

Disaggregating the need for housing across Australian communities

Abstract

The reduced share of public housing since the 1980s has resulted from the adoption of neoliberal policies that privilege private provision. While the Australian government has increasingly favoured rent assistance over direct provision, State governments have cited fiscal constraints to justify reductions in public housing stocks. Strict eligibility criteria have residualised public housing, transforming public housing estates into highly disadvantaged communities. Welfare recipients in the private rental market endure housing stress; insecurity of tenure; and are frequently banished to the periphery of major cities with adverse impacts on access to social support networks, employment, transport, services, and cultural activities. Failure to supply an adequate scale of social housing to accommodate population growth and those unable to secure adequate, affordable housing in the private rental or home purchase market, accords with Jessop's explanation of welfare state transformation, specifically the 'destatization' aspect of government withdrawal from service provision in favour of using private sector.

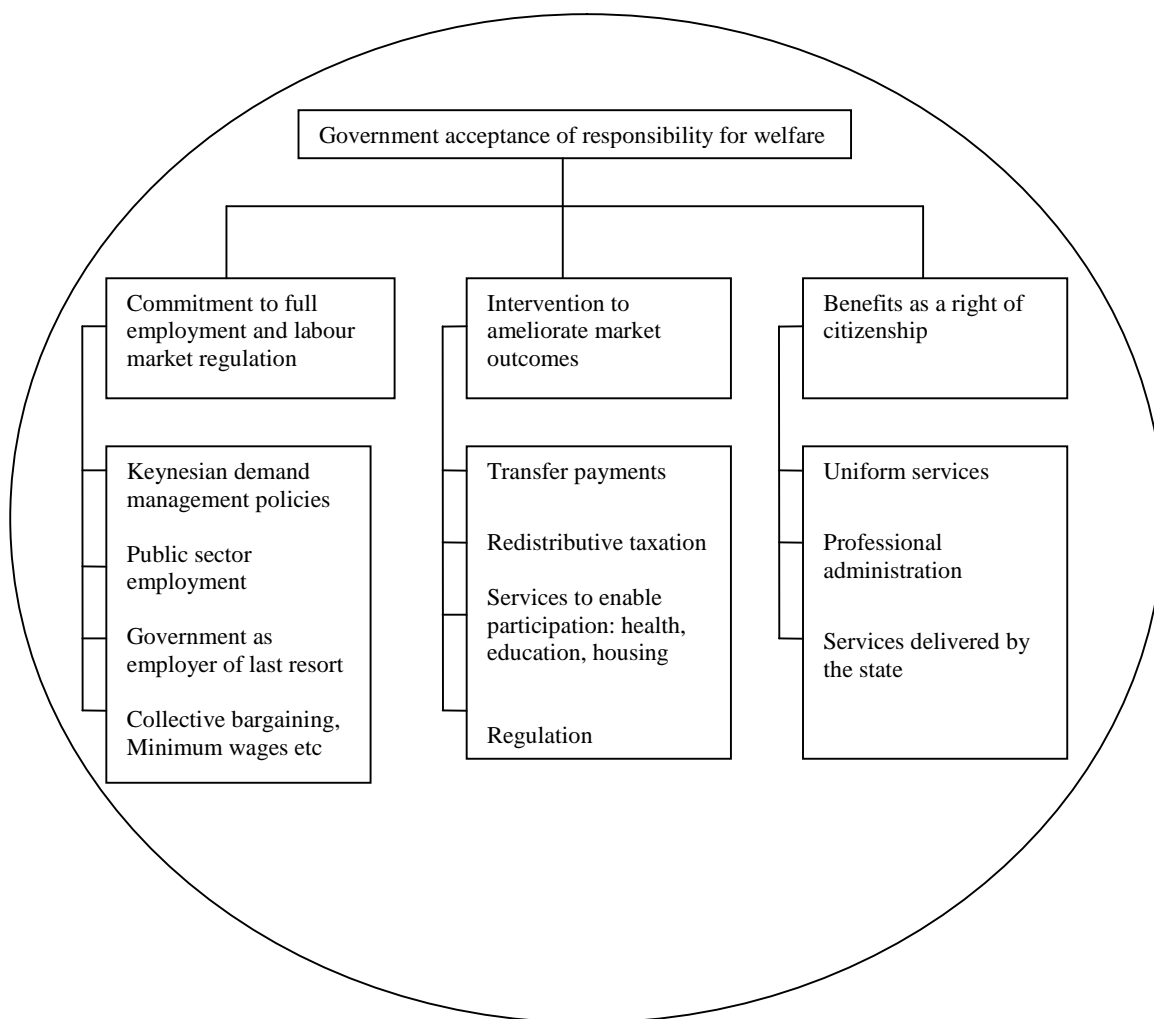
This paper reports research findings on unmet accommodation needs throughout Australia, broadly defined to include permanent and temporary housing. It combines policy analysis and a recent qualitative survey conducted with local government social planners. In aggregate results reveal that lack of availability of affordable housing, public housing and crisis accommodation services are significant issues for Australian communities. When disaggregated by remoteness indicators, the results reveal the heterogeneity of Australia's housing needs and the distinct housing issues that face our diverse communities. Attention to the character of regions adds significant complexity to the policy responses of government to housing. This analysis indicates an urgent need for more progressive, spatially aware public housing policies as the only feasible long-term solution

Introduction

The introduction of neo-liberal economic and social policies in Australia from the 1980s has had detrimental impacts in the housing sector. In tandem with economic policies to produce budget surpluses and foster international competitiveness by increasing the share of national income accruing to profits, redistributive policies that constituted deductions from surplus value to provide social services such as health, education and public housing have been curtailed. In Australia public housing stock has failed to expand in response to population growth and declining housing affordability.

