



SUBMISSION INTO THE NATIONAL HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS PLAN

Department of Social Services
Australian Government

Submission by the
Community Restorative Centre

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This always was, always will be Aboriginal Land.

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Submission into National Housing and Homelessness Plan

Thank you for the opportunity to provide submission with respect to the *National Housing and Homelessness Plan in Australia*. The focus of our submission pertains to housing and homelessness among people who are impacted by the criminal justice system, namely people exiting prison.

This submission is informed by our practice and experience as a long running evidence-based **community organisation working at the intersection of the criminal justice system and housing**. We urge that future planning of responses to housing and homelessness in Australia incorporates the experiences of CRC clients and staff, and more broadly people who have been in contact with, and are impacted by, the criminal justice system.

We highlight the following points in this submission:

- I. People exiting prison are the fastest growing client category for specialist homelessness services (SHS) over the past decade (Martin et al. 2021). 54% of people leaving prison expect to be homeless on release from prison (AIHW 2018).
- II. Exclusion from housing amongst people who have been in prison occurs at multiple levels, and is underpinned by a chronic shortage of social housing, a lack of temporary and crisis accommodation, financial exclusion from the private market, and limited access to specialist support services to assist with housing.
- III. There is an urgent need for dedicated housing and direct pathways to stable accommodation for people exiting prison, including pre-release engagement and planning with housing and community organisations.
- IV. There is a need to support and sustain specialist programs that enhance access to housing for people exiting prison. Governments must work collaboratively with community service providers and those with lived experience in program development.
- V. Policies and strategies for housing for people impacted by the criminal justice system must pay careful consideration to the needs of First Nations people who are shamefully over-represented in Australia's prisons. Housing strategy must centre and enhance culture and connection to community. Policies must not discriminate or exclude Aboriginal people from accessing safe and appropriate housing.
- VI. More housing options (and increased availability) are needed which can meet the needs of people who have been to prison and their families i.e., crisis accommodation, temporary accommodation, youth-specific accommodation, transitional accommodation, and long-term sustainable housing solutions.
- VII. Ensure that policies and procedures which impact housing and homelessness amongst justice involved people and their families support better outcomes e.g., supporting people to maintain leases while in custody.
- VIII. Embed an understanding of the needs of people impacted by the criminal justice system into housing policies, including adoption of trauma-informed and culturally aware approaches which aim to reduce stigma and discrimination of people who have been to prison.
- IX. Support community-based service delivery models which improve access to government services, and foster inter-agency cooperation between community organisations and government which can work towards a more integrated approach to addressing the complex needs of people exiting prison, including support with mental health and drug and alcohol use.
- X. Access to private rentals amongst people exiting prison could be supported through policies which provide more targeted financial assistance and address stigma and discrimination.

About CRC

The Community Restorative Centre (CRC) is the lead NGO in New South Wales (NSW) providing specialist support to people affected by the criminal justice system, with a particular emphasis on the provision of reintegration programs for people with multiple and complex needs who have recently been released from prison.

As a part of the CRC model of care, our support workers connect their clients with any supports they need, with a particular focus on supporting clients into long term, safe and stable housing. Overall, CRC's model of support includes intensive (outreach) case-management, which is holistic, relational, client centred (needs-based), flexible, and long-term (up to 12 months). Many of CRC's programs are based on a *throughcare* model, which means we begin working with clients while they are still in prison.

Engaging with clients prior to their release from prison (ideally 3 months prior) improves their engagement and facilitates smoother transition from prison into community. However, CRC also accepts clients from the community who have exited prison in the past 6 months, have complex needs and who experience a high level of disadvantage which puts them at risk of returning to prison. Client needs are met through the provision of both practical and relational supports which work symbiotically together. The practical supports assist with housing, finances, health, or legal issues. The relational supports are based on non-judgmental and unconditional support.

CRC has over 70 years specialist experience in this area. All CRC programs aim to reduce recidivism, break entrenched cycles of criminal justice system involvement, and build pathways out of the criminal justice system. **CRC works holistically to do this, addressing issues such as homelessness, drug and alcohol use, social isolation, physical and mental health, disability, employment, education, family relationships, financial hardship, and histories of trauma.**

Table 1: List of CRC's Transitional Support Programs

CRC Program (A to Z)	Overview	Clients supported 2021-2022
Alcohol and Other Drugs (AOD) Transitional Support (Greater Sydney Metropolitan)	The Transitional Alcohol and Other Drugs (AOD) Project is an outreach-based holistic counselling service for men and women with a history of involvement in the criminal justice system and complex AOD issues. It provides pre-release and outreach AOD support to people exiting NSW correctional centres across the Greater Sydney metropolitan region, including people on remand. The project is focused on working with people who have complex needs including mental illness and/or cognitive impairment.	872
Extended Reintegration Service (ERS) (South Western Sydney)	This project works with people on release from prison who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, have a Corrective Services risk assessment of high to medium-high (utilising the LSI-R tool) and have a mental illness and/or intellectual disability. ERS is a partnership with NSW Corrective Services, South-Western Sydney Area Health Service and NSW Housing. CRC transitional workers offer pre-release support and	14

	planning, and intensive holistic case management for up to nine months post-release.	
The Miranda Project (Penrith)	The Miranda Project provides a range of supports to women who are at risk of both ongoing criminal justice system involvement and family and domestic violence. It is based at Penrith Women's Health Centre and is a unique specialist service run by women for women. It provides both intensive casework and group work for women with complex support needs.	147
Pathways Home	Pathways Home provides outreach case management to young people aged 10-24 who have been involved in the criminal justice system and require AOD support. It provides case management to help young people address the drivers of their criminal legal system interactions through helping them plan and access what supports they will need post release. The program runs in Central, Eastern and Western Sydney.	37
Reintegration Housing Support program (RHSP)	The Reintegration Housing Support Program (RHSP) aims to connect people who are leaving custody, or who have been released in the last month, and are at risk of homelessness with specialist support workers who will assist with securing access to suitable accommodation, as well as wrap-around psychosocial support. CRC support workers based in six DCJ Housing Offices work alongside DCJ Housing staff to assist program participants to secure and sustain long-term housing once they leave custody.	240
Transitional and Post-Release Support (Nepean / Blue Mountains)	The Penrith/Nepean/Blue Mountains project works with people on release from prison who have experienced multiple and/or complex disadvantage, and who are risk of both homelessness and ongoing criminal justice system involvement. This project is focused on people who want to reside after custody in the Nepean, Penrith or Blue Mountains region. CRC staff are co-located with Wentworth housing.	74
Transitional Boarding House Support (Newtown)	The CRC/Boarding House Project works with people on release from prison who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, and who are seeking to live in a boarding house in the Inner Western Sydney region. The CRC transitional worker offers pre-release support and planning, and short, medium and long-term intensive holistic case management. CRC staff are co-located with Newtown Neighbourhood centre.	32

Transitional Indigenous service (NSW Far West)	<p>This project works with First Nations people on release from prison into the Broken Hill, Wilcannia and Menindee regions who have experienced multiple and complex disadvantage and are at risk of ongoing criminal justice system involvement. CRC transitional workers offer pre-release support and planning along with short, medium and long-term intensive holistic case management.</p>	<p>36</p>
Women's Transitional and Post-Release Service (Inner City Sydney and South Western Sydney)	<p>The Women's Transitional and Reintegration Services are outreach case management, transitional and reintegration services for women exiting NSW correctional centres who have experienced multiple and complex disadvantage and are at risk of homelessness and ongoing criminal justice system involvement.</p> <p>The Inner City Women's Transitional Service supports women who will return to the inner city and surrounding suburbs. It is part of the Inner City Service for Women with Complex Needs and operates in partnership with specialist services B Miles and Detour House.</p>	<p>90</p>

How CRC assists clients with housing

Help securing housing (both temporary and longer-term) is a defining and crucial factor in CRC support (particularly in the transitional services). Gaining access to safe and secure housing is something most clients need help with when exiting prison. An evaluation of CRC's transitional programs found that **housing is perhaps the most urgent need for CRC clients, who would otherwise be facing homelessness upon exiting prison.** Housing is fundamental in providing basic stability upon which to work on other elements of transition and reintegration (Sotiri et al. 2021).

Further, it was found that homelessness is associated with heightened risks for CRC clients, such as increased exposure to substance use, violence and interactions with police, all of which increase the risk of returning to prison. **A key part of re-integration is safe and stable housing. Successful re-integration can notably reduce criminality.** As shown in a recent evaluation of CRC programs, the number of proven offences among CRC clients fell by 62.1% following their engagement with the program (Sotiri et al. 2021).

Some of the practical ways CRC workers assist clients with housing include:

- assist people leaving prison with housing applications and trying to find suitable housing options, especially when clients have complex support needs;
- help clients with furnishing accommodation;
- help manage stress when people are in a housing crisis; and
- advocate for clients to housing services.

Approach to this submission

In writing this submission, consultations took place with several frontline CRC staff across a range of our programs to reflect on the immediate issues concerning securing housing for people exiting prison. The programs we consulted included CRC's Extended Reintegration Service (ERS), Reintegration Housing Support Program (RHSP), Penrith Transition, Families Casework Sydney Metro, Miranda, Sydney Metro Transition Team, Pathways Home, The Boarding House Outreach Service (BHOS), Far West Team.

We present direct quotes from CRC staff, where applicable. Case studies of CRC clients are presented at the end of the document.

Please note that when "government" or "housing" are referred to in this submission, this pertains to the NSW Government and the Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ), if not stated otherwise.

RESPONSE TO THE SUBMISSION QUESTIONS

1. Guided Question 1: *How can governments and community service providers reduce homelessness and/or support people who may be at risk of becoming homeless in Australia?*

In this submission we detail how governments and community service providers can address housing and homelessness among people who have been in contact with criminal justice system.

“Thousands of people leave NSW prisons each year with no support services engaged to work with them, no information about how to survive on the outside, no money, no identification, no clothing, no family or friends, and nowhere at all to live. For people seeking to make changes in their lives, including changes around drug and alcohol use, and staying out of prison, the experience of homelessness on release creates an enormous challenge in terms of maintaining such goals.” (Sotiri 2020)

1.1. Sub-question: What is most contributing to homelessness in urban, regional, and rural or remote areas?

People who have been recently released from prison are a particularly high-risk group for homelessness. Within this group, there are many people released from prison who have complex needs or are marginalised cohorts, increasing their risk of homelessness or unstable housing including mental health and/or alcohol and other drug (AOD) issues, young people, women (especially those who have experienced domestic violence), First Nations people, families of people in prison, and people on the child protection register. These populations face significant barriers to accessing housing and related support when being released from prison.

