et al (2014) reported that over a 36-month period, there was little change for participants despite receiving housing and intense support. Deep forms of social exclusion experienced by the long-term homeless make 'incorporation back into mainstream society a slow, complex and difficult journey' (Johnson et al , 2014, p. 22).

The MI Fellowship's Doorway Project found that over the three years of the project, people's natural support networks did change over time, albeit slowly. In particular, friends were seen as more actively supporting recovery, with additional support received from family, neighbours and colleagues (NOUS Group, 2014a).

Consumer participation programs may show promise in providing a space for formerly homeless people to participate in the community. An innovative program in the UK is St Mungo's Peer Advice Link (PAL). In this program people who have experienced homelessness volunteer to help people engage with their new communities including helping with building local support networks, and linking people to supports within their community. This program provides a structured volunteering program for formerly homeless individuals, and facilitates social inclusion programs for the recently housed. This approach was also demonstrated in the Doorway project (Nous, 2014b).

Workers and agencies can play a key role in facilitating consumers' engagement in activities. Key barriers people face in engaging in their local communities are both financial and a lack of information about what is available in their area (Broadway, 2005). Solutions put forward in this report included discount cards and/or negotiating free access to events and activities for people who have been formerly homeless.

Floating supports

According to Bowpitt & Harding (2008) the most effective support work should be available not just through 'stabilisation', but also through to a period when 'fuller restoration has been achieved' (p.10).

Floating support refers to lower intensity services and outreach delivered in people's homes with the aim of assisting them to sustain their tenancies. A key element of success in various programs that have managed to keep individuals and families housed (including individuals with complex needs) has been workers acting to 'join-up' services which address the multiple needs of a person experiencing homelessness – whatever those needs may be.

The Victorian Department of Human Services (2006) identified key issues for high risk tenancies as financial, nuisance behavior, mental health and substance misuse. To ensure housing stabilisation, areas identified as ongoing risks when preparing to secure housing, should also feed into an action plan for appropriate ongoing support.

Smith et al (2014), examined housing and wellbeing outcomes of formerly homeless individuals living in the private rental sector in the UK. At the end of the study, 19 months after securing a tenancy; two thirds of people who had remained housed experienced housing dissatisfaction. Key reasons for dissatisfaction were ongoing housing insecurity, amenity and personal issues. Outcomes were improved for those individuals who received some level of ongoing support, such as visits or weekly phone calls. Support for longer than six months was found to be as necessary for many people.

Smith et al (2014) found that the key areas where people needed ongoing support relate to:
- landlord disputes
- poor conditions and negotiating repairs and maintenance
- utility connection and bill errors
- problems with welfare payments
- debt issues
- renegotiating a lease
- seeking alternative accommodation
- eviction.

Hough (2010) examined the effectiveness of providing individual support packages to rough sleepers (an allocation of funds per individual to be used at their own discretion

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to facilitate finding permanent accommodation). The study found that 'long-term personalised support after resettlement, provided by one dedicated worker, was essential to maintaining tenancies'.

The length of support a person requires after securing housing has been shown to be specific to the individuals' existing or ongoing needs (Westmore & Mallett, 2011). For people with a long history of homelessness, these services are needed for a longer duration (Johnson et al, 2014). Eighteen months of or potentially indefinite support may be needed depending on the length of time of homelessness and the history of housing breakdown.

Facilitating ongoing supports

Clapton et al (2012) notes that while the provision of housing, particularly housing first programs have been shown to be beneficial, 'sustainable good outcomes … are dependent upon a range of interconnecting factors such as wrap-around supports'. If housing focused support is time limited, this will be required from mainstream services.

Seal (2005), has said that some of the key worker knowledge required to effectively refer a person on to a service includes understanding what services are available, eligibility criteria and internal procedures as well as strong skills in advocating for the consumer's needs.

Jones & Costello (2013), highlight the importance of workers establishing relationships with mainstream services in order to facilitate responsive and timely referrals. Beyond relationship building, they note that successful referrals are based on effective handovers, where the consumer's needs and history are able to be articulated to the new agency. They refer to this as a supported referral. Other key work that can assist engagement with ongoing supports includes attending appointments with consumers (Jones & Costello, 2013).

Summary of literature review

Across the literature, interventions that focus on accessing and maintaining housing have different names and operational models, and often serve different groups of people experiencing homelessness. For people who have experienced long-term homelessness, the move to a stable home may represent a significant shift in social roles and daily routines, and require specific specialist support (Gronda et a al, 2011).

This literature review aims to identify the key activities that workers undertake in order to assist people to gain and sustain housing that can be applied to a range of populations. A number of overlapping but distinct areas of intervention and activities have been identified. They include engagement, the use of housing focused assessment, finding housing, and resettlement and stabilisation activities.

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The literature identifies engagement with consumers as the cornerstone of providing housing-focused support. Engagement strategies may differ for various client groups - such as assertive outreach for consumers with long-term histories of homelessness, or flexible outreach for young people. In call cases engagement must be tailored to the individual. While engagement can take time and should be ongoing, the following strategies are effective:

- promoting consumer choice
- listening to the consumer
- presenting information in a way that consumers can readily understand.

Usually occurring alongside engagement activities, workers undertake assessment to identify a consumer's barriers to gaining housing, their housing histories, and ongoing support needs. Gathering a consumer's housing history can help a worker understand both periods of successful tenancy sustainment, as well as other supports that may be required to maintain a tenancy. Discussing housing preferences requires workers to guide consumers in examining what their wants and needs are, and what will be sustainable and affordable housing choices.