The Keynesian welfare state was part of post-war arrangements aimed at papering over the fundamental contradictions of the capitalist system and placating the working class by ameliorating the worst aspects of capitalism through income redistribution and removing some services from the ambit of the market. As shown in Figure 1, governments accepted responsibility for providing a socially determined level of welfare by maximising employment and providing access to income support and services such as health, education, and housing provided as a right of citizenship.

Figure 1: Characteristics of the Welfare State



Source: Cook (2006: 17)

The Australian wage earners' welfare state meant that the formal welfare state was less important than in some countries since wages and employment conditions ensured most needs could be satisfied without recourse to welfare state provisions (Castles, 1985). Nevertheless, the international expansion of public housing in the postwar period that was an integral component of the welfare state also occurred in Australia despite the high level of home ownership. The 1945 Commonwealth State Housing Agreement (CSHA) launched a national approach to the provision of public rental housing "for those who are in need of proper housing accommodation and who, for various reasons, do not desire or are unable to purchase their own homes" (AHR 1945:5, 386, quoted in AIHW, 1996).

The ability to make concessions during the post-war period was based on a prolonged period of economic growth and production within national confines (Teeple, 1995). The economic crisis of the 1970s, characterised by declining profitability, the breakdown of the Bretton Woods arrangements, oil shocks and recession, was the driving force for the shift to neo-liberal economic policies that signalled a retreat from the welfare state (Gough, 1979; Mishra, 1990; Glennerster, 1991; Scharpf, 2000). These included the embrace of globalisation, opening up new profit-making opportunities through privatisation and contracting out public services and restricting deductions from surplus value that were channelled into the welfare state. International agencies representing the interests of capital in developed countries have campaigned to implement institutional changes that reinforce globalisation. At the forefront have been organisations such as the IMF, World Bank, World Trade Organisation, OECD and the G7 which, according to Halliday (2002), represent the interests of hegemonic capital and promote the global spread of capitalism.

The shift to neo-liberal economic policies was reflected in housing policies of governments of both political persuasions in Australia. The Commonwealth emphasis in housing assistance has shifted from direct provision to subsidisation of private sector provision. In addition to the impact of housing policies it must be stressed that the ability of the population to secure adequate and affordable housing is structurally determined. In particular, abandonment of full employment, the increase in precarious employment characterised by changing industry employment shares and rising proportions of part-time and casual employment, and growing income inequality as the profit share of national income has increased, have also impacted on housing affordability and the need for crisis housing.

This paper reports research findings on the extent of unmet accommodation needs in Australia from a survey of local government conducted in 2007. The following sections discuss the survey method, issues in housing policy, housing affordability, effects of concentration of disadvantaged populations, employment, social cohesion and crisis accommodation. Data from the survey is disaggregated to explore the spatial dynamics of need and disadvantage further. The research confirms that there are significant unmet needs for affordable housing and crisis accommodation facilities such as refuges and hostels in Australia. This analysis indicates an urgent need for more progressive, spatially aware public housing policies as the only feasible long-term solution.

Survey with Local Government Social Planners

Local government social planners were interviewed in order to investigate service and infrastructure provision, to identify gaps in service delivery and to explore potential for creation of socially meaningful employment within communities across the Australian

landscape. A fifty per cent sample of local governments throughout Australia was selected by means of a stratified random sampling technique, using categories derived from the Australia Classification of Local Governments (ACLG) schema, initially developed by the Department of Transport and Regional Services (DOTARS)ⁱ. The survey applied an open-ended, semi-structured approach, mediated through a telephone interview.

For the purpose of this paper, the findings from the survey are isolated to comments relating to housing and accommodation (excluding aged and disability appropriate housing facilities). While participants gave a reasonable analysis of need for housing and accommodation within their community, the data gathered through this methodology was not exhaustive. The limitations of the survey relate to both time constraints that restricted participants' responses, breadth of participant knowledge and also relate to the constrained funding paradigm; that is the competitive and non committal character of contemporary funding regimes that are applied to local governments and many other community development initiatives in Australia (Allen, 2005). Subsequently results are compared with various sets of data, such as the Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) index and unemployment rates, to further investigate issues associated with regional development. Data is examined both nationally, by state and by remoteness indicators, with results revealing substantially different needs across space.

The survey population consisted of 665 local governments throughout Australia (excluding Torres Strait Islands off the coast of Queensland). 328 local governments, selected through a stratified random sampling technique were invited to participate in the study. 46 per cent of the sample (151) completed the entire survey. The rate of response is comparable to other contemporary telephone survey response rates. A weight was applied to the data by state and local government classification to adjust for non-response.

Issues emerging in housing

Appropriate, affordable housing is a prerequisite for health and facilitation of full participation in economic and social life. In Australia the yardstick for determining affordability since the 1990s has usually been set at 30 per cent of income for households in the bottom two income quintiles, with households paying more than 30 per cent considered to be in housing stress (Harding, Phillips and Kelly, 2004). This is an arbitrary measure that has been criticised because it ignores the actual impact of housing costs on living standards and distortions due to differences in household size and type (Seelig and Phibbs, 2006).