1.1.1. People released from prison – over 20,000 people at immediate risk of homelessness every year

People released from prison are the fastest growing client category for specialist homelessness services (SHS) over the past decade (Martin et al. 2021). **There were just over 41,000 people were in prison at the time of the 2020 prison census**, and an even higher number of people “flow-through” prisons. Martin et al (2021) estimated that, overall, about 65,000 prison releases occurred in Australia in 2019.

A national survey of people in prison found that **more than half (54%) of those leaving prison expected to be homeless or living in unstable accommodation upon release**. 44% of those surveyed were planning to sleep in short-term or emergency accommodation, and 10% didn’t know where they would be sleeping or planned to sleep rough (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2019). Using these figures, it can be estimated that over 20,000 people released from prison each year are at risk of homelessness.

“The main factor is the amount of time they’ve been homeless. It is easier to get housing for a younger person who’s not conditioned to live on the street. One of the frustrations of challenges is that a lot of these people are homeless due to their mental health and AOD problems.”

For many people impacted by the criminal justice system their homelessness is cyclical, whereby many people are homeless prior to entering prison, with the same survey finding 33% of people entering prison had been homeless in the month prior (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2019). Further, people in prison might not be able to sustain a private rental or lose their public tenancy (this happens for periods of imprisonment longer than 6 months). This can also impact the families of people who are in prison who may be residing in the home.

Homelessness is one of the main predictors of reincarceration in Australia (Baldry et al. 2003).

Research has shown that people exiting prison with complex support needs who receive public housing have better criminal justice outcomes than comparable cohorts who received private rental assistance only (Martin et al. 2021). The same study estimated a net yearly benefit of between \$5,200 and \$35,000 from providing public housing to people with recent prison histories.

A recent CRC Evaluation found that housing is often the most pressing needs for our clients when exiting prison (Sotiri et al. 2021). The study found that homelessness is associated with heightened risks for CRC clients, such as increased exposure to substance use, violence and interactions with police, all of which increase the risk of returning to prison. Moreover, bail conditions which require a stable address can be unrealistic when people are in more likelihood going to be homeless, and not having a stable address can be a direct pathway back to custody.

*“People who come out of the Broken Hill prison might get a two night accommodation via Link2Home. Majority of the time, however, that is not available. So, they give family’s address, but realistically, they are being released into homelessness. We pick them up and they are trying to find out where they are going to sleep. **Some of these men get out, for a week, get pulled out by the police while on the street and get a breach because they are not at the address that was provided. They don’t get any time or ability to get things right.**”*

Gaps in housing assistance when exiting prison

One in seven prison releases result in a request for assistance from a specialist homelessness service (SHS) (Martin et al. 2021). This correlates with AIHW data showing that around 9,000 people exiting custodial settings access SHS services every year (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2022). In NSW, people exiting prison are 32 times more likely to access SHS services (NSW Government FACSIR 2023).

However, there is still not enough support for people exiting prison to transition to stable housing. National SHS data shows a proportional increase in homelessness from 31% to 35% in their clients exiting prison settings due to the flow of people from institutions into homelessness (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2022). The same report showed that only 3.4% of clients requiring long-term housing were receiving long term housing support (see Table 2 below). A research report by the Australian Institute of Criminology found that **most people released from prison each year would meet the eligibility criteria for intensive housing support needs, however only 16% were able to be placed in a program that finds stable housing** (Willis 2018).

Table 2: Supports needed by SHS clients who have recently exited custodial settings (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2022)

Support needed	People requiring support	Percentage of people who received support
Short-term or emergency accommodation	4,600	64%
Assistance for family/domestic violence	660	70%
Material aid/brokerage	3,100	89%
Long-term housing	4,700	3.4%

1.1.2. There are unique housing considerations for specific groups of people impacted by the criminal justice system

Overarching factors driving homelessness amongst people exiting prison

This submission details throughout various barriers and shortfalls which contribute towards homelessness amongst people exiting prison, and other people impacted by the criminal justice system, such as families. Some of the key drivers of homeless amongst people exiting prison in NSW are:

- The overarching **housing crisis** and the chronic **shortage of social housing**, a dearth of temporary and crisis accommodation, financial exclusion from the private market, and limited access to specialist support services to assist with housing.
- The **lack of dedicated specialist accommodation** options for people exiting prison for example, in 2020 there were only 38 specialist beds in NSW for people leaving prison.
- Housing **systems and processes which can be exclusionary** and difficult to access for people exiting prison, especially those with complex needs.
 - People often leave prison without personal identification, or other records, which are needed to apply for housing support services when leaving prison.
 - Leases on rental (social and private) are compromised when someone goes into custody.
 - Exclusion from services due to complexity of support needs.
- Difficulties accessing housing amongst justice impacted people is exacerbated by **stigma and discrimination**.
- There is a complex relationship between **Parole/bail conditions** and housing. For example, people without a fixed address have difficulties in attaining bail and people with parole conditions relating to the child protection register or apprehended domestic violence orders may have limits on where they can live.
- The **social isolation** of people who have been in prison means they are often lacking social or family supports in the community who might be able to support them with housing. Conversely, **overcrowding of family homes** (especially amongst First Nations people) also drives people exiting prison into homelessness.

People with co-occurring needs

People who have multiple co-occurring complex support needs are over-represented in prison systems. These needs can increase barriers to accessing appropriate housing when exiting prison and increase their risk of homelessness. While mental health issues, experience of trauma, or drug

and alcohol use frequently occurs among people who are homeless, people with prison histories have additional barriers to overcome in accessing conventional housing due to stigma and discrimination.

Table 2: The Social context of imprisonment and disadvantage in NSW (Justice Health & Forensic Mental Health Network 2017b)

Disadvantage	Prevalence in NSW prisons
Mental health diagnosis	63%
Disability	28%
Homelessness (primary or secondary)	15%
Experienced a traumatic event	65%
Have been in an abusive relationship	28% men and 71% women
Committed current ¹ offence while intoxicated	60%
Placed in care <16 years	14%
Left school by year 10	72%
Experienced youth justice	33%
Prior imprisonment	60%

First Nations people

First Nations people are over-represented in prisons and experience an imprisonment rate that is 13 times higher than that of non-Indigenous populations (Martin et al. 2021). This overrepresentation also exists in the homelessness space where **one in five (20.4%) of the homeless population is Indigenous** (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2023). Factors that contribute to this include the **lack of appropriate supports, racism, discrimination, disconnection from Country and a lack of recognition of the strengths of cultural connection and kinship.**

There are important intersectional dynamics that must be acknowledged. First Nations women are **more commonly mothers and survivors of domestic violence** (Australian Law Reform Commission 2017). While they experience the same barriers to housing discussed above, in many instances these barriers are *compounded* through experiences of discrimination and racism.

First Nations people often experience a lack of appropriate supports that address the specific issues facing them (Baldry and McCausland 2009). For example, a survey of First Nations women in prison conducted by Legal Aid NSW found that **20% of Indigenous women relinquished social housing tenancies when entering prison.² However, only 2.6% were approved for priority housing when exiting custody** (n=153) (Legal Aid NSW 2015). This represents a failure of the social housing system to assist those who are most vulnerable. Further, many First Nations people and those who have exited the prison system feel they are discriminated against by service providers and especially in the private rental market (Paul Memmott et al. 2005). This is exacerbated by a **historic distrust of government and services by First Nations people impacting their ability to reach out for housing support.**

80% of people incarcerated in NSW prisons are not incarcerated anywhere near their intended place of residence in the community (Sotiri 2020). This means that **during imprisonment, First Nations people may experience disconnection from Country impacting their cultural wellbeing** and creating difficulty in accessing important kinship support. Further, the broader definition of family in Aboriginal

¹ Offence for which the survey participants were currently imprisoned.

² According to NSW Communities and Justice, “if a tenant is going into prison, they can apply to retain the tenancy for up to six months. However, if DCJ is reasonably satisfied that the imprisonment will be in excess of six months, DCJ can ask the tenant to relinquish the tenancy immediately.”

culture also means family impacts discussed below more broadly impact First Nations people (Gorrie 2018). This is important as the prevalence and length of homelessness increases for people with little to no family contact (Bevitt et al. 2015). Further, **cultural connection and kinship support is an important factor in reducing reoffending and improving wellbeing for First Nations people and should be supported by appropriate housing supports and pathways** (Lohoar, Butera, and Kennedy 2014).

Women

Women, and particularly First Nations women, are the fastest growing cohort in NSW prisons. While women comprise less than 10% of people who are imprisoned, **their population has increased by 64% in recent years** (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2019). Women have been found to experience greater challenges in securing accommodation after exiting prison due to **experiences of social disadvantage, child caring responsibilities, and risks of returning to partners and households where they may be at risk of domestic and family violence.** (Baldry et al. 2006). Structural factors, including lack of publicly provided resources such as health services and housing, can also exacerbate the barriers experienced by women (Baldry et al. 2006).

70-90% of women in prison have been victims of violence (ANROWS 2020). This means that women may have a violent partner in their place of residence creating instability in their housing environment. Domestic violence can also lead to further complex needs such as legal issues or mental health issues placing further stress and trauma on women leaving prison.

Many people with complex needs may have negative classifications on the NSW public housing register. **There is a strong correlation for women between domestic violence experiences, mental health and AOD issues and breaching tenancy policies** (Legal Aid NSW 2015). These breaches may lead to negative housing classifications for people which impacts their ability to access social housing. This could be alleviated by extending the appeal time for negative housing classifications, making processes easier for people to remove their negative classifications, and putting in further checks and balances to create a negative housing classification (Legal Aid NSW 2015).

People with mental illness and mental health concerns

People who have had interactions with the criminal justice system have a high prevalence of mental health diagnosis and acute mental illness (Butler et al. 2006). **A recent NSW survey found 63% of people in prison had at least one mental health diagnosis** (Justice Health & Forensic Mental Health Network 2017a). Research has shown those with a history of mental illness have poorer outcomes in relation to housing (Cutcher et al. 2014). Engaging with people with co-occurring mental health conditions and assisting them with housing support can reduce recidivism and have a positive impact on mental health (Draine and Herman 2007).

For people exiting prison in NSW, mental health service use indicates a higher future rate of homelessness service access (NSW Government FACSIAR 2023). In NSW, 32% of people exiting prison and accessing homelessness services are also accessing an emergency department and 25% accessed ambulatory mental health services (NSW Government FACSIAR 2023). **People experiencing homelessness with mental health conditions are 40 times more likely to be arrested and 20 times more likely to be imprisoned than those who live in stable housing** (Westoby 2016). Factors that contribute to this include the prevalence of co-existing AOD issues, issues in service access, acute episodes and potential hospitalisation impacting housing and discrimination.

