



Public housing and  
nonhousing outcomes  
– a background paper

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*Public housing and nonhousing outcomes – a background paper*

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**This paper** is about the nonhousing outcomes of living in public housing.<sup>1</sup> Specific nonhousing outcome areas dealt with include crime, education, employment, health, family functioning, and community-connectedness.<sup>2</sup>

## Background

Nonhousing outcomes are effects on a household as a result of housing that household securely and affordably in public housing.<sup>3</sup> Direct housing outcomes have three components: affordability, security of tenure, and quality (adequacy and appropriateness). Nonhousing outcomes are the knock-on or other effects in other realms of a person's life, both within and outside the home.

Houses are more than just shelter from the elements. They are located in places, in communities. Housing is the base from which we lead our everyday lives.

Public housing is sometimes maligned as 'causing' social problems such as crime. However, most of the studies reviewed in this paper show that providing public housing may provide positive outcomes. Public housing as a tenure type does not cause social dysfunction in itself. Although public housing tenants usually have poorer outcomes than average in terms of, for example, education or health, this does not mean the provision of public housing causes a negative outcome; it is more likely to be indicative of the relative disadvantage of those in receipt of assistance (Mullins and Western 2001b).

In the media, the community sector and the general populace, there are a range of ideas surrounding public housing and the behaviour of occupants, many of which are erroneous. For example, the notion that certain physical designs creates crime (and that fixing the design will fix crime). This is approaching the issues from the wrong perspective because it confuses *correlation* with *causation*. There have been a number of social outcomes associated with or caused by public housing that are negative (e.g. disincentives to work) and a number that are positive (e.g. better educational outcomes for children). The relationships between public housing provision and these nonhousing outcomes need to be questioned.

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<sup>1</sup> It does not consider the nonhousing outcomes of other types of housing assistance, such as assistance to home purchasers and homeowners, private renters, or other forms of social housing such as community housing, rental housing cooperatives and Indigenous housing.

<sup>2</sup> The first four areas are those common to most of the literature and are the focus of Phibbs and Young (2005). Bridge and others (2003) consider labour markets, education, health, crime, social capital, neighbourhood effects, market effects, tenure effects, income, and wealth. Burke and Hulse (2002) consider personal wellbeing, workforce participation, and social capital. Western and Mullins (2001) consider community, crime, poverty, social exclusion, perceived wellbeing, anomie, health, education, and labour force participation.

<sup>3</sup> Nonhousing outcomes can apply at a societal level, e.g. more appropriate call on welfare services, less reliance on social security expenditures, increased pool of skilled workers, greater safety for neighbours who are not public housing tenants, competitiveness of cities, etc., but these outcomes for society are not considered in this paper.

Tenure type can predict nonhousing outcomes generally. For example, homeowners are less likely to commit a crime than public housing renters. This is because tenure type is in many ways a shorthand for socioeconomic status due to the way that people are 'sorted' in a housing market by their income, age, parental assets, employment history and status, and so on. However, tenure type might not necessarily cause nonhousing outcomes.

This paper discusses the research into these possible positive or negative nonhousing outcomes arising from the provision of public housing. It will try to distinguish between the direct causal effects of provision of public housing and evidence of associated phenomena which are correlated with, but not caused by, provision of public housing.

## **General findings**

There was in the past a dearth of Australian studies on the nonhousing benefits of public housing provision (Bridge and others 2003: 3). However, there has been an improvement in this situation in recent years with the release of papers by Waters (2001), Phibbs (2003, 2005), Mullins and Western (2001), Waters (2001), King (2002), and Faulkner and Bennett (2002). Many of these papers followed a decision by the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) to make nonhousing outcomes a designated research area in 2000 (Waters 2001: 1).

The general findings of major research projects that covered a number of nonhousing outcomes are presented below.

### **Phibbs and Young**

Phibbs and Young's study (2005) investigates the effects on nonhousing outcomes (specifically crime, employment, education and health) on those households recently allocated public housing. They used a mixture of qualitative and quantitative tools including a literature review, focus groups and surveys (including a health assessment tool). The aim was to survey 350 tenants just after moving into public housing (T1) and six months later (T2). 175 of the sample were to be from Sydney and 175 from Brisbane. In addition, 70 community housing tenants were to be surveyed (all from Sydney). There were two criteria in choosing households: those with school-age children and those in the top Socio Economic Index for Areas quartile limiting the survey to households in the 'better' areas (Phibbs & Young 2005: 26). Further to the survey, four focus groups (two with public housing tenants and two with community housing tenants) were conducted. The researchers also gained access to the tenants' Medicare records where they gave consent. (For more details on methodology, see Phibbs & Young 2005: 21). The limitations of the research were that the targets for the sample size were not reached. 151 households were surveyed at T1 and T2. Fourteen households were selected for in-depth interview.

The study found that a number of non-shelter benefits of public housing were reported by tenants and evident in quantitative data (Phibbs & Young 2005: 4). This study is one of the very few empirical and qualitative studies carried out in Australia. Overall, the authors reported that after being housed, tenants felt more stable, their stress levels decreased and they had additional disposable income. The findings indicated that

overall 64% of respondents rated their public housing as a great deal better than their previous situation (Phibbs & Young 2005: 43).

### **Samuels and others**

Samuels, Judd, O'Brien, and Barton (2004) mapped the incidence of crime in three areas with concentrations of public housing in three different states (i.e. a total of nine estates), over a five-year period from 1997 to 2002. They found that crime was widespread throughout all the nine areas, and that it was concentrated at hotspots. They concluded that crime is strongly associated with concentrations of public housing. The adjacent areas of private housing also had high level of crime, but to a much lower degree.

### **Hulse and Randolph**

A study by Hulse and Randolph (2004a) involved interviews in 2003 with 400 unemployed people in Sydney and Melbourne. They were interested in whether housing costs and housing assistance created work disincentives. The respondents were all tenants, both public housing tenants and private housing tenants: 57 of the 400 were public housing tenants. This study is of particular interest for its findings about public housing tenants because public housing tenants have a much lower rate of participation in the labour force than people living in the other tenures. Seven in ten public housing tenants are not in the labour force, and four in ten public housing tenants are of workforce age but not in the labour force. Hulse and Randolph found that public housing tenants could face greater workforce disincentives than private renters because of issues around gender, age, family responsibilities, and length of time out of the workforce and in receipt of social security payments.

### **Nissim**

The Housing as a Human Right Project report was a joint project of the Victorian Council of Social Service, Shelter Victoria, Women's Housing Ltd, and the Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions. The project report, *Little piece of heaven* (Nissim 2004), was based on discussions with focus groups about what housing as a human right meant to them. The focus groups consisted of 185 people from 65 suburbs and towns around Victoria. The discussions were held between March and August 2004. The people's accounts are represented as a series of quotes grouped thematically. The methodological limitations are that there is little empirical evidence which is common to qualitative research in general; however that was not the aim of the project. Rather it was to give people a chance to speak in their own words about housing rights, and work towards having a charter of housing rights adopted in Victoria. The people who spoke about the effect that allocation of public housing (not all were public housing tenants) had on their lives were largely positive about it. Many emphasized the importance of security of tenure and affordability that the Victorian Office of Housing could provide. There were some locational issues such as needing to be near schools and services; however this did not mean that private sector housing was felt to be superior to public housing.

### **Bridge and others**

A study by Bridge, Flatau, Whelan, Wood and Yates (2003) aims to provide a systematic review of the evidence on the non-shelter effects of housing assistance measures. In addition, the report identifies key research questions which have not been

adequately addressed in the Australian context and which need to be addressed if housing and other arms of economic and social policy are to proceed on a well-informed basis. The authors review the literature on nonhousing outcomes from Australia and overseas. They look at the literature to see how tenures such as homeownership and public housing tenure can reduce poverty, or produce other benefits. They identify at least two shortcomings in the Australian and other literature: (i) the dearth of Australian studies (especially empirical), and (ii) the methodological difficulties of measuring the magnitude and impact of nonhousing outcomes (Bridge and others 2003: 3). There are suggestions near the end of the report about future research directions.

