

Shared Child & Family Needs

A 'Landscape Atlas' of the structural elements of the ECD system in Australia – A rapid compilation

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**Early Years
Catalyst**





Atlas Section

03





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Atlas Section Part Two

03

Shared Child and
Family Needs

Introduction to this section

Our broad definition of the influences on ECD includes the needs of parents as well as shared child and family needs (in addition to the NEST Framework child elements which are the focus of the systems examined in Part One of this atlas) – as articulated by the [Centre for Child and Community Health's "Core Conditions for Children and Families"](#).

Since [Bronfenbrenner's](#) ground breaking ecological systems theory was published in 1977, there has been ever growing understanding of the significant influences that a child's environment has on their developmental outcomes. As such, our exploration of the systems that influence ECD outcomes, takes an "ecological view" and looks to the systems that influence their family, home and community environments.

This next section explores the structural elements of the systems that influence the family/home/community environments (shared parent/ child and family needs):

- **parenting & family supports**
- **family & domestic violence supports**
- **social security**
- **secure and affordable housing**
- **safe, healthy physical and built environments (community infrastructure)**

We note that some of these categories may not be considered as stand-alone systems.

Parenting & family supports

Parenting and family supports is not a stand-alone system, but instead, elements sit within or are closely aligned with a number of the other systems that influence ECD outcomes. Parenting and family supports range from universal access resources like websites and helplines to the very targeted intervention programs mandated within the child protection system.

We have dedicated a chapter to exploring the landscape of parenting and family supports because of the preventative and protective role family and parenting supports can play in enabling strong families and nurturing home environments.

Throughout the systems mapping process, there was consistent feedback about the importance of ensuring access to responsive family and parenting supports in the current state system mapping, and such a strong emphasis in the desired future state about supporting strong families with universal and proactive supports.

In the following chapter, we have explored family and domestic violence supports (as a different type of parenting and family support), given the vital safety net they provide to protect the safety and wellbeing of children and (in most cases) their mothers.

1. Purpose of the system

The purpose of the parenting and family supports system is to strengthen relationships, support families, improve the wellbeing of children and young people, reduce the cost of family breakdown, and strengthen family and community functioning (*Department of Social Services, 2021b*).

2. Key national and state strategies

Strengthening families and communities is a universal goal for all levels of government including local government.

National and State strategies focus on keeping children safe and reducing the number of children in out-of-home care (and involved with the child protection system). There is also a strong focus around strengthening families.

[Table 1 in the Child Protection chapter of this atlas outlines key national and state strategies relating to parenting and family supports].

The National Action Plan for the health of children and young people 2020–2030

The following text is taken from the foreword to the [The National Action Plan for the health of children and young people 2020–2030](#):

“This resulting National Action Plan for the Health of Children and Young People: 2020–2030, shines a light on the importance of fostering the health of Australia’s future generations. It presents recommendations for action and highlights the need for collaboration between partners, including governments at all levels, the health sector, relevant organisations and children and young people themselves.

Importantly the Action Plan recognises that as a nation we need to invest in both ‘universal’ and ‘targeted’ prevention and early intervention in order to address population based health needs. This will help achieve optimal and equitable health outcomes for all children and young people – including those most in need due to social inequalities.

The Action Plan also recognises that children and young people do not exist in isolation, they exist within families. It is these families – and the parents and care givers within these families – that are the most powerful influence on a child’s life and development”.

Priority Area 2 is focused on ‘Empowering parents and caregivers to maximise healthy development’. It acknowledges the significant influence parents and caregivers have on multiple child health outcomes which means there is a big opportunity to engender greater equity by enhancing both universal and targeted parenting support interventions. It states that effective parenting support interventions offer a mechanism to improve both immediate and long-term child outcomes, especially during the antenatal and early childhood period.

In addition to National and State strategies, local government also plays a large role in the delivery of localised, place-based child supports. Many have localised strategies that articulate these supports.

CASE STUDY

Cumberland Children and Families Strategy 2019–2023

An example of the role played by local government is the [Cumberland Children and Families Strategy 2019 to 2023](#). It aims to improve the lives of children and their families and ensure that Cumberland is a place where children are safe, have access to quality education and care, have a voice and multiple avenues to participate in community life, including opportunities to develop their health and wellbeing.

3. No of people involved/% of Australian population

There are no easy to access statistics for the number of children and families that engage with family and parenting supports. However, the range and reach of where and how supports under this banner are delivered, indicate that tens of thousands of individuals and families engage with these services annually.

For example, for just the DSS specifically funded programs, there were **51,968** individual clients who accessed some form of Children and Parents Support Services in 2021–2022 (*Productivity Commission, 2022g*).

4. Access – universal or targeted?

As discussed above, the degree of access ranges from universal (everyone can access), to targeted universal (meeting eligibility criteria) to extremely targeted in the case of Child Protection matters.

An example of a universally available program is included below.

CASE STUDY

Triple P – Positive Parenting Program

In Queensland, the [Triple P Parenting Program](#) is universally available. It's not only children and teenagers who benefit from positive parenting. It also makes family life more enjoyable, easier and more rewarding for parents.

More and more parents understand that it's okay to ask for help and, in Queensland, positive parenting support to suit every family is free for any parent or carer of a child up to 16 years old.

The Triple P – Positive Parenting Program is used around the world and was developed right here in Queensland. It helps parents to raise children and teenagers who will grow up to be happier and healthier. Thousands of Queensland parents have already done Triple P and recommend it.

No matter what stage of life your child is at – or what challenges you're facing – Triple P can help you learn simple but proven ways to give them the best opportunity to reach their full potential.

5. Total government expenditure Australia-wide

Funding amounts are hard to compile given the diverse nature of supports. We know that the Commonwealth Government spent **\$381,515,000** on “Families and Children” in 2021–2022 (*Department of Social Services, 2022h*).

[In the 2022–23 Budget, the Australian Government announced an investment of \\$12.4 million over 4 years to increase access to playgroups and toy libraries.](#) This includes a pilot of up to 10 Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to operate First Nations Playgroups (*Department of Social Services, 2022e*).

The states also fund a huge range of programs, pilots and initiatives each year, including family support services which run to the hundreds of millions and billions for the larger states [see Table 3 in the Child Protection chapter].

The Productivity Commission's *Study of Expenditure on Children in the Northern Territory* (2017) highlighted the problems of so many disparate programs being commissioned from different levels of government and provided a series of practical recommendations focused on implementation approaches that would improve coordination and the experience of children and families (*Productivity Commission, 2020*).

6. Federal and State responsibilities for funding/delivery

Federal responsibilities

DSS funds **3,911** organisations across Australia to deliver child and parenting programs, early intervention and prevention services and resources to improve children's development and wellbeing and to support parents and carers in raising children. Services focus on children aged 0–12 years but may include children up to 18 years (*Department of Social Services, 2022c*).

State and territory governments responsibilities

States also fund services, as does local government. There is no publicly available compiled record of all these services or levels of funding.

7. System specific accountability/oversight/regulation mechanisms

As family and parenting supports is not a standalone system, there is no systemic oversight or accountability.

Legal requirements of child safe standards/organisations and other child and family related legislation would apply, as discussed in previous chapters.

The commissioning and contracts for the delivery of services is a key accountability mechanism, including reporting against the [DSS Family and Child Activity Outcomes Framework](#), which defines the expected outputs and outcomes of service providers and require them to report annually.

Where the supports sit within another system (such as supports provided by child and family health nurses within the primary health system) they will be subject to the accountability of that system.

8. How a family interacts with/accesses the system

It should be noted that family and parenting supports are often very responsive to the needs of their local community, with culturally appropriate workers, bi-lingual workers, and are able to adapt to meet specific needs.

Support is delivered through range of tailored services to strengthen families and improve the wellbeing of children. These programs aim to increase parenting confidence and capacity which leads to better opportunities and outcomes for children.

A snapshot of different types of supports:

- **Playgroups:** provide social and parenting support for parents and carers, contributing to the early development and wellbeing of children and parent-child relationships, and increasing feelings of belonging and connection in families with their communities
- **Children and Parenting Support services:** provide early intervention and prevention support to children and their families across Australia. Services seek to identify issues such as risk of neglect or abuse within families, and provide interventions or appropriate referral(s) before these issues escalate
- **Intensive Family Support services:** aim to prevent separation or to reunify families, through a variety of services as part of an integrated strategy focusing on improving family functioning and skills

Online parenting resources such as raisingchildren.net.au (funded by the federal government) provide free, up-to-date and independent information to help families grow and thrive together.

CASE STUDY

Parenting SA

[Parenting SA](#) is a partnership of the Department of Human Services and the Women's and Children's Health Network. Parenting SA is a program of the South Australian government. They have been providing quality information on raising children since 1996.

[Families Growing Together](#) offers parents and caregivers a range of support options to suit their needs. The State Government is committed to a strong plan to see every South Australian child grow up safe and healthy with a prosperous future.

9. Where/who delivers services for families

In theory, family and parenting supports should be available in every local community across Australia. The federal government's commissioning of NGOs aims to provide coverage for all children and families, even in remote and rural areas. Every jurisdiction has information available online about where to find out more. Within the **3,911** contracts that DSS has for the delivery of Child and Parenting Services, there is a wide variety of services, from major national NGOs, to small, community-based organisations.

The following government websites provide information about family and parenting supports in different states and territories:

- **Australian Capital Territory:** [Parentlink ACT](#) provides parenting information, guidance and support
- **New South Wales:** [Resourcing Parents](#) has information on services and support for families throughout New South Wales, including online webinars and courses
- **NSW Department of Family and Community Services – Parenting** has practical tips, information and resources for parents and carers
- **Northern Territory:** [Family Support Services](#)
- **Queensland:** [Support for parents and families](#)
- **South Australia:** [Parenting SA](#) provides support, services, information and resources for parents and carers
- **Tasmania:** [Parentline Tas](#)
- **Victoria:** [Better Health Channel – Parents](#) has quality-assured and easy-to-understand information on a range of issues, for parents of babies through to teenagers
- **Western Australia:** [Ngala](#) helps parents, grandparents and carers develop skills and cope with the challenges of parenting

Family & domestic violence supports

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare's [Australia's Children, Children exposed to family violence](#) report explains why it is important to dedicate attention to family and domestic violence supports. Being exposed to family violence can have a wide range of detrimental impacts on a child's development, mental and physical health, housing situation and general wellbeing.

More specifically, research has found exposure to family violence is associated with a range of negative outcomes over the life course, including:

- **diminished educational attainment**
- **reduced social participation in early adulthood**
- **physical and psychological disorders**
- **suicidal ideation**
- **behavioural difficulties**
- **homelessness**
- **future victimisation and/or violent offending**

When a child is exposed to family violence along with multiple other risk factors, such as socioeconomic disadvantage, parental mental ill health and parental substance abuse, more extreme negative outcomes are likely. However, exposure to family violence alone does not mean a child will necessarily experience negative outcomes. With the right support, children exposed to family violence may have increased resilience later in life (AIHW, 2022a).

1. Purpose of the system

Family violence is a widespread and serious problem that causes significant and detrimental impacts on individuals, families and communities across all facets of society.

Addressing family violence requires a whole-of-community response and a coordinated system working together to support adult and child victim-survivors, address risk and safety needs, and promote perpetrator accountability.

The [Victorian Family Violence Protection Act 2008](#) recognises these definitions of family violence, confirming that:

- **family violence is a fundamental violation of human rights and is unacceptable in any form**
- **family violence may involve overt or subtle exploitation of power imbalances and may consist of isolated incidents or patterns of abuse over a period of time**

Under the Act, examples of behaviour that may constitute family violence include (but are not limited to):

- **assault**
- **sexual assault/other sexually abusive behaviour**
- **stalking**
- **repeated derogatory taunts**
- **intentionally damaging or destroying property**
- **intentionally causing death or injury to an animal**
- **unreasonably denying the family member the financial autonomy that he or she would otherwise have had**



2. Key national and state strategies

- **unreasonably withholding financial support needed to meet the reasonable living expenses of the family member, or his or her child, at a time when the family member is entirely or predominantly dependent on the person for financial support**
- **preventing the family member from making or keeping connections with his or her family, friends or culture**
- **unlawfully depriving the family member, or any member of the family member's family, of his or her liberty**

Strategies and initiatives to address the impacts of family and domestic violence are complex and funding appears to be a mix of government at both national and state level, and philanthropic supports.

Services are delivered by a wide mix of organisations from large, national faith-based NGOs to place-based, community run domestic and family violence shelters for women and children. The delivery context is fragmented and is different in each jurisdiction. National policies and State/Territory-level plans articulate five main categories of support, which have linkages to other systems and supports:

- **safety/wellbeing to address an immediate threat**
- **housing**
- **financial**
- **legal**
- **ongoing counselling services**

The National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032

On 17 October 2022, the federal, state and territory governments released the [National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032](#) (the National Plan).

The National Plan is the overarching national policy framework that will guide actions towards ending violence against women and children over the next ten years.