People exiting prison can experience significant anxiety when transitioning into the community. **In NSW, 65% of people in prison had experienced or witnessed a traumatic event impacting on their**

mental health (Justice Health & Forensic Mental Health Network 2017a). This can translate to behaviour that may seem as agitated or closed off to a housing service or create feelings of being judged by service providers (Keene, Smoyer, and Blankenship 2018) making it harder for people to access the help that they need.

The co-occurring mental health needs further exacerbate the risk of homelessness amongst people exiting prison. One of CRC workers noted:

“One of the frustrations of challenges is that a lot of our clients are people who are homeless due to mental health and AOD. As a youth worker, I saw kids who are homeless, and also have mental health challenges...they take substances so they don’t have to worry about where they sleep. They easily end up in jail.”

People who use alcohol and/or other drugs

There is a complicated relationship between homelessness, substance use and criminalisation. Many people in prison have issues with substance use among other complex needs (Butler et al. 2011). Statistics show almost a third of people in prison nationally are at high risk of alcohol related harm (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2019) and 86% had used drugs in their lifetime (Justice Health & Forensic Mental Health Network 2017a). **There is a high prevalence of co-occurring substance use and (other) mental health disorders amongst people who have experienced prison** (Butler et al. 2011).

About two thirds of people who are in NSW prisons committed an offence while being under the influence of drugs or alcohol. About 12 % of their most serious offences were for drug crimes (Justice Health & Forensic Mental Health Network 2017a).

Homelessness puts people at risk of substance use. Substance use contributes to the stigma that many people leaving prison face representing a major barrier to housing and service access. There is sometimes a failure from housing systems to see substance use concerns as health related. People with complex AOD needs are often described as ‘too hard’ and do not receive access from community supports (Martin et al. 2021). As one of the CRC workers noted:

“People with AOD issues get judged when they apply for housing”

Along with other people with complex needs, **people with AOD use require comprehensive throughcare to transition into safe housing after exiting prison.** Providing a person with stable housing allows them to focus on their AOD issues rather than managing the added stress of deciding where they will sleep that night (RMIT University et al. 2022).

Young people

Young people who have had contact with criminal justice system have particular difficulties in accessing stable housing. On an average night there are 798 young people in detention across Australia, the majority of which are unsentenced and in custody for short periods (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2021). Specific issues include not being able to sign leases as they are under 18 or difficulty in accessing Centrelink services. **Housing options for young people are limited to refuges, temporary accommodation, and out of home care (under certain conditions).** When supporting young people to access housing options, CRC workers might need to assist them with compiling evidence why they can’t live at home.

Also, young people may be released into **“bail beds”**, the residing address being a part of their bail condition. A large proportion (72%) of the people detained in youth prisons are bail refused and held

on remand. **Many young people are refused bail because they do not have a stable address.** The findings from the Victorian Yoorrook Justice Commission detailed a lack of youth specific accommodation and AOD services for justice involved First Nations young people, and that many are placed on remand due to lack of accommodation. Further, a lack of accommodation support for families who have experiences of the criminal justice system is creating **child protection issues that hinder reunification and destabilise families** (Yoorrook Justice Commission 2023).

Early interactions with the criminal justice system can also impact a person's housing over their lives. Research has found that **adults are twice as likely to experience rough sleeping if they have been in youth detention** (Bevitt et al. 2015). According to this study, this relationship worsens the longer a person spent in youth detention (Bevitt et al. 2015).

People placed on the Child Protection Register (CPR)

It is particularly complicated to find housing for people who have committed sex offences. There are **rules around how many people who are on a sex register can be placed in a certain area.** It is particularly challenging to navigate the housing system for these people, with the limited availability of social housing options overall.

“A lot of our clients on child protection register. Temporary accommodation providers often don't take them and they need to travel far away to get a spot, for instance go to Wollongong when they are based in Sydney.”

Regional and remote communities

Regional and remote communities face further challenges in overcrowding, lack of infrastructure and limited-service access (Zufferey and Chung 2015). Research indicates that rates of homelessness are higher in remote, regional and rural areas of Australia (Wood et al. 2015).

In Broken Hill where CRC operates its Far West program, many people who leave custody are going straight into homelessness. This is because there are no short-term accommodation options and they **might have lost their previous rental, or can't go back to a family home due to overcrowding.** Overcrowding drives homelessness.

“There is a particular house I know of which has eight people sleeping outside. Every Indigenous household is overcrowded with large families and children. Not everybody has beds for themselves.”

The lack of infrastructure in this remote area impacts on all aspects of the community, and people being released from prison in particular. There is, generally, one bed for temporary accommodation after prison available for the entire area and is not specific to people in prison.

For instance, the only specific housing support in Broken Hill is crisis accommodation for women which is generally filled up to capacity and there are wait lists to get there from across the entire Far West. Without any crisis accommodation for homeless men in the area, the only option for them is being provided with a swag.

“We got a women shelter here, but it accommodates for the entire Far West area. It is very small - only got about 8 or 10 beds, and people can stay for up to 12 months. Many women are on the waitlist to go there, and when it's at capacity and they present homeless, women are given a swag.”

Overcrowding thus increases risk of breaching bail conditions.

“If their house is overcrowded, some men are not going to make their family’s housing situation even worse and they rather go into homelessness. They might be couch surfing where-ever they can, but this means they are still at breach of their bail condition.”

Even though there are some planned housing investments underway, it is unclear whether these will be able to **cover the high need that exists there.**

“The Far West region has funding for new houses, but it is not clear where the houses are going to be placed. The area spreads across 1000 km and includes about thirty communities. All of them are highly Indigenous and all suffer the same problems. They are planning on larger, five bedroom properties. Ten houses would not be enough, we probably need about 50 or more. We also need single units for the elderly.”

Families of people who are in prison

The **imprisonment of a family member creates significant stress for family that remain on the outside.** This is related to the emotional, social and psychological impacts of their imprisonment, as well as the material and financial implications, such as loss of household income, which can lead to housing instability for families (Travis, McBride, and Solomon 2006).

Conversely, **support from family can play a major role in assisting people to transition into community after they leave prison.** Family can and often do provide critical and important supports like housing and transportation as well as emotional support (Mowen, Stansfield, and Boman 2019).

Academic research and recent government inquiries (Committee on Children and Young People 2022; Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee 2022) have detailed the profound impact to children and young people of having a parent imprisonment. **The imprisonment of parents has been linked to housing instability** (Remond et al. 2023) as well as **trauma, educational instability and stigma** (Gale 2020). As shown above, factors such as trauma and stigma can lead to housing instability and issues accessing services.

There are specific challenges for **parents who leave prison when they don’t have a home and need to find sufficient housing to regain custody of their children.** A CRC worker has given the following examples of how difficult this might be to navigate:

“For example, a women might be offered a one-bedroom property as they don’t have their children living with them, but they may also be told by DCJ that their children can only be restored to them if they have a three bedroom property.”

1.2. Sub-question: What short, medium, and long-term actions can governments take to prevent homelessness or to support people who may be at risk of becoming homeless?

As detailed previously, people exiting prison represent one of largest populations at risk of homelessness in Australia, and **there are multiple points of risk for homelessness throughout a person's criminal justice involvement trajectory.**

Australia's housing crisis means there is a chronic shortage of available social housing, as well as a shortage of temporary and crisis accommodation accessible to people exiting prison. For people exiting prison (who typically have limited financial resources), **housing affordability largely excludes them from accessing the private market and puts them in competition for existing social housing stock which have lengthy waitlists.**

A confluence of factors (including stigma, and compounding and intersecting complex needs) means that **people exiting prison are often excluded from housing at multiple levels from losing leases on existing properties**, to not being able to access temporary accommodation when they are exiting custody. There is a need to address each of these drivers of homelessness, and a range of opportunities for governments to prevent or reduce homelessness and housing precarity amongst people impacted by the criminal justice system.

This section details the **multiple considerations to reduce homelessness and increase housing options for people exiting prison**, which relate to allocation of dedicated specialist accommodation, provision of specialist support to enhance access to housing and maintain tenancies, engagement with the community sector and those with lived experience to develop programs, review of policies and procedures which increase risks of homeless amongst people exiting prison (such as those which terminate housing tenure), and reduction of stigma and exclusion through embedding an understanding of the needs of people impacted by the criminal justice system into housing policies.

1.2.1. Dedicated allocations of housing for people exiting prison are needed

Fundamentally there is a lack of **dedicated accommodation options for people exiting prison**, which means people are exiting prison into homelessness, and/or attempting to access mainstream services which are often less equipped to service this marginalised group of people. In 2020, there were **only 38 specialist beds for people leaving prison in NSW**, and most of these bed are in crisis accommodation (Sotiri 2020).

Therefore, there is a crucial need for **more specialist beds for people leaving prison**. These specialist beds should be held with service providers who are equipped to understand the needs to people exiting prison, and ideally be dispersed across various housing providers, to ensure people are being meaningfully re-integrated into the community.

1.2.2. Develop and sustain specialist programs that enhance access to housing for people exiting prison

There is a need for more **services providing specialist support for people exiting prison** to support them with access to housing and maintaining tenancies. Currently there is an absence of support for people who require specialist support after leaving custody. **CRC is the only specialist service for people exiting prison in NSW.**

Assistance with housing is at the centre of CRC's model of support. All of CRC's transitional programs support people leaving prison in accessing housing across a range of accommodation/ housing types

(temporary, crisis, social, private). Caseworkers make phone calls, drive clients to their housing appointments, help them prepare paperwork, and seek alternative housing options. CRC workers work closely with service providers to facilitate their client's access to housing and re-entry into community.

However, only one of CRC's programs has housing specifically allocated and guaranteed for its clients (the Extended Re-integration Service - ERS). Another CRC program (currently in the third year of a pilot funded by DCJ), the Reintegration Housing Support Program (RHSP) is a co-located program in six NSW Housing Offices, which work closely and collaboratively with government and social housing providers to support clients to access housing and maintain tenancies. **Both these programs are good examples of formalised inter-agency coordination that enhances housing outcomes for people released from prison.** These programs should be expanded or extended to other client groups and locations.