### **Faulkner and Bennett**

Faulkner and Bennett's (2002) study explores the shelter and non-shelter implications for housing policy development of the relationships between housing assistance, residential location and relocation and the use of community and social care services by the older population. The quantitative part of the project utilizes data from the Australian Longitudinal Study of Ageing. This data was drawn from several surveys of between 779 and 2,087 older people, randomly selected from electoral rolls in the Adelaide statistical division in South Australia. In addition, focus groups consisting of some older persons, community organizations and government departments were held in different locations in Australia. Faulkner and Bennett found that for older people, homeownership is not always positive because of the maintenance burden. On the other hand, public housing could be threatening for older people because of the 'targeting', resulting in perceptions of crime and experience of fear. Overall, they found that social economic factors overrode tenure factors when it comes to predicting social wellbeing, and that housing only contributed a small variance (2-6%) to the results of the study.

### **Burke and Hulse**

Burke and Hulse's (2002) research compares the circumstances and attitudes of sole parents in receipt of rent assistance with those living in public housing in the context of gender and the feminization of poverty. They also address different tenure arrangements and related models of housing assistance. The research consisted of two components: analysis of confidentialized unit record files from the 1991 and 1996 Censuses of Population and Housing, and surveys of 1,700 sole parents in receipt of rent assistance and sole parents living in public housing. Those surveyed were living in seven urban and non-urban areas in three states (Queensland, Victoria and Tasmania). The project sought to examine both shelter and non-shelter outcomes for the two groups. The limitations of this study are that it only examines one household type (sole parent households) and compares between two groups receiving housing assistance rather than comparing prior and after receiving assistance. The project's aim is to examine the relative effectiveness of the two types of assistance to each other (public housing provision and rent assistance). Burke and Hulse found little difference in terms of disposable income (those in public housing had cheaper rent; those in private rental having a higher level of child support and employment income). They found little difference in the level of poverty between groups; probably because the higher incomes among private renters were offset by higher rent costs. Those in public housing were more disadvantaged in some ways but had lower rent (Burke & Hulse 2001: 6). They concluded that neither form of housing assistance was providing a huge

amount of benefit if after-housing income was considered, as many sole parents could not afford to meet their essential nonhousing needs even after assistance.

### **Mullins and Western**

Mullins and Western (2001b) examine the nature of the relationships between housing assistance (specifically, provision of public housing and rent assistance) and nine non housing outcomes: community, crime, perceived well-being, anomie, health, education, labour force participation, poverty, and social exclusion. Their study is empirically based, using data collected in 1997 as part of the South East Queensland Quality of Life Survey. The study gives a bigger picture of the outcomes (or linkages) between all tenure types and indicators of well-being. The method employed is to undertake a cross sectional (comparative) analysis of different tenure groups according to nonhousing outcomes. The authors identify the limitations of the study as its non-longitudinal nature, and therefore it cannot measure outcomes before and after housing assistance was given. The study shows that out of all tenures, homeownership confers the most benefits in terms of educational achievement, health, employment and income, while public housing is correlated with poorer outcomes. Private rental, although more expensive than public housing, is indicative of better outcomes than public housing (probably because some private renters have higher incomes). However within similar income groups, the differences in nonhousing outcomes are marginal between private and public renters. Homelessness (lack of a stable tenure) is linked to mental illness and chronic health problems. In short, tenure type is linked to relative poverty and advantage or disadvantage. They conclude that without longitudinal data it is hard to know what difference housing assistance makes, but surmise that it may not be as great a difference as some think.

### **Overseas**

Overseas studies are in more abundant supply than those undertaken in Australia (Bridges and others 2003). In general, the British studies focus on housing and health; the US studies on employment and 'welfare dependency'. The British studies are interested in the effect of community regeneration processes on creating better health outcomes (Ambrose 2000; 2001a; 2001b), while the US studies examine the supposed benefits of breaking up 'ghettoised' neighbourhoods, and the changes that might follow relocation into areas with greater opportunities or a better neighbourhood, especially the educational and employment outcomes. For example, Rosenbaum and Harris (2001) examine the impact of the 'Moving to Opportunities' program in Chicago, Illinois. This program enables families to relocate from disadvantaged areas to average or advantaged areas. The international studies are mainly about one nonhousing outcome (e.g. health) and as such will be discussed under the relevant topic below.

### **Other sources**

Other sources relevant for this paper are crime statistics for New South Wales, and a report examining the spatial distribution of social disadvantage (Vinson 2004). While these are not about housing per se, they are about the attributes of areas where people in receipt of housing assistance are concentrated. Selected crime and other statistics have been cited under the relevant topics below.

## Summary

While the studies in Australia were relatively few, since the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute designated nonhousing outcomes as an area of study in 2000, this situation has improved markedly. The AHURI studies about nonhousing outcomes or related areas are: Burke and Hulse (2000); Waters (2001); Mullins and Western (2001b); McDonald and Merlo (2002); Reynolds, Inglis and O'Brien (2002); King (2002), Faulkner and Bennett (2002); Burke and Hulse (2002); Baldry, McDonnell, Maplestone and Peeters (2003); Robinson (2003); Bridge, Flatau, Whelan, Wood and Yates (2003); Bessant, Coupland, Dalton, Maher, Rowe and Watts (2003); Bradbury and Chalmers (2003); Hulse and Randolph (2004a); Samuels, Judd, O'Brien and Barton (2004); Phibbs and Young (2005). Some studies have mainly reviewed the existing literature (Bridge and others 2003), while a few studies present empirical findings (Mullins & Western 2001b; Burke & Hulse 2002; Hulse and Randolph 2004a; Phibbs & Young 2005). Studies in Australia that compare 'before and after' effects of providing public housing are rare. In general the existing studies show that public housing allocation can produce some positive effects especially for those who were previously in unaffordable, overcrowded or unstable housing.

Public housing provision can improve outcomes dramatically when a person has a lack of stable tenure (is homeless), although access to support services are vital also (O'Brien and others 2002; Robinson 2003). However where a person is in receipt of any form of housing assistance (including public housing, rent assistance, Rentstart, etc.), they may have worse than average health, employment, education and crime outcomes when compared to private renters not receiving rent assistance, home purchasers and homeowners. All studies show that nonhousing outcomes vary by tenure; tenure is in effect an indicator of income or socioeconomic status. The receipt of housing assistance does not *cause* the poorer outcomes, it is just indicative that the person already requires assistance. It is hard to measure how much worse off a person would be if they did not receive housing assistance; the closest we get is the studies in relation to breaching of Centrelink beneficiaries (where an income support recipient loses part or all of their payment) where this caused rental arrears or even precipitated homelessness.

## Outcome areas

The next sections review the evidence in relation to six key areas:

- crime
- education
- employment
- health
- family functioning
- community connectedness

How does the provision of public housing affect outcomes in these areas (if at all)? Are causal effects on nonhousing outcomes of providing public housing clearer in some areas than others?

Most studies emphasize weak causality. For example, there is little evidence to support the idea that being a public housing tenant ‘causes’ a person to commit crime. There are reasons some people are more predisposed to commit crime, but their tenure type might not be a factor (although it may correlate to other factors). Alternatively, a child may do brilliantly at school, but be from a public housing estate. Once again, their tenure might be a minor factor compared to other factors such as parental support or innate ability. Correlation and causality are different things and need to be disentangled. The Australian and overseas evidence will be reviewed to try to answer key questions about the role public housing provision plays in contribution to outcomes.

## Crime

There is a greater likelihood of offenders coming from or living in postcode areas of high social disadvantage (Vinson 2004). The more disadvantaged the area for the postcode in which you live, the more likely you are to have a criminal conviction recorded against you or know someone else who has.

Those with criminal convictions or those leaving jail are more likely to be allocated public housing. However, this does not mean providing public housing causes crime, or that all public housing estates are crime-ridden – crime rates vary dramatically across estates. Some tenants’ accounts also contradict the supposition that private rental housing is safer: for example, after moving to public housing, some tenants said they felt safer and the area was better than their previous area (Phibbs & Young 2005: 41).

