



Queensland
Family & Child
Commission

Policy Submission

National Housing and Homelessness Plan Issues Paper

October 2023

Queensland Family & Child Commission

PO Box 15217

Brisbane City East QLD 4002

qfcc.qld.gov.au

For any information about this submission please contact

Strategic Policy

Email: strategicpolicy@qfcc.qld.gov.au

Phone: 07 3900 6000

Reference: F23/349

Background.....	3
QFCC positions.....	4
Queensland snapshot.....	5
A national plan to address child and youth homelessness	6
Young cohorts at greater risk of homelessness.....	7
Homelessness services and housing first initiatives.....	13
Capturing better evidence on ‘hidden’ or ‘invisible’ youth homelessness	15
Early intervention and preventative responses	16

Background

The Queensland Family and Child Commission (QFCC) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to inform the development of the National Housing and Homelessness Plan.

We have pledged our support for the National Youth Commission of Australia's and Youth Development Australia's renewed call for the development of a national plan to address child and youth homelessness. We encourage a youth specific plan to deliver on the strategic areas for action outlined in the 10-point Roadmap of the Report of the National Youth Commission Inquiry into Youth Homelessness.¹

It is undeniable that stable housing for families with children improve whole of life outcomes. A child's environment and experiences have a lasting impact on health, learning and wellbeing outcomes. Early intervention services that support families with children to obtain and sustain housing can achieve long-term outcomes for the family, including preventing young people from experiencing homelessness.

Unstable housing and homelessness are linked to other forms of social disadvantage. They have a ripple effect on the lives of families with children, including disruption to education, employment and health care, exposure to isolation, exploitation and violence, and increased mental illness and alcohol and drug use.² The right policy settings, centred around affordable housing, income support and integrated prevention responses are needed to ensure that children and young people have the right to thrive and develop to their fullest potential.

It is incumbent on government to ensure that young people are leaving statutory systems into safe and stable housing. A critical part of developing the solution to this complex issue must be elevating the voices of young people and families with lived experience to ensure their experiences and needs are reflected in policy and practice.

Safe, secure and affordable housing is fundamental for positive whole-of-life outcomes. For young people, a place to call home enables connections with family and culture and makes it easier to engage in education and employment and build community connection, inclusion and resilience.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) charter recognises that children need special protection. Under Article 27 of the UNCRC, the Australian government has responsibility for the needs of children, including a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development. Article 27 further states that the government take appropriate measures to assist parents and others responsible for the child to (when needed) provide material assistance and support programmes, particularly with regard to nutrition, clothing and housing.

Homelessness and related issues disproportionately impact Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. The QFCC has an explicit commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and their families. Self-determination, healing, dignity and respect are all fundamental elements needed to improve outcomes and relationships.³ We promote First Nations led solutions to address housing and homelessness issues impacting First Nations children, families and communities.

¹ National Youth Commission (2008), *Australia's Homeless Youth: a report of the National Youth Commission Inquiry into Youth*, https://youthhomelessnessconference.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Australias_Homeless-Youth-NYC_Report_2008.pdf.

² Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2021). Homelessness and overcrowding. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/children-youth/homelessness-and-overcrowding>

³ Queensland Family and Child Commission. (2022). Strategic Plan 2022–2023. <https://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/strategicplan>

QFCC positions

1. Develop a national plan to address child and youth homelessness.
2. Ensure a discrete focus on low income single parent families, young parents aged 18–24, young people in/exiting state care systems and First Nations young people and families.
3. Ensure priority access to housing for young people exiting state care systems and appropriate allowances to support independent living.
4. Establish temporary and long term housing models to address the difference in need.
5. Empower the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing peak bodies to directly work with community controlled services to address the housing support needs of their community.
6. Provide information about housing and homelessness services through youth friendly channels, in youth friendly language.
7. Review evaluation outcomes of Housing First initiatives and remove unrealistic conditions for individuals to access housing services.
8. Report nationally on children in state care who are not living in stable and safe housing.
9. Integrate homelessness with universal and early intervention and prevention human service responses.