The need for affordable housing options is one of the most prevalent issues in society today. Indeed, 87 per cent of local government social planners who participated in our study noted that lack of affordable housing and accommodation options had become a major social issue within their community. Nine per cent of those who didn't mention affordable housing as an unmet social need were from rural agricultural local government areas. The need for affordable housing was very closely tied to the need for investment in and construction of additional public or social housing options. Participants perceived that investment in state housing would help to address the affordability crisis, but expressed considerable doubt as to whether such an outcome would come to fruition. Participants in growth areas reported that investment in public housing had not been in line with projected residential growth.

The issue of need for affordable housing extended to provision of crisis accommodation services and housing brokerage services. Analysis of survey data collected reveals that many

of the housing affordability problems do relate to government policy and residualised supply of state accommodation options. The depth of the crisis, which has penetrated the majority of communities throughout Australia, also requires expansion of social services to address the consequences of social policy. As this analysis reveals, inaccessibility can have a snowballing effect on the social welfare of the most vulnerable.

Participants expressed need for the government and developers to invest substantially in accommodation options that would be accessible to lower income groups, to address the housing affordability crisis. However, it was noted that affordable housing constructed for private ownership often does not reach its target, nor does it go to local residents. For instance, participants from mining communities throughout Australia reported that affordable accommodation options service the transient population that work within the mining industry, rather than local residents experiencing accommodation stress. Participants from these communities noted that the tight housing market had impacted negatively on the welfare of those in lower income groups.

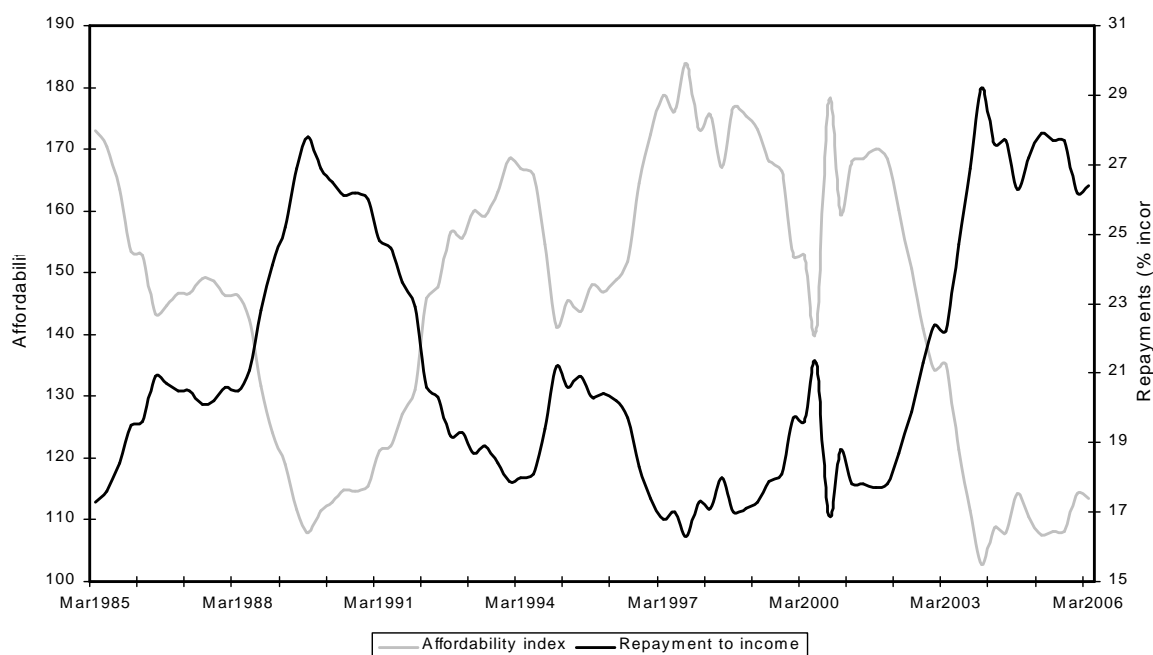
Data was collected from a very small number of indigenous community government bodies. However, the issues that emerged from the analysis are vastly different from those that presented in other local government areas and comparative data sets on unemployment and social indexing of these communities is not reliable. For the purposes of this paper, this data has been excluded. Exploration of data collected on the accommodation needs of the elderly and those with disabilities is also beyond the scope of this paper.

The following section provides a summary of the current situation of affordability by considering both the rental and home ownership markets. The following section reports results of the survey with local government social planners and contributes an in-depth understanding of the social issues that communities are facing in regard to the housing affordability crisis. Needs for expansion of social housing, crisis accommodation services and housing brokerage services are considered across the Australian Classification of Local Governments remoteness index.

Trends in Housing

Affordability issues are evident in both the rental and home ownership markets. Home ownership in Australia has been fairly stable at around 70 per cent since the mid 1960s. There are however strong concerns that it will decline in future as low income earners are priced out of the market (Beer, Kearins and Pieters, 2007). The Productivity Commission report *First Home Ownership* found several adverse demand side impacts (PC, 2004). In relation to owner-occupiers, the major factors were the availability of finance, lower interest rates, the injection of \$4.3 billion over three and a half years through the First Home Owners Scheme, growth in real incomes, population growth and smaller households. Investment in housing doubled in the past decade, reaching 17 per cent of housing stock and 40 per cent of new housing loans. This was primarily driven by negative gearing, changes in the capital gains tax in 1999 and the decline in the share market from 2000 to 2003 (PC, 2004).