A study by McGregor, Makkai and Mayhew (2002) compared the offences committed by public housing tenants and private rental tenants. They reported that “[d]etainees who reported living in public housing were more likely to be brought into police custody for violent offences (21% were compared to 17% of other detainees), or property offences (34% as against 30%). These offences were linked to illicit drug use almost invariably (between 70 and 84 per cent of detainees). The differences between the groups for both categories of offence are statistically significant.” (2002: 6). However, in other categories such as traffic, drink driving or drug offences, public

housing tenants had lower offence rates than private renters (2002: 6).<sup>4</sup> More female public housing tenants were detainees than female private renters.

While public housing and private rental tenants committed property-related and violent crimes more often, other crimes such as murder, fraud or dealing in drugs are distributed more evenly across space or may even be associated with more affluent areas<sup>5</sup>; for example, cocaine dealing was over four times more common in affluent or cosmopolitan beachside areas of Sydney such as Waverley than in poorer areas like Blacktown in Sydney's western suburbs.

McGregor, Makkai and Mayhew (2002: 2) found that "living in public housing does not *per se* increase offending once one accounts for the fact that offenders are generally more socially deprived and, as such, are more likely to be living in public housing". Their conclusion concurs with that of Matka (1997), who argued that people in public housing were more likely to commit crime in the first instance due to their lower socioeconomic status. Weatherburn and Lind (2001: 147) suggested that any excess of offending in public housing areas not explained by socioeconomic factors might be due to the proximity of existing juvenile offenders to those that are susceptible (cited in McGregor, Makkai & Mayhew 2002: 3). There are higher crime rates in areas with higher representations of public housing, but this does not mean that the housing causes crime *per se*. There might be some minor effects caused by housing type (Matka 1997), and greater opportunity for consorting with offenders than would otherwise be the case, as Weatherburn and Lind (1998) postulate. There is a large variance in crime rates between public housing estates, but there is very little data available at that small scale.

### **Concentration**

Crime is strongly associated with concentration of public housing (Samuels and others 2004: 32). As Vinson (2004) shows, comparatively few postcode areas are host to the majority of offenders. Public housing allocations or the availability of cheap private rental properties or caravan parks concentrate such people spatially. This spatial concentration could mean more association between offenders and others likely to offend (which is a cause of crime in itself, especially for young people). This is a 'neighbourhood effect': if a young person sees his or her peers undertaking criminal behaviour, not working, not going to school, etc., then this can become internalized as a norm. Vinson shows how residing in 'offender-prone' neighbourhoods might increase a young person's chance of becoming involved in crime (Vinson 2004: 39). Vinson (2004) and Weatherburn and Lind (1998) discuss the 'tipping point' thesis (that once a certain level of criminal activity in an area is reached, it can increase exponentially).

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<sup>4</sup> This might be partly explained by the older age profile of public housing tenants and their lower rate of car ownership.

<sup>5</sup> For example, in 2003 fraud was committed at the following rates in the following local government areas (per 100,000 population): Hurstville 341.4; Campbelltown 388.9; Narrabri 310.8. Dealing/Trafficking in Cocaine: Blacktown 0; Uralla 0; Waverley 4.8; Willoughby 1.5.

### What types of crime?

‘Acquisitive’ crimes more commonly committed by people from public housing estates are petty theft (such as break and enter, stealing cars, etc.), while some non-acquisitive crimes are also more often committed in public housing estates (e.g. breach of Apprehended Violence Orders, child abuse). Violent crimes such as murder, rape or assault are fairly rare and occur uniformly across the population.

However, it is not the presence of public housing *per se* that is associated with crime. As Samuels and Judd (2002: 7) comment: “[c]riminologists recognise that public housing areas are *not* necessarily criminogenic. Such conclusions would be reductionist and deterministic - some areas have high rates, others do not; some individuals are crime-prone, others are not.” Areas associated with criminal behaviour could be any disadvantaged area (whether the tenure is public rental, private rental, homeowner, caravan park or campsite). Concentration of disadvantaged people may make crime rates worse or grow exponentially (Weatherburn & Lind 1998).

### Where crime occurs

There is a difference between crime-prone areas and areas where criminal offenders live. Some areas are more crime-prone because they attract people to the prevalence of ‘targets’ (for example, the eastern suburbs of Sydney have higher than average incomes and higher than average crime rates). Car stealing might be concentrated in certain car parks or shopping malls. But notwithstanding this, crimes usually occur more often within reasonable proximity to the place of residence of the offender.

To illustrate the different frequencies of crimes, Table 1 contrasts three areas around the state. One is in central western New South Wales and has a high proportion of Aboriginal residents, some living in Aboriginal Housing Office housing or in mainstream public housing (Brewarrina); another is a western suburb of Sydney with high levels of public housing but pockets of affluence (Blacktown); and the third is an affluent Sydney suburb on the upper North Shore in a bushland setting (Ku-ring-gai).

**Table 1: Selected reported crimes per 100,000 of population by LGA, 2003**

Reported crime	Brewarrina	Blacktown	Ku-ring-gai
Malicious damage to property	6114.9	1582.0	582.5
Dealing or trafficking – narcotics	0	0	0
Breach – apprehended violence order	1196.4	198.4	26.8
Murder	0	0	0
Break and enter – dwelling	2942.5	857.1	801.4
Steal from person	275.9	236.2	72.9

Source: Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, NSW Recorded Crime Statistics – Local Government Areas 2003, online at <[http://www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/bocsar1.nsf/pages/lga\\_alphalist](http://www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/bocsar1.nsf/pages/lga_alphalist)>.

From the variations in crime rates, we can see that only some offences are more common among disadvantaged communities (theft in particular). Murder and drug trafficking were committed no more often in Brewarrina or Blacktown than Ku-ring-gai (zero in all three areas).

However, there is a vast difference between areas in breaches of Apprehended Violence Orders, the rate being the highest in Brewarrina and extremely low in Ku-ring-gai. Malicious damage occurs 9.5 times more in Brewarrina than Ku-ring-gai. The incidence of 'steal from person' is similar in Blacktown and Brewarrina, but much lower in Ku-ring-gai. However, 'break and enter' rates are fairly similar in both Blacktown and Ku-ring-gai. Crime rates can vary wildly or be similar, and socioeconomic factors are not always the dominant reason. Policing – the amount of resources and intensity – is also a factor that can influence crime rates slightly (P Crofts [University of Technology Sydney] 2004, pers.comm.).

## **Heroin**

Using heroin is classed as a crime, as are some of the things some addicts do to get money to buy it (stealing, dealing, etc.). However heroin users are a heterogenous group. Bessant and others (who undertook an ethnographic study of users in four different locations) found that some "had spent too many years in jail and others [had] no experience of crime" (2003:21). Not all heroin users commit crimes to fund drug use.

Heroin users can have severe housing problems, or are homeless. For example, Bessant and others reported that 12 of the 47 people they interviewed were squatting, which can be illegal (2003: 27). The incidence of squatting was highest in higher rent areas (e.g. the City of Yarra in inner-city Melbourne). For some heroin users, housing and other needs come second to meeting the cost of their drug habit.<sup>6</sup> Many reported housing crisis or transience (Bessant and others 2003: 27).

Dalton and Rowe discuss the physical improvements made to several well-located inner-Melbourne public housing estates associated with heroin use. Despite the improvements, applications for transfers continue to be high and some potential tenants are reluctant to move to these estates. "A key factor in the reluctance of people to live on a number of these estates is that they have become sites for extensive trading and use of illicit drugs. This has led to the common areas, such as lifts, stairwells, laundries, foyers and surrounding open space becoming degraded with discarded sharps and other detritus." (Dalton & Rowe 2002). They call this degraded public space a 'tragedy of the commons'. Recent evidence (Nagle 2004), however, suggests that the problem has been addressed and turnover has decreased.