Queensland snapshot

Housing and homelessness data

- In 2021, approximately 24 per cent of all people experiencing homelessness in Queensland were children and young people (18 years and younger). This is an increase from 2016 (22%). In 2021, 3,453 children under the age of 12 experienced homelessness or living in severely crowded dwellings in Queensland.⁴
- In 2022, 11 per cent of young Queenslanders reported that they were worried about having a safe place to stay, and 2.1 per cent reported that they had no fixed address or lived in a refuge or transitional accommodation.⁵
- A state-wide survey of young people aged 10–17 years under youth justice supervision found that in 2022, three in 10 young people were living in unstable and/or unsuitable accommodation.⁶
- Increasing numbers of Queensland young people are accessing specialist homelessness services in contrast to the Australia-wide trend. However, in the past five years there has been a 21.4% decrease in young people under a child protection order accessing these services (Table 1).⁷

Table 1: Number and rate per 10,000 young people aged 15–24 years accessing specialist homelessness services, FY18–FY22

	2017–18	2018–19	2019–20	2020–21	2021–22	% increase or decrease
Number (and rate) Australia-wide	43,180 (17.8)	42,960 (17.2)	42,387 (16.7)	41,652 (16.2)	39,300 (15.3)	9.0% decrease
Number (and rate) Queensland-wide	4,981 (10.1)	5,340 (10.7)	5,153 (10.1)	5,553 (10.7)	5,603 (10.7)	12.5% increase
Number Queensland-wide under a child protection order	1,175 (2.4)	1,200 (2.4)	1,142 (2.2)	1,099 (2.1)	923 (1.8)	21.4% decrease

Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

- As at 30 June 2022, there were 19,741 children and young people on the Queensland public housing register. These are people who have been approved for public housing but not yet received an offer of housing. The

⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2021), *Estimating homelessness*, Census of Population and Housing. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/housing/estimating-homelessness-census/2021>.

⁵ Mission Australia (2023). *Australian Youth Survey*. <https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/what-we-do/research-impact-policy-advocacy/youth-survey>

⁶ Queensland Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs (2022). *Youth Justice Census Summary: State-wide (2018 to 2022) – under supervision*. <https://www.cyjma.qld.gov.au/resources/dcsyw/youth-justice/resources/census-summary-statewide.pdf>

⁷ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2022). *Specialist homelessness services annual report 2021-22*. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/homelessness-services/specialist-homelessness-services-annual-report/contents/clients-services-and-outcomes>

number of children and young people aged 0–24 years on the Queensland public housing register grew from 15,155 in 2018 to 19,741 in 2022.⁸

- During the QFCC’s discussions with children and young people aged between 13–18 years in the preparation of the report *Voices of hope: Growing Up in Queensland 2020*, issues regarding affordable housing and support when transitioning to independent living were raised. Young people told the QFCC they want leaders to take more action to provide affordable housing and homelessness, particularly in relation to poverty, domestic violence and mental health issues.⁹
- In 2023, the QFCC undertook research with adult Queenslanders to collect data on the community’s perspectives about children and young people and systems designed to support them. The Community Perceptions survey asked respondents what they thought were the biggest issues for parents and children in Queensland.
- Respondents were able to answer in their own words and responses were assigned to key themes:
 - The most common themes were that the cost of living, poverty, inflation, and finances are the biggest issues facing parents and children in Queensland (33%). An additional nine per cent added concern about housing affordability and homelessness.
 - Housing affordability and homelessness were significantly more likely to be noted by respondents who identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.¹⁰

A national plan to address child and youth homelessness

The QFCC supports the National Youth Commission of Australia’s and Youth Development Australia’s renewed calls for the development of a national plan to address child and youth homelessness. A national child and youth homelessness plan provides opportunity to deliver obligations under the UNCRC with respect to Article 27 regarding living standards and housing, the Department of Social Services *Safe and Supported: the National Framework for Protecting Australia’s Children 2021–2031*, the *National Standards for Out-of-home Care*, and the *National Plan to End Violence against Women and their Children 2022–2032*.¹¹ The plan should also align to strategies in the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap* and *Australia’s Disability Strategy*, as referenced in the Issues Paper.

The Report of the National Youth Commission Inquiry into Youth Homelessness provides a 10-point Roadmap to inform the development of a child and youth plan.¹² A holistic child and youth specific plan is critical to ensure a discrete focus on addressing the needs of children and young people and factors that bring them and their families into contact with the homelessness system.