Figure 2: HIA affordability index 1985-2006



Source: HIA First Home Buyer Affordability Index (HIA Economics Group, 2007)

Figure 2 shows that the housing affordability index for first home buyers has declined dramatically since the early 1980s reflecting the rise in the proportion of income required to service a mortgage (from 19.3 per cent in 1985 to 26.4 in 2006).

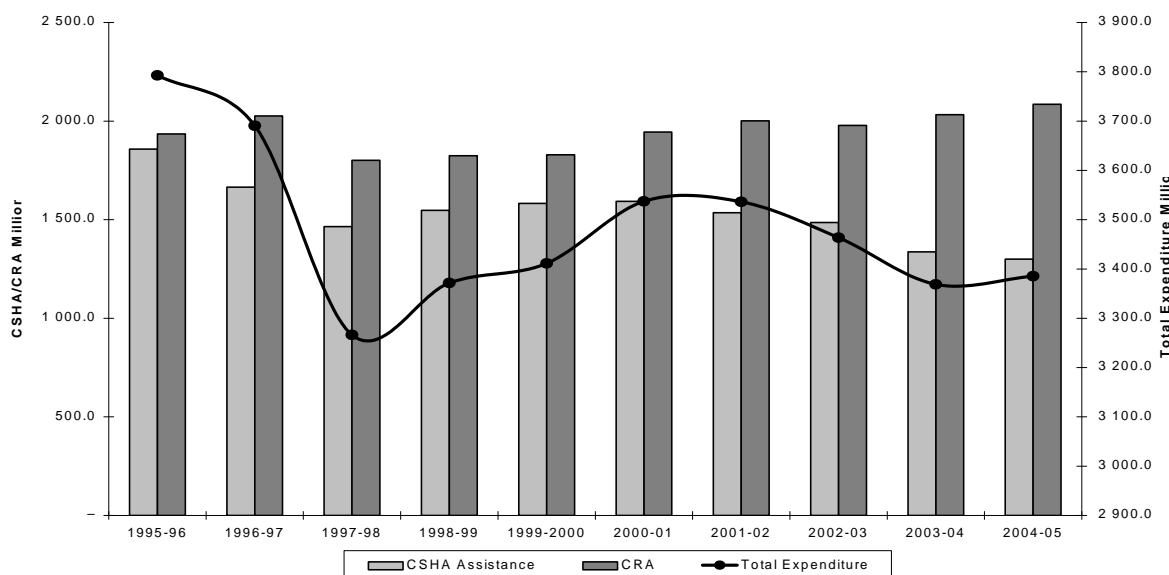
Wood and Stoakes (2006) examined housing affordability and tenure shares in Victoria using Census data from 1981 to 2001. They found that although home ownership increased from 73 per cent in 1981 to almost 75 per cent of households in 2001, households with a head under 35 recorded a fall from over 55 per cent in 1981 to less than 50 per cent in 2001. Housing affordability deteriorated throughout the period and the proportion of households in the bottom two quintiles paying more than 30 per cent of income in mortgage payments increased from 26 per cent in 1981 to over 48 per cent in 2001.

In the private rental market, which accommodates approximately 20 per cent of Australian households, there is widespread evidence of housing stress, and this stress has escalated over time (Beer, Kearins and Pieters, 2007). Wood and Stoakes (2006) found that private renters in Victoria paid an average of 42 per cent of income in 1998-99 compared with only 29 per cent in 1975-76. For the bottom two income quintiles those in housing stress increased from less than 40 per cent in 1981 to over 54 per cent by 2001. Various reasons suggested for housing stress in the private rental market point to market failure, including the concentration of new investment at the top end of rental market, longer duration of renting due to declining housing affordability, and a decline in low cost private rental stock due to proportionately higher property management fees and higher maintenance costs (Mowbray, 2006).

In the rental market, the two most similar groups are those in social housing and recipients of Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA). The major policy change in relation to these two groups has been the increasing proportion of resources for CRA and declining total real expenditure. Rent assistance recipients increased from 480,000 in 1984 to 941,306 in 2006 (SCRGSO, 2007) while Commonwealth assistance to state governments for public housing under the (CSHA) has declined over time in real terms. Figure 3 shows that between 1995-96

and 2004-05 total real expenditure declined by almost 11 per cent and CSHA expenditure declined by 30 per cent while CRA expenditure increased less than eight per cent. CRA expenditure exceeded CSHA expenditure in 1995-96 and increased from \$1,935m in 1995-96 to \$2086m in 2004-05.

Figure 3: Real CSHA and CRA expenditure 1995-96 to 2004-05 (2004-05 dollars)



Source: Review of Government Service Provision (SCRGSP, 2006)

Social housing waiting lists are a partial measure of the demand for social housing but seriously underestimate need due to strict eligibility criteria in most states. Many people who are eligible are not on the waiting list for a variety of reasons including lack of public housing in the location or perceptions of futility due to long waiting lists (IC, 1993). Local Government Social Planners who participated in our study also noted that members of their community viewed public housing as an inaccessible public facility and regarded engaging in application processes as hopeless. Wait times for people on public housing lists vary with severity of need, however reports of wait times lasting between two and ten years should be seen as unacceptable and an unwarranted timeframe to leave one in accommodation stress. To illustrate, in 2005 there were 385,440 social housing dwelling in Australia and 252,463 households were waiting for social housing (SCRGSP, 2006). To further highlight, government provision of social housing is important as it can have a major impact on housing affordability as rents are set at a maximum of 25 to 30 per cent of income. In 2004-05, 94.8 per cent of tenants paid less than 30 per cent of income in rent.