While certain public housing estates have been centres of heroin use and distribution at times (such as the Collingwood high-rises in Melbourne), this again is probably because of the allocation effect – dysfunctional behaviour and drug use will persist among poor people who are housed together. Some addicts when interviewed said that they wanted to move out of the inner city to suburban or even rural areas where heroin is not available. One respondent said: "I left Melbourne ... the Mornington Peninsula just out of Melbourne and got clean for about eight months. But then as soon as I came back and moved into the Commission [high rise public housing] I started using again" (cited in Dalton and Rowe 2002: 5).

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<sup>6</sup> However, there are also many 'hidden' and long term heroin addicts who manage to hold down a job, pay their bills, maintain a tenancy and buy heroin.

So, for some people, living in the inner-city estates can encourage illegal drug use, if that is where the locus of drug sale and use is. However the problem was not the housing tenure per se: some users interviewed had transferred to suburban or rural public housing as another way of escaping or getting 'clean' (Dalton & Rowe 2002: 6).

### **Ex-prisoners**

Providing stable housing and support services for ex-offenders after release from prison plays a part in reducing recidivism. This is especially important in the weeks directly after release as most repeat offences are committed during this time. Baldry and others (2003) found that ex-prisoners were more likely to return to prison if they were homeless or transient, had no accommodation support, or felt the support they did get was unhelpful. Transience was indicative of more likelihood of reoffending. A majority of the transient ex-prisoners (about half the total) were re-incarcerated within nine months. Those who stayed with family or a partner had much less likelihood of returning to prison than those living alone or in transient housing situations (Baldry and others 2003).

### **Design**

The hypothesis that physical design can influence crime (environmental determinism) is hotly debated among researchers (Mullins & Western 2001a, 2001b). The effect of urban design is uncertain (Phibbs & Young 2005). The question to consider is whether environment is *associated with* crime or *causative of* crime. While changes can be made to physical environment to 'design out' crime, the allocation thesis (that some areas are more crime-prone because more crime-committing individuals live there) is supported by criminologists like Weatherburn and Lind (1998). Physical factors are secondary to the criminal intent of individuals: after all, if no individuals had the intent to commit crimes, there would be no reason to redesign an environment to reduce opportunities for crime. Areas with low crime rates such as Sydney's upper North Shore have less defended environments; housing may be detached, accessible and have windows without bars – whereas in Newtown or Redfern bars on windows and deadlocks are the norm.

Does regeneration or redevelopment of public housing estates reduce crime? The results are mixed and there is little empirical evidence in Australia that this is so. For example, Stubbs and Storer (1996) found that the upgrading of housing and environment in the case of the Radburn-design Airs public housing estate in Sydney's south-west had little to no effect on crime without other changes (such as providing more employment). Often the only way of making a real difference to an area's incidence of crime is removing the (generally small) number of offenders who overwhelmingly commit the majority of crimes. Again, Matka found (1997) that socioeconomic factors are more important than building design factors.

The Radburn-style design of some public housing estates has been blamed for providing escape routes for criminals and a 'no man's land' atmosphere. Radburn design might or might not *facilitate* already existing criminal activity taking place more efficiently. If we examine the actual incidence of crime on estates, then high rise estates might be just as crime-prone as Radburn style ones. Wealthy people also live in Radburn-style neighbourhoods, and high-rise units but may not commit crimes at the

same rate. The danger in environmental theories of crime is a neglect of the social factors that are more likely to cause crime.

There have been some studies that address the 'design as an influencer of crime' hypothesis. Bridge and others (2003) discuss the conjecture that design might influence crime because of 'poor defensible spaces'. Samuels and others (2004) discuss the idea that the 'surveillability', accessibility and territoriality aspects of spaces may make them crime-prone (or not). Improving visibility and creating defined private spaces may make space more defensible (Samuels and others 2004). They conclude that design factors may influence but not cause crime, pointing to socioeconomic factors and poor parenting as the cause.

### **Correlations**

Vinson (2004) showed that disproportionate numbers of offenders come from a small number of disadvantaged postcodes. For example, on the criminal conviction map provided on CD with the Vinson study report, Redfern/Waterloo clearly stands out as an area with a higher than average proportion of offenders; this is also one of the highest concentrations of public housing in New South Wales. Mullins and Western (2001b) also found that there are higher crime rates in and around public housing estates, as did Samuels, Judd, O'Brien and Barton (2004). However Weatherburn and Lind (1998) caution that socioeconomic factors should be accounted for, as these need to be given much more weight than housing factors.

Housing is largely only an indicator of crime insofar as a tenure type that is cheaper is the tenure of choice or necessity for a large proportion of offenders. Housing type, housing assistance or housing design cannot *cause* criminal behaviour by themselves. Weatherburn (1997) stated:

... [there is] little evidence to support a proposition that the quantity or type of public housing in a postcode exerts a strong effect on its recorded rates of assault, robbery, malicious damage to property, motor vehicle theft or break and enter dwelling, independently of social factors.

### **Predictors**

The best predictors of likely criminal activity are: inadequate parenting, especially neglect (which in itself associated with poverty and lack of social and familial support), youthfulness, maleness, and associating with other offenders (Phibbs 2002; Weatherburn & Lind 1998). Economic factors such as prevalence of unemployment and income inequality are highly correlated with the prevalence of certain crimes (Vinson 2004). For example, a recent drop in some types of criminal offences was potentially attributable to a decrease in unemployment and a rise in average wages for younger men (D Weatherburn, quoted in *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 November 2004).

### **Intervention**

Social interventions are more effective than physical ones. For example Samuels and others (2004) studied nine areas with public housing concentrations, six of which had been subject to a government and/or physical intervention. They found that crime is strongly associated with public housing concentrations, but a reduction in crime could be achieved where whole-of-government interventions were implemented. Although

changing physical design factors had some effect, the most important strategies that reduced crime were social ones. They concluded that “it is neither density nor design that generate these behavioural patterns but, rather, socially disadvantaged single-men [sic] housed in close proximity” (2004: 49). While public housing estates are not necessarily “criminogenic”, they may be “criminocentric” (2004: 55).

## Education

Public housing provision seems to be conducive to positive educational outcomes. Although there is less research available on this topic than other outcome areas, there is one major empirical piece of research (Phibbs & Young 2005) and some anecdotal evidence (Nissim 2004).

Tenure types are correlated to educational outcomes. Home ownership is positively associated with children’s educational attainment (Mullins, Western & Broadbent 2001b: 33). It also has a strong association with higher socioeconomic status. Those whose parents are homeowners will on average have higher levels of educational attainment than those whose parents are renters. This is because tenure type can be read as a ‘proxy’ for income, employment history, education, etc., not because the tenure type ‘causes’ a particular outcome. For example, outcomes for private renters can vary widely because renters have different socioeconomic statuses.

Tenure type as predictor, on the other hand, may be irrelevant for some individuals. For example, to take a high profile case, Mark Latham grew up on a public housing estate (Green Valley), and was encouraged by his mother to study hard at school. He went to a selective high school in the south-western suburbs of Sydney and was hoping to go to university when his father died. Due to the family’s financial circumstance, he probably would not have got to university if it was not for the intervention of the local Labor party branch whose membership supplied donations which allowed him to complete a Law degree at Sydney University where he won the University Medal. Latham’s example is an exception – one where ‘local community’ came into play to overcome financial and class barriers.

The provision of public housing seems to produce better outcomes for children’s education than if it had not been provided. Phibbs and Young (2005) found, that overall, parents who had been allocated public housing believe strongly that their children’s educational performance was about the same or had improved. Table 2 shows the results of the comparison of performance before and after their move, for the Brisbane public housing tenants surveyed.

**Table 2: Educational performance of children before and after moving into public housing**

	Subject performance (%)	Motivation performance (%)
Better	53	45
Worse	7	10
About the same	40	45
Total	100	100

Source: Phibbs and Young (2005, Table 5.1.4-1 p. 49); N=60.

Socioeconomic status is the key indicator predictive of educational outcomes. However the effect of public housing provision on education is positive where public housing provides a more secure, spacious and stable environment than the previous one. Being a public housing tenant is less predictive of overall educational attainment than other factors such as parental level of education and socioeconomic status, suggesting it has no negative effects. Among groups with a similar socioeconomic status, housing instability and homelessness produce worse educational outcomes. Poor school attendance and changes of school cause educational problems and prevent continuity of assistance or remediation. Public housing assists improvements in educational outcomes because it provides stability. This is demonstrated by Phibbs and Young (2005), who looked at 'before-after' allocations to public housing.