It highlights how all parts of society, including governments, businesses and workplaces, media, schools and educational institutions, the family, domestic and sexual violence sector, communities and all individuals, must work together to achieve the shared vision of ending gender-based violence in one generation.

Violence against women and children is a problem of epidemic proportions in Australia:

- **1 in 3 women has experienced physical violence since the age of 15, and one in 5 has experienced sexual violence (ABS, 2017a)**
- **on average, a woman is killed by an intimate partner every 10 days (Serpell et al., 2022)**
- **rates of violence are even higher for certain groups, such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women (AIHW, 2019)**

All Australian governments are united in their commitment to addressing the unacceptable rates of violence in our communities. The National Plan has been developed and agreed

by Ministers with responsibility for women's safety across all jurisdictions. It was a product of a collaborative consultation processes that included:

- [the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs Inquiry into family, domestic and sexual violence](#)
- the Statement from Delegates from the [2021 National Summit on Women's Safety](#) as well as feedback captured through all sessions at the Summit
- [key findings from the public consultation and targeted workshops and interviews](#) (including with victim survivors)
- advice from the National Plan Advisory Group and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Council on family, domestic and sexual violence
- [Respect @ Work: Sexual Harassment National Inquiry Report \(2020\); Set the Standard: Report on the Independent Review into Commonwealth Parliamentary Workplaces \(2021\)](#) and the Australian Human Rights Commission's [Change the Course: National Report on Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment at the Australian Universities \(2017\)](#)
- the existing evidence base, including [Changing the picture; Changing the landscape](#); and the [Wiyi Yani U Thangani \(Women's Voices\): Securing our rights securing our future report \(2020\)](#)

The National Plan builds on the first [National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010–2022](#).

The federal government has also committed to developing a future standalone First Nations National Plan to address the unacceptably high rates of violence Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children experience.

Being exposed to family violence can have a wide range of detrimental impacts on a child's development, mental and physical health, housing situation and general wellbeing.

3. No of people involved/% of Australian population

According to the 2016 [Personal Safety Survey](#) conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, since the age of 15 (ABS, 2017a):

- **1 in 2 women** has experienced sexual harassment in their lifetime
- **1 in 3 women** has experienced violence by a partner, other known person or a stranger since the age of 15
- **1 in 4 Australian women** has experienced intimate partner violence since the age of 15
- **1 in 4 Australian women** has experienced emotional abuse by a current or former partner since the age of 15
- **1 in 5 Australian women** had experienced sexual violence since the age of 15
- **1 in 6 women and 1 in 9 men** experienced physical and/or sexual abuse before the age of 15

Women are most likely to experience physical and sexual violence in their home, at the hands of a male current or ex-partner. Of women who had children in their care when they experienced violence from an ex-partner, 68 per cent reported that the children had seen or heard the violence (ABS, 2017a).

Additionally, 23 per cent of women in Australia have experienced sexual violence in their lifetime including childhood sexual abuse and/or sexual assault since the age of 15 (ABS PSS 2016). However, the true prevalence of sexual violence is likely to be higher as we know that many incidents of sexual violence go unreported. According to the 2022 ABS [Sexual assault – Perpetrators](#) release, 97 per cent of sexual assault offenders are male.

In 2017–18, **26,500 children aged 0–9** were assisted by specialist **homelessness** services due to domestic violence (AIHW, 2019).

Based on age-standardised rates, the rate of family-violence related assault hospitalisations for Indigenous Australians was 30 times the non-Indigenous rate (based on age-standardised rates) ([NATSIHS](#)).

CASE STUDY

Domestic Violence

In an Indigenous community context, where family and kinship networks can be broad and complex, the term 'family violence' can be considered as covering relevant issues and behaviours within a broader set of relationships. Interventions to address family violence have therefore moved away from the approach of treating incidents as one-off events, and instead follow holistic, culturally appropriate approaches that are integrated into communities. For more information on these programs, see [Family violence prevention programs in Indigenous communities](#).

The following data regarding self-reported experiences of family violence comes from the [National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey 2018–19 \(NATSIHS\)](#).

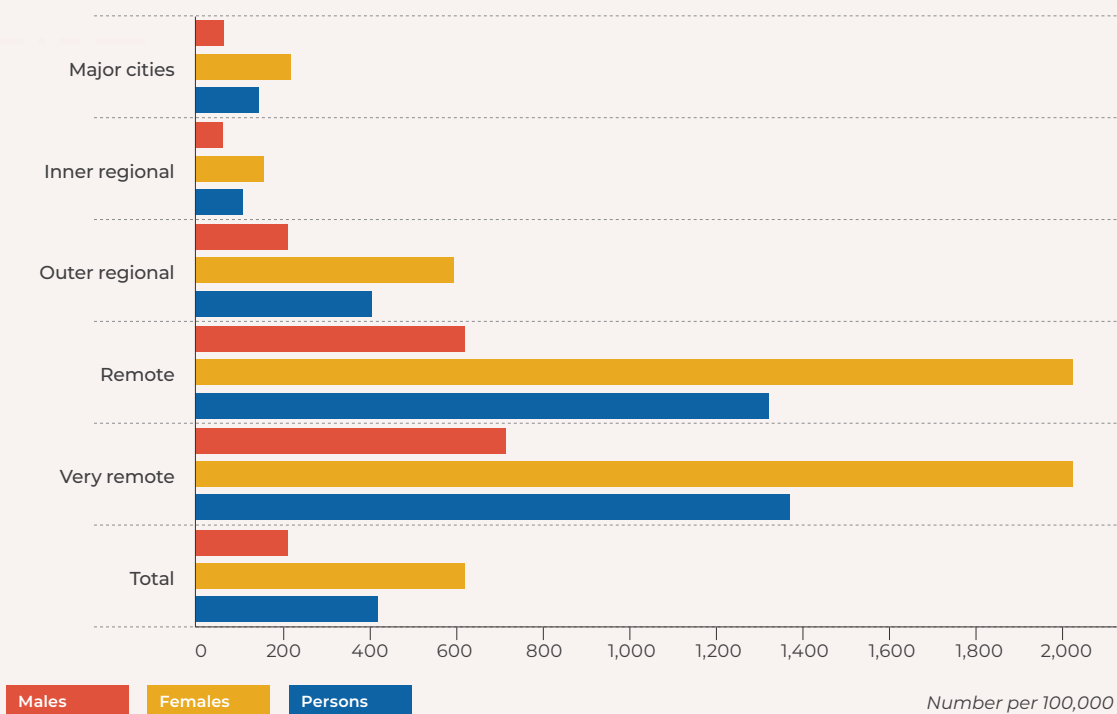
- In 2018–19, 8.4% (an estimated 21,700) of Indigenous Australian women aged 15 and over reported experiencing domestic physical or threatened physical harm in the previous 12 months.
- NATSIHS indicate that in 2018–19, 16% (an estimated 76,900) of Indigenous Australians aged 15 and over had experienced physical and/or threatened physical harm in the preceding 12 months, while 6.3% (an estimated 30,900) experienced physical harm.
- Of those experiencing physical harm, 74% believed that the offender was under the influence of alcohol or other substances during the most recent incident.
- In the two-year period from 1 July 2017 to 30 June 2019, there were 14,061 assault hospitalisations for Indigenous Australians, accounting for 30% of all assault hospitalisations.
- The rate was highest for Indigenous females aged 35–44, and increased with remoteness (Figure 1).
- Indigenous Australians were 14 times as likely to be hospitalised for assault as non-Indigenous Australians (age-standardised rates of 951 compared with 68 per 100,000, respectively). The ratio was higher for females, with Indigenous females 27 times as likely as non-Indigenous females to be hospitalised for assault.
- Between 2006–07 and 2018–19, there was an 11% increase in the rate of assault hospitalisations, based on age-standardised rates (or 5,214 to 6,702 hospitalisations).

Hospitalisations for assault, Indigenous Australians, by sex, age and remoteness, Australia, 2017–19

Reasons for hospitalisation:
Family violence-related assault

Disaggregation:
Remoteness area

Sex:
Males, Females, Persons



Source: AIHW National Hospital Morbidity Database

This bar chart shows that by age, hospitalisation rates for assault were highest for Indigenous Australians aged 35–44 at 2,013 per 100,000. By area of remoteness, rates were highest in Very remote areas, at 2,458 per 100,000.

By age, hospitalisation rates for family violence-related assault were also highest for Indigenous Australians aged 35–44 at 1,023 per 100,000. By area of remoteness, rates were highest in Very remote areas at 1,367 per 100,000.

Across disaggregation's, rates for both assault outcomes were generally higher for Indigenous Australian females than for Indigenous Australian males.

In the two-year period 2017–2019, of the total assault hospitalisations of Indigenous Australians, 6,918 (49%) were family violence-related.

Based on age-standardised rates, the rate of family-violence related assault hospitalisations for Indigenous Australians was 30 times the non-Indigenous rate (based on age-standardised rates).

Among Indigenous Australians, the rate of family violence-related assault was:

- higher for females compared with males
- highest for those aged 35–44 compared with other age groups
- highest in Remote and Very remote areas of Australia compared with non-remote areas

Over the period of 2006–07 to 2018–19, there was a 63% increase in the rate of family violence-related assaults for Indigenous Australians (based on age-standardised rates), or an increase from 1,902 to 3,319 in total annual hospitalisations.



4. Access – universal or targeted?

Access is universal.

Support to engage with the system often comes from GPs, friends, local community supports, online resources and hotlines.

In the first instance, support can also occur through the Australian Government Initiative: [1800RESPECT](#) or the Family and Relationships hotline (*Family Relationships Online, 2022*).

Through the 1800RESPECT hotline, families are taken through key areas of support:

- [domestic and family violence support services](#)
- [sexual assault and violence support services](#)
- [advocates for older people and people with disability](#)
- [support services for particular groups](#)

5. Total government expenditure Australia-wide

Violence against women and their children costs the Australian economy billions of dollars each year. Without appropriate action to address violence against women and their children, an estimated three-quarters of a million Australian women will experience and report violence in the period of 2021–22, costing the Australian economy an estimated \$15.6 billion.

This is more than last year's \$10.4 billion plan by the Australian Government to stimulate the economy in the face of the global financial crisis; more than the Government's \$5.9 billion Education Revolution; and more than three-quarters of the initial budget allocation in 2008–09 of \$20 billion to its Building Australia Fund.

Implementation of Time for Action: The National Council's Plan for Australia to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children (the Plan of Action) aims to reduce the levels of violence against women. The Government is delivering **\$1.3 billion** to support implementation of the National Plan (over 10 years). It will fund initiatives to support the prevention of violence, early intervention, responses and recovery and healing.

To place this in perspective, if the Plan of Action resulted in an average reduction in violence against women and their children by just 10 per cent by 2021–22, some \$1.6 billion in costs to victims/survivors, their friends and families, perpetrators, children, employers, governments and the community could be avoided (*Department of Social Services, 2022d*).

States and Territories are investing with additional support from the Commonwealth. We can estimate total funding is in the range of \$847.8 million (if we exclude the \$260 million from the Commonwealth Government through the [National Partnership](#) 2021–2023 to avoid double counting). This includes:

- [VIC](#): \$241 million
- [QLD](#): \$363 million
- [NSW](#): \$100 million
- [NT](#): \$54 million
- [TAS](#): \$31.5 million
- [WA](#): \$34.4 million
- [SA](#): \$16.4 million
- [ACT](#): \$7.42 million

6. Commonwealth and State responsibilities for funding/delivery

Domestic and family violence prevention receives funding from federal, state and territory governments.

Federal responsibilities

The federal government is responsible for the overarching national policies designed to reduce domestic and family violence while the state and territory governments are responsible for delivery of front-line support services and law enforcement responses.

At the federal level, the 2022–23 Budget provides \$1.3 billion over six years which builds on the \$1.1 billion committed in 2021–22 Budget.

State and territory government responsibilities

Funding flows from federal government to the states and territories, and there are different approaches across the jurisdictions. There are highly fragmented delivery mechanisms and partnerships with a range of organisations depending on the state or territory (*Spinks and Lorimer, 2022*).

7. System specific accountability/oversight/regulation mechanisms

Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission

[The Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission](#) is a new national body. The Commission is an Executive Agency established under the Public Service Act 1999 (Cth) by an order of the Governor-General, with the order commencing on 1 July 2022.

The Commission will function as a national body to improve the coordination of policy and services. This will help people experiencing domestic, family and sexual violence access the support they need no matter who they are, or where they live.

The Commission will:

- **provide national leadership and consistency in policy, services and supports**
- **combine available data and evidence to provide best practice advice**
- **promote national coordination across a range of policies and system interactions**
- **act as an independent, accountable and transparent agency**
- **amplify the voice of victims and survivors**

Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety Limited (ANROWS)

Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety Limited (ANROWS) is an independent, not-for-profit research organisation established to produce evidence to support the reduction of violence against women and their children.