In contrast to the situation with social housing, rents for CRA recipients are determined by the market. Of the 941,319 CRA recipients in 2006, the average rent assistance was \$82.50 per fortnight, while average rent payments were \$303.90 per fortnight (ABS, 2007). This means that CRA provided a subsidy amounting to only 27 per cent of rent to recipients. The ineffectiveness of CRA in delivering affordable housing is highlighted by the fact that one-third of recipients who remain in housing stress after receiving rent assistance (SCRGSP, 2006).

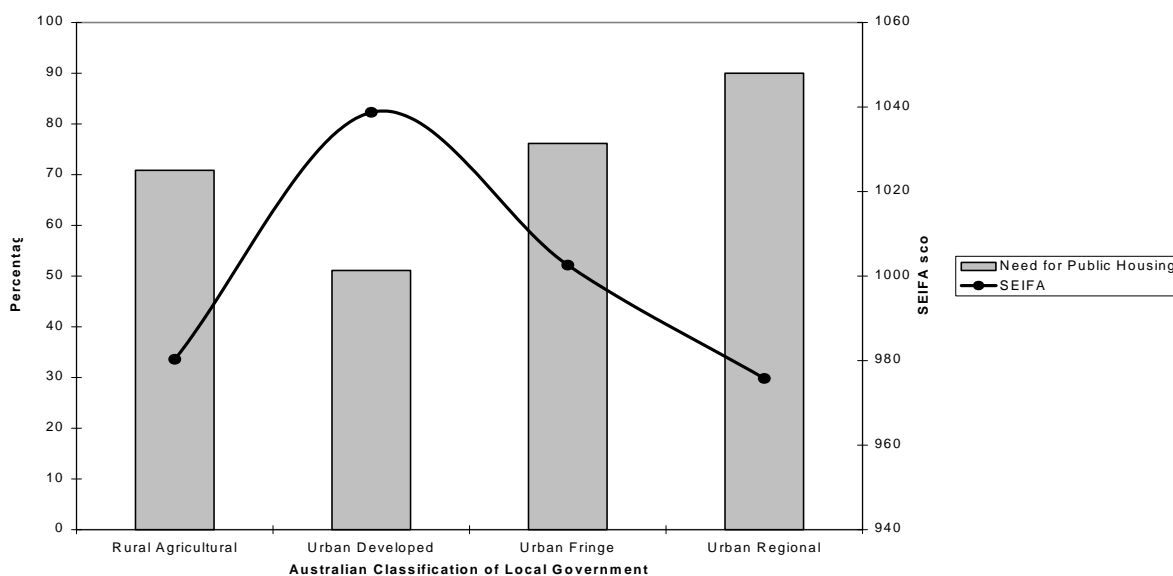
Need for Social Housing

The discourse surrounding public housing does not allow policy space for consideration of the expansion of public housing as a solution to the housing crisis. Public housing stocks have declined due to the combination of lack of new construction or acquisitions and the sale of existing stock. Some participants reported that all public housing stocks within their local government area had been sold. The extensive social consequences of this withdrawal is exemplified in the research findings of Burwood Social Plan (2004: 56), which concluded that:

There is a long waiting list for priority public housing, with more service providers stating that many women involved in protracted family law disputes are forced into the private rental market and subsequently face bankruptcy proceedings in order to obtain public housing.

Eighty-seven per cent of participants noted that housing affordability was an issue in their local government area and 77 per cent reported that expansion of public housing was needed. Queensland reported the highest rates of need (91 per cent) for expansion of public housing, while Western Australia reported the lowest rates (68.1 per cent). Examination of the data by the Australian Classification of Local Government, a regional classification that considers remoteness from services and opportunity for social interaction, and the SEIFA advantage/disadvantage index reveals a distinct inverse relationship, with areas that have low (relatively high disadvantage) SEIFA scores indicating higher levels of need for public housing. This analysis suggests that those areas that are disadvantaged also have an inadequate supply of public housing. Further examination of how this situation impacts on disadvantage is necessary.

Figure 4: Percentage of participants reporting need for public housing and the SEIFA advantage/disadvantage index.



Source: ABS (2001) SEIFA Index of Relative Socio-Economic Advantage/Disadvantage, Cat No. 2033.0.55.001ⁱⁱ; Author’s own data.

While 77 per cent of participants reported need for investment in public housing, they reported that the scale of need was unknown and were not able to offer further information on this. This is part due to inadequate data, but also due to the characteristics of those

experiencing housing precariousness. For instance, the Byron Shire Council Social Plan (2004: 52) notes that:

There have been an increasing number of reports of homeless women and children with strong connection to the shire. These are women who are not necessarily visible as being homeless as they are moving around – staying with friends one week, in a caravan park another week, at times sleeping in their cars.

Many participants commented that public housing was needed, but that an adequate maintenance programme should also accompany this investment. Participants commented that many public housing estates remain in poor repute, and this contributes to the stigma that public housing tenants endure. In communities that did have a greater supply of public housing stock, participants reported that due to the stringent eligibility requirement, the presence of the housing stock had brought highly disadvantaged individuals and families into their community.