### **Transience and stability**

There is a strong association between living in the private rental market and mobility (moving home often). What effect do frequent moves have on a child's education? Burke, Aspin and Short (2001) found that 43% of sole parents in the private rental market receiving rent assistance lived in their current housing for less than a year. This has implications for their children's educational continuity. Changing schools often is associated with poorer educational outcomes.

Phibbs and Young (2005) find that there are some reported positive effects of improvement in educational progress after secure and affordable housing has been provided where that housing reduces transience. They found that after 6 months of being housed in public housing, 92% of respondent's children were enrolled at the same school (Phibbs & Young 2005: 44). They found that there is evidence to suggest that changes in address leading to changes in schools can have negative impacts on educational outcomes (2005: 19). Both the respondents and teachers interviewed identified transience as having a negative impact on children. Teachers expressed regret that remedial programs undertaken with children with learning and behavioural difficulties would be disrupted when the family moved – and progress would be lost (Phibbs & Young 2005: 45).

Phibbs and Young found evidence of greater school stability after a move into public housing (2005: 47), and that teachers identified stability as important for the learning process especially when a child had learning difficulties. One teacher told them in an interview: "... that issue though, of the family just having to move on because they haven't met their rental obligations, is a very disheartening one because you see children who are just starting to make progress because they've been here for a while and then off they go, and you know that their education will now falter because it will take some time for them to be picked up" (quoted in Phibbs & Young 2005: 48).

The participants in the Housing as a Human Right project in Melbourne emphasized that finding stable affordable housing near a good and sympathetic school assisted their children settle in and make progress. This was especially the case where the public housing they had been allocated was close to a school they felt comfortable with. Being located away from school was seen as a major drawback. One mother said: "... absenteeism from school for our kids is a lot to do with the location of housing" (quoted in Nissim 2004: 28). If women leaving violent situations had no housing assistance, their children often had to change schools several times, which was viewed

negatively (Nissim 2004: 28). Changing schools often (because of moving houses) was considered negative for children by the parents. Armina, an asylum seeker on a bridging visa, said: "... changing school, it's very bad for the kids. Actually they have psychological problem... my daughter, she say 'if I change school, I will kill myself'" (quoted in Nissim 2004: 28).

Stability was emphasized as especially important for people that had fled from torture and abuse. The support the school gave to students including flexible options which rely on stability such as being able to pay off excursion or camp fees over the year, were very important to the parents. These flexible practices and learning supports were found in schools in disadvantaged areas (often having specialist programs or support).

### **Overcrowding**

Overcrowding, poor housing conditions and noisy housing conditions have been linked to poorer study practices and educational achievement (Phibbs & Young 2005; Mullins, Western & Broadbent 2001b: 33). Overcrowding is a factor in some parts of Australia, more so in Indigenous households where family size is bigger, and this can impede educational outcomes. Overcrowding and poor quality housing may impede effective study. Phibbs and Young (2004: 38) found that after moving to public housing, people with children had much more room. Instead of the child studying on the kitchen table in a crowded and noisy environment, the child might have a big enough room to set up their own study space (Phibbs & Young 2005: 45). So far as public housing is spacious enough, it can impact positively and provide an adequate study environment.

### **Poverty**

Poverty may have a detrimental effect on a child's education. Burke, with Aspin and Short (2001) found that in general, sole parents in public housing had more children and received less child support from the non-custodial parent; however after housing subsidies are taken into effect their incomes were similar to privately-renting sole parents. Sole parents in public housing and in receipt of rent assistance and renting privately had been unable to afford school excursion fees (72% and 84% respectively, Burke & Hulse 2001: 6). Housing assistance may alleviate poverty somewhat, without these subsidies the parents would be even worse off or have to move more often which may in turn affect their children's education. Sole parents were generally worse off than others.

For older students, housing costs could impede education. One older student in Castlemaine (Victoria) was paying \$170 a week in rent. For a student on a low income, this was not affordable: "It just means that everything I do is restricted because of the incredible cost of living, of paying your rent" (quoted in Nissim 2004: 39).

### **Neighbourhoods**

Neighbourhood effects might impede or foster better educational outcomes. While stable and affordable housing can assist in producing better educational outcomes, neighbourhood effects (such as a child's peers 'wagging' school or being involved in crime) might also weaken them. Associating with young offenders increases a young person's chance of becoming involved in crime (Weatherburn & Lind 1998).

However, an evaluation of the US ‘Moving to Opportunity’ program – a demonstration program in five cities that assisted poor families to move out of subsidized housing (including public housing) in very poor neighbourhoods – found no statistically significant effects on employment outcomes for adults or educational achievement for children, and found only marginal improvements in the quality of schools attended (Orr and others 2003). This suggested either there was no significant neighbourhood effect on education, or the new school attended was similar to the old school attended and thus had no beneficial effect.

Another US study found the opposite. Briggs’s (1998) study of Afro-American and Latino Yonkers residents who were ‘ghettoized’ in South West Yonkers (a borough of New York), and then ‘desegregated’ to other parts of the city showed that there might be positive effects for young people in moving to more affluent neighbourhoods. “Several key findings indicate that the benefits arising from the interplay between housing mobility and social capital for the ‘movers’ were quite noticeable. Young people maintained existing networks but developed new ones, thus widening their networks to include people who could enhance their prospects in education and employment” (Briggs 1998:200, cited in Hugman & Sotiri 2001: 16-17).

Rehousing families in areas of greater affluence is one method favoured in parts of the USA to produce better educational outcomes. However, some research shows that relocation may not make much difference at all to educational outcomes. Mullins, Western and Broadbent (2001b: 33) cite a 1950s US study “focusing on one group of slum children who were rehoused with their families, and one group of children who continued living in the slum, found surprisingly little difference between the two in terms of school performance (Wilner and others 1962). The expectation that the rehoused children would perform better did not eventuate”. Factors other than housing might have much greater influence. Mullins, Western and Broadbent comment that although “negative education impacts on children occur when they are homeless, when they live in overcrowded conditions, when they are slum dwellers, and when they live in noisy accommodation” (2001b: 33), these effects were equivalent to only 2 or 3 months retardation of learning. With adequate educational support this can be overcome despite adverse conditions.

### **Other factors**

While neighbourhood effects may have some or no influence, educational outcomes can be predicted by a range of factors apart from neighbourhood. For example, socioeconomic status, level of parental education, and individual ability are well known predictors of educational achievement. Students whose parents are well-off and highly educated and who have individual aptitude are the most likely to do well in school. Peck (2001) found that: “... on average, compared with students from high SES [socio-economic status] families, those from low SES families leave school earlier, have lower aspirations, tend to have different patterns of subject selection in post-compulsory schooling, achieve at a lower level at school, obtain lower Tertiary Entrance Scores, are less likely to go to university, and are more likely to enter occupations associated with low SES”.

## Employment

Although more poorer Australians live in the private rental market than in the other housing tenures, poverty rates are higher among public housing tenants (Mullins & Western 2001b: 9).

The low-income situation (poverty) of public housing tenants has real quality-of-life implications. The sole parent public housing tenants surveyed by Burke and Hulse had one or more days without adequate food during the previous four weeks (70%), had been unable to afford school excursion fees for their children (72%), had been unable to heat their houses adequately (45%), and had been unable to afford a holiday (78%).

A majority of people in public housing are not in the labour force. A minority are underemployed or unemployed. Overall, some 9% of public housing tenants in New South Wales are receiving Newstart allowance (classed as unemployed) and on some estates it is only about 3% (Department of Housing statistician 2004, pers. comm. December).<sup>7</sup> The vast majority of public housing tenants are not required to, or able to, participate in the workforce, and of those that are required to, 30% do so (Wood 2004: 2). The majority are aged or disabled pensioners (more than 50% combined), or sole parents. As Phibbs and Young point out, "... as clients of the public housing system they are relatively poor performers in the labour market. (If the situation were otherwise, they would not pass the income test that is an eligibility requirement.)" (2005: 31). That is, public housing tenants are marginal to the labour market in comparison with people in the other housing tenures.