ANROWS was established as an initiative of *Australia's first National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010–2022* (the National Plan). Since the launch of its inaugural research program in October 2014,

ANROWS has delivered quality research and associated reports, research synthesis papers, tools and resources across all priority areas of the National Plan. Importantly, ANROWS has also actively worked with decision-makers to support the take-up of the evidence it has produced (ANROWS, 2022).

8. How a family interacts with/accesses the system

Support to engage with the family and domestic violence support system often comes from GPs, friends, local community supports, online resources and hotlines.

Through the 1800RESPECT hotline, families are taken through key areas of support:

- [domestic and family violence support services](#)
- [sexual assault and violence support services](#)
- [advocates for older people and people with disability](#)
- [support services for particular groups](#)

There are also other services available and information on support services for [money and finance](#) and [housing](#).

An example is the [Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria](#). The Domestic Violence Resource Centre (Victoria) is a state-wide service based in Melbourne that offers a telephone support and referral service. The Centre's website has resources, information and advice on family violence and sexual abuse, as well as a [directory of Australia-wide services](#).

9. Where/who delivers services for families

Depending on what state/territory you live in, there are different options for families and children to access family and domestic violence services once they have contacted the 1800RESPECT hotline. These are grouped by jurisdiction:

- [Australian Capital Territory](#)
- [New South Wales](#)
- [Northern Territory](#)
- [Queensland](#)
- [South Australia](#)
- [Tasmania](#)
- [Victoria](#)
- [Western Australia](#)

Support services for men who are experiencing family violence, and information regarding behaviour change programs, is available [here](#).

Crisis payments

Through Services Australia (via MyGOV) a *Crisis Payment* is available for people who have experienced a family or domestic violence incident. This is in addition to other income support payments.

Individuals must meet all of the following criteria to receive this payment:

- **be contactable by social workers to assess their situation**
- **be eligible for, or getting, an income support payment or ABSTUDY Living Allowance**
- **be in [severe financial hardship](#)**
- **be in Australia when the incident happened and when they submitted their claim**
- **meet criteria regarding living situation**

To find out all the conditions, read [who can get it](#).

Services Australia has social workers available to provide support claimants including connecting them [to other supports](#): including other payments, legal services including legal aid and other support services including:

- **family and domestic violence services**
- **emergency accommodation and long-term housing support**
- **financial help**
- **counselling**
- **health services**

Social security

Discussion about financial security is focused on the social security and welfare payments system that operates in Australia.

The welfare system is a safety net designed to keep people out of poverty, but not generous enough that recipients do not aspire to and seek paid employment. In theory, Australia's income support payments are based on the principles of reciprocity and mutual obligation, principles that have wide community support as well as bipartisan political support. However, the ECD systems mapping project highlighted several mental models and underpinning narratives that inform the framing of the welfare system – the notions that poverty is a choice, that those in poverty should be punished (and by extension, their children) and that there are good parents and bad parents – and if you can't afford your children – you are a bad parent.

There is significant evidence about the impacts of growing up in poverty on children's development and life trajectory (*Department of Health, 2019b*). In imagining a desired future early years system, systems mapping participants called for all children and families to have their material basics met and universal access to many more services – removing the stigma of targeted programs and services.

Access to material basics should be a fundamental right for children recognising that it is necessary for their development. The impacts of financial stress, housing insecurity and reduced access to social participation and inclusion have significant impacts for children and families, particularly in sole parent households.

1. Purpose of the system

Australia's social security system aims to support people who cannot, or cannot fully, support themselves, by providing targeted payments and assistance. There are specific welfare payments for families, aiming to ensure that children are not living in poverty – these include parenting payments as a form of income support, Family Tax Benefits A and B for low-income families, and child care subsidy eligibility to enable low income and welfare dependent families to access low cost early childhood education.

Welfare is administered through the federal Department of Social Services – which helps to support families and children through the provision of programs and services as well as benefits and payments. Further support is provided through grants and funding for organisations providing services for families. There's help for families with the cost of raising children ([Family Tax Benefit](#)), new parents ([Paid Parental Leave](#) and Dad and Partner Pay), young people leaving formal care (through [Transition to Independent Living Allowance](#)) and [more programs and services](#).

2. Key national and state strategies

There is no explicit national strategy for the reduction of poverty, nor one directly referencing social security or welfare. There are many national and state strategies aimed at addressing a single element of disadvantage and poverty (i.e. ending homelessness), but not an overarching strategy.

However, after 19 years (see below), in September 2022, the Senate referred an [Inquiry into The extent and nature of poverty in Australia](#) to the Senate Community Affairs References Committee for inquiry and report by 31 October 2023. This builds on the advocacy of the Australian Council of Social Services (ACOSS) and its state counterparts and others who have been consistently vocal about the need to eliminate poverty.

The inquiry will examine the extent and nature of poverty in Australia with particular reference to:

- the rates and drivers of poverty in Australia
- the relationship between economic conditions (including fiscal policy, rising inflation and cost of living pressures) and poverty
- the impact of poverty on individuals in relation to:
 - employment outcomes
 - housing security
 - health outcomes
 - education outcomes
- the impacts of poverty amongst different demographics and communities
- the relationship between income support payments and poverty
- mechanisms to address and reduce poverty
- any related matters

In 2003 – almost two decades ago - there was a Senate Inquiry into Poverty and Financial Hardship, resulting in: **A hand up not a hand out: Renewing the fight against poverty (Report on poverty and financial hardship)** which recommended a National Strategy.

[Chapter 18 – Future Directions](#) – explored the need for a comprehensive, national whole of government approach to poverty alleviation in Australia. It also reviews the need for structural changes to reduce poverty in this country, as well as an integrated policy framework to promote social and economic sustainability.

All states supported a national approach, however, this did not eventuate.

The recently elected Federal Labor Government's election platform states:

Nurturing Our Children

35. Labor understands that in order to have the best start in life, children need resilient, happy, loving families and communities. We will work to protect children at risk from disadvantage, neglect and abuse. We will seek to reduce the number of Australian children living in poverty.

A fair social security system

81. Labor believes that our social security system should work to keep children and families out of poverty, so they can learn and reach their potential. Furthermore, the system should be reviewed so that it's equipped to meet future challenges that will affect work such as technological change

3. No of people involved/% of Australian population

Therefore, at the time of writing, **the most relevant National Strategy is:**

[Department of Health and Aged Care | National Action Plan for the Health of Children and Young People: 2020–2030](#) (the Action Plan).

The Action Plan provides a roadmap for a national approach to improve and ensure the health and wellbeing of all Australian children and young people – providing them with the best start to life (*Department of Health, 2019b*).

The Action Plan has a focus on poverty and reducing the impacts of disadvantage on a child's health.

Certain populations are especially prone to health inequity as a result of social, geographical and other determinants. **Many children and young people also fall within multiple 'priority' population groups**, something which can have a compounding effect on their health needs and outcomes. Positively, there are opportunities to tackle health disparities experienced by these populations by working to address the causative factors underpinning their inequity. This is especially the case if actions are taken early in childhood, with greater potential to shift health trajectories and disrupt intergenerational cycles of disadvantage. One of these priority population groups is: **Children and young people born into poverty**

- Almost one in six children and young people live below the poverty line.
- The risk of poverty for children and young people in sole parent families is three times that for children in couple families.
- Low family income can increase emotional distress within a family, adversely affect parenting practices and lead to behavioural problems in children and young people.
- Deprivation of basic material needs can reduce a child's engagement in school, in turn impacting a child's development and educational opportunities.

Australian's receiving income support payments

In June 2021, 5.4 million people or 26 per cent of the population aged 16 and over received an income support payment (*AIHW, 2021*):

- **21 per cent (1.1 million people) received unemployment payments**
- **6.0 per cent (321,000 people) received parenting payments**

Australians living in poverty

The following [Australian statistics around poverty](#) are from the Australian Council of Social Services (ACOSS).

Australia has the 16th highest poverty rate out of the 34 wealthiest countries in the OECD – higher than the average for the OECD:

- **one in eight adults and one in six children (761,000 or 16.6%) in Australia are living in poverty**
- **most people living below the poverty line in Australia rely on [social security](#) for their income**
- **among different family types, sole parent families have the highest poverty rates, at 35%**
- **children in sole parent families are more than three times as likely to live in poverty (44%) as children in couple families (13%)**
- **people with paid employment are also living in poverty in Australia**
- **among people in households where the main income is wages, 7% are in poverty (which includes**
 - **families with children, those reliant on only part-time earnings, and those with high housing costs).** Since most people live in wage-earning households, this group is a substantial part (38%) of all people in poverty (*Davidson et al., 2022*).

Children living in poverty

The proportion of children living in poverty differs significantly across the different jurisdictions as the table below illustrates:

Poverty rates and counts by state/territory, 2020

INCOME POVERTY RATES AND NUMBERS									
	Household			Persons			Children		
	#	%	Rank	#	%	Rank	#	%	Rank
NSW	453,000	14.8	5	913,800	11.4	6	231,100	13.6	4
VIC	354,900	13.9	7	716,100	10.9	7	164,900	11.6	6
QLD	315,600	16.1	4	676,400	13.5	1	193,800	17.3	2
SA	129,900	17.9	1	220,300	12.8	4	48,900	13.2	5
WA	162,100	16.1	4	325,700	12.8	4	85,800	16.6	3
TAS	38,400	16.4	2	62,400	11.8	5	17,100	14.1	7
NT (a)	9,700	14.7	6	24,700	13.3	2	10,800	18.5	1
ACT (a)	14,000	8.2	8	22,600	5.4	8	4,900	8.6	8

Note: Due to smaller sample sizes, NT and ACT figures are averaged over two years, 2019 and 2020. Poverty calculations are based on real equivalised household disposable incomes, after housing costs. Nil and negative incomes are excluded from poverty calculations. Housing costs included mortgage repayments, rent and property rates.

Source: Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre | Author's calculations based on HILDA Survey waves 2 to 20 (2002–2020)

Looking across states and territories, the rate of individual poverty ranks highest in Queensland at 13.5 per cent, followed by the Northern Territory at 13.3 per cent (Table 3). The lowest rates of poverty rates are to be found in ACT (at 5.4%) and Victoria (10.9%).

Source: (Duncan, 2022)

4. Access – universal or targeted?

Access to income support and a range of other payments is targeted, based on eligibility criteria.

Australia's income support system is based on residency status and need, and is paid by the federal government out of general revenue.

Payments are usually only available to Australian residents — most migrants do not have access to the majority of payments for up to four years after their arrival under the Newly Arrived Resident's Waiting Period (NARWP).

This eligibility criteria prevents newly arrived Australians from accessing social security payments until they have been an Australian Resident for four years, with limited exceptions.

There are exemptions from the qualifying residence requirements and from the NARWP for certain people. For people who are in hardship but cannot get any other form of income support, Special Benefit provides a safety net. A NARWP applies to Special Benefit, but this can be waived if the claimant has suffered a substantial change in circumstances beyond his or her control (*Department of Social Services, 2022i, Klapdor, 2020*).

Parenting Payments

This is the main income support payment for a young child's main carer. Eligibility criteria include:

- being under the income and asset test limits
- meeting [principal carer rules](#) for a child aged under eight years if the parent/carers is single, or under six years if the parent/carers is partnered
- meeting residence rules
- a parent/carers's partner is not currently receiving Parenting Payment

With an increase in September 2022, the current base rate of Parenting Payment (for a single parent) is **\$65.40 per day** (includes parenting payment, energy assistance and pension subsidy). By comparison, the Aged Pension for a

single person is **\$1,026.50 per fortnight** (\$73.30 per day) (*Services Australia, 2022*).

A single parent with one child on parenting payments can earn [around \\$100 per week](#) before their payments are reduced.

According to the principle of mutual obligation, **people who require access to the welfare safety net can access it, but in return must meet certain obligations** such as preparing for and looking for work.

However, in recognition of the "job" of parenting, recipients of parenting payments do not have to undertake mutual obligation activities (actively seeking employment) until the youngest child is eight years of age (if single parent) or six years of age (if partnered). Nonetheless, being in receipt of Parenting Payment has obligations (and the failure to comply can result in the stopping of payments) including providing up to date information about personal circumstances – particularly about relationship status, as well as the obligation to have your children immunised.

5. Total government expenditure Australia-wide

In 2019–20, the total estimated **\$195.7 billion** of government welfare spending was distributed across four target groups (*AIHW, 2021*):

- 39% (\$76.4 billion) for older people
- 26% (\$50.3 billion) for people with disability
- **20% (\$38.1 billion) for families and children**
- 9.5% (\$18.5 billion) for unemployed people

Rate of income support payments

The rate of income support payments is a topic of ongoing public discussion, with a particular focus at the moment. Analysis suggests that the current rates are not enough to lift recipients above the poverty line, which is exacerbated in times of high inflation and rising costs of living,

despite the rates being indexed to inflation and reviewed on a bi-annual basis.