EXAMPLE OF GOOD PRACTICE: CRC's Extended Re-integration Service (ERS)

The ERS works with people who are leaving custody with complex needs, including intellectual disability and mental illness, are at risk of homelessness upon leaving prison and have a medium to high risk of re-offending according to an assessment made by parole. Clients are referred from Corrective Service NSW (the funding body) and must live in a certain locality. Participation in the program is voluntary, but if the client accepts housing through that program, they are also accepting the supports that come with it. The goal of ERS is to house clients safely and support them while they are in the community. If the person has been previously categorised as an "unsatisfactory" or "ineligible" tenant with Housing NSW, they will still be eligible for housing under this program.

The program is a collaborative partnership with Corrective Services NSW, Southwestern Sydney Area Health Service and NSW Housing. Collaboration ensures a range of relevant agencies are involved to support the client, including a mental health team, community housing, drug health, a CRC case worker, and parole. CRC transitional workers provide up to three months of pre-release support and planning, and intensive holistic case management for up to nine months post-release. ERS is effectively housing clients with a range of complex needs and helps clients to engage supports needed to manage their tenancies.

"Generally it works really well having someone offered a property as a part of the program; it is not a housing first program because it is part of their parole that they will have this support. Everyone involved in the team is incredibly collaborative. There is a huge benefit of the program being long-standing - everyone is there for the right reason - being outcome of the client."

CRC workers have noted that the extended support and a guarantee of housing would be suitable for other client groups too:

"In a perfect world it would be great to have something like ERS for young people leaving prison. In particular, having a connection with housing that gives the client an automatic property when they get out of prison – certainly not the case now."

Throughcare/ in-reach into prison to plan housing upon release is essential

Throughcare/ prison in-reach is an effective way to assist in planning the release of people in prison, including supporting housing needs. **Services attending prison increases the awareness of support options for people leaving prison and makes it easier for them to contact support services on release.** CRC workers regularly engage with clients 3 months before they are being released to begin building relationships and support awareness with people.

EXAMPLE OF GOOD PRACTICE – CRC in-reach into prison

Pathways Home is a CRC program for young people aged 10-24, residing in Western Sydney who have been involved with the criminal justice system and need support for drug and/or alcohol use.

The Pathways Home Program works with young people while they are in custody and post-release. Transitional workers offer pre-release support and planning, and long-term holistic case management in the community in the following LGAs (Parramatta, Cumberland, Blacktown, The Hills Shire).

Workers visit and support young people in correctional or juvenile justice centres on a pre-release basis, and on an outreach basis in the community. Pathways Home puts the young person at the centre of case management. Workers provide respectful and culturally appropriate support in helping the young people achieve their goals.

1.2.3. Consult and collaborate with community organisation and people with lived experience in program design and delivery

Governments need to ensure they are consulting and collaborating with community organisations, service providers and people with lived experience, in the development of program and service design, funding considerations and design of KPIs. Below we detail several considerations for Government when engaging with community organisations who are providing services to people exiting prison.

Programs/ funding requirements need to be designed in close consultation with service providers

People exiting prison with complex needs require more intensive and longer-term support. Therefore, funding contracts, and KPI's relating to worker caseload need to consider the complexity and intensity of support required as to ensure they are realistic and can best meet the needs of clients. KPIs should always be developed in collaboration with the service provider.

CRC advocates for longer term support of clients, and CRC case management generally lasts from **three months prior to release from prison to twelve months post-release**. While this is considerably longer than many other support services, ideally our programs would like greater flexibility to work with clients on a longer term basis, as per the needs of the clients.

“When you take someone who has really complex needs, simply stabilising their mental health will take six months and there are all the remaining issues. Support length can be a bit inhibiting as everyone gets only a certain amount of time.”

Another consideration in program design and contracts is to consider how to ensure KPIs match what is expected be provided by other services, for example **there can be inconsistency in the prescribed timeframes for case management in contracts (up to 12 months) and transitional tenancy agreements** whereby housing providers might require guaranteed support for up to 18 months. This presents difficulties to ensure clients can maintain tenancies when their case management support period has formally ended.

Ensure long term funding to organisations and housing providers which support people with complex needs, including those exiting prison

Funding to community organisations and housing services needs to be long-term. Longer term funding is essential to ensure consistency of service provision for a population who has often been failed by systems. Longer funding timeframes for community organisations will ensure **better stability**

for the staff and, therefore, better outcomes for clients. Further, funding uncertainty leads to higher staff turnover as they leave to find more stable employment. This can cause staffing issues and impact severely on service delivery.

Longevity of funding also influences the strength of connections with other service providers. A key part of CRC's work is building connections with housing agencies that can accommodate people with experience of the criminal justice system.

"Building rapport between the services and establishing relationships is the core of our work. Everything is working well where our staff has made connections with every single (housing) provider. They let us know when there is a place coming up."

"It took our program two years to get here, and our organisation had already been known in the localities prior to when we started. Pilot programs are often successful but after 2-3 years they are no longer funded. Services change and new programs are being created and funding is constantly being moved around. Housing providers are changing all the time."

CRC often needs to advocate on behalf of our clients to achieve good housing outcomes for them. In the experience of our frontline staff and managers, we often **need to build rapport with other services and housing providers.** Funding instability and frequent changes to housing services can be highly disruptive to the process of linking our clients to suitable housing:

"If a good program disappears due to lack of funding, the connections we have established no longer exist. Other organisations KPIs will fall off when a good program disappears from the picture."

1.2.4. Review policies and procedures which impact housing and homelessness amongst justice involved people and their families

Enhancing access to temporary accommodation from prison

Considering the high risk of homelessness for people when they are exiting prison **there needs to be more streamlined processes for people to arrange and access housing at this critical juncture.** Ideally people exiting custody would have transitional or longer-term accommodation arranged while they are still in custody, however, temporary accommodation is often the only option.

Gaining temporary accommodation is often the immediate priority for people exiting prison who otherwise will be facing homelessness in the community. However, **arranging temporary accommodation while in prison is not straight forward.** The NSW Government's homelessness information and telephone referral service, Link2Home, is not accessible from prison. Temporary accommodation can be arranged for people released from prison by a prison officer via "Set to go" program but people in prison are frequently not aware of this option. Further, this service is not available to people on remand.

It is not unusual for people to be released from prison unexpectedly, and therefore, without any housing in place. For example, a person may go to court and be released later that day. For these people, time to prepare any kind of housing or access any kind of support is impossible and can lead to releasing people into homelessness.

“None of my clients were housed. We do the advocacy for them and support them, but there is nothing out there for them. No systematic way to secure housing.”

Support to maintain leases on social housing while in custody

Another reason why people exit prison into homelessness is the **termination of their social housing lease during the time they were in prison.** If a person is going into prison, they can apply to DCJ Housing to retain the tenancy for up to six months.

“The impact of going to prison (even for just a short period) jeopardises people's Housing leases, which are only held for up to 6 months while someone is in custody. This also has implications for others living in the home (but who are not on the lease). A prison sentence can see a whole family become homeless.”

People may re-instate their application within two weeks of leaving prison, however this may still lead to homelessness as they await reinstatement of their tenancy. Further, the wait times for public housing are incredibly long. In NSW, at June 2023, the median wait time for priority applications on the NSW Housing Register was 3 months and almost two years for general applications. For locations where the CRC runs programs such as Penrith, this wait time is estimated to be five to ten years.

“People are told that if they leave their social housing, they will get another one after their release. But that might take 6 to 12 months.”

It should be noted that **termination of leases is also an issue for people with private rentals,** as it is often not be feasible to keep a property for financial reasons, or the rent might be terminated by the private party.

“People who are in a private rental before custody immediately lose their house when they go to prison. Like that, people are losing all their property and everything they've ever owned.”

Provide housing support to families of people of people in prison

Termination of leases while someone is in custody also puts family members at risk of homelessness. From CRC's experience of supporting family members of people in prison, we find that **women (and their children) whose partner has gone to prison are often at risk of homelessness** due to their name not being on the lease, or through financial stress of not being able to pay rent or mortgage on their own. These women are in a difficult situation and often face issues of trauma or financial strain, but are generally not eligible to live in women's' shelters because the majority are reserved to victims domestic violence.

“I call them “prison widows”. When a man goes to prison, has a female partner and child, the next day she doesn't have anywhere to go. Everything is in their man's name, as some women still live in the shadow of their husbands. She has no money, the lease is not in her name. These women often have no rental history, no utility bills in her name. They can go to temporary accommodation for 28 days as they are not eligible for shelter if there's no domestic violence.”

An additional consideration, and risk factor for homelessness, is that some women (especially those who have experienced domestic violence) are fearful of seeking support from, or engaging with, government services for the fear of losing their children.

To prevent homelessness amongst families of people in prison programs there needs to be careful consideration of how existing housing policies might inadvertently impact them. More support is needed to help families sustain their tenancies, through assisting them in transferring the lease into their name and providing financial and other wrap-around supports.

Make the housing system less punitive

There is a need to consider how current policies might contribute towards cycles of homelessness amongst justice involved people. For example if someone has been found non-compliant in public housing, it is very difficult to get back on the housing list, which likely means imminent homeless, or return to prison.

As outlined above, people exiting prison often having complex needs (mental health, substance use) which can lead to their housing being terminated. This might be exacerbated by the housing potentially not being suitable for their needs, such as when they are placed in an area of high frequency of drug use, or when police get called on instead of supports.

As modelled by CRC's, ERS program, it would be desirable to **re-assess suspended housing applications for people who leave prison with complex needs**, even though they may have not been compliant in the past. This is required to break the cycles of disadvantage that many people exiting the prison system face.

1.2.5. Embed an understanding of the needs of people impacted by the criminal justice system into housing policies

Address stigma and barriers to housing

CRC clients often experience stigma and discrimination on the basis that they have been to prison. This can range from negative attitudes of people processing housing applications to service providers making exclusions based on criminal histories. People who have been to prison have already served their sentence and should not be perpetually punished.

Moreover, **work must be done to educate organisations that provide housing and relevant supports on the fact that many of those who have been to prison have significant unmet health needs**, which can be linked to their imprisonment – and ensuring that they have a safe place to live is critical. Education on the realities of criminalisation and imprisonment can work to reduce stigma.

“We do a lot of educating other agencies about our client cohort. This goes for governmental and non-governmental. We explain their histories, trauma in childhood, complex mental health issues, and what impact custody has on people.”

Public and community organisations should strive for successful re-integration of people with criminal histories into the community. In aiming for this, we can avoid the sense of “perpetual punishment” when people continue being excluded from the society based on the crimes they have already served prison time for.