Randolph and Murray (2004) analyzed 2001 census data to profile the employment status of public housing tenants in Sydney. Less than a third were in the labour force. See Table 3.

Housing is much less of a factor in predicting unemployment rates than aggregate demand levels, and government policy settings that had progressively abandoned full employment as goal (Mitchell & Muysken 2004). For example, there have been large variations in unemployment rates in a particular locality before, during and after a recession, but little fluctuation in tenure type.

Table 4 indicates unemployment rates in two local government areas in Sydney that contain a fairly high proportion of public housing. Although the Fairfield/Liverpool district includes many public housing units, its unemployment rate has fluctuated over time in line with economic conditions. Macroeconomic factors are much more important than any housing or location effects on unemployment rates.

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<sup>7</sup> Some of the large inner-Sydney estates (for example Waterloo) have a high proportion of older residents.

**Table 3: Employment status of adults living in public housing, Sydney 2001**

Employment status	Sydney public housing tenants		Sydney residents	
	N	%	N	%
Employed full-time	17,166	13.1	17,166	39
Employed part-time	12,360	9.4	12,360	16.9
Employed, hours not stated	2,139	1.6	2,139	1.8
Unemployed	11,420	8.7	11,420	3.8
Not in the labour force	83,555	63.7	83,555	33.4
Labour force status not stated	4,470	3.4	4,470	5.2
Total persons	131,110	100	131,110	100

Source: Randolph and Murray (2004).

**Table 4: Unemployment rates in Fairfield and Liverpool**

Year	Proportion
1996	16.2%
2001	14.1%
2003	9.2%
2004	6.3%

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics.

Tenure type is indicative rather than causative of employment status. People are more or less sorted into tenures by the amount of resources and level of income they have. Tenure is a de-facto indication of employment status and work history. Once housing is allocated or chosen it might have some independent effect (for example, if one moved to a remote part of the state or a place with a higher unemployment rate, one may have less chance of getting a job). But these locational effects – while important – are one set of effects among others such as educational level, skill level, local labour market characteristics, and macroeconomic factors like aggregate demand.

### Disincentives to work

There is some debate as to whether the provision of public housing increases the propensity to be or stay unemployed because of disincentive effects related to income rules and rents, or remote location of housing. Insofar as public housing is fixed in space, it can affect employment options if it is remote from job opportunities. For example, if a person is allocated a house in Cranebrook in western Sydney, and does not own a car, they are relatively remote from major employment centres and reliant on buses. Hulse and Randolph (2004a) found that public housing tenants could face greater workforce disincentives than private renters because of issues around gender, age, family responsibilities, and length of time out of the workforce and an income derived from social security payments.

### House prices

Bridge and others (2003) looked at the interrelationship between house prices in one region and higher than average unemployment in another. That is, work, jobs and high house prices in one region may ramp up unemployment in other regions as those who cannot afford it leave high-cost job-rich areas for a lower housing cost but higher

unemployment area. This means that the unemployed or not working are 'exported' from high housing cost regions and concentrated in low-cost regions. Some of these low-cost regions are host to public housing.

People might be pushed away from areas with better employment opportunities by rising housing costs. Those participating in the Housing as a Human Right Project often mentioned being forced to move further away from Melbourne or regional centres. "People spoke of areas that used to be affordable and no longer were ... They described having to move to outlying suburbs where housing was affordable but jobs, services and transport were limited or non-existent. One young man reported that he and friends had moved out of Shepparton to find cheaper housing, but had attracted the ire of social security. Dave said "...then Social Security's on our backs, "Why aren't you getting a job", but it's a Catch 22. The only place we're gonna get a place to live is outside Shep. The only place we're gonna find work is IN Shep!" (Nissim 2004: 30). This illustrates the tension between housing affordability and proximity to job opportunities. Lack of transport that allowed people to get to and from work was mentioned especially in relation to small towns where there was only, one bus service a day however it did not run before work hours, but got into the town (Tatura) at 10.30 am. These comments indicate that there may be a spatial mismatch effect in such areas, or at least significant barriers as people were forced further outwards into smaller rural towns. As Angela in Melton (a satellite suburb of Melbourne) succinctly put it, "... the further out you get the cheaper it is, so that's where people on a lower income tend to go" (quoted in Nissim 2004: 29).

### **Effective marginal tax rates**

There is some debate as to whether the way public housing is provided creates a disincentive effect to (the small minority) of public housing tenants who are actively required to look for work.<sup>8</sup> Hulse and others found that there are very high effective marginal tax rates applied to a public housing tenant's earnings if they take on work. They explain this concept: "effective marginal tax rates (EMTRs) ... refer to the percentage of each additional dollar of income that goes on tax and withdrawal of various types of income support and other financial benefits. High EMTRs can provide disincentives for people to enter paid work or to increase their income from paid work since they receive little benefit by way of extra income to spend." (Hulse and others 2003: ii). For example, if a public housing tenant starts to work, their rent goes up proportional to gross income for every dollar earned, Centrelink benefits are lost in part or whole once the person earns more than \$62 a fortnight. Costs associated with workforce participation – transport, food, and clothing – also increase.

The 'stacking' of various benefit withdrawals often means that a person may face real disincentive effects if their income is only going up in real terms very slightly. In some household scenarios, a person can actually lose income if they take on work. Australia's mix of Commonwealth social security payments including rent assistance, tax rebates, and state-based schemes such as housing subsidies ('rebated rent'), interact chaotically. Public housing tenants face a severe loss of income because they lose at

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<sup>8</sup> The vast majority of public housing tenants – some 90% – are on pensions and not required to look for work. Only 9% are on Newstart payments (NSW Department of Housing, *Annual report 2002-2003*).

least one dollar in every four beginning with the first dollar they earn (Hulse and others 2003: 21). This is because their rent is income-related, most paying 25% of gross income in rent (to a maximum of the deemed market rent for the dwelling). The majority (56%) of the public housing tenants in the Hulse and Randolph study were concerned about the impact of getting a job on rents (2004: 29). Nevertheless, half of the public housing tenants thought they would be better off if they earned more from paid work and their rents went up. See Table 5.

**Table 5: Public renters' perceptions of rent setting and work disincentives**

	Agree (%)	Neither agree nor disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Total (%)
There's no point in getting a job or working more hours if my rent goes up.	35	19	46	100
If I get a job or work more hours and my rent goes up, I'd still be better off.	49	16	35	100

Source: Hulse and Randolph (2004a: 30); N=57.

### Penalising

Some of the participants in the Housing as a Human Right project confirmed a view that there are real disincentives to work in the public housing and social security system. One woman gave up her job because 'she couldn't afford it'. Trish from the Thornbury Indigenous women's group said: "... on the one hand, you've got these welfare reforms that say we've got to get women back to work, but on the other hand you're penalising them, when they do get work, even if it's part time work. It's not worth them working" (quoted in Nissim 2004: 39). Libby, a public housing tenant, explained the interrelation between her rent, social security payments and wages: "I got a job at Forges. I worked there for six months. They [the Office of Housing] put my rent up to nearly \$300 per week, and then paying my gas, electricity and water, I had \$10 to my name every week. So I gave up my job because I couldn't afford it...it was the wages and everything. I'm spewing I had to give up but...it was either lose my kids because I couldn't afford to dress them and feed them, lose the house because I couldn't afford to pay for it, or lose my job. So I chose to give up the job" (quoted in Nissim 2004: 39). Others were reportedly working cash in hand or even stealing to 'get ahead'.

Likewise, in response to a question in an interview in Phibbs and Young's study, one tenant explained the 'poverty trap' built into the system (Phibbs & Young 2005: 51):

- I: So does that figure in your thinking? When you're thinking about work, do you take the rent policy into account?
- Mary: Yes. Well, the rent policy and the Centrelink policy, so most people don't want to work for three dollars an hour, besides it probably isn't worth your while, and it doesn't really have to be constructed that way because other countries don't – it's a poverty trap.