The current (as at September 2022) [social security payment rates](#) are listed in the table below. It is noted that these represent a significant increase (due to social security payments being indexed to inflation).

Social security payment rate increases on 20 September 2022, per fortnight

PAYMENT	CURRENT RATE	RATE FROM 20/9/22	INCREASE \$	INCREASE %
Single pension	\$900.80	\$936.80	\$36.00	4.0
Partnered pension (each)	\$679.00	\$706.20	\$27.20	4.0
Single JobSeeker Payment, no children	\$642.70	\$668.40	\$25.70	4.0
Partnered JobSeeker Payment, no children	585.30	\$608.70	\$23.40	4.0
Parenting Payment Single	\$855.00	\$889.20	\$34.20	4.0

Source: Department of Social Services (DSS), [Indexation Rates September 2022](#), (Canberra: DSS, 2022)

As welfare payments are indexed to inflation, and inflation has recently climbed faster than it has in 20 years, there has been a larger (permanent) increase in both pension rates (than since 2010) and unemployment benefits (since 1990) (JobSeeker Payment) (ABS, 2022, Department of Social Services, 2022j). However, it is noted that there have been ad hoc/temporary increases that have been bigger.

The [COVID-19 Supplement](#) rate paid from April to September 2020 (\$550 per fortnight) **was equivalent to a 197%** increase in the single rate of JobSeeker Payment.

550 Reasons to Smile

The experience of parents on Parenting Payments during the COVID-19 pandemic, when all income supports were raised significantly (due to the widespread availability of income support payments), demonstrated the power of increased rates and the corresponding reduction in household stress, sense of insecurity and overall increase in wellbeing for their children and themselves.

This impact was captured by the [550 Reasons to Smile](#) Facebook group, where people who were living below the poverty line were temporarily given 550 reasons to smile thanks to the temporary Coronavirus supplements. They shared their stories on the site.



6. Commonwealth and State responsibilities for funding/delivery

Commonwealth responsibilities

The Commonwealth Government has sole responsibility for the provision of welfare payments through the social security system.

The social security system is governed, managed and administered solely by the Commonwealth Government, via Services Australia under the Department of Social Services, which reports to the Minister for Social Services, amongst others.

The Ministers and portfolios related to social security and income support are:

- The Hon Amanda Rishworth MP, Minister for Social Services
- The Hon Bill Shorten MP, Minister for the National Disability Insurance Scheme; Minister for Government Services
- The Hon Julie Collins MP, Minister for Housing; Minister for Homelessness
- The Hon Justine Elliot MP, Assistant Minister for Social Services; Assistant Minister for the Prevention of Family Violence

Family assistance payments may include:

- **Income Support Payment**
 - PARENTING PAYMENTS
- **Family Assistance Payments**
 - FAMILY TAX BENEFIT A
 - FAMILY TAX BENEFIT B
- **Health Care Card or Pensioner Concession Card**
 - Health Care Card – PBS and access to other state-based discounts/supports
 - Health Care Card status is used as an indicator of disadvantage – which unlocks subsidised access to ECEC, bulk billing in the health system, very low-cost prescription medication, etc
- Energy supplement
- Child Care Subsidy (CCS)
- Telephone Allowance
- Rental Assistance
- Paid Parental Leave
- Other supports concessions based on welfare “status” – state funded and administered

7. System specific accountability/ oversight/regulation mechanisms

The legal basis for social security welfare/income support

There is a Right to Social Security that stems from International Law (*Attorney-General's Department, 2022*). Australia is a party to seven core international human rights treaties. The right to social security is contained in [Article 9 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#).

This requires that a country must, within its maximum available resources, ensure access to a social security scheme that provides a minimum essential level of benefits to all individuals and families that will enable them to acquire at least essential health care, basic shelter and housing, water and sanitation, foodstuffs, and the most basic forms of education.

The social security system should cover the following specific situations:

- health care
- ageing
- unemployment
- employment injury and illness
- family and child support, including the need to care for adult dependants
- maternity
- disability

Australia is also signatory to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals. The first of these goals is "No poverty".

A number of existing laws are relevant to the realisation of the right to social security in Australia (*Attorney-General's Department, 2022*):

- The **Health Insurance Act 1973** underpins the Medicare scheme by providing for payments by way of medical benefits and for hospital services.
- The **National Health Act 1953** makes provision for pharmaceutical, sickness and hospital benefits, and for medical and dental services.
- The **Social Security Act 1991** and the **Social Security (Administration) Act 1999** govern entitlement to and administration of a number of benefits, including the age pension, disability support pension and child disability assistance, carer payment and allowance, parenting payment, youth allowance, Austudy, Newstart allowance, sickness allowance, special needs pensions, farmers hardship bonus, crisis and disaster recovery payment, concession cards and the student financial supplement scheme.
- The **Carer Recognition Act 2010** is intended to increase recognition and awareness of carers and to acknowledge the valuable contribution they make to society.
- The **Aged Care Act 1997** facilitates access to aged care services by those who need them, regardless of race, culture, language, gender, economic circumstance or geographic location.
- Family Tax Benefits Parts A and B and the baby bonus are payable under the **A New Tax System (Family Assistance) Act 1999**. The Act also provides for Maternity Immunisation Allowance, Child Care Benefit and Child Care Rebate.
- The **Paid Parental Leave Act 2010** provides for payments to eligible primary carers (mainly birth mothers) of newborn and newly adopted children.

Legal Accountability

Administrative Appeals Tribunal: The [Administrative Appeals Tribunal](#) hears legal appeals of decisions made under the Social Security Act 1991. The Tribunal is the first level of external review of decisions made by Centrelink about social security, family assistance, education or training assistance and parental leave payments [see Annex 1 for more information about Administrative Appeals].

Litigation to challenge social security decisions: The Robodebt scheme was halted due to litigation by Legal Aid Victoria in the Federal Court where the scheme was found to be unlawful. The establishment of a [Royal Commission](#) into the Robodebt Scheme reflects how powerful litigation can be as an accountability mechanism.

Economic Justice Australia: represents Community Legal Centres who specialise in Welfare Rights Law and provides expert advice to government on social security reform to make it more effective and accessible.

Parliamentary Accountability

The **Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee** was announced in November 2022 as an expert committee to advise on tackling disadvantage and boosting economic inclusion:

- The committee will have up to 12 members (including a Chair).
- The committee will provide advice to Government on economic inclusion including policy settings, systems and structures, and the adequacy, effectiveness and sustainability of income support payments ahead of every Federal Budget.
- The Committee will include social security academic experts, representatives from key relevant advocacy organisations, unions, business peak bodies, the philanthropic sector and economists.

The Senate Inquiry into the extent and nature of poverty in Australia 2022

See section 2 above.

Social/political accountability

Anti-Poverty Week: [Anti-Poverty Week](#) supports the Australian community to have an increased understanding of poverty and to take action collectively to end it.

There is ongoing work by many civil society organisations who invest in research, policy development and advocacy to increase the focus on addressing poverty.

8. How a family interacts with/accesses the system

Interaction with Services Australia is predominately online or by phone.

To access income support payments:

- **applications and administration are through Services Australia (Centrelink)**
- **income support payments are deposited directly into a nominated bank account on a fortnightly basis**
- **there are Services Australia locations across Australia, but people are encouraged to interact via the online system as much as possible**

The payment systems are automated and the other types of supports are also automated as much as possible including

- **Child Care Subsidy which is paid directly to the child care provider**
- **Rent Assistance which is calculated and paid automatically, if eligible**

Parents are obliged to stay informed about their obligations and to notify Services Australia if their circumstances change.

See simple explanations about how to access income support from the [Raising Children's Network](#).

9. Where/who delivers services for families

Parenting Payments

Parenting Payment is the main income support payment for principal carers of young children. Basic conditions of eligibility are that the claimant must:

- **be the principal carer of a qualifying child aged under six years of age if partnered, or aged under eight years of age if single**
- **if required, meet mutual obligation requirements (unless exempt).**

Only one member of a couple can receive Parenting Payment.

Unless exempt, the ordinary waiting period applies to claimants.

Residence requirements:

- **claimant must be an Australian resident**
- **available to new Australian residents after 208 weeks in Australia as an Australian resident (some exemptions may apply, including where the person became a single parent while an Australian resident)**

Paid Parental Leave

There is an eligibility test to claim Paid Parental Leave. Each claimant must have:

- **worked for at least 10 months of the 13-month work test period prior to the birth or adoption of their child**
- **worked for at least 330 hours in that 10-month period (just over one day per week) with no more than a 12-week gap between 2 working days**

Secure and affordable housing

For many people, home ownership or even private renting is not possible due to low or no income, life circumstances and the sheer costs of accessing housing. Insecure housing, instability and financial stress can have major impacts on families and a child's home environment, and their developmental outcomes.

This chapter focuses on the “affordable housing system”, as the element of the larger housing system that has significant influence on early childhood development. There are multiple definitions of affordable housing. The NSW Federation of Housing Associations defines affordable housing as “housing that eliminates housing stress for low-income individuals whilst balancing the need for housing to be of a minimum appropriate standard and accessible to employment and services” (NSWFHA, 2016).

1. Purpose of the system

The ‘affordable housing system’ – one that is intended to create affordable housing and minimise homelessness. This is distinct from the residential property market and the private rental market in Australia – the housing market.

The affordable housing system is subject to significant government interventions. These can be divided in to two categories- those related to affordable housing and those related to social housing (Department of Communities and Justice, 2019).

Affordable Housing

Affordable housing is not the same as social housing. Affordable housing generally refers to housing for those who cannot access the private rental market as well as the affordable end of the private rental market (for those who can afford it with or without government assistance).

Affordable housing is managed more like a private rental property. It is a rental dwelling made available through a housing assistance program that provides for a specified level of below market rent, with eligibility typically targeting households on low to moderate incomes. Affordable housing is open to a broader range of household incomes than social housing, so there is scope to earn more income and still be eligible. Rent is calculated differently and there are different tenancy arrangements. The tenant pays for the rent.

Rents for affordable housing are set in one of two ways:

- **rent is set as a discount of the current market rent which means the rent is usually between 20-25 per cent below the market rent**
 - **where rent is set this way, the amount you pay will depend on the market rent for a similar property in the same area**
- **rent is set as a proportion of a households before tax income**
 - **where rent is set this way, households may be charged between 25-30 per cent of their before tax income for rent.**

Managers are mostly not for profit community housing providers (Department of Communities and Justice, 2019).

Social Housing

Social housing is secure and affordable rental housing for people on low incomes with housing needs who cannot afford the private rental market. It is a form of rental housing provided and/or managed by government or non-government organisations that is rented out at below market rent. Rents for social housing are usually calculated differently to affordable housing (*Department of Communities and Justice, 2019*). It includes:

- **public housing (managed by government)**
- **community housing (managed by registered community housing providers or not-for-profit organisations)**
- **aboriginal housing (managed by government or community housing providers, including Aboriginal community housing providers)**

2. Key national and state strategies

Housing has had peaks and troughs when it comes to its place on the national agenda. The Housing Ministers' Council - made up of the federal Minister for Housing and state and territory ministers for housing - was scrapped in 2013 and for several years, there was no Federal housing minister. Housing did have a place on the COAG agenda but was dropped when COAG transitioned to National Cabinet.

In 2022, a new Minister for Housing and Minister for Homelessness was appointed, The Hon Julie Collins MP. In October 2022, the Commonwealth Government announced The Housing Accord which aims to build 1 million "well-located" homes, including some non-market housing, over five years from 2024. Under the Housing Accord, the Commonwealth Government plans to spend \$350 million to deliver 10,000 additional affordable homes by mid-2029, while states and territories have agreed to contribute funding or in-kind support for 10,000 more.

Federal settings

At the federal level, the Department of Social Services (DSS) is tasked with increasing housing supply, improving community housing and assisting individuals experiencing homelessness through targeted support and services (*Department of Social Services, 2020*). In particular DSS oversees and works with the Treasury and state and territory housing departments to implement the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA).

DSS also oversees a range of other housing services through programs and services including:

- **Commonwealth Rent Assistance**
- **The National Rental Affordability Scheme**
- **Building Better Regional Cities Program**
- **Housing Affordability Fund.**

Homelessness services include:

- **Reconnect**
- **Domestic and family violence**

Insecure housing, instability and financial stress can have major impacts on families and a child's home environment, and their developmental outcomes.

The National Housing and Homelessness Agreement

The National Housing and Homelessness Agreement is a bi-lateral agreement between the Commonwealth and each state or territory government. The National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA) recognises the Commonwealth and the states' and territories' mutual interest in improving housing outcomes across the housing spectrum, including outcomes for Australians who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, and need to work together to achieve those outcomes (*Department of Social Services, 2022f*).