⁸ Queensland Government, Department of Housing (2023), unpublished data request.

⁹ Queensland family and Child Commission (2021), *Voices of Hope: Growing Up in Queensland 2020*, [2020 GUiQ: Voices of Hope | Queensland Family and Child Commission \(qfcc.qld.gov.au\)](https://qfcc.qld.gov.au/2020-GUiQ-Voices-of-Hope).

¹⁰ Queensland family and Child Commission (2023), *Community Perceptions Survey 2023*, [Community Perceptions Survey Report 2023 \(qfcc.qld.gov.au\)](https://qfcc.qld.gov.au/Community-Perceptions-Survey-Report-2023).

¹¹ Department of Social Services, *Safe and Supported: the National Framework for Protecting Australia’s Children 2021–2031*, p.37 and 41 accessed 14 March 2022 https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/12_2021/dess5016-national-framework-protecting-childrenaccessible.pdf; Department of Social Services, *The National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010–2022*, p.8 accessed 14 March 2022 https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/08_2014/national_plan1.pdf

¹² National Youth Commission (2008), *Australia’s Homeless Youth: a report of the National Youth Commission Inquiry into Youth*, https://youthhomelessnessconference.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Australias_Homeless-Youth-NYC_Report_2008.pdf.

Children and young people's experience of homelessness is very different to adults. The needs of children and young people should not get lost or play second to the needs of adults in any plan to address homelessness. Nor should it get lost in any national plan that has a singular or primary focus on housing. For this reason, Australia needs a plan to transform systems and services, so these meet the specific needs of children and young people.¹³

Towards ending homelessness for young Queenslanders 2022-2027 is the Queensland Government's plan to address youth homelessness and improve housing outcomes for young people. A \$29.8 million investment has been committed to deliver initiatives focused on providing an integrated framework of housing with support, including:

- additional coordinated support for young people, delivered by Specialist Homelessness Services
- helping young people connect to education, training and employment
- supporting and responding to the needs of First Nations young peoples
- delivering new and improved digital resources to help young people and their support networks:
 - access housing and support early
 - secure and sustain a tenancy
 - plan pathways to home ownership
- recruiting specialist housing workers who will help young people obtain and sustain safe, secure and affordable housing.¹⁴

The Queensland Plan provides a positive example of government listening to children, young people and their supports, to inform fit-for-purpose policy. It is also a positive example of cross-agency collaboration and acknowledges that responding to the housing needs of children and young people is not just about providing houses and requires an integrated approach across systems that support the needs of children, young people and their families.

Young cohorts at greater risk of homelessness

The Issues Paper references the intersection of housing policy with other policy areas including domestic and family violence and health adversity. The QFCC also encourages a discrete focus on:

1. Single parent low-income families and young parents (18–24)
2. Children exiting (and in) the out-of-home care and youth justice systems
3. First Nations young people and families.

Single parent low-income families and young parents

Poverty and financial stress are leading causes of homelessness and overcrowded housing, which can lead to unsafe living environments for children.

¹³ Youth Development Australia (2013), *It's Time – for a national plan to address child and youth homelessness*, provided at the National Conference to address child and youth homelessness July 2023, (unpublished).

¹⁴ Queensland Government Department of Housing (2022), *Towards ending homelessness for young Queenslanders 2022-2027*, <https://www.housing.qld.gov.au/about/strategy/housing/towards-ending-homelessness>.

Australia has adopted the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, the first of which is to 'end poverty in all its forms everywhere by 2030'.¹⁵ The OECD defines poverty at the household level. An individual household is considered to be living in poverty if its income is less than one half of the median disposable income.¹⁶

Children being raised in one parent families and young parents (18-24 years) are more likely to experience a low household income than those in couple families. Only 1.6 per cent of Queensland couple families had a household income of less than \$650 per week versus 17.1 per cent of Queensland one parent families (Table 2).