In conducting assessment, the literature highlighted the need ensure that consumers are receiving the correct income entitlements, as well as identify existing debts. Where required, workers in the specialist homelessness sector should respond to issues around debt by referring to a specialist financial counsellor.

The process of finding housing begins with the provision of clear and concise information, and, with the consumer, determining how much assistance they require to conduct housing searches and apply for properties. Once housing has been located, consumers may require assistance to apply for a tenancy and move into a property. For many consumers, financial assistance can help to remove initial barriers to securing housing. The literature highlights a number of key activities that workers may undertake with consumers at this stage, such as:

- assisting with filling out applications forms
- provision of character references
- assistance in moving into a property
- provision of furniture
- connection of utilities.

The literature review highlighted that efforts to resettle and stabilise a household are fundamental for both people who had been homeless or were at-risk of homelessness. Some people may require very little assistance to resettle in a new property and/or community, while people with long histories of housing instability may require ongoing or floating support, or permanent supportive housing. The literature highlighted the following areas where consumers most often needed skills development in order to sustain tenancies:

- money management

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- skills for daily living
- links to education, employment and training.

Often consumers benefitted from advice around their rights and responsibilities as a tenant, and the literature highlighted that workers should not assume people are aware of these rights. During the resettlement and stabilisation phase of housing focused support, referral to and active follow up of ongoing supports within the local community were beneficial.

The provision of ongoing or floating supports offered a safety net to prevent further evictions. In general the literature highlighted the benefit of linking people into supports in their local community that could respond if an issue came up, or returned.

Successful interventions in housing-focused support in the literature relied on a combination of practical supports, specialist knowledge, and workers ability to disseminate that knowledge to clients.

Analysis of focus groups and consultations

Methodology

Between September and January 2014, CHP held focus groups and consultations with consumers and practitioners in the Specialist Homelessness Sector (SHS). In total, the projected conducted six in-depth consultations and four focus groups (two with consumers and two with practitioners).

Consumers were recruited through CHP's Peer Education and Support Program (PESP) and a consumer participation register of people experiencing or who have experienced homelessness. Practitioners were recruited from the Victorian SHS. Agencies were asked to nominate leading practitioners through CHP's eNewsletter. In-depth consultations with practitioners were also undertaken when gaps were identified in the representation of service providers attending focus group (such as Aboriginal practitioners and regional practitioners).

Focus groups and in-depth consultations ran for up to two hours, and both practitioners and consumers were asked broad questions about building effective working relationships, the nature of assessments, locating housing and the resettlement process. (See Appendix 1 - 2). Focus groups were transcribed and thematically coded.

Advanced practitioners were asked to reflect on how they build rapport with consumers, the assessments they undertake and how information from assessments inform housing searches. Practitioners were asked about the specific activities that are carried out with consumers to obtain housing and their experience of supporting people to sustain tenancies.

Consumers were asked how practitioners facilitate engagement, the types of questions practitioners ask them before they start looking for housing, and their experience in locating housing. Consumers were asked whether they received any help to settle into their home or the community and whether, if a problem arose in their housing, they would return to their support worker or the agency for assistance.

The following section of the report provides a synthesis of the key themes that emerged from this qualitative analysis.

Engagement and building rapport

Initial and ongoing engagement strategies are essential for establishing a trusting relationship. Practitioners and consumers agree that the most effective forms of engagement are underpinned by a worker's communication style, transparent practice and ability to provide information to consumers in an accessible manner. The strategies detailed below are often interdependent and interrelated.

Consumer guided engagement

Advanced practitioners are clear that engagement must be be driven by the consumer and facilitated by the practitioner. Practitioners used a combination of soft and active engagement strategies to build rapport. Soft engagement strategies are used in initial meetings, where practitioners stress the importance of taking a slow approach. They allow consumers time to tell their stories, and practice reflective listening while acknowledging the consumers' lived experience of housing crisis and homelessness. Often practitioners report using these initial meetings to begin building the working relationship, as well as responding to immediate needs – for example by offering material aid or transport.

This approach allows consumers to slowly build a working relationship with practitioners. As one young consumer said:

'When I was going through court, my support worker would come from work, pick me up from my house, take me to court, stay at court with me until everything was sorted, then take me home… you see that the worker's going to be there'.

Promoting consumer involvement and choice is a key engagement practice, with practitioners noting that that focus must be on the individual consumer. One practitioner noted that her work is guided by:

'…tailoring that rapport building process with them. For some of the clients, rapport building might not necessarily be the most important thing. They want your information, they want your expertise, they want answers, the trust isn't the big issue'.

This was echoed by consumers, both in terms of positive experiences and practice deficits. Some consumers told the study they had been unaware (either from previous experiences or from a lack of knowledge of the service system) that they were able to influence their level of engagement with services.

A consumer with a long history of rough sleeping said that in his previous experiences with homelessness services, he had not been involved in decisions about his housing journey:

'All the options were taken away from me… I relied on that worker for everything where there was no need for that. I could manage. I just needed guidance and assistance'.

Another consumer noted:
'[The workers] would push and push and push me to make decisions… things I didn't want to do'.