Increase skills and understanding across the service sector around how to support people impacted by the criminal justice system

Related to this need to reduce stigma and discrimination, there is a need amongst public and community service providers to better understand **how to support justice involved clients, especially those with complex needs**. There is a need to ensure that all client facing services are properly trauma involved, which means understanding the complexity of needs of this marginalised group.

“A housing worker who doesn’t understand drug and alcohol use and mental health issues is questioning why the client hasn’t gone to a rehab. It is because he is not ready, or they won’t take him, or it is not easy to get there.”

“We need specialist workers who understand the criminal justice system and the population that has experienced it. This could be people who have lived experience or workers who live in the communities we are serving.”

The need to be sensitive and trauma informed to people with complex needs is nuanced and extends to how physical environments present, whereby some client struggle to access services because they find **offices and processes mimic prison environments**. Therefore, there needs to be consideration of all barriers to accessing services, including how to make them more inclusive environments.

“For instance, the office has two security guards. We might bring a woman there on the day of release and she could get easily overwhelmed by the setting. The housing worker is sitting behind the screen and basically questioning her in a way that sounds like an interrogation.”

Consider the complex needs and histories of trauma when allocating housing

Allocations into social housing properties often don’t consider the individual needs and risks of people with complex histories of trauma and mental health issues, which means people are sometimes housed in locations or environments which are not appropriate. **There needs to be greater consideration of the appropriateness of housing**, so that allocation into housing represents a step towards stability.

“Everyone only gets two chances to refuse a property offered to them. If we are lucky enough to get allocated a property for a woman who is in recovery from AOD and it is in an area that is triggering, for instance with a lot of drug dealing around, we may need to reject it. Housing doesn’t like to see when we come back.”

“In other instances, we might get a young Aboriginal woman living in a block where there are only men and she feels unsafe.”

Lower the administrative requirements in housing applications for people with complex needs

The complexity of the administrative process to access to social housing is often burdensome and unrealistic for people exiting prison. People exiting prison face unsurmountable pressures in trying to reestablish their lives in the community, and some of the administrative obligations of housing can ultimately exclude them. An example of such expectation and how it is not being realistic is provided below, using the example of health documentation that could help with a priority housing application.

“I have a client from custody who was released about a month ago and DCJ housing were to re-instate his housing application. He had two weeks to provide supporting materials. He provided all his documents from Justice Health, and

there was an extensive record. They told him he has to take it to his GP. He neither has a GP nor understands why his prison records are not enough. We don't have drop-in health services in the area and making additional appointments, potentially at a cost, is hard for our clients."

"I have a client whose temporary accommodation expired – she used all of her 28 days. Housing has put her on a case plan where she has to go to private rentals where she'll never be considered. I understand why they ask people these things and there might be a person coming out of prison who can actually do all this. But for some clients, there's no option out there and if she doesn't get more temporary accommodation, she will sleep on the street."

1.3. Sub-question: What types of homelessness supports and services do we need more of?

To address cycles of homelessness amongst people exiting prison there is a need for a range of services and support to stop the trajectory of homelessness at multiple points. As detailed above there is a need for more specialist services which help people exiting prison access accommodation and maintain tenancies across a range of accommodation types. Specific considerations for different accommodation types are detailed below.

1.3.1. Longer-term social housing

Access to long term, stable, appropriate and safe housing is the ultimate goal for CRC clients (and other people exiting prison), as housing stability is central to our client's rebuilding their lives in the community. For most of our clients, who lack the financial means to participate in the private market, longer term housing is likely to be sought via social housing.

Gaining a **long-term social housing tenancy is a much sought after outcome for CRC clients, however** there are challenges to achieving this. In NSW, there are extremely long wait lists for social housing, and systemic issues increase the difficulty people have in accessing long term social housing. Some of these issues are detailed below.

Providing health documentation to get priority housing is challenging for people coming out of prison

Getting medical reports from prison to place CRC clients on relevant priority lists can be challenging. Often, our clients have first received a mental health or other diagnosis while in prison, however, their **health records are with Justice Health and the process of retrieving them can be lengthy**. Further, requirements to provide additional medical evidence beyond that from Justice Health can be difficult for CRC clients. Processes need to be improved to streamline the process of being placed on relevant priority lists.

"We need more mental health supports and access to mental health nurses, psychiatrists, psychologists. We have clients with mental health issues who need someone to diagnose them. They might have ADHD which massively feeds into other disorders like depression or anxiety. At the moment, community mental health system focuses on severe mental health issues like psychosis, and no psychiatrist will bulkbill our clients."

For some of CRC's clients, evidence of complex needs could help house them more quickly. **Not having a stable accommodation can prevent people from engaging with support services**. This contributes

to cycles of disadvantage. For instance, evidence of address is needed for clients to be assessed by NDIS (National Disability Insurance Scheme). However, a client will need NDIS so they can reach appropriate housing. As CRC staff has noted:

“You need stability to get on NDIS, but you can’t get the stability because you don’t have NDIS.”

Supporting people exiting prison into long-term housing requires brokerage funds

People leaving prison often have limited access to funds, and provision of brokerage money supports the establishment of longer-term accommodation. CRC workers have highlighted the importance of having brokerage fund to support clients with setting up their home with furniture or having money to make simple repairs. Brokerage funds allow for simple and flexible actions to support tenancies.

“Housing blocks are tough places to live. I had a client there and it took nearly three months and windows didn’t get repaired.”

“We need to make sure that people have the linen they need. The windows don’t have fly screens, the door might not lock properly, or a new lock is needed, there are holes that we have to plug. People need Wi-Fi. With brokerage money, we can support women to make their homes feel safe.”

Example of good practice: CRCs’ Miranda Project

The Miranda Project is a holistic support program for anyone who identifies as female who has involvement with the criminal justice system and has been victim to or is at risk of family and/or domestic violence. The aim of the project is to support women to live lives free from violence and the criminal justice system.

The Miranda Project aims to provide:

- positive opportunities and options for women leaving prison or court (genuine and safe pathways away from custody and violence)
- increased connection to mainstream services for women historically locked out because of the complexity of their need
- increased safety for high-risk women in the community

We do this through:

- Provision of specialist holistic trauma informed case work and case management
- Access to Miranda Hub currently co-located with Penrith Women’s Health Centre which provides safe social space, access to groups, social and recreational activities and co-located services including specialist DFV services.
- Provision of information about family and/or domestic violence
- Building strong referral pathways for women
- Access to brokerage money

1.3.2. Transitional / supported housing with flexible timeframes

Transitional accommodation (maximum 12 – 18 months) which is linked to support services is an important housing type of people exiting prison with complex needs. However, there are **relatively few transitional accommodation options for people exiting prison** in NSW, especially in regional and remote areas.

“More transitional housing is needed. Depends on the person, could be 6 to 18 months. For some people six months is enough”

Transitional housing is particularly important for people with complex support needs who have never maintained a tenancy and who require more intensive supports. Transitional housing gives people the important time to build independent living skills and the stability in their life needed to sustain a tenancy.

“For someone who has never lived on their own, they might not stay in a place where there is no servicing staff.”

“You want people have housing first, but how successful is it going to be without supports? Also, the support needs to be appealing, not discouraging. I would say “supported housing first” is a good approach for many of our clients leaving prison. It would be great to have more supported accommodation on release and options for a staggered-out approach after that.”

There is a need for more transitional accommodation, attached to appropriate supports, which do not exclude clients based on their criminal record. Although there is limited transitional housing for people exiting prison in NSW, CRC workers have supported clients to be housed in a number of transitional properties. Feedback from workers indicates the importance of flexibility in timeframe of support, non-discriminatory or punitive practice, and understanding of the complexity of needs of our clients.

“Our clients have recently been accessing a program called “The Haven” which uses a good model that we hope to keep referring the women we work with into. It offers crisis accommodation for up to 3 months but there is a longer-term option for 6-8 months as well that gives you extended period of time to make sure no-one goes into homelessness.

The workers are highly skilled to work with women, they work with women, and they can support people in restoration process to get their children back. The workers are not likely to come into your apartment, but you meet fortnightly, and they make sure you are looking for something long-term.

Also, there is no exclusion for drugs and alcohol, but there are safety mechanisms around like not using inside or not being intoxicated. There is openness to work with women with criminal justice records. The apartments are really nice and new, which help with restoring women’s dignity. You have your own space, own set of keys, and there’s communal space as well. This sort of model is really needed – it is safe, stable, clean.”

Example of good practice: CRCs' Transitional and Post-Release Support (Nepean / Blue Mountains)

The Penrith/Nepean/Blue Mountains project is co-located with Wentworth housing, and therefore has a strong relationship with housing providers in the area (Link WentWorth), which manages two transitional properties. These properties are deemed suitable to our client's needs because they are 3-bedroom houses, with a lockable bedroom, in a shared house.

"If they are vacant, they allocate the spots to us and we find a person that fits. We nominate them and they get it. One of my clients has been there since May and has now secured full-time work. So this is three people out of a case load up to 25. I wish I had more of these."

1.3.3. Temporary accommodation

As discussed previously, **temporary accommodation is often the only option available to people exiting prison to prevent imminent homelessness upon release but is not always easy to access from prison.** There are a number of recommendations and considerations for people exiting prison outlined below.

The duration of temporary accommodation

In New South Wales, there has been a **recent change from 2 to 7 days of temporary accommodation which has, overwhelmingly, been positive** for CRC clients. Temporary accommodation has been available to clients for up until 28 days overall (both before and after the change). After 7 days, people need to apply for an extension if they are still in need of temporary accommodation.

"Two days of temporary accommodation was horrendous - by the time you settle in, you have to move on again. We have always advocated for longer than that."

CRC workers suggested it would be desirable to consider a **longer period of temporary accommodation for people who are leaving prison (e.g. two weeks).**

"The first two weeks when people get released from prison are incredibly busy. There is a lot of running around for paperwork and appointments. Not having the stress with moving again and spending a day in a housing office to ask for an extension would be a great help."

CRC clients have to take all their belongings and travel to the local housing office to get an extension. Clients and CRC workers who attend housing offices report that the experience is time consuming, inefficient and unpleasant, and formerly imprisoned people often experience stigma on the basis of their contact with the criminal justice system. This experience needs to be repeated every time their accommodation expires and can be demotivating. **It is recommended that people accessing temporary accommodation can extend their stay without having to physically attend a housing office.**

"None of my clients have hit the 28 days limit, they would have disengaged prior. I currently have 11 clients, eight of those are homeless full stop."

Varying quality and conditions of temporary accommodation

There is a lack of consistency in the quality, conditions and rules of temporary accommodation across NSW. Some temporary accommodation is said to be completely unsuitable and inadequate, the facilities are often dirty, with broken equipment.