Table 2: Number and percentage of families with children with an income of less than \$33,800 per year

	Australia	QLD	Brisbane/ Moreton Bay	South East	South West	Sunshine Coast/ Central	North Queensland	Far North Queensland
Number and percentage of couple families with children with household income less than \$650 pw	58,345 (2.0%)	9,284 (1.6%)	2,734 (1.4%)	2,436 (1.8%)	1,139 (1.8%)	1,308 (1.4%)	479 (1.1%)	597 (2.2%)
Number and percentage of one parent families with household income less than \$650 pw	183,449 (17.2%)	39,281 (17.1%)	10,658 (14.9%)	9,512 (16.8%)	5,319 (18.9%)	7,104 (17.6%)	3,434 (17.9%)	2,840 (20.3%)
Total number and percentage of families with household income less than \$650 pw	241,794 (6.0%)	48,565 (6.1%)	13,392 (4.9%)	11,948 (6.2%)	6,458 (7.1%)	8,412 (6.4%)	3,913 (6.0%)	3,437 (8.4%)

Source: QGSO custom tables

Housing affordability is decreasing. In June 2018, the median weekly rent for a three bedroom house in Queensland was \$350. In June 2023 it was \$500, an increase of 42.9 per cent.¹⁷ Rents are increasing at a rate that far exceeds increases in wages or family support payments.

Table 3 demonstrates increases in median rent prices between 2017 and 2022 across Queensland regions. Over the past five years, every region has experienced at least a 28.2 per cent increase in rent with the sharpest increase being 50.0 per cent in North Queensland. Over the past 12 months, the greatest increase has been in South West region, with rental increases of almost 20.0 per cent.¹⁸

¹⁵ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda>.

¹⁶ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *Poverty Rates*, <https://data.oecd.org/inequality/poverty-rate.htm>

¹⁷ Queensland Residential Tenancies Authority (2023), *Median rents quarterly data*. <https://www.rta.qld.gov.au/forms-resources/median-rents-quick-finder/median-rents-quarterly-data>.

¹⁸ Queensland Residential Tenancies Authority (2023), *Median rents quarterly data*. <https://www.rta.qld.gov.au/forms-resources/median-rents-quick-finder/median-rents-quarterly-data>.

Table 3: Regional increases in median rents between December 2017 and December 2022 with 1-year and 5-year percentage increases

Region	Dec17	Dec18	Dec19	Dec20	Dec21	Dec22	1 year increase	5 year increase
Brisbane and Moreton Bay	\$390	\$395	\$400	\$410	\$440	\$500	13.6%	28.2%
South East	\$410	\$418	\$420	\$425	\$480	\$560	16.7%	36.6%
South West	\$300	\$300	\$310	\$320	\$350	\$415	18.6%	38.3%
Sunshine Coast and Central	\$320	\$350	\$350	\$380	\$440	\$480	9.1%	50.0%
North Queensland	\$290	\$300	\$335	\$350	\$370	\$400	8.1%	37.9%
Far North Queensland	\$325	\$330	\$350	\$350	\$380	\$420	10.5%	29.2%

Source: Queensland Residential Tenancies Authority. RTA data mapped to QFCC identified regions.

[Median rents quarterly data](#) | [Residential Tenancies Authority \(rta.qld.gov.au\)](#)

Low-income families and young parents are most likely to experience financial stress and not be able to meet the costs of living. In 2022, 4.0 per cent of young Queenslanders reported that they or their families could not afford their rent or mortgage. Rates of concern were higher (6.0-7.0%) among young people living in Far North Queensland and Southeast regions.

Table 4: Number and percentage of young people aged 15–19 who reported they or their family could not afford to pay rent or a mortgage

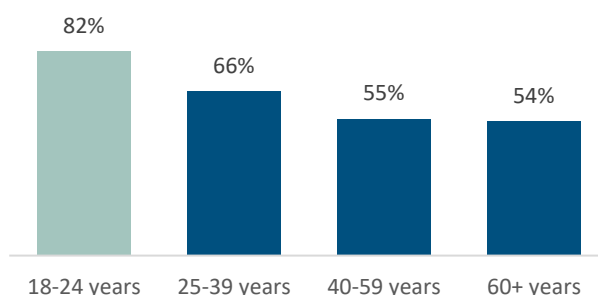
Number of young people	Australia	QLD	Brisbane/ Moreton Bay	South East	South West	Sunshine Coast and Central	North Queensland	Far North Queensland
In region who responded to Mission Australia's survey	18,800	5,680	2,799	924	855	209	410	236
Could not pay rent or mortgage	4.1%	3.9%	2.3%	7.1%	4.4%	4.8%	4.4%	6.4%

Source: Mission Australia Youth Survey Report 2022¹⁹

¹⁹ Mission Australia (2023), *Australian Youth Survey*. <https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/what-we-do/research-impact-policy-advocacy/youth-survey>.