This theme (of part time or casual work not being 'worth it') recurred in other interviews as well. However, other interviewees, while aware of the high effective marginal tax rates, preferred to work despite these, for reasons such as

improving their self-esteem, getting out of the house or setting an example to their children (Phibbs & Young 2005: 53).

### **Location**

Location of public housing may make it more difficult for a person to access work. Some housing estates may be remotely located (for example, Cranebrook or Minto, on the fringes of Sydney) and located in low labour demand regions (for example, in some country areas in western New South Wales or coastal areas like Taree). On the other hand, many of the largest estates are extremely well located (for example, Waterloo, which is very close to the Sydney central business district and near a major train station; the ring of inner-Melbourne high-rise estates) and are situated in low unemployment areas. However, there is little data available to allow for a comparison to be made between estates and the issue is more complex than location. The unemployment rate in Waterloo is 16% (all residents); this is a theoretically job-rich area. Randolph and Murray (2004) found that working public housing tenants in Sydney were less likely to live in the local government area where they worked (33.6%), compared with all Sydneysiders (28.5%).

However there might be a mismatch between the skills of the tenants and the needs of the employers (rather than a spatial mismatch).

Is there a 'spatial mismatch' effect, where willing workers are located away from areas where jobs are relatively available? Or do people move away from an area because there isn't any work in the first place and they can't afford to live there? Or do they live in areas with low unemployment rates but still can't get a job? The 'spatial mismatch' hypothesis has received particular attention in the 1990s, after having first been put forward by economist John Kein in 1968, in the USA where the low-income and poor housing status of people is highly correlated with race, i.e. being Afro-American. In a survey of the research undertaken in the 1990s Ihlafeldt and Sjoquist (1998) found that most studies supported the hypothesis. They added that the phenomenon was more striking where poor Afro-Americans were highly concentrated together in neighbourhoods and lacking access to good mass transit; and, further, that the phenomenon might be a problem specific to big cities. Their conclusion has been supported more recently by other analysts, like Allard and Danziger (2003) who found that (white and nonwhite) social security recipients in Detroit who lived close to work opportunities were more likely to work and less likely to stay on social security than those social security recipients who lived further away from jobs.

Croce (2001) surveyed the issues in an Australian context for National Shelter in 2001: she found there was a greater divide between people who could access a full range of opportunities because of their position in housing and labour markets, and those who could not do so – a process of socio-spatial polarization.

In a Melbourne study of the mismatch between where low-income people live and work currently underway, Dodson suggests that there is a connection between inequalities in labour markets and inequalities in housing markets that are having exclusionary effects (Dodson 2004: 16):

Labour market opportunities for those in outer locations, particularly the declining industrial areas on or near the fringe of the metropolitan areas are thus likely to be more constrained than are the opportunities for centrally located households. Given

that it is those households at the lower end of the labour market who are most vulnerable to adverse economic and labour market shifts, it is this group who are most likely to draw on direct government assistance, whether for income or for housing (or both).

This study is not looking specifically at the situation of public housing tenants.

Phibbs and Young (2005: 40) found most people who moved into public housing felt that after moving they were closer to employment or employment opportunities. Some tenants who had moved further out, for example from a middle-ring to an outer suburb of Brisbane, were aware that they or their children might have greater difficulty in finding or getting to and from work (Phibbs & Young 2005: 55). Some tenants started to study after their housing was allocated, which would make them more employable. Impacts of public housing provision on employment were mixed, according to Phibbs and Young.

Hulse and Randolph (2004a) found that most unemployed (public and private) renters in their study did not think that their area of current residence made getting a job more difficult. However, responses varied by proximity to the central city: most respondents living in outer Sydney thought living there made it more difficult to get a suitable job (2004a: 31). Moreover, public housing tenants thought that living in public housing made it difficult to move to areas with more work (see Table 6).

Locational disadvantage was one of the three main difficulties to getting a job mentioned by the 400 unemployed renters in Hulse and Randolph's study.<sup>9</sup> The public housing tenants in this study identified location as the third difficulty in getting a job, with 51% identifying it as a factor: the main factor mentioned was age discrimination (identified by 65%), and then lack of skills or self-confidence (identified by 61%). A half of the public housing tenants said they would choose moving to another area to get a job over staying where they were with no job (Hulse and Randolph 2004a: 44).

### **Pockets**

Labour demand in a region is a key factor that affects employment opportunities. Higher unemployment exists where the number of jobs within a local labour market is much greater than the number of unemployed persons looking for work. These ratios vary across space; for example, the number of jobs per person searching for a job is much smaller in northern New South Wales than in Sydney's Lower North Shore. If demand does not exceed supply, unemployment will always be above a frictional level (when people change jobs). Without active labour market programs this will in all probability be the case, given that, the market rarely soaks up all unutilized labour without active government intervention.

There are major pockets of unemployment in certain regions. Employment and unemployment are not distributed evenly. These regions can have mixed tenure types and do not always correspond to a tenure type associated with unemployment (for

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<sup>9</sup> Locational disadvantage in this context referred to there being not enough jobs in the areas where the unemployed renters lived, living too far away from areas where there were jobs, and employers being reluctant to taking on people who lived in particular areas (Hulse and Randolph 2004a: 40).

example high levels of public housing). High unemployment regions can also contain high levels of private rental (for example, middle-ring Sydney suburbs such as Canterbury and the far North Coast of New South Wales) or high levels of homeownership (for example, some country areas where incomes may be low but housing is cheaper to buy, like Manila, Broken Hill or Barraba in rural New South Wales).

Jobs and apprenticeships (particularly in manufacturing or utilities) have reduced or disappeared because of industrial restructuring. For example, public housing estates such as Elizabeth (South Australia), Broadmeadows (Victoria) or La Trobe Valley (Victoria) are “failed” industrial areas (Burke 2001: 32) These estates were built to house workers in proximity to industrial centres, but when the demand for labour in manufacturing collapsed in the 1970s and 1980s, the tenants living on the estates became unemployed.

### **Movement and sorting**

Regional employment variations do matter (Bradbury and Chalmers 2003). High unemployment rates in a region do not always drive people away to areas of greater job opportunity – in fact, the higher the rate of unemployment, the less likelihood of moving. To put it another way, a lot of the movement of unemployed people is *between* areas with relatively *similar* unemployment rates. There is also a lot of movement of unemployed people within areas with low unemployment rates. They concluded that the lower the unemployment rate in any given area, the more likely someone is to exit from payments (Bradbury & Chalmers 2003). Those seeking work tended to gravitate towards such areas while those not required to seek work tended to seek lower housing cost areas. There might be a lock-in effect in high unemployment locations as a person may simply not be able to afford to move.

### **Stability**

Conversely, others argue that security of tenure might benefit a tenant trying to find a job. Phibbs and Young (2005) find that (quoting Bryson 2000) greater mobility can make it harder to find a job and keep it. Certainly, without stable housing it is hard to maintain the necessary documents and wardrobe, etc., to go job hunting. Phibbs and Young do report positive effects created by housing stability. People interviewed reported being able to address their issues, take up study or move into employment. One man in their study was a former boarding house tenant who had moved 8 times in two years before moving into public housing. His housing costs were significantly cheaper after the move. After moving he reported better self-esteem, got a full-time job and started paying off his debts (Phibbs & Young 2005: 55).

Some of the people interviewed for the Housing as a Human Right project reported similar impacts. Bec, a young Richmond woman explained that: “Adequate housing is absolutely fundamental for your health and also for your employment prospects. If your accommodation is uncertain, you’re not in the position to be able to hold down a job or follow through with a course of study... there’s just such as relationship between stability in where you live and your sense of being secure and able to live your life without threat of eviction...” (quoted in Nissim 2004: 41).

Hulse and Randolph (2004a) found that most unemployed public housing tenants in their study thought that being in public rental housing helped them look for work by giving them a sense of security. See Table 6.