Flexible engagement strategies

Active engagement strategies such as outreach are undertaken in relation to consumers who do not seek out services. For those who are involved in outreach models (particularly in assertive outreach), specialist practitioners articulate a practice in which they consider themselves a guest in the person's environment. As one outreach worker explained:

'We're very conscious when we first meet people that we're walking into their home so we have techniques that sort of make it more respectful. For example, walk further out, or call out like ten metres out before you get into their space, and not to sort of go in immediately'.

An Aboriginal tenancy worker highlighted how this notion of guesthood is a key cultural competency in her work, saying:

'In Community, you cannot walk into someone's home as a stranger and start poking around into their life. It would immediately freak them out … So you almost conduct a visit like you've been invited for morning tea…'.

Advanced practitioners believe that flexible engagement strategies help reduce perceived power imbalances between them and consumers and help to build rapport. For this reason, a number of practitioners meet consumers outside the office environment, in a neutral environment where the individual or family feel comfortable saying that this helped to build rapport.

A worker whose team engages with young people out in the community explained this further:

'It's about building their trust and doing it in a normalising way, such as going and doing things young people will do, so it doesn't look like they're in a worker-client relationship, it's normalised behaviour'.

Consumers told the study that workers attempting to reduce the potential for power imbalances is key to engagement:

'I've been dealing with services for a long time, I don't really respond to it when there's some kind of a power thing'.

Effective communication styles

Consumers noted that effective communication styles involved practitioners showing them respect and compassion, while acknowledging their lived experience of housing crisis and homelessness. Conversely, poor engagement relates to people feeling their lived experience and their history is neither heard nor understood.

Advanced practitioners understand that engagement may be a slow process, and that consumers need time to tell their story. In relation to initial meetings, one practitioner noted:

'It's really making sure the team have the emotional intelligence to be able to adequately assess where that person is at that point and let them dictate how they want that first session to go…'.

Consumers also found this non-judgmental open helpful when engaging with their worker:

'[The worker] made me feel normal, that it wasn't me that was crazy… she never judged me. She understood me as a person. She didn't push me'.

Managing expectations through transparent, professional practice

Practitioners unanimously reported that their work was underpinned by being honest with and respectful of consumers, while trying to manage their expectations. Practitioners try to foster professional and transparent practices through setting boundaries and providing accurate information. One practitioner specialising in accessing the private rental market noted:

'I'll start trying to set boundaries and set up realistic expectations about what our program requires and also what the housing system is like and the reality of what's available'.

While a rural THM practitioner told the study:

'The way to build rapport is to have that transparency and reliability… not making promises you can't keep… following up what you say you're going to do… Taking the time to explain what we can and can't do… not just saying "No you can't have that"… but "You can't have that because…"'.

Most consumers see a balance between professionalism and compassionate support as preferable. One consumer, living in supported accommodation told the study:

'I'm fortunate I can sit with my worker for an hour and talk about my housing issues… and after that hour we just sit and talk. And the ability to be able to sit down and communicate with someone… not just housing, not just jargon… I've never come across that.'.

Specialist worker knowledge

Practitioners and consumers see specialist worker knowledge in the engagement process as combining expert knowledge of the causes and impacts of trauma, housing crisis and homelessness. In addition, consumers understand that practitioners have the expert knowledge about housing, homelessness and community sectors that they need to resolve their housing issues. As such practitioners can assist consumers to navigate situations and systems that are either unfamiliar, stressful, or of which consumers are wary.

Consumers said they could quickly pick a worker with the specialist knowledge required to help them:
'In the first ten minutes you'll know if you're sitting with an idiot - or a really vital part of your case plan'.

Using assessment to inform practice

Practitioners noted that they conducted a range of assessments with consumers including examining housing history, income, debt, mental health, health, employment history, existing services and family or social supports. These assessments are undertaken to identify current needs, as well as help practitioners strategically plan housing options for consumers.

The importance of gradual and ongoing housing-focused assessment

Assessment that is ongoing, and evolves as rapport is built with consumers is essential to providing housing-focused support. As a health outreach worker noted, assessment is intentionally broad:
'…because I feel like homelessness cannot be fixed if the other elements are not touched'.

Advanced practitioners, where possible, take a gradual approach to assessment so as not to overwhelm consumers. However, practitioners again noted that the consumer should drive this process. In some instances, consumers are keen to get initial assessment completed, in order to begin the housing search. As one worker noted:
'People are coming to us, because they're clear on what they want and they're clear that they can't afford to live where they are anymore'.

Practitioners used initial assessment to begin establishing a working relationship that they would build on through more refined and detailed questions. They stressed that housing-focused assessment needs to be ongoing:
'While there may be a 'formal' assessment process, assessment will continue throughout the length and duration of that support period… you are learning about that person and building the relationship with that person and developing that over a long period of time'.

Determining appropriate housing

Advanced practitioners are highly aware of the need to provide suitable and sustainable accommodation for consumers, while acknowledging that housing affordability issues makes this a particularly challenging task.

Practitioners use their specialist knowledge when undertaking assessments to understand how a consumers' history has affected previous tenure, how it may affect future housing and the supports that will be needed to maintain a tenancy. The information captured during an assessment is fed into case management plans, as it assists practitioners to understand the initial barriers people face in gaining housing, as

well as providing them with a picture of which housing options will be appropriate to pursue with clients.

Specialist knowledge of local markets is used by practitioners to identify housing options. In regional areas, some tenancy managers working in THM's noted that housing options are limited to public housing if a person cannot access the private rental market.
'In a rural area – we're in a small town. Once they're blacklisted, the real estates all talk to each other, so that's the end of the story'.