Local government is often a first point of contact for communities, and when the state and federal government withdraw from provision of adequate and affordable public housing, it is often the local government or community groups that are left to plug the policy gaps. Some local governments, particularly those in rural areas continue to ease the short fall in public housing by providing their residents with a small amount of social housing. However, the rate base of and funding for local government is not adequate to address housing needs. Only the federal government has the fiscal capacity to adequately meet the public housing needs of Australia's population.

Public housing was not only needed for local residents suffering housing stress, it was also needed, especially in rural agricultural and rural remote areas, to attract skilled workers or seasonal workers to provide services for communities.

Need for Crisis Accommodation

Crisis accommodation is sought for a number of reasons. The major reasons for seeking support include domestic violence, eviction, usual accommodation not available, relationship or family breakdown, and financial difficulty. 44 per cent of participants reported need for additional crisis accommodation facilities within their LGA, and noted that demand for services/facilities far out weighed the supply. Investment in additional crisis accommodation facilities for those involved in domestic violence was the most frequently cited need; this was followed by refuges for homeless men and homeless youth.

The government currently provides crisis accommodation options through two main programmes. The first is the Crisis Accommodation Program (CAP). CAP commenced as part of the Commonwealth State Housing Agreement (CSHA) in 1985 to assist people who were homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. Under CAP the Commonwealth provides finances to acquire, construct or upgrade buildings that are used by local governments and various community groups to provide emergency accommodation under the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP). The SAAP is jointly funded by the Commonwealth and State governments (AIHW, 2007). Its purpose of SAAP has evolved over time, from simple provision of accommodation to include a range of support services to assist clients achieve independence and return to the community. The strategy applies case management and referral to housing, education, labour market and community services

(Erebus Consulting Partners, 2004). The stated objective of the current SAAP agreement that runs from 2005 to 2010 is to focus on prevention and early intervention (DoCS, 2007).

In 2004-05 there were 1,294 providers who assisted 100,400 SAAP clients (AIHW, 2006). There is evidence that agencies are operating at capacity and there is unmet need since 56 per cent of applicants were turned away, comprising 54 per cent of adults and unaccompanied children, and 60 per cent of children accompanied by an adult. Agencies that were primarily targeted to families had the highest turn away rates. Program evaluations have found that SAAP's effectiveness is constrained by the lack of affordable and appropriate housing, "the impact of high rates of unemployment and poverty, and the diversity of problems faced by SAAP clients including mental health and domestic violence" (Erebus Consulting Partners, 2004: 5).

Despite the demarcation between social housing and crisis accommodation many people transition between the two. A review of the use of SAAP services in Victoria between 2002 and 2004 found that eight per cent obtained public tenancy during SAAP support. Of those who moved into public housing 25 per cent needed SAAP support again and 20 per cent had moved out of public housing before the end of the following financial year (Kelly, 2006). Similarly, those in public housing prior to accessing SAAP services used 11 per cent of support periods, primarily due to financial difficulty and domestic violence. Of public tenants using SAAP services 40 per cent were single women with children.

Kelly (2006) found that single people under 25 years and Indigenous Australians were the most likely to be repeat service users. The early intervention *Reconnect* program began in 1999 to provide various forms of support to reduce homelessness among youth aged 12 to 18. *Reconnect* provides a range of services to improve outcomes relating to family and community relationships, and employment, education and training outcomes (Erebus Consulting Partners, 2004).

Survey participants from local governments outside metropolitan areas reported much higher rates of need for domestic violence refuge facilities (28 per cent), than their urban developed counterparts (eight per cent). Many participants from non-metropolitan areas reported a complete absence of emergency accommodation facilities, which therefore meant that those seeking refuge were faced with the additional challenge of leaving their local area. The absence of such services can disrupt daily life, employment, education, community interaction, and interaction with family and social networks. For instance, when accommodation services are made available to youth at risk of homelessness they maintain stronger links with education and the community (DoCS, 2007).

Similarly, high levels of mobility for school aged children disrupt education, formation of lasting friendships and participation in sport and other activities in the community (Erebus Consulting Partners, 2004). The United Nations (2007: 13) concludes that a "transitory and insecure life leads to numerous forms of other disadvantage, including social isolation, poor mental health, increased exposure to crime, greater vulnerability to being a victim of crime, lack of employment opportunities, and persistent stigmatization and discrimination."

Participants revealed that even when emergency accommodation was available within their local communities, it was only supplied for certain social groups. In several cases, it was revealed that in spite of documented need, political decisions had undermined the sustainability of some refuge services, particularly those for youth. In isolated cases

participants reported that residents had mobilised to block refuge facilities opening in their neighbourhood.

Need for investment in crisis accommodation services was not tightly connected to trends evident in unemployment or other social indexes, however the trends in responses are reflective of homelessness and broader social processes. For example, the highest needs reported for youth refuge accommodation were located in urban developed areas (17 per cent) and in rural agricultural Australia (18 per cent).

The high need reported in rural Australia is most likely associated with the residualisation of social services to these communities. Urban developed areas become destinations for homeless people, which may provide some explanation of the higher incidence of need in these areas. The Youth Needs Audit of Penrith City Council (2002: 18) provides an illustration of this situation:

Refuges in Emu Plains and Penrith are often full, with young people having to go to the city for emergency accommodation or organise to stay at a friend's house. Young people believe that this could be improved by providing more crisis and long-term accommodation services in Penrith.