As shown in Figure 1, young people aged 18–24 with parent or carer responsibilities were the age group most likely to report having difficulty in paying for day-to-day expenses.

Figure 1: Age group comparison of the percentage of parents/carers reporting difficulties in paying for day-to-day expenses



Source: QFCC community survey

Family tax benefit is a means tested payment to parents to assist with the costs of raising children. Across Queensland, almost six in 10 families with children under 15 years were accessing this benefit. Looking at the variations in regional household economy across urban, regional and remote areas will inform better service planning. For example, the regional variations described above in median rental costs as a percentage of household income and single parenting households. Additionally, the majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders live in urban and regional areas and are over-represented in social housing and homelessness. Community-led solutions provide the only solution to address variation in community needs.

Children exiting the out-of-home care and youth justice systems

As discussed in the Issues paper, structural factors influence the likelihood of someone becoming homeless including young people in and exiting state institutions. A number of homeless children and young people subject to a child protection order are supported by and accommodated in specialist homelessness service youth services at various locations across Queensland. Specialist homelessness services are not part of the regular suite of placements for Child Safety as they are not a preferred placement option for young people under child protection orders. Research from the CREATE Foundation found that up to one in three young people are homeless in the first year after leaving out-of-home care.²⁰

For children involved in the youth justice system, a state-wide survey of young people aged 10–17 years under youth justice supervision found that three in 10 young people were living in unstable and/or unsuitable accommodation.²¹ In 2021–22, the Office of the Public Guardian community visitors raised 727 issues on behalf of children and young people held in Queensland watchhouses. These issues were often about identifying suitable accommodation for when the child or young person is released from the watchhouse (among other issues). A lack of accommodation means young people are often held in remand.

²⁰ CREATE Foundation. (2021). CREATE Post Care Report 2021. <https://create.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/CREATE-Post-Care-Report-2021-LR.pdf>

²¹ Queensland Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs (2022). *Youth Justice Census Summary: State-wide (2018 to 2022) – under supervision*. <https://www.cyjma.qld.gov.au/resources/dcsyw/youth-justice/resources/census-summary-statewide.pdf>

Providing accommodation and support to homeless young people under 16 years of age has generally been seen as the responsibility of State child protection departments, as opposed to Commonwealth sponsored programs such as specialist homelessness services. The funding provided through NHHA to deliver the Youth Housing and Reintegration Service (YHARS) only provides accommodation to young people aged 15–21 years.²² **This leaves a service gap for young people aged below 15 years who are homeless or self-placing and do not meet the current Australian Government criteria for independent living.**²³ It also means that young people are driven, at times unnecessarily, into State care institutions due to not having a safe place to live.

Young people told us:

“There’s a gap in young people who experience homelessness who are going into foster and out of home care. There’s this weird gap between 16–18 years old, where you don’t actually qualify for adult homelessness services. A lot of times it’s difficult to reintegrate into the foster and out of home care system.”

There are limited services funded to provide outreach and supports to young people involved with State institutions experiencing or at risk of homelessness. The QFCC recently interviewed professionals working with children who self-place outside of government institutions.

Interviewees told us:

“We need different housing models. Temporary housing for young people until they get on their feet. Housing stock in places where kids want to be. (They’d rather sleep in a tent or under a bridge than be in a placement an hour from Brisbane or off country). Even where the family isn’t safe to stay with, being in the same area as family and close to peers provides comfort for some children.”

The Queensland Government has committed funds and implemented policy change to give financial and practical support to young people living in care up to the age of 21 through the Home Stretch campaign. The campaign also calls for the need to quickly address housing needs for these young people. Supporting the housing needs for young people involved in statutory systems, and their families, is critical to addressing systemic and structural inequities of government systems that bring young people and families into contact with statutory systems.