Another worker noted that in small areas, simply having family or associates who are known to the agents can mean a person isn't able to access housing, and additionally, potential tenants face significant racial discrimination from agents.

Consumers report mixed experiences with assessment processes, both in terms of how they are undertaken and how practitioners use that information to inform housing options. They clearly articulated negative experiences they have had when they felt that practitioners did not possess the specialist knowledge required to direct them to realistic housing options.

Consumers with experiences of long-term disadvantage, who had been unable previously to sustain tenancies, spoke of the frustration they endured when practitioners directed them to locate their own private rental. As one consumer told the study:
'[My] medical condition has affected my ability to hold down long term employment, and to hold on to suitable accommodation… At various times, I've gone into private lease agreements, my own place… I was able to keep the place going for one and a half years, but in the end [hospitalisation] happened again, so I was back into a pretty temporary accommodation… When a worker hands me a form , perhaps talks about looking in the real estate and stuff like that, it's like, you don't get it. That's not realistic. You know, it just doesn't work, … like what type of a hole am I going to end up in, you know? … so it's just one ongoing cycle'.

Another consumer, who had experienced significant trauma as result of family violence since birth, reported a similar experience:
'When I was told to go to private real estate, I just knew, I was thinking, "you're joking, aren't you?" I've been evicted that many times…once you're blacklisted and you've got a bad credit rating, they're not going to look at you'.

Working with consumer preferences
Practitioners and consumers stressed the importance of working with consumers around their housing needs (such as proximity to schools and medical facilities) and preferences (such as size and location).

Both consumers and service providers indicated that workers providing information, and both assisting and allowing consumers to actively negotiate the tensions between their preferences and needs and affordability is particularly effective.

A consumer who had been in a supported and subsidised private rental program said that his practitioner provided him with information about a range of housing options that in turn helped him make informed choices.
'They have a philosophy of choice. They will not push you into something. The only thing my case worker pushed me on was I wanted to get a flat with a laundry… she said "You might have to let that go, because there aren't too many flats around that are affordable and have got their own laundry"…They make sure that you don't take the first one… I was in a flat within a month of meeting my caseworker, and in that time I knocked back four flats…'.

Practitioners have developed a range of tools to assist consumers to make informed choices. These include working through basic budgeting with them, demonstrating differences in the cost of different suburbs, working with public housing waitlist information, to using publicly available median rental data to show the variances between suburbs in a region. As one consumer reported:
'He did a thorough needs assessment, and what I'd like – where and what. He kept stressing to me that flexibility in location would be a valuable thing'.

While these examples represent good practice, this was not the experience for all consumers. Some consumers did not receive basic information about their housing options, nor any indication that they had choice in their housing, with one consumer saying:
'No one talked to me about housing options or what I could do or what I wanted or what was on offer'.

Consumers who had not actively been involved in planning their housing, reported feeling disempowered.
'Everything was done before I went in for an appointment – I'd show up and it was "I've done this, I've done that"… All the options were taken out of my hands, rather than me being given the options'.

Another consumer felt removed from the housing journey, and would prefer:
'[a] little bit of guidance and direction about the best avenues to pursue. Giving advice from their experience, but not taking it away from me… My housing is my issue. And it's something that I wanted to resolve'.

Another consumer told the study that the way in which her options were presented made her feel anxious and without options:
'If you want to live comfortably with you and your children… appropriate living, you're going to have to wait over ten years…so you need to have inappropriate living and hurry up and get out of here'.

Assisting consumers to gain access to housing

Once practitioners and consumers have assessed suitable housing options, leading practitioners reported providing a range of supports to consumers to locate and gain access to housing. This includes basic information provision, completing housing applications, private rental preparation and active rental searches alongside the consumer.

Provision of housing information

Advanced practitioners provide consumers with housing information both verbally and in written form. The types of information range from addresses of real estate agents, print outs of available properties, information about various social housing programs, guidance in conducting web based housing searches and advice about applying for housing. The need to ensure consumers are provided with resources and assisted to understand the information was emphasised by advanced practitioners.

Consumers who participated in the study reported mixed experiences of quality of information they received in relation to how practitioners assist them to use this housing information. At the most supported level, consumers are provided with information and walked through eligibility, applications and the process involved in securing housing. Some people accessing the private rental market report that their workers provided them with lists of available properties, and coordinated inspection times.

Other consumers report that they were provided with lists of housing options including crisis accommodation, rooming houses and housing associations. These lists are often quite large, and consumers were not always aware of what the housing options mean. However, the expectation from workers was that their search was self-directed. This was particularly challenging for some consumers, as they would spend days – and in some cases months – calling accommodation providers and waiting for vacancies.

Housing searches

Approaches used by practitioners to prepare consumers to undertake housing searches include one-on-one support around social housing applications and conducting private rental preparation workshops. These workshops either in groups or one-on-one include information about consumers' rights and responsibilities, applying for a property, presenting at an open for inspection and paying rent.

Consumers who receive proactive support in locating housing have far more positive experiences. A number of consumers spoke of practitioners taking them to view properties – both in the private and social housing systems.
'The process was going through and looking at places that were around… They'd say "we've got this, this, this and this"… You'd get an email saying these are available, then

they'd take you to the inspection… then they'd put in the form, then they'd advocate for you – the good reasons why you should get the place'.

Some advanced practitioners noted, that sometimes consumers are unwilling to allow them to join them in attending housing inspections as they did not want the real estate agent to know they are homeless. In these cases, practitioners ensured consumers knew what to expect when attending an open for inspection.