“Some of our clients prefer to sleep in their car over accepting a bed in particular temporary accommodation facility.”

Some aspects of temporary accommodation might mirror custodial settings; providers apply curfews and make strict rules around visitors or drugs and alcohol use. Quite often the clients need to leave the premises during office hours which technically makes them homeless during the day and increase their risk of criminalisation.

“People who access temporary accommodation and refuges are forced to leave the property at 9am and generally can’t access the property again until 3-5:30pm. This means they are still being homeless for part of the day. This adds a lot of additional stress to clients in an already vulnerable position, impacting on their ability to rest, be productive, and further reduces their self-worth, ability to work or feel ‘grounded’, safe and stable amongst a variety of other issues. In addition, they are susceptible to the elements and further risk of violence towards them or others and a higher risk of reoffending.”

Rules and procedures in temporary housing are often not transparent which also makes clients vulnerable to being expelled from their accommodation.

“My client had his temporary accommodation cancelled because he had a visitor. He didn’t get any notice and according to him, it was just someone dropping off clothes for him, which is something you need when you leave custody. People in temporary housing are not given any courtesy or voice to advocate for themselves. This client was abstaining from drugs and was doing really well overall. After this experience, he disappeared from the radar.”

Temporary accommodation services are not always equipped to meet complex needs

Some temporary accommodation providers are not equipped to understand people with complex needs, including mental health and substance use, which sometimes leads to **police being called which creates a pathway straight to custody for people who have been recently incarcerated.** Quality standards across temporary accommodation providers should have inclusions around how to support people exiting prison, and those with complex needs.

“Often it is people’s mental health. Police are being sent out blind.”

“You are putting someone into a place where they are likely to relapse. I have seen places run by a person overtly using ice in the hallway. When the client relapses there, they will get a record of not being able to sustain tenancy.”

Allocations of temporary housing must be suitable for client’s needs

There needs to be greater consideration of an individual’s need when allocating temporary housing, as some accommodation might unsuitable people exiting prison, or with specific health needs.

“Another challenge is when I get temporary accommodation for a client which is a beautiful 10-bedroom house, however shared with 10 other blokes. The last thing you want to do for a person with severe anxiety is go into a shared property.”

“There are some housing offers that we don’t get excited with because we just know these areas are not suitable for clients in [substance use] recovery. These places are going to have so many triggers [around substance use].”

Temporary housing **allocations for people leaving prison are often in areas where they have no support or connection to the community**, which can lead them to feel unsafe and unsupported, and requires them to travel extensively to access services (including Parole). Providing people with an option around location of temporary accommodation would help people stay near their communities and feel supported in their accommodation rather than adding to risk factors.

“A person might be sent to temporary accommodation in Yagoona while they are reporting to a probation officer in Fairfield.”

Temporary accommodation lacking in the remote and regional areas

There is **one bed dedicated to temporary accommodation for the entirety of Broken Hill** in a local hotel. Additional options being offered by Link2Home are within a 500 km distance. There are no public facilities catering for people who are homeless.

“In the past, local hotels used to offer rooms for temporary accommodation that was paid by the government and assigned via Link2Home. About two years back, someone with a mental health issue stayed in probably every hotel in town and caused some damage to the equipment. Since then, local hotels don’t participate in Link2Home scheme anymore. So, we get one bed, and if there is an event in the town and hotels are booked, then we get none.”

1.3.4. Crisis accommodation

Crisis accommodation is **very limited in terms of availability and options for people exiting custody**, particularly when it comes to women experiencing violence and young people.

There is a need for more domestic violence shelters

Overall, there needs to be more crisis accommodation for women escaping domestic violence. However, **there are complex considerations for justice involved women who are escaping domestic violence**, and some shelters are not always suitable, or exclude people based upon their criminal record. Temporary accommodation is often not a suitable or safe option for women escaping violence. Justice involved women who may be excluded or unable to access crisis accommodation are at risk of homelessness.

“In the past 12 months, I have probably called the domestic violence line about 60 times and got a place twice. We need to take what we can get, but there are many considerations, for example around security. For someone who has just escaped violence, the room should not be shared. And that is not always the case.”

Crisis accommodation needs to cater for single parents with children

Women who have experienced domestic violence often need crisis accommodation that will cater not only for themselves but for their children too. However, some housing providers restrict access to those with older children, including those who are over the age of 12. **Not being able to keep (older) children with them in crisis accommodation can be detrimental to women escaping violence and discourage them from seeking support.**

“We need more properties which will accept families with children over the age of 12 and 15. Often when we have a family escaping domestic violence, those children have to go to a refuge and get separated from their mum. This is often why women are not leaving.”

Crisis accommodation for young people

Crisis accommodation for young people is very limited in its availability. Crisis accommodation for young people is supposed to run for three months, but often gets extended until twelve months, partially because there are very few options to assist young people with housing.³

Refuges for young people often assess whether the person might be a risk to others. **Having a criminal history might exclude our clients for getting housed at a refuge for young people.** Limited availability and lack of appropriate housing facilities likely exacerbates the pressure on providers of crisis accommodation to exclude particular clients.

Some young people are “too old” for youth refuges and “too young” for the youth ones. Refuges for young people might place age restrictions on who is considered “youth” in their service and will only accept people under the age of 21 years old. This can be for capacity reasons, and also not to put young people at risk by living with adults. However, CRC supports young people in contact with criminal justice system who are aged up to 24 years. Conversely, some adult refuges will not accept young people because they would be at risk in that facility. Therefore, young people may need to go into temporary accommodation instead.

“If a 16 year calls Link2Home, they will first look at crisis refuges. If there’s no availability, they place them in temporary accommodation which puts them at risk because there might be people convicted of sex offences or using drugs.”

1.3.5. Boarding houses

The issues relating to boarding houses are complex for people exiting prison, as boarding houses vary greatly in quality, and there is no guarantee of sustained tenancy, and people might have their lease terminated without a notice. **Boarding houses can also be unsafe environments, especially for women escaping violence. However, they can be relatively low- threshold and low cost, enabling people who are leaving prison to maintain some level of stability.** CRC operates a program called the Boarding House Outreach Service (BHOS), which successfully supports people who have recently exiting prison with holistic support.

Example of good practice: CRC’s BHOS program

An example of a program where people released from prison can be housed in a private providers with supports is the CRC’s Boarding House Outreach Service (BHOS). The program which works with people on release from prison who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, and who are seeking to live in a boarding house in the Inner Western Sydney region. The CRC transitional worker offers pre-release support and planning, and short, medium and long-term intensive holistic case management.

This program has been enabled via a cooperation with private boarding houses providers and a local neighbourhood centre. A lot of the program’s clients are on the Child Protection Register which makes their housing particularly complex. The program works with private providers due to established rapport with the program. During the 12

³ As noted above, young people at risk of homelessness can only access refuges, transitional accommodation, or *out of home care* (they qualify for the latter if they had been removed from their family by DCJ).

months of case support work, many clients are able to move to more stable accommodation (this usually means public housing though).

“The only way we can get our clients into boarding houses is that the owners trust our service and they know they can call us if something happens. We support people when they are in the boarding house and help them move on after they’ve been offered public housing or they can move on and live with family. It is not a stable form of accommodation though – people can be asked to leave from day to day and the environment can remind them of while they were in prison.”

1.3.6. Youth specific accommodation

Medium-term, flexible accommodation for young people leaving prison is highly needed

Justice involved young people have particular housing needs which can be difficult to achieve in the current housing system. If a young person gets released on Section 28 of the *Bail Act 2013* (NSW) it means they get bailed into accommodation; there are organisations offering specific “bail beds” for up to 28 days with the expectation they will be able to transfer to crisis accommodation. However, many refuges won’t accept a person with (particular) criminal charges. **In the absence of a suitable medium-term accommodation, a young person may need to return back to prison.**

“I have a young person who got arrested in January on charges of non-consensual sex from his ex-partner. Because of the nature of charges. “Bail assistance” has found him a “bail bed” for 28 days but no refuge wants to accept him on the basis of these charges because they perceive him creating risky to other clients. He has over-stayed his 28 days twice now already. If he can’t find a place to live, he will have to go back to custody. And these are just alleged crimes at this stage.”

Crisis accommodation for young people can be very rigid and punitive, which puts young people at risk of homelessness (or returning to prison). Crisis accommodation for young people needs to have **a higher level of flexibility to accommodate for young clients with more complex histories.**

“Young people we work with often don’t have good boundaries and they don’t know to take care of themselves. Some of the refuges are quite punitive. For instance, I know of a refuge for 12 – 17 year olds and their curfew is 6 pm. If you break the curfew, you get expelled. However, the people we are working with have commonly been living like an adult since they’ve been about 10 years old and they are very likely to fail the rules.”

Young people coming out of custody have limited independent living skills. **There is a need for more medium-term accommodation options that are 3 – 6 months (12 months maximum) for young leaving custody who have complex needs.**

1.4. Sub-question: How can services be better coordinated to support people who are experiencing homelessness and more effectively respond to those at risk of homelessness?

1.4.1. Support community-based service delivery models which improve access to government services

Support access to and communication with housing offices for community sector specialist programs

It is beneficial for specialist programs that support people released from prison to have **direct lines of communication with housing offices or priority access to housing**. Across CRC programs there are a range of arrangements with government services. In programs where there is no formal arrangement, CRC workers have more limited access to services and have to go through **the same processes as the general public** when they are trying to access housing for someone who has just left prison.

“You can be sitting on the phone for 30-40 minutes when you get to speak to someone. Getting direct access to a worker would make it so much easier.”

In other programs, CRC has experienced the direct benefit of having more formalised arrangements with housing offices. Currently, there are two CRC programs which have formalised relationships with government services; the (pilot) Reintegration Housing Support Program (RHSP), which is funded by DCJ, is a co-location model where case workers are based at housing offices and can work with public housing teams directly; and the Extended Re-integration Service (ERS) which is funded by Corrective Services NSW, clients are allocated housing via direct cooperation with a housing representative.

EXAMPLE OF GOOD PRACTICE: Reintegration Housing Support Program (RHSP)

The Reintegration Housing Support Program (RHSP) works by basing CRC staff in six DCJ Housing Offices across NSW (two CRC workers based in each office). CRC staff work alongside DCJ Housing workers to assist program participants to secure and sustain long-term housing once they leave prison.

While there is no specific housing stock allocated to this program, and acceptance onto the program is not a guarantee of access to permanent housing, the program aims to connect clients to existing housing support products and provide wrap-around case management support to help clients sustain their housing.