Medium sized urban regional local governments, particularly those along the NSW coastline reported high unmet demand for accommodation to cater for homeless men (42.3 per cent), as did local governments in urban fringe areas (35.7 per cent). Analysis from Erebus Consulting Partners (2004) found that single men accounted for almost one-third of those seeking support in 2002-03.

Need for domestic violence refuges, as reported by participants of this study was far higher in urban fringe (33.1 per cent), urban regional (26 per cent) and rural agricultural (25.7 per cent) areas than in urban developed areas (8.8 per cent). Data from the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (2007) on reported rates of domestic violence confirms this spatial trend. This analysis suggests that the degree to which the spatial needs of this social problem are being adequately met needs further exploration.

Participants suggested that there was great potential for expansion of collective housing options, which provide post-crisis accommodation for various vulnerable groups. Indeed, research has shown that this modelling of housing has proven to be somewhat beneficial to tenants, as it provides a space for development of household management skills, development of communication skills (Ziersch & Arthurson, 2005).

Beyond that, participants reported that the needs of people seeking refuge is complex and varies across each individual case. They noted that a range of social support, childcare and substance abuse services needed to be available to people using crisis accommodation facilities. Previous studies have found that at least 30 per cent of people who access these services require ongoing assistance with mental health issues (Erebus Consulting Partners, 2004).

Need for Brokerage services

The crisis of housing affordability and the deficient stock of state accommodation options reveals itself in capacity crisis in emergency relief services. For instance, as affordable housing is scarce people are increasingly drawing on social service to help them identify appropriate accommodation options. Not surprisingly, these services are struggling to come

to grips with the demands of their increasing client pool, largely because of the current supply constraints on affordable accommodation. Participants of this study most commonly reported deficiencies in brokerage and referral services for those seeking temporary or medium term accommodation and sought additional administrative support for these services. Brokerage services assist in the locating of affordable accommodation, aiding with rental applications, helping to locate furnishings, while also involving visitation services and mentoring. Such a service would assist those in crisis maintain connections to community and institutions that they need to access, while also minimising the disruptiveness that housing precariousness entails.

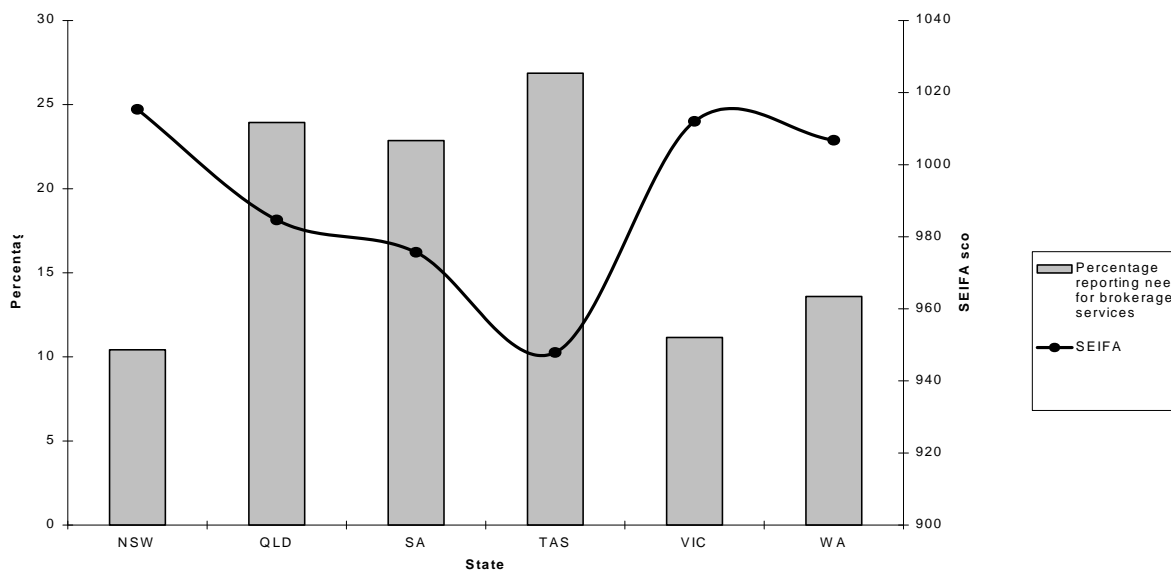
These services are especially important as the non-availability of affordable housing options and reduced access to public housing stocks creates conditions where discrimination against communities enduring situations of crisis and housing precariousness may flourish. This was a particular issue for metropolitan areas. The Ashfield Social Plan (2001: 69) exemplifies this point:

Young women with children, whose partners have left, not only find the cost of housing too expensive but also face discrimination from real estate agents and landlords in obtaining appropriate private rental accommodation. Because of the scarcity of public housing these groups are forced into paying a disproportionate amount of their incomes in accommodation costs.

Areas most likely to report service deficiencies for brokerage services were in urban fringe and urban developed areas that surround the capital cities. This undoubtedly reflects the dramatic increases in housing prices over the last decade. For instance, 20 per cent of participants from urban developed areas reported need for additional brokerage services. To further illustrate, one survey participant reported that within the local government area there were three staff available to provide accommodation brokerage services for 1200 homeless people.