Consistent with the literature review, practitioners who are attempting to house people in the private rental sector note that they use a range of techniques to build relationships with real estate agents. These include head-leasing a property, providing annual landlord insurance, providing gardening services to the property to ensure upkeep as well as a range of financial incentives for either the landlord or the consumer (bond, subsidized rent etc). This allows consumers who are otherwise not able to access housing to be considered for properties. As one consumer said:
'It ended up being pretty easy to get a place, because of the program. The program paid to rent from the real estate agent – so they were guaranteed rent'.

Practitioners engaging with the private rental sector understood that agents were employed by the landlord, and understood the need to professionalise their relationships with landlords. This includes networking, inviting agents to information sessions, and considerable time maintaining these relationships once they are established.

Proactive support in conducting a housing search was not experienced by all consumers. Over half of the consumers who participated in the focus groups noted that services had expected them to find housing through directly calling services.
'They gave me a list and said 'There's a phone, start ringing'… and I got a rooming house… and that's the way it was for four years. I moved three times… I went back to [the service] and they gave me another list. The last time I tried to move without anyone helping me – it was 3 o'clock on a Friday afternoon. They said "here's a cheque, here's the address, this is the only bed in Melbourne"'.

Applying for a property and accepting an offer
In relation to applying for a property, effective practice was overwhelmingly found to include assistance in understanding the application process, as well as filling out an application. This was true for both private and social housing applications.

As one consumer accessing the private rental sector noted:
'They'd fill out the forms, and they'd talk to you about the question. And they may frame it in a different way to what you'd answer – just to get it through. And you read it and you sign it and put it in for you. And they send a letter along also promoting you as a good and reliable tenant'.

Consumers and practitioners both highlighted the specialist knowledge required of practitioners in relation to offers from social housing providers. Consumers felt empowered when practitioners were able to advocate either on their behalf or with the consumer, when an unsuitable property offer was made.

'So, my worker, I was told that I could refuse on certain conditions that I had already put on my form and that I had medical backing with, so it was a matter of saying, well, I can accept this place as long as it's brought up to a standard that's suitable'.

Conversely, some consumers were given poor advice about whether they could decline unsuitable social housing offers:

'I was told there's one offer – and I knew that wasn't true'.

Another consumer, who had spent years in a THM, felt pressured into accepting a property that was too small for her family

'I felt like I for bullied to accepting [the property], it was like hurry up and get out of there'.

Another consumer being temporarily housed in a rooming house style said she felt compelled to accept the first property offer which came up:

'I felt bad saying no, because I'm thinking I don't have a choice really'.

Some consumers had to wait a long time to receive a social housing offer, but noted that when an offer was made, things tended to happen very quickly.

'Bang out of the blue I get a call from the [worker]… and he said "I've got a public housing offer for you", and I said "This year?" and he said "No, right now"… and that was it'.

Preparedness to maintain housing

Prior to applying for permanent or long-term housing, and after securing housing, practitioners work to prepare people for maintaining their tenancies. .

This includes assisting people to develop skills for daily living, including grocery shopping, cleaning, property maintenance, cooking and budgeting. This appears to be particularly common when a person is in a youth refuge, temporary housing or a worker is involved to help them sustain their existing tenancy. In these instances, the level of support to develop skills is based on client choice and existing competencies. For instance, one youth worker said:

'Some young people have a lot of experience because they may have brought up their siblings throughout their life, so they are very good at their living skills'.

Consumers found that practitioners who recognise their existing abilities, can assist them to build on those skills to foster independence.

'[My worker] gave me a bit of confidence, and enough knowledge to navigate myself - but with her guidance. And that was good for me… I was really nice to have that power back, but I did make mistakes or have questions she was there'.

Moving into a home and moving into a community

Practical assistance provided in resettlement

Similar to other stages of housing focused support, practitioners noted that resettlement preparation and stabilisation often occurs alongside other activities. For instance, showing a person a property may also provide an opportunity for an orientation to the local neighborhood, including local shops, libraries and health services.

Some consumers receive significant support from practitioners in both moving into their new property and establishing their new home. This ranges from practitioners physically helping people move in, arranging electricity connection, to ensuring the house is furnished. Some consumers are given new furniture packages and some taken to source and select second hand furniture. Others are assisted to access No Interest Loan Schemes (NILS) for white goods and other essential items. One consumer, who was previously unaware that NIL Schemes existed said it made a significant difference in his ability to settle into a new home.

'If I hadn't had that help, I would have just had to have managed, and just tough it out I guess…. You know, just sleep on the floor for a while or something….'.

However, this level of support is not offered to all consumers. One consumer told the project how his support ended when he signed his lease:

'I went to see place, said yes, agreed to meet at 10am the next morning, signed the paperwork and that was it – the place was completely painted out, replaced all the carpets, put in new doors. It was great. But it was empty. Not a single thing in it'.

The provision of furniture was seen by consumers as helping them make their house a home:

'I'd moved into a flat once – all I had was a mattress and a TV… That was it - and that place never became a home… As soon as I moved into a place that had everything… the first day I moved into that place it felt like home'.

Once moved in, some practitioners provide orientation packs to their consumers. A rural tenancy manager noted that they provide their consumers with orientation kits, which outline their rights and responsibilities, as well as local supports, community groups and essential numbers.