The program is open to people who are likely to need housing support to avoid homelessness when they are released from custody, regardless of age, gender, ethnicity or the prison where they are being held. Program participants must be seeking housing support in one of the six DCJ Districts where the program operates.

Preliminary findings from evaluation of this program that included a comparison with other people released from prison who didn't receive CRC support via RHSP have been overwhelmingly positive. Benefits include improving the understanding DCJ housing staff have of client needs through collaboration and co-location, supporting extremely vulnerable clients to access housing and providing the wrap around support needed to sustain tenancies.

“We have had the opportunity to educate DCJ Housing staff on the complexities our clients face, the trauma they have experienced, and the triggers that may destabilise them.”

“We are not cherry-picking clients, we don't say these are too hard. We are the end of the road, we take them, we have to do the work with other services to get around.”

Ensure an integrated approach to address housing, mental health issues and AOD use

Some of the most pressing challenges for CRC clients are housing, mental health, and AOD use. CRC workers typically connect and coordinate support for these concerns on behalf of their clients. However, there is often limited formal coordination of support between services. **Outcomes for justice involved people accessing housing could be improved if a more holistic approach was taken, integrating better support for housing, mental health, and AOD services.**

“Housing is in their own little silo and only see the housing component in their life. They don’t realise that our clients have often been pushed to the border by their mental health, drug or alcohol issue.”

1.4.2. Ensure integrated and interagency approach to address the co-occurring needs of people exiting prison seeking housing

Inter-agency cooperation is the key to successfully housing clients

Participating in ad-hoc or regular inter-agency coalitions is an important part of CRC’s work. Though inter-agency meetings, **coalitions and case coordination meetings are essential tools that help secure housing and sustain tenancies for people released from prison who have complex needs.**

“A lot of the inter-agencies we attend are not helpful because our clients are involved in criminal justice system and have specific needs. We benefit from working with organisations where there is a lot of cross-over of clients or who can prioritise them and there are not many organisations in our space.”

“Our staff attend case coordination meetings. These might involve community organisations providing mental health supports, NDIS, an AOD service, charitable organisations, community housing, or transitional accommodation providers. DCJ housing is rarely present, although an Aboriginal housing officers might attend these. We discuss what the person’s support needs are, and the clients can attend them too. It helps to make sure services are not over-lapping and make everyone accountable. There are some practical outcomes with regards to housing, like collating medical reports to submit a priority housing application. Also, the services might help with health and mental health issues so the client can sustain a tenancy.”

“There are inter-agency meetings might be in place for all services in a particular locality that help with referrals and making connections and are attended by both government and non-government organisations. Similarly, there are coalition meetings out there, usually around a particular cohort of people. For instance, we attend a prison-related one.”

For clients who are most at risk, there are formal coalitions and programs in place, such as NSW Action Meetings of CRC’s Extended Reintegration Service. **With a guaranteed participation and commitment of all relevant stakeholders, these programs generally yield great results for our clients.** An example is provided below:

“When women are in an extreme risk according to a domestic violence safety action tool, their names go on “safety action meetings”. This involves police, housing, child protection, the local advocacy service, and any other services involved in the family. The meetings are chaired by police and in some of the

areas, the list is so extensive that it goes for a day. Every participating agency has to provide an update on that particular person. DCJ housing attends those meetings, and we get excellent outcomes when that happens.”

“There are local coordination meetings (LCM) in place that are usually organised by corrections and are centred around people who are rated as high-risk in terms of re-offending. They involve mainly government departments - health, housing, police, and ourselves. We get referrals into our program from those meetings. You get a great overview of where the client is and what they need, to make our work more efficient.”

Government presence on inter-agency meetings is important

Inter-agency coordination meetings can be a practical way for community organisations, private providers, as well as government representatives to meet and collaborate.

“We all want to be working together, but as community workers, we can only do as much - complete case plans, help chase up medical reports, drive clients to appointments. But we can’t replace the government agency in coordinating housing support for our clients.”

“The previous Aboriginal housing specialist in our area would invite us in for regular meetings. She invited stakeholders, organised a lunch, came to our office, and she did that regularly, came into our office. “

Having more involvement of housing staff on meetings would be helpful so the involved organisations have up to date information about the resources that are available to the community and their clients.

“Housing might be doing lots, but we don’t know about it. For instance, we just learnt they have furniture packages (about \$2000). But client needs to ask for it, they don’t advertise it because they don’t have enough of them. It can really help; clients can take pride in their property and continue paying rent. We need housing to let us know what our clients are entitled to. “

“The other day, someone has asked me if I knew that there is a homelessness assertive worker in the area which we have never heard of or come into contact with.”

2. Guided Question 2: How can governments, across all levels, best work with communities to support better housing outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people?

As detailed in Section 1.1.2 First Nations people are shamefully over-represented in Australia's prison system. **Policies and strategies for housing for people impacted by the criminal justice system must pay careful consideration to the needs of First Nations people.** Housing strategy must centre and enhance culture and connection to community. Policies must not discriminate or exclude Aboriginal people from accessing safe and appropriate housing.

2.1. What cultural, social, and economic factors need to be considered?

Housing for First Nations people needs to centre culture

First Nations people have broad kinship connections and cultural obligations to have an open home to families. There are also cultural obligations to travel for reasons such as Sorry Business. These cultural obligations can impact tenancies and are not supported by policies relating to visitors or absences. This also means that **overcrowding of properties is a more prevalent issue for First Nations people, however current overcrowding measures do not recognise the nuance of First Nations ways of living.**

“Housing providers should not be treating First Nations people as single even though they are not in a relationship. They like to be with family and a studio is not a suitable housing option for that. However, if they don't accept this housing offer, they might not be getting another one.”

“The last census, there was an undercount of Indigenous people. As a result, when counting the number of people living in a property, it seems like there is enough housing. But there are houses with ten people in them and the census managed to reach only about one person per a house.”

First Nations clients might also have **greater ties to particular areas where they have family or to Country itself.** The housing displacement that can come with criminal justice system interaction is particularly impactful on First Nations people. This also means that having a close person imprisoned is very destabilising to their social life and support networks.

“They always explain to me why they live where they live, like that their grandmother lived here or that they have six children living within the surrounding in six miles.”

“I have a First Nations client who moved into a caravan because both her sons were in prison and she was not coping well with being far from them.”

Housing allocations for Aboriginal housing also needs to be diversified by location and housing type. In Broken Hill, much of the available Aboriginal social housing is located on the fringes of town continuing to disadvantage First Nations communities.

“In Broken Hill, all First Nations people who are successful with their housing application are put at the outskirts of the town in flats and there is a lot of drug use and crime around these. There are other social housing properties spread around the town where they put non-Indigenous people.”

Cultural awareness in housing offices should be enhanced

Housing officers and service providers often lack cultural awareness. Simple examples such as hostile body language, requiring clients to take appointments in an office or over the phone rather than meeting them where they are at or having policies that don't recognise the nuance of Aboriginal culture are all examples of this. First Nations people are particularly perceptive to cultural unawareness due to a historic lack of trust in government services, especially those who have had interactions with the criminal justice system. As such, **providers need to improve training, policy and communication to be more supportive of First Nations people as well as increasing the amount of First Nations staff.**

"First Nations [people] hold a lot of shame for a lot of reasons and might not be willing to give information. They are not going to give you information if you are a government department because they have had children removed by the government."

"One or two identified workers is not enough to cover for an entire area."

Proof of Aboriginality can be an obstacle in accessing services for First Nations people who have been in prison

Specialist Aboriginal Housing programs play an important role in ensuring that First Nations people can access housing. However, our **First Nations clients have reported difficulties with proving their Aboriginality to these providers.**

"In order to access Aboriginal housing, you need your Certificate of Aboriginality. There's lots of reasons why people we work with don't have that. They often face difficulties with going back to their community due to financial or psychological barriers and their experience of trauma."

While some services do provide an option for a Statutory Declaration of Aboriginality, there seems to be lack of acknowledgement of how these issues may arise with the providers themselves. Funding organisations should consider working with the programs on **ways to more flexibly support First Nations people who have criminal histories, limited documentation and complex needs.**

3. Guided Question 3: How can all levels of governments, along with housing organisations, institutional investors, not-for-profits, and private industry, improve access to social housing, which includes public housing and community housing

Please see our response to Guided Question 1, in particular 1.2.4 and 1.3.1.

4. Guided Question 4: What should governments, private industries, the not-for-profit and community sectors focus on to help improve access to housing and housing affordability in the private market?

Housing affordability is an increasing problem across all Australian states and territories, and private rentals are generally unattainable for people released from prison, especially if they have complex support needs. Further, there are huge obstacles in securing employment with a criminal record, and lack of employment reduces the likelihood of securing private rentals. **Access to private rentals amongst people exiting could be supported through policies which provide more targeted financial assistance.**

4.1.1. Targeted financial assistance

Rental Assistance adjustments

Centrelink payments and housing subsidies are not enough to be able to afford a private rental property in a metropolitan area. **Rental assistance needs to be relative to rental prices according to the median price for a dwelling type in the area** or subsidise a proportion of rent rather than a fixed amount might be a way to address private housing affordability for people with barriers to employment or low income.

“Unless you have a stable income, private rental applications are a waste of time. You are not going to find a place. Take, for example, women needing a three-bedroom place in Sydney while being on a parenting subsidy.”

“The amount from Centrelink keeps you under the poverty line and might not even cover a boarding house.”

Debt management programs are needed

Many CRC clients may have past **debts from previous housing providers, and that limits their housing applications all across NSW.**

“It used to be that if you are paying consistently for six months or it was below \$500 you could go back to the register. That has changed recently and people might need clear up their debt completely. With such history, no real estate is going to look at them.”

Interest-free loans

For clients with a prospect of employment, guaranteed **interest-free loans** might be another tool to help people who are establishing themselves with paying bonds and furnishing properties.

4.1.2. Address exclusion to private rental markets

Address racism and stigma within private rental markets

Feedback from CRC caseworkers highlighted that people who have been in prison face considerable stigma and discrimination on the private rental market. This is compounded with racism for our First Nations clients, which is said to be particularly prevalent in rural and regional communities with larger Aboriginal communities. **There is a need to consider how private rental markets can be better regulated to prevent exclusion by way of stigma and racism.**

“I went for an inspection and I have done my application. I am very fair skin and I was dressed. They didn’t realise I am Aboriginal and told me that I got accepted. I went there with my partner the next day to sign the lease and as soon as I walked in, they turned me away. They said it is their choice whom they accept for housing and they said they made a mistake accepting me. There are certain rental agencies where Indigenous people know they can’t go to.”