Medium to very large rural agricultural areas also reported complete or near absence of brokerage services to support their community members in accommodation stress. These reports are consistent with general trends of service decline in rural Australia. Analysis of data by state reveals that areas reporting need for additional brokerage services are those areas that are comparatively disadvantaged. The figure below clearly illustrates this inverse relationship, with areas that have low (relatively high disadvantage) SEIFA scores indicating higher levels of unmet need for these services.

Figure 5: Percentage of participants reporting need for additional housing brokerage services and the SEIFA advantage/disadvantage index.



Source: ABS (2001) SEIFA Index of Relative Socio-Economic Advantage/Disadvantage, Cat No. 2033.0.55.001; Author's own data.

In tight rental markets, such as some of the mining areas in Western Australia and Queensland, the scarcity of affordable rental or post-crisis accommodation is never more evident than in the waiting periods that people seeking to transition out of crisis-accommodation endure. Participants reported that at times these wait periods lapsed 6 months. The sheer lack of accommodation options for people in accommodation crisis has seen welfare support workers placing people in caravan parks as medium term accommodation options, due to the lack of affordable accommodation options in the public and private rental markets.

Conclusion

Each community faces a range of social issues, and policy has varying degree of responsiveness to the needs of individuals, families and communities. Analysis of data collected throughout this study clearly shows distinct variation in the issues that communities are struggling to come to grips with, however the need for affordable housing is one social issue that transcends space. This paper sought to identify service provision and services levels that were inadequate to meet local demand. The findings suggest that a realignment or a re-shuffling of service provision would not address the situation of service deficiencies, but simply redistribute deficiencies across social services and across space. Constrained funding paradigms were a key barrier to effective service and infrastructure provision in communities. Investment in housing to meet the accommodation needs of communities is urgently needed and financial resource constraints should not be an a priori justification for not fulfilling this responsibility.

Research has long shown that poor housing and poor or inaccessible services/infrastructure are closely associated with limited social opportunity. Our analysis reveals that areas with high levels of need for public housing, crisis accommodation and housing brokerage services

are also the communities that are comparatively disadvantaged or experiencing higher rates of violence and other social issues. While research has traditionally focused on disadvantage located in public housing estates, these tendencies transcend both public and private housing estates. Randolph & Holloway (2005:174) explain that:

The creation and maintenance of concentrations of disadvantage in private housing is just as much an outcome of the way the private market allocates those with least choice to the least desired locations, as the concentration of disadvantage on public housing estates is the outcome of increasingly targeted allocation and eligibility criteria among public landlords.

Traditionally public and community housing has sought to provide the stability needed for tenants to access the labour market and reduce poverty. Arthurson and Jacobs (2008) found that the qualities of social housing, relating to affordability and secure tenure, assisted tenants in locating and maintaining employment and subsequently reduced social exclusion. Expansion of social and public housing would be likely to address the housing affordability crisis, yet such an action is at odds with the government's growth and development trajectory. Moreover, the debate is constructed in such a way that stifles effective policy responses. Beer et al (2007) note that the debate on housing affordability is very much affected by tensions concerned with land containment policies and ecological sustainable development, as a result the debate focuses on planning responses rather than policy that will see affordable housing materialise.

The residualised role of the state has consequences for redistribution and equality, which are borne unequally. This study has uncovered some of the dynamics concerned with the unequal distribution of housing stress and affordability. The existence of the unmet needs for these services necessarily leads one to query the effectiveness of current policy solutions, and their ability to come to grips with the housing and housing support needs of communities across Australia.

The economic crisis that commenced in the mid 1970s undermined the ability of the Australian wage earners' welfare state to continue as a vehicle for delivery of adequate living standards for workers. The advent of mass unemployment meant that for the first time in the postwar period large numbers of people were forced to rely on the underdeveloped formal welfare state provisions. The introduction of neo-liberal policies that successive governments have persisted with have impacted adversely on housing provision and other areas of social provision. Failure to supply an adequate scale of social housing to accommodate population growth and those unable to secure adequate, affordable housing in the private rental or home purchase market, accords with Jessop's explanation of welfare state transformation, specifically the 'destatization' aspect of government withdrawal from service provision in favour of using private sector.

Further, residualisation of social housing has become entrenched through increased tightening of targeting mechanisms since 1973 so that a high proportion of allocations of social housing are now to people with complex needs. The shift to reliance on CRA for those outside the labour market has resulted in a deterioration in access to affordable housing. This research confirms that neo-liberal policies have been an inadequate response for the provision of adequate, affordable and appropriate housing and indicates an urgent need for more progressive, spatially aware public housing policies as the only feasible long-term solution.

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ⁱ The Australia Classification of Local Governments (ACLG) schema, initially developed by the Department of Transport and Regional Services (DOTARS), groups local government over three variables. The first step defines if the local government is urban or rural based on population size and density. The second step considers proximity to an urban centre, industry and population growth. This groups local governments into developed, regional, fringe, remotes, agricultural and significant growth. The final step looks at population size and classifies local governments small, medium, large and very large. Each step allocates a prefix to develop a three-letter identifier for each class of local government. For instance, UDS for Urban Developed Small.

ⁱⁱ The ABS SEIFA Index of Relative Socio-Economic Advantage/Disadvantage variables on income and skill. A high score indicates that an area has a relatively high proportion of people with high incomes or a skilled workforce and low proportion of low incomes and unskilled people in the labour force. Areas with a low SEIFA score have a comparatively high proportion of people with low incomes and unskilled people in the workforce.