The importance of practitioner's professional networks

Beyond building a positive relationship with consumers and housing providers, practitioners noted the importance of building both networks and rapport with external service providers. Some spoke of spending considerable time investing in their networks, firstly to ensure their clients are being appropriately supported by their

existing practitioners, as well as having relationships with services to which to refer new consumers.

As one worker noted worker noted:
'You're got to work well with other support workers… it can't be us versus them… it's all about communication'.

Another rural worker said:
'We're lucky… in a small area… having that good rapport… we see (some workers) twice a week, we can chat about clients, where we're at, what we need to do to get them where we need them to go… it really, really helps… It gets better outcomes'.

Consumers also noted that practitioners with well-established networks are able to provide rapid assistance and follow up. As one consumer said of his worker:
'If she couldn't fix it, she'd know who could'.

Connection to community and local supports

Consumers noted the challenges they face in maintaining social and support connections once they have moved. One consumer identified isolation as a key challenge in moving into a property, particularly for people who move out of area.
'The problem with going in and out of housing a lot is that you – because you might be changing a different area, you're moving around all the time, it's really hard to keep connected to specialists, medical, medical help'.

In addition, practitioners noted that people face social isolation following either their homelessness or housing crisis.
'…often people would become disconnected with what they liked to do…. We had a couple of women who really loved painting, but hadn't been able to do it, one because they couldn't afford it, but they'd become quite isolated as well…'.

Advanced practitioners advised that linking consumers into their local community is very important, and a key practice that assists people to sustain their housing. As one worker said:
'Good quality workers engage [consumers] in the community. The roof [first] and then you make it a home, and then you make a community… and then they don't come back into the system'.

Practitioners use their local knowledge to link into opportunities:
'So when we were working with them, we were able to link them into the local community arts centre … And some [consumers] were just clubs in their areas or the area they were going to live in and many of them are still doing them and are involved in those clubs and other volunteering activities and so I mean I think that that's really important'.

Consumers noted that effective practice assists them to find services, complete forms, and access a wide variety of supports. In addition, practitioners who go above and beyond, assisted with things such as paying for education, and being a social support – such as taking people out for coffee, meals and to activities in the local community. *'They pick you up, they take you out, you have a coffee… just general talk'.*

This proactive approach is seen by practitioners as reducing the barriers to social inclusion.
'We just explain what they are and see if they want to go along [to an activity]… literally take them there and see what they think'.

Practitioners noted that they rely heavily on their professional networks and knowledge of local services to link a person into supports. However, there are challenges in ensuring links are maintained.
'You try and link them in with community supports. The majority of people probably don't want to do that, but you offer it and public transport [assistance… We try and put the emphasis on the community supports, but it doesn't always work'.

The provision of a safety net during resettlement
Practitioners acknowledge the challenges in current funding agreements to provide floating supports to consumers. Despite programmatic limitations, expert practitioners are keenly aware that finding ways to work with people to maintain their housing is essential.

Consumers noted that having a safety net of support around them assists them to settle in to their accommodation. With one saying:
'It really helped me to transition to where I am now'.

This was not experienced by all consumers, with one person saying:
'My housing worker was brilliant up to the second I signed a lease. And since then I've spoken to him once'.

A practitioner noted that while they're not funded to work with a client beyond a 13 week period –, to ensure that clients can properly stabilise their situation, they break the support up over a year. In this service, the worker does a two to four week intensive support then does less intensive support for a longer period over the remainder of the year.

A tenancy manager noted that they schedule in home visits around 6 weeks (or halfway) into the person's time in Transitional Housing. And while funded only for tenancy management, they noted that they often have to step in and try to provide additional supports – either within their own agency or from their external networks.
'It's in our best interest to make sure that person is travelling well, because if they're not - we're not going to be able to get them out at the other end, because they're not

going to be ready and two they're not going to look after the property and do the right thing'.

The need for ongoing floating supports is particularly important for people with a history of rough sleeping. As one worker noted:
'It's so hard for someone that has been sleeping out for a while, like it's incredibly hard to <u>have</u> housing. [Our involvement is] for around a month and you can't possibly settle someone into housing who's been sleeping out for five years…'.

A consumer with a lengthy history of rough sleeping said even after two years with permanent housing his need for support was ongoing, and he couldn't see it ending.
'I still feel fragile'.

A number of consumers noted that the transition to being housed is challenging:
'Even like, with paying rent and stuff too. When you're homeless, you don't pay rent'.

With another young person saying:
'I remember when I first moved into my unit… I wasn't used to cleaning a whole house, so sometimes… it'd get a bit messy… I already knew how to cook so I was pretty right there, but there's other people that sort of don't really know how to cook or clean too good, and that's why I think they need the help to be able to keep the place clean or look after themselves'.

Agencies use a range of methods to support consumers in programs longer term – especially when ongoing support is not in their program requirements. A rural worker noted that the past volunteers would go in and perform welfare checks, noting that this had assisted people to remain socially connected and could assist them to connect with community supports. They noted that this required resourcing from the agency however, in order to keep volunteers up to date in relation to any changes in tenancy legislation or program requirements.

Tenancy sustainment

Experiences of tenancy sustainment are varied for consumers. Many reported that their support ceased when they found housing, while those in permanent or semi-permanent supportive housing reported that either ongoing or short term supports had been provided to assist them to settle in.