Under the NHHA, to receive funding, state and territory governments are required to have publicly available housing and homelessness strategies and contribute to improved data collection and reporting. The housing strategies must address the NHHA housing priority policy areas relevant to the state or territory. The housing priority policy areas include:

- **affordable housing**
- **social housing**
- **encouraging growth and supporting the viability of the community housing sector**
- **tenancy reform**
- **home ownership**
- **planning and zoning reform initiatives**

The homelessness strategies must also address the NHHA priority cohorts, and outline reforms or initiatives that reduce the incidence of homelessness. Priority homelessness cohorts include:

- **women and children affected by family and domestic violence**
- **children and young people**
- **Indigenous Australians**
- **people experiencing repeat homelessness**
- **people exiting from care or institutions into homelessness**
- **older people**

NHHA funding is critical for enabling state and territory governments to provide services to people who need housing assistance. However, other sources of funding for housing programs have ceased (including funding for remote housing) and demand for housing and homelessness services has increased, meaning there is additional pressure on funding delivered through the NHHA to deliver housing outcomes. The Productivity Commission has criticised the NHHA for not fostering collaboration between governments or holding governments to account.

The National Rental Affordability Scheme

The National Rental Affordability Scheme (NRAS) is a federal government affordable housing initiative, delivered in partnership with state and territory governments.

The National Rental Affordability Scheme (NRAS) is governed by the National Rental Affordability Scheme Act 2008, amended by the National Rental Affordability Scheme Amendment Bill 2019. The National Rental Affordability Scheme Regulations 2020 (2020 Regulations) came into effect on April 1 2020 (*Department of Social Services, 2022g*).

NRAS issues financial incentives to organisations that provide people on low to moderate incomes with an opportunity to rent homes at a rate that is at least 20 percent below market value rent. NRAS homes are not social housing—they are affordable private rental homes.

The Scheme seeks to address the shortage of affordable rental housing by offering annual financial incentives for up to ten years, to rent dwellings for eligible NRAS tenants at 80 per cent or less of the market value rent.

NRAS commenced on 1 July 2008 and will conclude in 2026.

Commonwealth Rent Assistance

Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA) is governed by federal social security legislation. CRA is paid to people renting privately (or from community housing providers) who receive an income support payment or Family Tax Benefit Part A above the base rate (*Department of Social Services, 2022a*). CRA provides an income supplement for about 1.35 million renting households across Australia.

At a cost of \$5.3 billion per year, CRA is Australia's largest single housing assistance program.

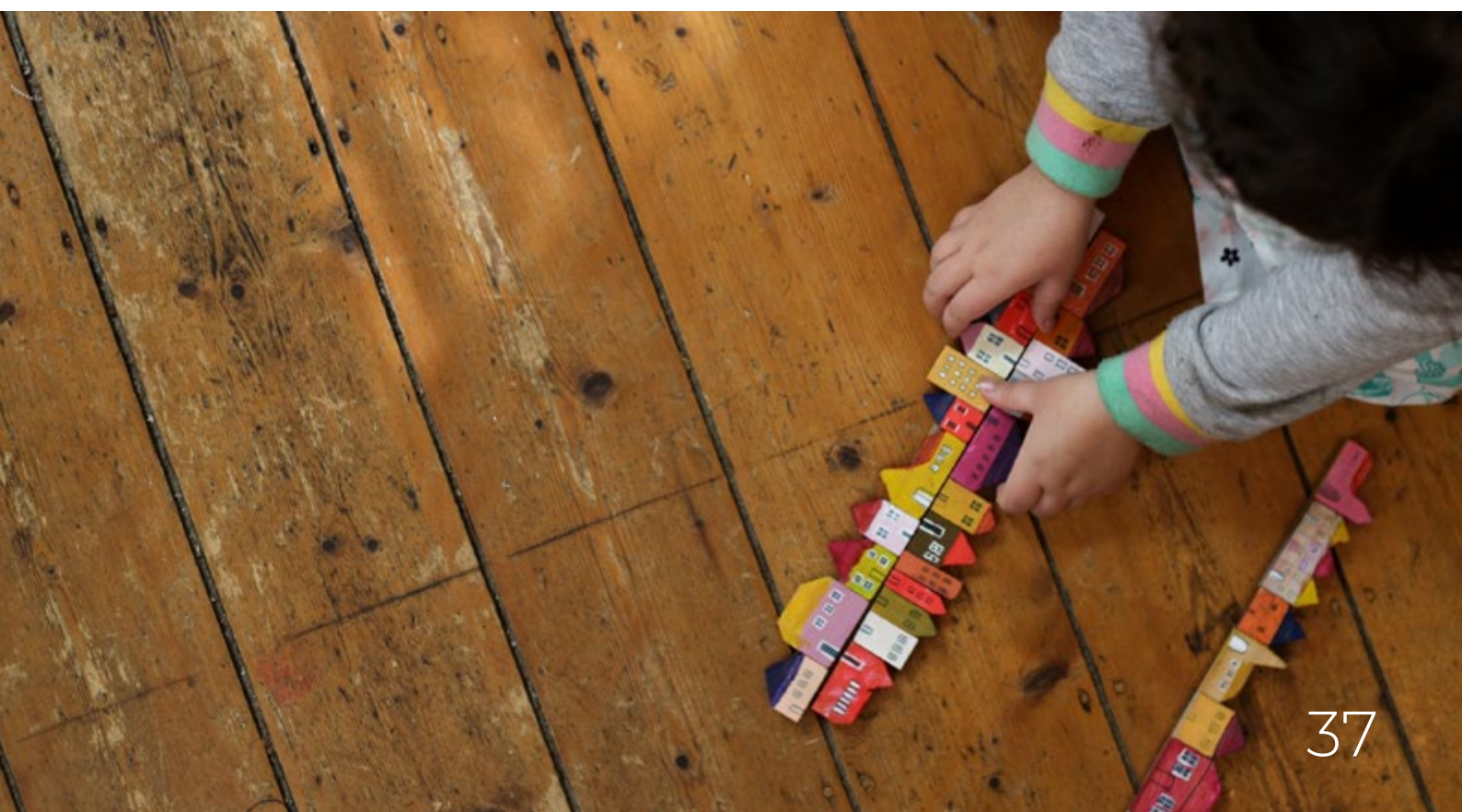


TABLE 1:
Key actors and strategies by jurisdiction – HOUSING

	Ministry	Portfolio	Strategies
ACT	<p>Yvette Berry MLA Minister for Housing and Suburban Development (appointed October 2016)</p> <p>Rebecca Vassarotti MLA Minister for Homelessness and Housing Services (appointed November 2020)</p>	<p>Housing ACT aims to provide safe and appropriate housing to meet the needs of low income and disadvantaged individuals and families in the ACT.</p> <p>The Community Services Directorate within Housing ACT oversees homelessness policy; housing assistance policy; housing sector regulation; public housing asset management; public housing growth and renewal program; and social and affordable housing delivery through Housing ACT.</p> <p>ACT Housing provides safe, affordable and appropriate housing that supports tenants to sustain their housing long-term including allocating housing to eligible applicants in community housing. They work with the specialist homelessness sector to assist people who have become homeless or who are at risk of becoming homeless.</p> <p>The Directorate also provides funding and support to the homelessness and community housing service providers to address homelessness and provide sustainable long term housing options. The ACT Government offers an Affordable Rental Scheme for older people on low incomes.</p> <p>Public housing, community housing or housing provided by the ACT Affordable Rental Office.</p>	<p>ACT Housing has developed the strategy Growing and Renewing Public Housing 2019–2024. The goals of the strategy reflect its broad ambition. The policy levers affecting housing span numerous portfolios and the action plan shows the many ways in which the government will act in coming years, in particular:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$100 million in new investment to further grow and renew our public housing stock as well as provide new opportunities for growth in the community housing sector • a renewed commitment to meet or exceed population growth in our land supply, with 15% of dwelling sites committed for public, community and affordable housing further reforms to the Residential Tenancies Act to strengthen the rights of renters seed funding for new innovations in housing management, design and ownership to make sure the ACT is at the forefront of ways to do better in these areas. <p>The Strategy includes a second Common Ground, the Housing First pilot, and delivery of the first of four long-term supported houses for people with enduring mental health issues.</p> <p>Housing ACT’s Young People Program (HYPP) which helps young people aged up to 25 years old to find secure and affordable long-term accommodation</p>

	Ministry	Portfolio	Strategies
NSW	<p>Hon Natasha Maclaren-Jones MLC Minister for Families and Communities, and Minister for Disability Services (appointed December 2021)</p> <p>Hon Anthony John Roberts MP Minister for Planning, and Minister for Homes (appointed December 2021)</p>	<p>The Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) provides support for people experiencing or who have experienced domestic and family violence; people experiencing or at risk of homelessness and people in need of safe and affordable housing.</p> <p>DCJ offers several supports for people on low and very low incomes to rent in the private market and also managed established contracts with registered community housing providers to deliver social and affordable housing dwellings through the Social and Affordable Housing fund.</p> <p>Department of Planning and Environment works to address housing supply, including affordable, social and Aboriginal housing. The Department also manages the NSW Government's social housing portfolio—the largest in Australia—which consists of more than 125,000 homes and is valued at more than \$50 billion.</p>	<p>The Department of Planning and Environment has created Housing 2041, the State's long-term housing strategy which outlines a 20-year vision for better housing outcomes.</p>
NT	<p>Hon Selena Uibo MLA Minister for Housing and Homelands (Appointed May 2022)</p>	<p>Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities (TFHC)</p> <p>The Department (TFHC) provides access to social and affordable housing and tenancy support services; provides housing and tenancies for eligible Northern Territory Government employees; delivers solutions to address homelessness and support those at risk of homelessness; and coordinates funding and provides strategic planning and policy advice for the delivery of new housing and related infrastructure in remote communities, homelands, outstations and town camps.</p> <p>In addition, TFHC manages the \$1.1 billion <i>Our Community. Our Future. Our Homes</i> remote housing investment package in partnership with the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics to deliver housing programs and infrastructure to support communities. The Northern Territory Government investment is supplemented by \$550 million from the Australian Government's five-year National Partnership Agreement for Remote Housing.</p>	<p>The Department has developed the NT Community Housing Growth Strategy 2022–32 to provide direction and growth of the sector for the next 10 years. It includes partnerships with the housing and homelessness sector, peak bodies, non-government organisations, disability services and land councils.</p>

	Ministry	Portfolio	Strategies
QLD	<p>Hon Leeanne Enoch MP Minister for Communities and Housing (appointed November 2020)</p>	<p>Department of Communities, Housing and Digital Economy provides housing and homelessness services</p>	<p>The Queensland Housing and Homelessness Action Plan 2021–25 aims to increase social housing supply across the state; support ongoing delivery of products and services launched under the <i>Queensland Housing Strategy Action Plan 2017–2020</i>; support responses for women and families experiencing domestic and family violence; and provide ongoing homelessness supports.</p>
SA	<p>Hon Nat Cook MP Minister for Human Services (appointed March 2022)</p> <p>Hon Nick Champion MP Minister for Housing and Urban Development; Minister for Planning (Appointed March 2022)</p>	<p>Through the Department of Human Services/SA Housing Authority</p> <p>The South Australian Housing Trust, trading as the SA Housing Authority, is responsible to the Minister for Human Services for the delivery of better housing opportunities.</p> <p>The Department for Infrastructure and Transport (DIT) has diverse responsibilities for infrastructure planning and provision within South Australia, including management of public sector building assets and infrastructure. It provides building project planning, design and construction services, facilities management, and property related services to South Australian Government clients.</p>	<p>SA Housing Authority has launched the state's new 10-year housing, homelessness and support strategy – Our Housing Future 2020–2030, which covers affordable housing, social housing, and homelessness services.</p> <p>The success of the strategy will depend on partnerships between all parts of the housing sector, including the construction and development sector, government and non-government organisations. It is long-term strategy to improve housing in South Australia. It includes 33 actions under five clear strategies that will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • boost the supply of affordable housing • reduce and prevent housing stress • boost employment and growth across the state, including supporting hundreds of jobs in the construction and development sectors • modernise the social housing system • reform the homelessness system • support well-functioning and inclusive communities <p>The South Australian Aboriginal Housing Strategy 2021 – 2031 is a 10-year plan to improve housing outcomes for all Aboriginal South Australians. It has a common vision that Aboriginal peoples within South Australia have equitable access to safe, secure and affordable homes; and that this is achieved through shared decision making and culturally informed services, to maintain Aboriginal peoples personal and cultural wellbeing.</p>
TAS	<p>Hon Guy Barnett MP Minister for State Development, Construction and Housing (appointed April 2022)</p>	<p>There are over 12,000 social housing properties in Tasmania that are owned by the Director of Housing on behalf of the Tasmanian Government. Around 6,000 homes are managed by the Tasmanian Government's social housing service, Housing Tasmania, and around 6 000, properties are managed by community housing providers. Community housing providers also manage homes they have funded themselves or homes on behalf of private owners to support social or supported housing.</p>	<p>Communities Tasmania has developed several key housing strategies: Affordable Housing Action Plan 2015–2019 (Action Plan 1) and the second stage the Affordable Housing Action Plan 2019–2023 (Action Plan 2). A third action plan will be developed for the final years of the Strategy. Underpinning each Action Plan are three strategic interventions to address housing assistance and supply across Tasmania. These are:</p>

