

Homeward bound: social security and homelessness

In 2019 the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) chapter of the Australian Institute of Administrative Law (the Institute) awarded an administrative law project grant of \$5,000 to ACT community legal centre Canberra Community Law (CCL) to undertake research on social security and homelessness in the ACT.

This research culminated in the report *Homeward Bound: Social Security and Homelessness*, which was a collaboration between the National Social Security Rights Network (NSSRN) and CCL to examine the impacts of social security and public housing systems and their intersection with homelessness.

The report makes recommendations for how the social security and public housing systems could be improved to reduce or prevent homelessness. The report's findings rely on data collected by CCL which demonstrate the impact of social security and public housing on residents in the ACT. These findings have broader application to other Australian jurisdictions, particularly given that social security is a responsibility of the Commonwealth Government.

Social security recipients experience the highest rates of poverty in Australia, with over half of Newstart Allowance recipients living below the poverty line and most priced out of the private rental market. For many social security recipients, public housing is the only viable housing option for them. However, this research found that high demand and long waiting lists leave many people with nowhere to turn.

The client experiences examined in this research included people sleeping rough, people unable to pay their rent and people sleeping on couches, in their cars and in the living rooms of friends and family. Clients frequently sought assistance from CCL after relationship breakdowns, family tensions or overcrowding, which made their informal living arrangements untenable. Those in private rental accommodation said they faced eviction but had not yet been allocated a public housing property. Even people in public housing were extremely vulnerable to any changes in their personal circumstances, including unexpectedly high bills or other expenses, or costs associated with repairs or damage, as their Centrelink payments left no room for emergency expenditure.

This research report was funded by the Institute; however, the views expressed were those of CCL and NSSRN and were not necessarily those of the Institute.

The full report can be read at <<http://www.nssrn.org.au/wp/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/19756-CCL-Homeward-Bound-Social-Security-and-Homelessness-low-res.pdf>>.