“We have had clients who were offered rental subsidy scheme which can be up to \$320, but the amount is never enough. We have clients who can’t access computer, they can’t read or write, so they need support each step on the way in a rental application. I went to view property with a client the other day and she left it tears, because she felt the stigma with which real estate agent approached her, looking at her tattoos.”

5. Guided Question 5: How could governments work better with industry, community services and other organisations to improve housing outcomes for all Australians?

Providing housing and support for people exiting prison will provide better outcomes for the broader community through reducing homelessness and enhancing safety.

6. Case studies

Case study: RHSP client

S is a 49-year-old male who has been a client of CRC's Reintegration Housing Support Program for approximately six months. S was referred to the program via the LCM after being released from custody into homelessness. He has a long history of incarceration and has served several adult sentences. S has struggled with substance dependency his whole life and has been homeless multiple times. S battles with diagnosed PTSD induced by childhood trauma and multiple traumatic experiences throughout his adult life, severe anxiety and depression.

S was deemed a high-risk reoffender upon being released. His criminal history consists of multiple offences, however substance dependency has been the catalyst for S's struggles with the criminal justice system. S has been charged with multiple drug-related offences - according to S most of the other crimes committed were under the influence or motivated by his substance dependency.

Since his release, S and I have worked extensively on resolving his homelessness utilising the RHSP's collaborative relationship with DCJ. The RHSP successfully supported S to obtain transitional housing while we worked on a long-term solution. Together we completed a case plan and implemented goals, which required extensive advocacy with other services and case coordination. S had expressed a deep desire to address his AOD barriers, primary healthcare and mental health, however he was understandably reluctant given that he had never addressed these issues previously and did not know where to start. The RHSP is an outreach-based support program, which allowed me the freedom to attend the required appointments with S and support him along the way. Together we initiated engagement with a trauma-informed GP, AOD counselling, psychology and psychiatry support.

S and I identified long-term, stable accommodation as one of the primary goals he wished to achieve. We determined that the best way to resolve his long-term homelessness was through public housing (DCJ) and we successfully lodged a priority application. Throughout the process DCJ was extremely supportive, understanding and helpful. We maintained regular communication and if an obstacle presented itself, DCJ staff would work with us to overcome it. We were continually informed on what supporting evidence was required and made aware of where things were up to along the way - providing S with the clarity he needed during a stressful time.

Fast forward to the present and S has successfully obtained a DCJ property; he has been maintaining his tenancy extremely well and has finished furnishing his new home. S is continually engaging with support services, attending weekly AOD counselling, fortnightly psychology appointments and he now has the confidence to attend these appointments alone. S has rekindled his relationship with his family and sees them weekly. S is eight months' sober, of which he is rightfully proud, and he has successfully completed all post-release requirements with Parole, who ceased supervision with S after he went from a high-risk reoffender to a low-risk. S has expressed his gratitude to CRC and the RHSP program, however I have made a point of emphasising his hard work and determination throughout our time working together. S has come an extremely long way and I look forward to watching him continue to succeed.

Case study: ERS client

M is a 43-year-old man with a history of schizophrenia and substance use disorder. M has a long history of psychiatric care in various mental-health services spanning a period of 20 years in custody. M has had numerous admissions to Long Bay Hospital and to hospitals in the community. As a result of repeated incarcerations, most of his psychiatric care has occurred in custody, and M has been under Community Treatment Orders both in the community and in custody. M has previously been homeless, unemployed and in receipt of the Disability Support Pension.

Prior to his referral to the ERS program, M's last tenancy was 10 years ago when he had a public housing property that was relinquished after a return to custody. He had been living with his mother in between his releases but the relationship had become strained, they had a falling out, and she was no longer willing to accommodate him.

ERS staff started working with M after his referral in January. He had been undergoing an adjustment to his medication and struggled with paranoia and hallucinations, which affected his ability to sustain any meaningful conversation. During the three-month pre-release stage his symptoms stabilised and M could actively engage in conversation and make insightful contributions to his support plan. His memory improved and he was able to identify material supports he needed, such as clothes to wear on release, identification documents stored with family and various bits of other personal information. This proved useful for completing Housing forms and other documentation. M built a good rapport with his ERS transition worker, which allowed him to disclose sensitive details including some of the frustrating physical side effects of his medication, which were added to his post-release support plan.

On release day, M was picked up from the correctional centre by the transition worker. He was provided with clothing purchased through brokerage, which he changed into in the bathroom in the Visitors Centre before leaving the correctional centre. M received support with attending all his appointments on release day, including reporting to Community Corrections, signing his lease at Housing, attending a banking branch for his statement for Centrelink and purchasing his first lot of groceries. Unfortunately, M was involved in an altercation at the new address on the first night, resulting in serious injuries that required a hospital stay. ERS staff were able to advocate for M with DCJ Housing, as his accommodation had become unsuitable and risked exposing him to further instances of violence. DCJ were supportive and were able to provide assistance through a series of placements in TA and, through liaising with partners at the department, M was housed in a lower-density area after two weeks. M received support with setting up the new house using a mix of donations from the Women's Transition program and other community welfare organisations.

After four months in the community, M was involved in an incident that led to new charges and a return to custody. During a visit to M in custody, he expressed that the support he received was far more positive and helpful than during his previous releases. He engaged with mental-health services and complied with his CTO despite his misgivings. He received support with linking up to a GP in the local area to address previously untreated physical health issues, for which he received successful treatment. M was also referred to the local drug health services where he received fortnightly phone counselling as a condition of his parole, which he attended, albeit grudgingly. After receiving support letters from his GP and his transition worker, M was able to have his DSP reinstated. He also obtained a photo ID through Services NSW, which overcame a barrier that prevented him from accessing various community services. The family has also witnessed an improvement in his mental health and they are regularly including him in family gatherings, which has had a discernible effect on his wellbeing and general outlook.

Case study: BHOS client

T has been in and out of custody since he was a young adult. As a result of childhood trauma, T has also struggled with long-term drug dependency. T was referred to the Boarding House Outreach Service (BHOS) in the lead-up to his release from custody. Even though T had been in and out of custody multiple times, this was the first time he had received support. BHOS provided pre-release support, including a referral to the CRC AOD team, to assist with his recovery. T was initially apprehensive about how having support would make his release different from previous times. Despite this apprehension, T engaged with both BHOS and his AOD worker. A specialist GP appointment was arranged for his release to ensure his recovery care continued and to assist in preventing relapse. The parole unit arranged two nights of temporary accommodation.

Upon release, BHOS provided T with clothing and helped him to access additional temporary accommodation, while supporting him to view boarding houses. One week after leaving custody, T had secured accommodation and moved into a boarding house. During this first week, he also attended the prearranged GP appointment, which he reported was a positive experience. T required the support of a psychiatrist; however sourcing a psychiatrist who bulk bills can be challenging. BHOS approached multiple services and advocated for a bulk-billed appointment. After a six-month wait, T saw the psychiatrist and completed the required assessments.

T was given a referral to a specialised counsellor who works with people with histories of incarceration, which reduced his anxiety about being judged by other services and allowed him to access the support he needed to begin his trauma recovery. T lived in a boarding house for six months, and while he often struggled with the other residents, with support from his BHOS and AOD workers, he was able to remain there. T had previously submitted a Housing NSW application. During assessment, part of his application was sent to be completed by a previous Housing provider, however, it was sent to the wrong housing provider and couldn't be located. For four months, BHOS continued to engage with Housing and the housing provider, advocating for T's application to be followed up and finalised.

His incomplete Housing application further impacted his ability to access other housing options, as being on the priority housing waitlist was a requirement. After persistent advocacy and follow-up from BHOS, T's housing application was eventually finalised, and he was offered a property through DCJ Housing, which he accepted. Once T had been successfully housed, BHOS completed referrals to charity organisations to obtain furnishings for his property, and brokerage money received through a Club Grant was utilised to purchase essential items.

T has become a strong advocate for himself. He continues to work on himself by attending the local gym daily and engaging in regular counselling, and he recently starting a TAFE course. BHOS assisted T to obtain a refurbished laptop to complete his course. T is hoping to become an AOD counsellor to support other people who have had similar experiences to him.

Case study: Miranda client

E is 24-year-old woman living outside of Sydney. E was referred to CRC's Miranda Project for diversionary support as she was too fearful to access services in her small community, as most people in the town were connected with the perpetrator's family. In addition to this, domestic violence services in E's area did not support women who were viewed as the perpetrators of violence, directly excluding E from supports. On meeting virtually with E, it was clear that she had been mis-identified by police as the 'primary aggressor of the alleged violence.' She disclosed a long history of family and domestic violence and also of the ways she had resisted the violence to protect herself and her young children. E shared that in protecting her children an incident occurred, police were contacted and E was arrested. Sadly, this also resulted in her children being placed in the care of the person she was acting to protect them from, further complicating matters and increasing E's level of fear and worry for her young children.

E shared a long history of interpersonal, systemic and institutional abuse perpetrated by the adults in her life. Due to this violence E expressed a distrust for services and professionals working in the community sector. The case worker needed to consider this in her approach, investing in and extending the rapport and trust-building phase of the work. The case worker needed to spend time creating a solid foundation before moving forward with any other aspects of the work.

Since this time, E has worked alongside a senior case worker to engage in domestic violence psycho-education, utilising the Insight Exchange Model and response-based practice to highlight the ways E thought and acted intelligently to keep herself and her children safe, despite the challenges. In addition to this, E engaged with practical supports, which included practical and emotional support during criminal and family law meetings; support to complete paperwork; access to brokerage when required; family and criminal in-person court support; information about additional services and supports and warm referrals, including trauma counselling. A comprehensive, holistic and trauma-informed case plan has been created alongside E to ensure short- and long-term goals were identified.

There has been an ongoing balancing process to encourage E to reach out to services and build her trusted support network while maintaining her (and her children's) safety, self-determination and self-efficacy. E has continued to engage with CRC's Miranda Project, never missing a session and stating that without the support she would not have made it this far through the legal process while maintaining her wellbeing, her employment and her home.

While Emma's criminal and family matters continue, with her case worker's support - along with referrals for legal supports - the criminal charges have been reduced so that they can be heard in Local Court, significantly decreasing the risk of imprisonment and a conviction that would impact her current employment and career path. Emma's referrer has reached out to thank CRC's Miranda Project for the 'incredible support' provided to Emma, as she did not believe another service would have been able to navigate the barriers and connect and engage Emma to this extent to achieve these outcomes so far.

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