Ministry	Portfolio	Strategies
TAS	<p>The Department of Communities had been delivering all housing asset management functions, including asset planning, maintenance, capital upgrading, construction, procurement, project management, upgrade and construction initiatives. The Department of Communities has been abolished and is transitioning into other parts of Tasmanian Government. Housing is transitioning to a new statutory authority known as Homes Tasmania – due to be established in October 2022.</p> <p>The Homes Tasmania Bill 2022 and Homes Tasmania (Consequential Amendments) Bill 2022 deliver on the commitment made by the Tasmanian Government in February this year to create a dedicated housing authority, to be called Homes Tasmania. This new Authority will build, acquire and partner with the not-for-profit sector to deliver a 10-year, \$1.5 billion housing package the largest housing investment in the State's history.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Preventing housing stress of low-income earners by increasing the supply of affordable homes. Targeted early intervention to assist Tasmanians in need who are at risk of housing stress or homelessness. Rapid response and recovery aimed at people who are at immediate risk or experiencing homelessness to find safe and secure housing. <p>Other housing strategies include the Community Housing Growth Program (CHGP) to deliver new social and affordable homes and the Streets Ahead Incentive Program which assists households to purchase a home from Housing Tasmania. HomeShare assists households to buy their own home under a shared equity scheme</p>
VIC	<p>Hon Danny Pearson MP Minister for Housing (appointed June 2021)</p> <p>The Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) is responsible for child protection and family services, prevention of family violence, housing and homelessness, disability, seniors, carers, multicultural affairs, LGBTIQ+ equality, veterans, women and youth.</p> <p>Homes Victoria is a DFFH agency that manages and maintains the \$31 billion portfolio of public housing dwellings, which are home to nearly 120,000 people, and works in partnership with community housing providers who own or manage community housing throughout Victoria.</p> <p>Homes Victoria also works closely with the homelessness sector to reduce homelessness.</p>	<p>Homes Victoria is managing the Big Housing Build; a \$5.3 billion program to fast-track the construction and acquisition of more than 12,000 new social and affordable homes across metropolitan and regional Victoria.</p>
WA	<p>Hon John Carey MLA Minister for Housing; Lands; Homelessness; Local Government (appointed March 2021)</p> <p>The Department of Communities delivers disability services, child protection and family support, housing, and community and regional initiatives.</p>	<p>Under the WA Housing Strategy 2020–2030 launched in October 2020, the Department continued to support more than 35,000 public housing properties. As part of delivering on All Paths Lead to a Home: Western Australia's 10-Year Strategy on Homelessness 2020–2030, the Department spent \$59 million on homelessness support services in 2020–21.</p>

3. No of people involved/% of Australian population

Despite many interventions, demand for secure and affordable housing aimed at low-income earners will climb more than 50 per cent by 2041 in many parts of the country and the number of households in housing stress is expected to climb from 640,000 in 2021 to 940,000 by 2041.

This equates to approximately 1.4 million Australians in housing stress in 2021.

Family households represent one half of current unmet housing needs. They make up 40 per cent of all households (*Wright and Clun, 2022*).

4. Access – universal or targeted?

Targeted – if referring to the affordable housing system rather than the housing market:

- **social housing is secure and affordable rental housing only available for people on low incomes with housing needs**
- **affordable housing is open to a broader range of household incomes than social housing, but eligibility is still influenced by income level**

Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA) interacts with other types of welfare payments – including income support and the universal Family Tax Benefit A. In order to qualify for CRA, a person or family must first qualify for an eligible social security payment, more than the base rate of Family Tax Benefit Part A, or an eligible Department of Veterans' Affairs service pension or income support supplement, and pay or be liable to pay more than a minimum amount of rent, called the rent threshold, for their principal home. CRA does not have a separate income or assets test. The CRA is assessed as part of the process for claiming a social security payment or Family Tax Benefit Part A. The amount of Rent Assistance payable may be reduced by the income and asset tests applying to the primary payment. Special rules apply to eligibility if you receive certain types of welfare payments (*Department of Social Services, 2022a*).

Other targeted components include:

Disability Housing

Australia's Disability Strategy 2021–2031 has as a key outcome that 'people with disability live in inclusive, accessible and well-designed homes and communities' (*Department of Social Services, 2021a*). It is supported by two priority policies directly related to housing:

- **increasing the availability of affordable housing**
- **housing is accessible and people with disability have choice and control about where they live, who they live with and who comes into their home**

There are a range of housing options for people living with disability, many of which are funded under the NDIS. See the disability chapter for more information on Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA)

Specialist homelessness services

The specialist homelessness services system aims to promote wellbeing and independence for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, by providing assistance that supports them to achieve and maintain housing and social and economic participation (*Productivity Commission, 2022h*). Governments seek to achieve these aims through funding specialist homelessness services to deliver transitional supported accommodation and a range of related support services that:

- **are accessible**
- **identify and address individuals' needs as appropriate**
- **are of high quality, provided by qualified staff in a safe environment**

Governments aim for specialist homelessness services to meet these objectives in an equitable and efficient manner. Each State and Territory Government's homelessness strategy must address the NHHA priority cohorts, and outline reforms or initiatives that reduce the incidence

of homelessness (*Department of Social Services, 2022f*). Priority homelessness cohorts include:

- **women and children affected by family and domestic violence**
- **children and young people**
- **Indigenous Australians**
- **people experiencing repeat homelessness**
- **people exiting from care or institutions into homelessness**
- **older people**

Specific provisions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

In 2018, under the NHHA, the federal, state and territory governments committed to improved housing outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. However, the Productivity Commission suggests the NHHA has been a missed opportunity to articulate how governments are working together to address the persistent inequality in housing outcomes, including overcrowding, that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people face (*Productivity Commission, 2022a*).

National Partnership for Remote Housing Northern Territory (2018–23)

The highest levels of overcrowding in Australia occur in remote Northern Territory. Based on the 2016 Census, about 27,600 Aboriginal people living in the Northern Territory live in overcrowded houses, of which 10,700 are considered homeless. Under the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing (2008–18), good progress had been made towards decreasing the proportion of overcrowded households in remote and very remote areas across Australia. However, the Remote Housing Review 2017 recommended that work needs to continue to bring overcrowding down to acceptable levels.

In 2018, the Federal and Northern Territory governments committed to the joint funding

of \$1.1 billion (\$550m each) over five years under the National Partnership for Remote Housing 2018–23, Northern Territory, to improve housing outcomes in remote communities of the Northern Territory by:

- **reducing overcrowding through increasing the supply and standard of housing; through the construction of 1,950 bedrooms – equivalent to 650 three-bedroom houses – over five years (*NIAA, 2022*)**
- **ensuring a role for the Land Councils in the governance of the National Partnership**
- **providing transparency about how money is spent; and**
- **ensuring to the maximum extent possible, works are delivered by local Indigenous Territorians and businesses.**

For the first time, the Northern Territory Land Councils are participating in decisions of broad policy and strategy for remote housing and monitoring of investment. This is carried out through the Joint Steering Committee that oversees investment under the National Partnership.

Safe Places Emergency Accommodation Program (Safe Places)

Under the Fourth Action Plan of the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010–2022, the Commonwealth Government established the Safe Places Emergency Accommodation Program (Safe Places).

Safe Places projects provide new or expanded emergency accommodation for women and children experiencing family and domestic violence. These projects are expected to provide around 780 new safe places, supporting up to 6,340 women and children escaping violence each year.

5. Total government expenditure Australia-wide

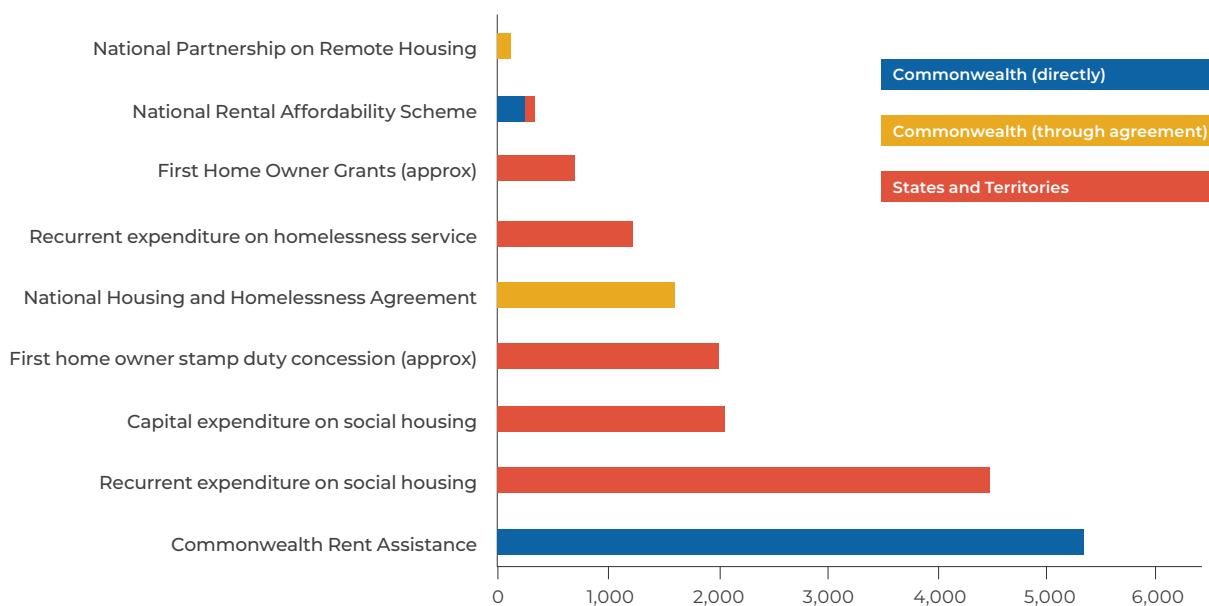
From 1 July 2018, the National Affordable Housing Specific Purpose Payment was replaced by National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA) funding and maintains the funding associated with the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness.

The federal government provides:

- **around \$1.6 billion per year to the states and territories through the NHHA to improve Australians' access to secure and affordable housing across the housing spectrum. The NHHA includes \$129 million set aside for homelessness services in 2020–21. States and territories match this funding**
- **around \$5.5 billion per year in Commonwealth Rent Assistance to help eligible Australians pay their rent**

NHHA funding accounts for only a small proportion of the total housing assistance dollars – \$1.6 billion compared to around \$16 billion spent in total on housing assistance, including the Commonwealth Rent Assistance (see figure below).

Spending on housing assistance, 2020–21 (\$m)^a



a. State and Territory expenditure on homelessness services and social housing includes funding provided to the States and Territories under the NHHA, meaning there is some double counting in state and territory recurrent and capital

expenditure on social housing and homelessness services. State and Territory Governments spent about \$7.8 billion on social housing and homelessness services in 2020–21, which includes the \$1.6 billion provided through the NHHA.

Source: (Productivity Commission, 2022h)

Recent announcements indicate that the federal government will increase funding directed to housing and homelessness services, including for social and affordable housing, remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing and crisis and transitional housing (*Productivity Commission, 2022a*).

The federal government has also announced it will establish a National Housing Supply and Affordability Council and has committed to establishing the Housing Australia Future Fund. The returns from this \$10 billion fund will be used to build 30,000 social and affordable housing properties over five years (*Productivity Commission, 2022h, Productivity Commission, 2022a*).

Also of note in regard to funding are recent (2021-2022) announcements by various state governments to increase spending on social housing:

- **the New South Wales Government announced \$812 million to deliver new and upgraded social housing**
- **the Victorian Government announced \$5.3 billion to build 12,000 new social houses and affordable and low-cost homes**
- **the Queensland Government announced \$526 million for new and upgraded social housing**
- **the Western Australian Government announced \$875 million for about 3,300 social housing dwellings**
- **the South Australian Government announced a \$76 million construction stimulus for social and affordable housing**
- **the Tasmanian Government announced plans for about 2,350 new social housing dwellings**

Spending on homelessness

Direct expenditure on specialist homelessness services is provided by state and territory governments. In 2020-21, total recurrent government expenditure on specialist homelessness services was \$1.2 billion (or \$47.49 per person in the population) — 96.8 per cent of which was provided to agencies to deliver specialist homelessness services. The remaining 3.2 per cent was attributed to state and territory government administration costs (*Productivity Commission, 2022h*).

6. Commonwealth and State responsibilities for funding/delivery

Federal responsibilities

Social housing is funded and delivered from 1 July 2018 under the National Housing and federal, state and territory governments.

While there is no 'head of power' under the Constitution for the Commonwealth in relation to housing, the federal government oversees the implementation of the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA) by state and territory housing departments (*Productivity Commission, 2022h*).

State and territory government responsibilities

Housing affordability and homelessness prevention are the responsibility of State and Territory governments – including the delivery of housing and homelessness services.