Despite the fact that most funded programs are time limited, advanced practitioners are clear that preventative practices which keep people housed are preferred in all cases.
'The best outcome we find is actually keeping people in private rental in the first place, then they don't fall out… trying to get people back into stable housing can take months or years and costs a lot of time and resources …if you can actually get in there with some brokerage and make an affordable rent top-up until they get their full benefit, or

if they get back to work that's huge, because they are already in their community, they are in a home, in a community already'.

This work is often undertaken outside of an open support period. A worker noted that they stress to the young people they work with that they can always call for advice. The worker noted that this occurs quite frequently and the key areas where consumers asked for advice was with assistance in paying rent, or about people staying at their property. Putting in place these "preventative measures" tended to stabilise a consumer, with the worker saying:
'Once they know the support's out there they tend to be ok… they know how it is to go back through the system, and I don't think they want to do it again'.

Preventative work was seen as effective in stopping people cycling through the homelessness service system. Successful prevention of housing crisis and homelessness however, relied on practitioners receiving timely referrals, or a consumer actively contacting the service early in a housing crisis. A number of practitioners noted that often they only found out a tenancy was at-risk when a referral was made from a tenancy tribunal.

Ensuring successful tenancy sustainment, includes practitioners moving from doing for to doing with the consumers. As one consumer reported:
'After the first year, and you asked them to do something for you. They'd say "can you do it yourself? Is there any reason you can't do it yourself?"… and it's preparing you to go on to live life unassisted. Which at the time really annoys you !...The way they make you stand up on your own two feet – they give you the tools to do it. If you don't know how to do something they'll tell you how to do it, but they won't do it for you. That was great'.

This consumer went on to say:
'When I left the program [into independent private rental] …there was no guarantee of rent being paid and all that – but I went from having a terrible renting record, to having a great rental record because of [the program]. The first place I applied for said "Are you still interested in this? You have great references!"'.

Most consumers spoken to in the study (with the exception of those who were in permanent supported accommodation), seemed reluctant to return to the service or worker that had housed them initially if they needed to. For some this reluctance was based on negative experiences – particularly around worker engagement, while for others, this reflected positive practice where their practitioners had effectively linked the consumer in with other services which had become their primary supports. For others, they now relied on personal networks for their support, with one consumer saying:
'I've sourced my own networks and services I can use'.

Summary of focus groups and consultations

The analysis of the focus groups and consultations found that effective work with consumers is underpinned by practitioner expertise in both navigating the housing and homelessness sectors with consumers, and their methods of interaction.

Leading practitioners had a well-developed understanding of the causes of homelessness, and how this affects both consumers' housing pathways, and their interaction with the housing and homelessness sectors. As such, their methods of engagement are adapted to the consumer. This flexibility ensures that housing work is driven by the consumer. Practitioners understand that assisting consumers to resolve their housing crises or homelessness relied on the worker's ability to engage the consumer in the process. To do this, practitioners promote consumer choice, while managing expectations. Key to building a trusting working relationship is honest and transparent practice, which focuses on the consumer's strengths.

Assessment assists practitioners to investigate a consumer's housing history, and identify causes of housing breakdown and potential ongoing support needs. Workers use the assessment process to begin to map out potential housing options that will be both appropriate and available to consumers. Leading practitioners then targeted housing searches around appropriate options, and tailor their support based on a consumer's needs and strengths.

In a tightly constrained housing market, practitioners need to help consumers to identify realistic housing options. Again, a consumer's engagement with the housing search helps practitioners to work with consumers around appropriate options. They assist consumers to secure housing through helping with applications, taking consumers to inspections, navigating potentially unfamiliar neighborhoods and accepting housing offers. Once housing was secured, workers understand the need to both assist a person to relocate, and to resettle them into their local community.

Throughout this process, leading practitioners continue to conduct ongoing assessment. This helps to identify long or medium term support needs with the consumer, and in building these supports from within the consumer's local community.

Conclusion

The study found that the provision of housing-focused support requires workers to both understand complex and fragmented service systems, and to help the consumer to navigate them.

This review has examined the specific activities that workers undertake in order to find, secure and assist individuals and families to sustain housing.

While engagement, assessment, finding housing, securing housing and sustaining housing are identified in the literature review as key activity areas, consultations with consumers and practitioners allow us to further define these activity areas.

While engagement and assessment have been identified as two distinct activities, more often than not they will be concurrent processes. Engagement relies on the ability of workers to be flexible, to be led by the needs identified by the consumer, and to be knowledgeable about the resources available to meet those needs. It also relies on workers building a mutually beneficial relationship with consumers in order to take the housing journey with them.

Assessment is the process of identifying housing needs, discussing preferences and identifying barriers to securing housing, as the basis for ongoing work. We found that successful assessment allows advanced practitioners to take the information obtained in assessment and identify housing options, consumers' preference and needs, and to begin planning ongoing support requirements.

Finding housing requires workers to have an understanding of various housing options, knowledge of eligibility requirements, established relationships with housing providers and to actively participate in the search and application process with consumers. This is often complemented by access to financial assistance to meet the large upfront costs of securing housing. Workers place significant emphasis on ensuring, to the best of their ability, that this process is guided by consumers, and balances consumers' preferences and needs.

Settling in and sustaining housing, again were both discrete and related processes. The literature and consultations found that much of the information, skills and assistance required when first accessing housing, is also required to sustain housing. This includes knowledge of tenancy rights and responsibilities, money management and budgeting skills, skills for independent living as well as connections to meaningful community activity and employment.

Where additional services are both needed and wanted, by the consumer, the role of housing-focused support is to facilitate referrals and, if needed, to support the consumer to access these services.