Priority access to temporary and longer-term housing stock within close locality to friends, family, support networks and on country and independent supported living allowances appropriate to meet the rising costs of living should be prioritised for these cohorts. Accommodation services should be made available for these priority cohorts, particularly those children and young people who are aged under 16 years and leaving care or detention, to address this service gap.

Approaches to meeting the accommodation needs of at-risk young people and their families could be leveraged from housing measures implemented in responding to the pandemic.

²² Queensland Family and Child Commission, *Changing the Sentence: Overseeing Queensland’s youth justice reforms* p.99 accessed 24 January 2022 <https://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-06/QFCC%20Changing%20the%20Sentence%20lo%20res%20spreads.pdf>

²³ Queensland Family and Child Commission, *Changing the Sentence: Overseeing Queensland’s youth justice reforms* p.85 accessed 24 January 2022 <https://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-06/QFCC%20Changing%20the%20Sentence%20lo%20res%20spreads.pdf>

Young people told us:

"I think it was pretty clear during COVID-19 how quickly people can be put into safe accommodation, such as student accommodation and short-term accommodation. This could be a short-term solution - simply filling properties as much as possible."

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and families

The majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders live in urban and regional areas and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders are over-represented in social housing and homelessness.

Illnesses such as rheumatic heart disease and rheumatic fever were largely eliminated through housing and medical service improvements in the second half of the twentieth century, however these conditions are still prevalent in remote communities, resulting in the deaths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.²⁴ Improvement in health outcomes and reduction of infection for children, young people and their families can be achieved through adequate housing design and infrastructure²⁵ across urban, regional and remote areas.

In 2023, the QFCC published the *Queensland Child Rights Report 2023*. The report details the state of children's rights in Queensland. It analyses how Queensland upholds children's rights, and it identifies the changes needed to embed a child rights approach across government policy, legislation and systems to deliver better, more equitable outcomes for Queensland children. In regards to access to safe housing, the report states:

In 2021–22 in Queensland, overcrowding in social housing remains a significant issue for First Nations. In 2021, 71.0 per cent of survey participants living in state-owned and managed Indigenous housing (SOMIH), lived in dwellings of an acceptable standard, down from 90.5 per cent in 2018. This means that almost 30 per cent of SOMIH homes do not meet people's right to an adequate standard of living. This includes children and young people.

In 2021, 81.2 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Queensland lived in appropriately sized (not overcrowded) housing, compared to 94.8 per cent for non-Indigenous people. The National Agreement on Closing the Gap aims to increase this number to 88 per cent by 2031. It also sets 2031 targets that all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander households:

- *within discrete Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities receive essential services that meet or exceed the relevant jurisdictional standard*

²⁴ Paediatric cardiologist Bo Remenyi and Paediatric Infectious Disease Specialist Professor Jonathan Carapetis cited in Four Corners, *Heart Failure: An investigation into the hidden killer in remote Australian communities*, 10 March 2022, <https://www.abc.net.au/4corners/heart-failure:-an-investigation-into-the-hidden/13787308>.

²⁵ END RHD Centre of Research Excellence (2020), *The RHD Endgame Strategy: Evidence Brief #3 Considerations for a comprehensive remote housing strategy*, , <https://endrhd.telethonkids.org.au/siteassets/media-docs---end-rhd/endgame/evidence-briefs/rhd-endgame-strategy-evidence-brief---comprehensive-housing-strategy.pdf>; Healthhabitat, *Safety and the 9 Health Living Practices*, accessed 15 March 2022 <https://www.healthhabitat.com/what-we-do/safety-and-the-9-healthy-living-practices/>.

- in or near to a town receive essential services that meet or exceed the same standard as applies generally within the town.

Data shows that, although improvement has been made, we are not on track to meet these targets. With the release of the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing Action Plan 2019–2023, Queensland established Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing Queensland, a peak body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community housing providers. This is a positive step in ensuring the interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing providers are represented and improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing outcomes in Queensland.²⁶

The QFCC raises caution about the unconscious biases in government systems towards First Nations people. Care should be taken in consulting on, developing and implementing services and programs to address ‘overcrowding’ as a risk factor for homelessness. A lack of cultural consideration can result in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children being brought into contact with child protection systems and removed from kin, Country, and culture – whether that be from the lack of housing or a lack of understanding of cultural ways of being. The harms of this disconnection on an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child or young person can be long lasting.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing peak bodies should be funded and empowered to work directly with community controlled services to address the housing and support needs of their young people and families.