They deliver this either directly through:

- **public housing (PH)**
- **State owned and managed Indigenous housing (SOMIH)**

or indirectly through funded providers including:

- **community housing (CH)**
- **Indigenous community housing (ICH)**

ICH is generally managed by ICH organisations (although some ICH dwellings are managed by State and Territory housing authorities). State and Territory governments have assumed

responsibility for administering ICH in urban and regional areas, however arrangements vary across jurisdictions.

While State and Territory governments have similar broad objectives for providing social housing, individual objectives differ depending on historical precedents and processes for interaction with community sector providers. Private housing markets also vary across jurisdictions. Accordingly, policy responses and associated forms of assistance vary across jurisdictions.

Differing levels and types of assistance are provided in each State and Territory and across differing urban, regional and remote areas.

There are differences in eligibility criteria for the different assistance types and diverse factors affecting waiting lists.

7. System specific accountability/oversight/regulation mechanisms

At the Commonwealth level, the Department of Social Services is tasked with increasing housing supply, improving community housing and assisting individuals experiencing homelessness through targeted support and services.

In particular, the Department oversees and works with the Treasury and state and territory housing departments to implement the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA).

For complaints about the conduct of a public service agency or their employee, including both government and some non-government organisations, residents can approach the relevant Ombudsman for their jurisdiction.

8.How a family interacts with/accesses the system

Depending on the State or Territory, families can access housing assistance by applying through an online portal or by phone.

For example, NSW (as per other States) has a dedicated webpage to apply for housing or access other supports.

https://www.facs.nsw.gov.au/housing/help/applying-assistance/assistance?SQ_VARIATION_549474=0

Apply for housing assistance

You can apply for Housing Assistance in NSW either online or by phone. To apply online click the Apply for Housing link below and start your form. The online form is the quickest and simplest way to apply for housing assistance. You just need an email account. You can also apply over the phone. Call the Housing Contact Centre on **1800 422 322**, Monday to Friday: between 9 and 5pm to complete your form.

Apply for Housing

Continue your saved form

Domestic Violence Line	1800 656 463
Link2home Homelessness	1800 152 152
Link2Home Veterans and Ex-Service	1800 326 989
Child Protection Helpline	13 2111

For some affordable housing, access is direct via the housing provider.

9. Where/who delivers services for families

Affordable housing is usually managed by not-for-profit community housing providers, and/or by private organisations.

Social housing – secure and affordable rental housing for people on low incomes with housing needs – is managed as follows:

- **public housing – managed by government**
- **community housing - managed by registered community housing providers or a not-for-profit organisation**
- **aboriginal housing – managed by government or community housing providers, including Aboriginal community housing providers**

CASE STUDY

SEARMS HOUSING Provider

With many First Nation communities currently living in extreme poverty and at risk of/or experiencing homelessness, [SEARMS](#) endeavours to address this entrenched disadvantage whilst preserving the integrity and the core of Aboriginal values and beliefs.

SEARMS was established in 2003 under the Regional Management Model of the Aboriginal Housing Office (AHO) as a co-operative between six Aboriginal housing providers to improve efficiencies and services:

- Batemans Bay Local Aboriginal Land Council
- Bodalla Local Aboriginal Land Council
- Budawang Aboriginal Corporation
- Cobowra Local Aboriginal Land Council
- Mogo Local Aboriginal Land Council
- Ulladulla Local Aboriginal Land Council

SEARMS provides housing and tenancy management services to the Aboriginal Housing Office and other Aboriginal organisations, including local area land councils, in the south eastern region of NSW.



Most of the regional areas served by SEARMS have higher than average Aboriginal populations and Aboriginal households in social housing tenure. This correlates to the census information that calculates an Index of Relative Socio-economic Advantage and Disadvantage (IRSAD) using Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) scores. The result shows many of the areas in the Far South Coast region are rated in the two most disadvantaged quintiles.

SEARMS current property management portfolio consists of around 400 properties in townships and communities from Nowra down the coast to Wallaga Lake, and across to Queanbeyan, Yass, Young and Goulburn.

Their services include:

- tenancy management – local, social and affordable tenancies
- asset management
- project management
- housing policy recommendations where applicable – including rent setting and arrears management options for owner organisations
- residential property development (since 2021)

A core component of SEARMS service delivery is in ensuring tenants have access to supports that assist them in sustaining their tenancies. As such, they work closely with tenant advocacy provider Murra Mia and other locally based health and employment services.

Where possible, they promote Aboriginal employment in the procurement of contractors and services.

SEARMS is a recognised AHO Growth Provider and became a registered community housing provider under the National Regulatory System for Community Housing (NRSCH) in January 2020.

SEARMS recognises the additional opportunities such registration provides – particularly with attaining its goal to increase the supply of appropriate housing options for our communities.

In June 2020, SEARMS established a second office in Canberra. In June 2021, SEARMS was successful in its Aboriginal Community Housing Innovation Fund application to build 26 new dwellings in the Far South Coast NSW for itself and on behalf of three client Aboriginal corporations. These dwellings are a mix of bushfire rebuilds and new builds.

In July 2021, SEARMS signed a lease for the Batemans Bay Community Centre and relocated its head office to this site to create a housing and community hub.

[SEARMS Aboriginal Corporation – Aboriginal community housing](#)

Safe, healthy physical and built environments

While community development can mean many things, we have largely focused on the concept of liveability and what makes a place somewhere a family can thrive.

Although definitions vary, liveability indicators typically include things like health, education and costs of living (which are covered elsewhere in this atlas) as well as amenity (natural, physical and cultural attributes of a place), connections to community, friends and place (through school, sporting activities, volunteering) and lifestyle and opportunity (*Bourne, 2019*).

Given this definition of liveability, we have focused this chapter on local government as the key provider of amenity and placemaking; and, depending on the priorities and capabilities of each council, a key actor in building local identity and social cohesion.

1. Purpose of the system

Local government authorities exist to provide services and amenities to local communities and are also responsible for regulating and providing services for land and property in their district.

The most common kinds of local authorities include city councils in metropolitan and regional urban 'hubs', as well as shire councils, which serve many rural areas. The titles of local councils vary from state to state.

A key priority of local government is the general health and well-being of their local community, reflected in such activities as drainage, immunisation, public toilets, water coolers, waste disposal and the cleaning and maintenance of local streets, footpaths and roads. Local governments also provide community services (such as libraries and childcare) and recreational facilities (such as public gardens, parks and sports grounds). Depending on the wealth and means of the council, attempts to encourage tourism or the hosting of 'special events' to foster local commercial benefits or community pride are not uncommon.

Local government is a means of ensuring that local communities function effectively on a daily basis and are provided with the basic services and facilities that Australian communities expect to find in suburbs, towns and rural areas (*Megarrity, 2011*).

2. Key national and state strategies

We were unable to find an overarching national strategy in relation to local government and community development. While there may not be a national strategy, there are a range of national programs. For example, in 2022, the federal government announced four new programs for communities across Australia (*DITRDCA, 2022d*):

- **Growing Regions Program**
- **Priority Community Infrastructure Program**
- **Investing in Our Communities Program**
- **Regional Precincts and Partnerships Programs**

The **Growing Regions Program** replaces the Building Better Regions Fund and aims to deliver investment in regional infrastructure and community projects. It will provide funding for capital works for community and economic infrastructure across rural and regional areas. The program will be open and competitive with grants awarded on a merit basis. Administered funding for the program will be provided over three years. The program will be open to local government entities and not-for-profit organisations. The program will exclude private enterprise and for-profit entities (*DITRDCA, 2022b*).

The new **Priority Community Infrastructure Program** and the **Investing in Our Communities Program** are funded from 2022-23 to 2026-27. These programs will be closed and non-competitive.

The **Regional Precincts and Partnerships Program** will provide a strategic, nationally consistent mechanism for funding and coordinating projects that transform a place, to benefit communities in regions, regional cities and rural Australia. The program will also

be the mechanism for delivering all future regional partnerships to help regions move towards net-zero emissions, a decarbonised economy and sustained regional growth. The program will invite proposals nationally from state, territory and local governments, as well as not-for-profit organisations, to come together in genuine collaboration to apply for a Precinct Partnership. In this context, precincts are 'places with a purpose' – defined geographic areas or community clusters – like shires, districts or regions – with initiatives shaped around a specific shared need or theme (*DITRDCA, 2022d*).

TABLE 1
Key actors and strategies by jurisdiction – LOCAL GOVERNMENT

	Ministry	Portfolio	Strategies
ACT	Mick Gentleman Minister for Planning and Land Management	<p>The Legislative Assembly for the ACT is the only parliament with responsibility for both state/territory and local government functions (for example: garbage collection; looking after parks and gardens; libraries; and maintaining drains, roads and footpaths).</p> <p>https://www.parliament.act.gov.au/visit-and-learn/resources/factsheets/australian-levels-of-government</p>	<p>The Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate oversees the ACT Planning Strategy 2018. The vision of this strategy is to be a sustainable, competitive and equitable city that respects Canberra as a city in the landscape and the National Capital, while being responsive to the future and resilient to change. It includes a goal of an accessible Canberra – with better integrated land use and transport, well-designed and safe public spaces, a wide range of housing choice, and be easily accessible by people of all ages and abilities.</p>
NSW	The Hon Wendy Tuckerman MP Minister for Local Government	<p>The Office of Local Government is the NSW Government agency responsible for strengthening the sustainability, performance, integrity, transparency and accountability of the local government sector.</p> <p>OLG has a policy, legislative, investigative and program focus in regulating the State's 128 local councils. The agency also works collaboratively with the local government sector to support local councils to deliver for their local communities. OLG is part of the Department of Planning and Environment.</p> <p>OLG publishes a range of guidelines, codes, practice notes and other guidance for local government. These generally relate to functions that councils carry out under the Local Government Act, or under other legislation or policy for which the Minister for Local Government is responsible. These guidelines and guidance materials aim to support NSW councils to govern in a lawful, prudent, transparent and accountable manner as well as to provide strong and sustainable services to local communities.</p>	<p>Relevant legislation includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local Government (General) Regulation 2021 • Local Government Act 1993 • Local Government Amendment Act 2021 – provides for changes that implement the Government's commitments to rating reform – with greater flexibility for councils to harmonise rates from 1 July 2021

	Ministry	Portfolio	Strategies
NT	Hon Chanston (Chansey) James Paech MLA Minister for Local Government	<p>The system of local government in the Northern Territory is made up of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 17 local government councils • the Local Government Association of the Northern Territory (LGANT) • the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) <p>This follows a significant restructure of local government which was carried out from October 2006 to July 2008. The primary feature of the restructure was the forced amalgamation of 53 rural remote councils into 8 shire councils. The restructure occurred at the same time as a study of service delivery to Aboriginal communities was being undertaken and, further, was overlaid from July 2007 by the Northern Territory Emergency Response (the 'Intervention').</p> <p>Unlike local government in all other states, local government in the Northern Territory does not have responsibility for the functions of the following as the Territory Government is responsible for these functions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • planning (development assessment and land use planning) • building regulation • environmental health <p>Responsibilities are largely around traditional property related services.</p>	<p>The Local Government Act 2019 commenced on 1 July 2021 and provides for local government in the Northern Territory.</p> <p>Local government provides services and maintains facilities for residents and visitors in the Northern Territory within geographical areas where they exercise responsibility as governments under the NT Local Government Act ('the Act'). Section 11 of the Act states that the principal role of a council is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to act as a representative, informed and responsible decision-maker in the interests of its constituency; and • to develop a strong and cohesive social life for its residents and allocate resources in a fair, socially inclusive, and sustainable way; and • to provide and coordinate public facilities and services; and • to encourage and develop initiatives for improving quality of life; and • to represent the interests of its area to the wider community; and • to exercise and carry out the powers and functions of local government assigned to the council under this Act and other Acts <p>Section 7 of the Act states that local governments are established by that Act and that as part of the system of local government in Australia:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the Territory is divided into local government areas having regard to: • geography and natural configuration; and • the nature and density of population; and • the viability and appropriateness, of each area as a separate unit of local government administration; and • a council is constituted for each area to be responsible for the government and management of the area at the local level

TABLE 1
Key actors and strategies by jurisdiction – LOCAL GOVERNMENT

	Ministry	Portfolio	Strategies
QLD	<p>Hon Steven Miles</p> <p>Minister for State Development, Infrastructure, Local Government and Planning</p>	<p>In Queensland, the Department of State Development, Infrastructure, Local Government and Planning administers legislation to provide for the good governance of all Queensland local governments. It ensures local governments are accountable, effective, efficient and sustainable. The department works closely with local councils and industry stakeholders to form legislation and advise on other council matters.</p> <p>Each local council will also work closely with other Queensland Government departments, statutory authorities and industry stakeholders for ongoing guidance on the operations of local government:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of Premier and Cabinet • Department of Transport and Main Roads • Department Resources • Department of Energy and Public Works • Office of Independent Assessor • Queensland Integrity Commissioner • Queensland Ombudsman • Queensland Audit Office • Local Government Association of Queensland • Local Government Managers Australia Queensland • Local Government Finance Professionals 	<p>The Queensland Government is delivering a rolling reform agenda in the local government sector.</p> <p>New reforms since 2018 aim to strengthen the transparency, accountability and integrity measures that apply to the system of local government in Queensland and follow the release of the Belcarra report and other input from local government stakeholders.</p> <p>This includes the (October 2020) Electoral and Other Legislation (Accountability, Integrity and Other Matters) Amendment Act 2020 and supporting regulation changes in effect.</p>