A key theme to emerge from the qualitative interviews and the literature review was the importance of workers' specialist knowledge in providing housing-focused support. This includes specialist knowledge in relation to:

- the causes and impacts of homelessness
- knowledge of the impacts of trauma on homelessness, and the potential for homelessness to cause trauma
- an understanding of how housing histories may affect potential housing options
- knowledge of the variety of housing options available to consumers, their eligibility requirements and referral pathways
- knowledge of state based housing eligibility, application processes and allocations
- knowledge of tenancy legislation
- an understanding of how resettlement activities contribute to tenancy sustainment
- knowledge of, and commitment to developing and maintaining effective networks in order to refer consumers to other services.

The overall findings of the literature review and qualitative research formed basis of the practice guides and a housing-focused support training module.

Development of practice resources and a housing-focused support training module

Methodology

The findings from the literature review and the qualitative study informed the structure of the practice guides. CHP consulted with an academic in relation to developing the guides, and created the following five 'Guides to Providng Housing Focused Support':

- An overview of homelessness
- Engagement and building rapport
- The role of assessment in housing-focused support
- Supporting consumers to access housing
- Supporting resettlement and stabilisation

The guides, including practice toolkits were developed by CHP and drafts were circulated for comment to workers across Australia via peak bodies and service networks . These included the Victorian Regional Homelessness Networkers, the Victorian Regional Children's Networkers, representatives from the National Shelter Policy Network, members of the Community Housing Federation of Victoria's Transitional Housing Management working group, participants from the focus groups and consultations, and the project's Reference group. Feedback from participants was incorporated into the final guides.

The project then developed a training module, to complement the guides. CHP anticipates that the training will be most effective and beneficial for workers with less than two years of experience in the housing and homelessness sector. The training module is designed to reflect the content of the Guides, while providing activities and exercises to assist workers to develop their skills in providing housing-focused support, and to reflect on their current practice.

CHP asked members of the Victorian SHS to volunteer to attend a trial training session, of approximately three hours duration. Eight people attended the training. The group worked through the training module, and held robust discussions about ways in which the training could be improved, the exercises could be enhanced, and further improvements to the Guides.

Feedback from the training confirmed that this resource will be an excellent primer for new or early-stage workers in the SHS, with participants suggesting they will use the practice guides as part of new employee inductions.

Based on feedback from the group, the training module and practice guides were enhanced, and are delivered with this report as a stand-alone document, and accompanying PowerPoint presentation.

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Appendix 1 – Focus group and consultation questions for workers

1. Tell me about the first things you do when you meet a new client?
   Prompt: What attitudes and activities does it take to establish rapport?

2. What assessments do you do with consumers before you begin assisting them to find housing? What are you looking for?
   Prompt: Balancing wants and realistic expectations? Examining various housing options? Financial counselling? Income assistance

3. When a consumer begins to search for housing, what specific <u>activities</u> do you carry out or support a consumer to carry out, which work well?
   Prompt: Is it the same process for all groups? Do you provide information (eg websites?) or practical help (e.g. transporting to viewing, transport vouchers, local orientation)?

4. When someone secures housing, what are your practices in relation to helping someone move in?
   Prompt: Singing lease? Brokerage? Arranging removalists? Understanding lease? Is the level of support the same for all client groups?

5. Once someone has moved in, what activities do you do to assist them to settle into their home and community? (How long for?)
   Prompt: Do you refer to other services? Do you do a local orientation (chemist, doctor, library, shops? How is social inclusion promoted?

6. Do people often come back to you after you have rehoused them with housing issues? What are these issues?
   Prompt: Anti-social behavior? Financial difficulties? Problems with real estate agents/housemates/landlords? Repairs and maintenance? Resigning a lease?

7. What do you do/would you do in this situation? What assistance can you provide?
   Prompt: What tenancy advice do you provide? Can you provide financial support if tenancy is at risk? Do you refer on to other services? Is that effective?

Appendix 2 – Focus group questions for consumers

1. What questions did your support worker ask you about your housing history and preferences before you started to look for housing?
   Prompt: Balancing wants and realistic expectations? Examining various housing options? Looking at location preferences, Financial counselling? Income assistance?

2. What did your worker/s do so you felt confident working with them?
   Prompt: Choice? Demonstrate being trustworthy? If they didn't, what would have made you feel good or safe working with them?

3. When you started searching for a house, what specific <u>activities</u> did your worker do for you or with you to find accommodation? What worked well?
   Prompt: Do you provide information (e.g. websites?) or practical help (e.g. transporting to viewing, transport vouchers, local orientation)? What didn't happen that you needed or wanted?

4. When you got your house, what activities did workers do to help you move in?
   Prompt: Singing lease? Brokerage? Arranging removalists? Understanding lease? What didn't happen that you needed or wanted?

5. Once you moved in, what activities did workers do to help you to settle into their home and community? (How long for?)
   Prompt: Furniture provision? Utility connection? Were you referred to other services? Did you receive a local orientation local orientation (chemist, doctor, library, shops? How did you meet people in your local area? What didn't happen that you needed or wanted?

6. If you had a problem with your house or your housing, would you go back to your original support worker to get assistance? Have you ever had to? What were the issues?
   Prompt: Anti-social behaviour? Financial difficulties? Problems with real estate agents/housemates/landlords? Repairs and maintenance? Resigning a lease? Tenancy advice? If yes, what made you feel comfortable going back for support? If no what made you uncomfortable in going back for support?