Homelessness services and housing first initiatives

Individual, community and structural factors often co-exist for young people and families experiencing homelessness and some housing and homelessness services are contingent on individuals not engaging in behaviours such as crime and alcohol and drug use.

There is extensive evidence for more contemporary models such as Housing First initiatives emerging from the United States. Housing First involves the rapid identification and provision of suitable, long-term housing, coupled with the necessary services that individuals and families require to maintain this housing. Crisis services can focus on getting people through a crisis and into housing or in many circumstances individuals or families can be diverted from the homelessness service system directly into a house with their own lease. Services collaborate to support people to meet their obligations as tenants and improve their quality of life through connection with services, friends and community. Access to housing is not contingent on compliance with support services or abstaining from drugs or alcohol, instead, compliance is with the conditions of a standard lease with supports provided to enable this. Criticisms of more traditional housing models include that individuals must often be willing to address certain issues in order to gain access to permanent housing (Please & Bretherton, 2012) and that housing is positioned as a ‘reward’ they must prove themselves worthy of (Sahlin, 2005)

The successes achieved by Housing First programs undermine the assumption that people with complex and or challenging support needs cannot successfully sustain a tenancy. This evidence has shown that Housing First delivers better housing outcomes, while generally costing less than keeping people homeless. Keeping people homeless represents a major drain on health and community services, due to the physical and mental strain on

²⁶ Queensland Family and Child Commission (2023), *Queensland Child Rights Report 2023*, <https://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/child-rights/report>.

people who have no safe space to live. People who have accessed permanent, safe housing make less frequent use of expensive, publicly funded services like emergency departments and prisons.

Evidence from Australia is growing and has demonstrated that this is a model that works well in our community and is delivering positive outcomes for people experiencing homelessness. Brisbane has been leading the way through the investment into increasing the supply of housing, funding services, and great community support.²⁷

Evaluations of Housing First initiatives and similar models in Australia should be reviewed to inform the development of the Plan.

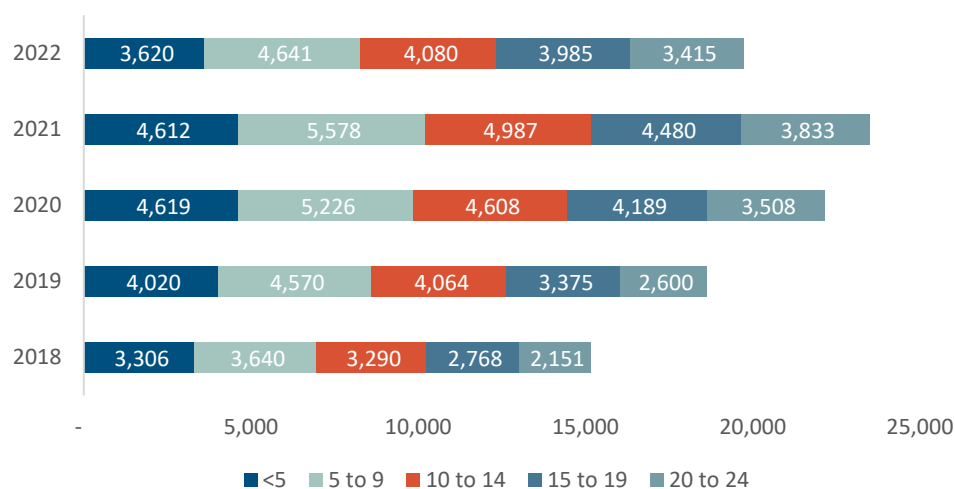
Young people told us:

“To me it's quite simple - each and every person who becomes homeless should be supported until they are no longer homeless. Every person should be able to access safe, secure, and sustainable housing.”

“I think we should follow other cities and countries that have a Zero Homeless approach, where first and foremost, people are given housing, and then work with government agencies to address health, education, finances etc.”