	Ministry	Portfolio	Strategies
SA	The Hon. Geoff Brock MP Minister for Local Government	<p>Local government in South Australia is made up of 68 councils, which make decisions and deliver services to their communities without intervention from the state government.</p> <p>The Office of Local Government, within the Department for Infrastructure and Transport, advises on the constitution and operations of local government. This includes whole of government policy, which affects local government and the relationship between state government, councils and associated representatives.</p>	<p>The following Acts establish the legal framework that local councils operate within:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constitution Act 1934 • Local Government Act 1999 • Local Government (Elections) Act 1999 • Local Government (Implementation Act) 1999 • Outback Communities (Administration and Management) Act 2009 • South Australian Local Government Grants Commission Act 1992
TAS	The Hon Roger Jaensch MP The Minister for Local Government and Planning	<p>The Office of Local Government, within the Department of Premier and Cabinet, contributes to the wellbeing of local communities by providing high quality advice and services to the Tasmanian Government, the local government sector and the public to ensure that councils are well-governed, responsive and sustainable acting in the best interest of their communities. The Office does this by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • providing expert policy advice on local government matters; • administering and ensuring the sector's compliance with relevant legislative and regulatory provisions; • enhancing local government performance by supporting good governance practices and ensuring transparent performance monitoring; • delivering education and training; • supporting the Local Government Board and Boards of Inquiry; and • ensuring regular contact between the Tasmanian Government and local government so that the sector's views inform key regulatory and policy decisions, including through supporting the Premier's Local Government Council (PLGC) 	<p>The Future of Local Government Review has been commissioned by the Tasmanian Government to ensure the system of local government is robust, capable, and ready for the challenges and opportunities of the future.</p> <p>The Minister has appointed five members to the Local Government Board established under the Local Government Act 1993, which also includes the Director of Local Government, to undertake the Review. The Future of Local Government Review commenced on 20 January 2022 and will take approximately 18 months to complete.</p> <p>The Government will not introduce a new legislative framework for local government until there is a clear reform pathway arising out of the Future of Local Government Review.</p>

TABLE 1
Key actors and strategies by jurisdiction – LOCAL GOVERNMENT

	Ministry	Portfolio	Strategies
VIC	<p>The Hon. Melissa Horne</p> <p>Minister for Local Government</p>	<p>Local Government Victoria, within the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions, provides policy advice, oversees legislation and works with Victoria's 79 local councils to support responsive and accountable local government services.</p> <p>LGV works with councils to ensure that bushfire and emergency management approaches meet government and community requirements. LGV administers the State's responsibilities for the local government sector in the provision of capital and recurrent funding. The capital programs administered by LGV include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Growing Suburbs Fund supports investment in critical local infrastructure in Melbourne's diverse and fast-growing interface councils • The living libraries infrastructure program funds new, redeveloped or refurbished public library infrastructure and mobile libraries to provide accessible high-quality libraries to everyone in the community • The free from violence local government project assists councils to deliver innovative family violence prevention programs that meet the needs of their communities. <p>There are also recurrent funding programs administered by LGV.</p> <p>LGV provides administrative and policy support to the Victoria Grants Commission. The Commission is responsible for the annual allocation of untied Commonwealth financial assistance grants to councils under general purpose and local roads grants.</p> <p>LGV administers the councillor conduct framework which provides a clear hierarchy for the management of councillor conduct issues.</p> <p>LGV provides good governance guidance and support to councils in delivering good governance to their communities.</p>	<p>The Local Government Act 2020 is badged as the most ambitious reform to the local government sector in over 30 years. The Act drives improved service delivery, innovation, collaboration, and sustainable futures for all Victorians through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • better financial management and community engagement • clearer standards of behaviour for elected representatives • increased council and councillor accountability • changes to election processes and candidate requirements • increased transparency of council decisions <p>The Act was proclaimed in four stages. The first stage was proclaimed on 6 April 2020 and final stage was proclaimed on 1 July 2021:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • STAGE 1 (complete) focused on electoral processes and the development of candidate training. • STAGE 2 (complete) focused on transparency and community engagement. • STAGE 3A (complete) focused on integrity and governance. • STAGE 3B (underway) focused on integrated strategic planning and reporting. • STAGE 4 (complete) focused on procurement, complaints handling and key regulations articulating the powers of councils

	Ministry	Portfolio	Strategies
WA	Hon John Carey BA MLA Minister for Local Government	<p>The Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries partners with local government to deliver good governance to the community.</p> <p>Relevant legislation that it administers includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local Government (Administration) Regulations 1996 • Local Government (Financial Management) Regulations 1996 • Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1960 • Local Government Act 1995 • Local Government Grants Act 1978 • Local Government Legislation Amendment Act 2019 • Local Government Amendment (COVID-19 Response) Act 2020 (Amendment Act) • Local Government (Audit) Regulations <p>The Local Government Advisory Board is a statutory body established under the Local Government Act 1995 (the Act) to advise the Minister for Local Government on local government constitutional matters.</p>	<p>The State Government has announced the final package of reforms to the Local Government Act 1995, following a review of public submissions.</p> <p>It is classes as the most significant package of reforms for WA local government since the Local Government Act 1995 was passed more than 25 years ago.</p> <p>The reforms have been developed on the basis of findings identified as part of the Local Government Act Review and recommendations of various reports, including the Local Government Review Panel Final Report.</p> <p>The proposed reforms are based on six themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Earlier intervention, effective regulation and stronger penalties • Reducing red tape, increasing consistency and simplicity • Greater transparency and accountability • Stronger local democracy and community engagement • Clear roles and responsibilities • Improved financial management and reporting

3. No of people involved/% of Australian population

Local governments play an important role in the lives of all citizens in the six Australian states and the Northern Territory. In the ACT, the Legislative Assembly is responsible for local government functions (for example: garbage collection, looking after parks and gardens, libraries and maintaining drains, roads and footpaths).

This means that **25.3 million residents** (out of a total Australian population of 25.7 million) have access to, and are serviced by, local governments.

4. Access – universal or targeted?

Access is universal in the sense that all local residents have the right to access the resources and infrastructure created and managed by local councils.

Limitations to access can include accessing those facilities that are subject to fees and user charges such as sporting ovals. However, many assets such as libraries and parks are free to use.

5. Total government expenditure Australia-wide

There are strict limitations on local government powers to raise their own revenues beyond the application of taxes on the unimproved value of property (or 'rates'). This leads to a major transfer role for the centralised revenue collector (the federal government) to state and local governments and leaves local government with limited revenue raising capacity.

Since the late 1970s, the federal government has been the largest external provider of funding for local government. The federal government will have provided over \$64 billion under the Financial Assistance Grant program to local government since 1974–75 (including 2022–23). The grant is provided under the Local Government (Financial Assistance) Act 1995 (*DITRDCA, 2022a*).

The Financial Assistance Grant program consists of two components:

- **a general purpose component which is distributed between the states and territories according to population (i.e. on a per capita basis), and**
- **an identified local road component which is distributed between the states and territories according to fixed historical shares**

Both components of the grant are "untied" in the hands of local government, allowing councils to spend the grants according to local priorities.

Local government grants commissions in each state and the Northern Territory recommend the distribution of the funding under the Financial Assistance Grant program to local governing bodies in accordance with the Act and the National principles for the allocation of grants under the Local Government (Financial Assistance) Act 1995 (*ALGA, 2022b, DITRDCA, 2022a*).

The Australian Capital Territory does not have a local government grants commission as the territory government provides local government services in lieu of the territory having a system of local government.

The grant is paid in quarterly instalments to state and territory governments for immediate distribution to local governing bodies.

The quantum of the grant pool changes annually in line with changes in population and the Consumer Price Index (the Act provides discretion to the Treasurer to alter this annual indexation).

Financial Assistance Grant program 2022–23

In 2022–23 the federal government will provide \$2.9 billion in untied funding to local governing bodies under the Financial Assistance Grant program. This includes \$2.1 billion which was brought forward from the 2022–23 estimate and paid to states and territories on 11 April 2022. The remaining 2022–23 allocation to states and territories will be paid in four equal quarterly instalments scheduled for August, November, February and May (*DITRDCA, 2022a*).

TABLE 2:
Local Government Financial Assistance Grants Program funding 2022–2023

Jurisdiction	General purpose (4)	Local roads (4)	Total (4)
NSW	631,015,679	258,851,128	889,866,807
VIC	511,121,757	183,936,468	695,058,225
QLD	408,379,918	167,162,951	575,542,869
WA	217,009,283	136,416,538	353,425,821
SA	142,040,871	49,031,659	191,072,530
TAS	45,295,582	47,279,546	92,575,128
NT	19,636,493	20,899,295	40,535,788
ACT	36,153,432	28,608,331	64,761,763
TOTAL	2,010,653,015	892,185,916	2,902,838,931

Source: (*DITRDCA, 2022a*)

In addition to receiving federal and state grants (14% of total revenue), local government authorities also raise money from their residents, usually through rates (38% of total revenue) and other fees and user charges and through the sales of goods and services (28% of total revenue). Local governments do not have the power to raise taxes (*ALGA, 2022a*).

6. Commonwealth and State responsibilities for funding/delivery

The Australian Constitution does not include local councils. While the structure, powers and responsibilities of the federal and state governments were established during federation, local government was not identified as a Commonwealth responsibility. It remains a State and Northern Territory responsibility to this day (DITRDCA, 2022c).

Local Governments act on the delegation or authority of the States (and the Northern Territory) with respect to regulatory tasks that are deemed to be most effectively and efficiently defined and/or implemented at the local level.

Every state and territory, except the ACT, has a separate system of local government. Local government regions might be known as councils, shires, boroughs, or municipalities. Each is administered by a council (or equivalent) which makes decisions on local, town or city matters.

What all local councils in Australia have in common is that they are the creatures of state/territory legislation, which stipulates the activities which the state or territory requires the local government to perform, as well as the functions it is allowed to perform if it chooses. In practice, local councils have a great deal of autonomy, but they can be dissolved, suspended or amalgamated with other councils if their state/territory government regards such measures as appropriate. The state or territory government may also override council decisions (Megarritty, 2011).

The main roles of Local Government are governance, planning, community development, service delivery, asset management and regulation. Local Government also plays a significant role in the implementation of national policy objectives such as the waste export ban, Closing the Gap initiatives, family and domestic violence programs, and strategies to reduce carbon emissions. Local Government contributes to policy areas such as transport infrastructure and the provision of human and community

services including childcare and aged care (DITRDCA, 2022c).

Councils determine service provision according to local needs and the requirements of state and territory legislation (DITRDCA, 2022c).

As this list below shows, Local Governments are jointly involved in funding or service-delivery in a number of areas (Productivity Commission, 2017, ALGA, 2022c). Local government services cross all areas and can include:

- **infrastructure and property services, including local roads, bridges, footpaths, drainage, waste collection and management**
- **provision of recreation facilities, such as parks, sports fields and stadiums, golf courses, swimming pools, sport centres, halls, camping grounds and caravan parks**
- **health services such as water and food inspection, immunisation services, toilet facilities, noise control and meat inspection and animal control**
- **community services, such as childcare, disability, aged care and accommodation, community care and welfare services**
- **building services, including inspections, licensing, certification, and enforcement**
- **planning and development approval**
- **provision and management of facilities, such as airports and aerodromes, ports and marinas, cemeteries, parking stations and on-street parking**
- **cultural facilities and services, such as libraries, art galleries and museums, and community events**
- **water and sewerage services**
- **business services**

- emergency management
- other services, such as abattoirs, saleyards and group purchasing schemes

In the context of ECD, it is important to note that in Victoria, [Maternal and child health consultations](#) are delivered by local government.

7. System specific accountability/oversight/regulation mechanisms

Each state has a *Local Government Act* that sets out the rules for the formation and operation of local government.

On a jurisdictional basis, there are significant differences between the systems overseeing councils.

See section 2 of this chapter for key actors and strategies by jurisdiction.

8. How a family interacts with/accesses the system

Every time a person leaves their house, they are using services provided by their local council. Councils deliver hundreds of services to their local communities. A range of in-home services are also offered by councils.

9. Where/who delivers services for families

There are 537 councils Australia-wide. Of these, around 55% are regional, rural, or remote councils.

A national map with the boundaries for all local government areas is available at <https://dbr.abs.gov.au/absmaps/index.html>