Moving towards Housing First initiatives will require significant long-term investment to address public housing shortages and prevent long wait lists from continuing to grow. As at 30 June 2022, there were 19,741 children and young people on the Queensland housing register. These are people who have been approved for public housing but not yet received an offer of housing. As shown in Figure 2, the number of children and young people aged 0–24 years on the Queensland housing register grew sharply between 2018 and 2021 but then dropped below 20,000 children in 2022. With the exception of 2022, there has been a steady increase in the number of children and young people aged 0–24 years on the public housing register across all regions over the past five years.

Figure 2: Number of children and young people aged 0–24 years on the QLD public housing register, 2018–2022



Source: Department of Housing unpublished data request.

²⁷ Parcell, C., Tomaszewski, W. and Jones, A. (2013), *An Evaluation of Brisbane Street to Home: Final Report*.

Increasing awareness of support

Many people who may come across a young person in need may be unsure how to connect them with the right services and supports that will enable meaningful and timely outcomes. Queensland's *Towards ending homelessness for young Queenslanders 2022–2027* recognises that key information needs to be more accessible to community members so they can identify young people at-risk and provide them with support before reaching crisis point.

Information needs to be easy for young people to find, clear and current. Schools play a key role in the lives of young people and there are opportunities to better connect housing and homelessness information and services to identify and help young people and their families in need of housing support.

Young people told us:

“More visibility is needed online. The one thing that everyone has, is a phone. It’s a necessity now, and there is a lot of free wifi available. We need to get more resources online and it needs to be actually accessible. This could be videos for those that may have learning disabilities. No one wants to read 3 pages of ‘how we can help.’”

Capturing better evidence on ‘hidden’ or ‘invisible’ youth homelessness

Housing instability and homelessness experienced by children and young people is frequently underreported. Young people often couch surf or stay with family or friends without having long-term stable housing and do not consider themselves to be homeless. Young people who are couch surfing have much higher levels of psychological distress and poorer overall mental health.²⁸

An area of concern for the QFCC is children in statutory out-of-home care who ‘self-place’. The term describes the cohort of young people who leave their approved placement and go elsewhere. However, there is an absence of data on this issue and the number of children within this cohort who couch-surf or live on the streets is unknown. Children who self-place are reported to be often disconnected from support and at increased risk of homelessness during their time in care and post-transition from care.²⁹

Children exiting state institutions are overrepresented in homelessness data, national data reporting could inform planned homelessness prevention supports and services and reduce the demand on crisis services down the track.

²⁸ Hail-Jares, K., Vichta-Ohlsen, R. & Nash, C. (2021), *Safer inside? Comparing the experiences and risks faced by young people who couch-surf and sleep rough*, Journal of Youth Studies.

²⁹ J Venables, (2023), *Features of Service Delivery that Young People in Out-of-Home Care Who ‘Self-place’ and Stay in Unapproved Placements Value When Accessing a Specialist Support Service*, *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, pp. 1-2, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10560-023-00939-8>.

Early intervention and preventative responses

As referenced in the Issues Paper and Queensland's *Towards ending homelessness for young Queenslanders 2022–2027*, addressing homelessness and improving housing outcomes can not only rely on housing strategies.

Between 2021–22, 5603 young people aged 15–24 years presented alone to specialist homelessness services in Queensland (10.7 per 10,000 of the population). Of these young people, 45 per cent had a current mental health issue, 30 per cent experienced domestic and family violence and 12 per cent reported experiencing problematic alcohol or drug use. In the same period, 923 children and young people on a child protection order received support from a specialist homelessness service (2.1 per 10,000 of the population).³⁰ This data highlights young people experiencing homelessness have compounding needs and shows those potential 'entry points' into other service systems providing earlier opportunities to identify and address homelessness risk factors before young people require crisis services.

Government and the human services sector need to work in closer partnership to support young people to enable better integration between homelessness, housing with support services and other critical services including education, health, employment, child safety, and youth and adult justice.

³⁰ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2022), *Young people presenting alone. Specialist Homelessness Services Annual Report*. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/homelessness-services/specialist-homelessness-services-annual-report/contents/young-people-presenting-alone#Client%20characteristics>