**Table 6: Public renters’ perceptions of the link between security and flexibility associated with tenure**

	Agree (%)	Neither agree nor disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Total (%)
This type of rental has helped me look for work by giving me a sense of security.	51	23	26	100
This type of rental makes it difficult to move to areas with more work.	60	18	23	100

Source: Hulse and Randolph (2004a: 33); N=57.

### Endemic unemployment

Entrenched unemployment and underemployment is a fact of life in many Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development countries (Mitchell and Muysken 2004). Global forces, aggregate demand as well as macroeconomic settings are much more of a factor in determining employment than housing type or even location. By and large, those living in public housing are on the periphery of the world of waged work; they are in effect in ‘excess’ to demand (Forrester 1996).

In summary, there is little evidence of a spatial mismatch effect or demand deficit for the type of labour that could be provided by public housing tenants. Many are in fact working part-time and casually, but are on part-payments of a Newstart Allowance or a pension. Others are retired or have a disability. The reduction in blue-collar jobs and apprenticeships has had a real effect on entrenching longer periods of unemployment, especially for older men and youth.

Private renters receiving rent assistance are marginally more likely or less likely to become employed than public housing tenants. (The evidence varies: see, for example, Wood (2004), compared with Burke, Aspin and Short (2001).) Those receiving rent assistance are less likely to be long term unemployed, older or disabled.

Stable housing might have some positive benefits for those who have been homeless or moving around a lot to find and keep a job, and might also allow people to do other sorts of non-waged work such as look after their children more effectively. Those who want to work might face locational disadvantages, and major skill disadvantages because of their education and lack of unskilled or entry level jobs in general.

## Health

Some researchers (Ambrose 2000, 2001a, 2001b; Wilkinson 1999; Phibbs & Young 2005) suggest that causal links between health conditions and housing can be easier to demonstrate. Others say that there is a “complex interrelationship with other factors” (Bridges and others 2003) or that “direction of causality between housing and health is often unclear” (Waters 2001: 2). Most studies conclude the best indicator of health overall is socioeconomic status (regardless of tenure type). As Ambrose (2001a: 2) notes, “the interface between living conditions and health is a complex one and it was accepted ... that it would be futile to search for any simple ‘cause/effect’ relationships” in the course of study.

Phibbs notes that there appears to be little quantitative work on this subject in Australia (Phibbs & Young 2002: 6). Waters (2001) is an exception, subjecting census data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics 1995 national health survey to multivariate regression analysis. Waters compares homeowners and renters, and as such public housing renters are included in the renter category. Phibbs and Young (2005) found that once people were housed in public housing, they reported improved health.

### General health and visits to the doctor

Waters (2001) finds that in general, renters have worse health than home purchasers or owners. In her study the landlord type was not able to be isolated so the report does not report on public housing renters’ (as opposed to all renters’) health. Waters does mention that in a study of the impact of socioeconomic disadvantage on health in Adelaide, “Geddes et al. (1993) found that socio-economically disadvantaged people with access to public housing tended to have better health outcomes than those in private rental accommodation” (cited in Waters 2001: 21). Waters found that renters were significantly more likely than outright owners to have visited a doctor in the last 12 months (odds ratio 1.18 with a 95% confidence interval of 1.08–1.29).

Phibbs and Young surveyed and interviewed public housing tenants when they had just received a public housing allocation and six months later. In regards to Medicare use, they found, for the Brisbane public housing tenants surveyed, that light users of Medicare tended to increase their use while heavier users reduced their use over the period (2005: 61-62).

**Table 7: Changes in the use of Medicare services before and after moving into public housing**

	Average services per month before public housing	Average services per month after public housing	Average benefits per month before public housing	Average benefits per month after public housing
Total sample (N=130)	1.92	1.86	\$60.96	\$58.66
Light users <sup>a</sup> (N=42)	0.46	0.95	\$13.46	\$28.88
Heavy users <sup>b</sup> (N=22)	4.32	3.39	\$152.36	\$106.23

a Users where average services used per month before public housing is less than 1.

b Users where average services used per month before public housing is greater than 3.

Source: Phibbs and Young (2003: 8); authors’ analysis of data provided by the Health Insurance Commission.

They also found that 18% of tenants reported their health was ‘much better now’ than 12 months ago, 23% ‘somewhat better now’ while 44% reported their health was ‘about the same’, after moving into public housing. Beneficial effects cited by respondents were a better diet, healthier eating, improvement in self esteem, and reduced stress (Phibbs & Young 2005: 61).

### **Smoking**

Waters found that the odds of smoking were 3.5 times higher for renters (public and private) compared with outright owners (2001: 14). Renters also reported a higher number of serious health conditions than owners.

### **Nutrition**

Moving into public housing often means an improvement in income for many tenants formerly paying higher rents in the private rental market. Phibbs and Young (2005) found that self-esteem and income improvement led to improvement in nutrition as well. For example, a number of respondents reported that after the move into public housing they had more money to buy healthier foods. Other respondents reported they now had access to a kitchen that allowed them to prepare fresh food (Phibbs & Young 2005: 59).

A report on heroin users and better housing by Bessant and others (2003) supports this finding. They concluded that there is a potential “... for safe and secure housing to increase the well being and social capacity of heroin users. In terms of physical wellbeing, access to housing is shown to result in a range of general health benefits, including better nutrition and improved hygiene” (Bessant and others 2003: ii).

### **Damp**

Certain health conditions appear to be correlated with certain housing environments. Cold, damp and mould are the biggest housing environment factors affecting health of occupants (Mullins 2001b). For example, respiratory illnesses might be exacerbated by damp, cold, mouldy or humid housing. Detrimental effects on respiratory health affect children living in these housing environments more than adults (Wilkinson 1999; Ambrose 2001a). There is more evidence showing health benefits of improving housing for children than there is for adults (Wilkinson 1999).

### **Temperature**

Also pertinent to Britain is a correlation between the interior housing temperature and winter deaths, especially older people (Wilkinson 1999). Cold would be a health threat for those sleeping rough or living in areas where the temperature does drop to low levels such as Victoria, southern New South Wales, and Tasmania or in desert regions. There is also a much greater heat threat to health in Australia. One study found that after adjusting for the effect of air pollution, thermal extremes currently contribute to the deaths of approximately 1,121 people a year in the Australian cities and 18 people a year in the New Zealand cities studied (Kjellstrom 2003, citing a study by Guest Morgan, Moss, Woodward, McMichael 1996). One example from overseas involving the effects of heat on older people is the estimated deaths of some 10,000 over-75-year-olds in France during a heatwave in the summer of 2003. Part of the reason for the high number of deaths was the lack of air conditioning and dehydration (Lichfield

2003). Studies of heat-related illness show that in areas where heat variation is highest, deaths increase, while in other areas that are often hot, mortality related to heat waves is lower as there is some measure of adaptation (Chestnut, Breffle, Smith, & Kalkstein 1998).

According to those interviewed for the Housing as a Human Right Project, cold was a constant companion as many had either inadequate heating in their homes or tried to use the heaters less because of the cost. One man in Yallourn North said “I don’t [use the heaters] any more. I just switch the telly on and the light from the telly lights the room up. I go and get a nice blanket and put it around me. And if it gets really too cold, well, there’s only one place to go – to bed” (Nissim 2004: 12). Many of those renting said their houses were not up to standard and had poor insulation. Many felt they had no option as real estate agents told them “you get what you pay for” (Nissim 2004: 13). Most of the complaints came from private renters. Since public housing units in Victoria often include central or other forms of heating, the problem of cold could be alleviated by a move into public housing.

### **Toxins**

There is a clearer relationship between housing and disease where housing materials are toxic. Specific diseases or harm can be caused by exposure to certain substances which are used in the construction of a dwelling. Some examples of negative health effects caused by toxic housing materials or bad design are: neurological impairment in children caused by lead in the paint; lung cancer caused by radon (in Britain); asthma linked to dampness; injuries sustained or death because of unsafe design, fire or lack of repairs; and the lung diseases associated with exposure to asbestos (Wilkinson 1999).

With all the above examples, it is the housing type rather than the provision of housing assistance that is the cause of negative health impacts. Any housing, regardless of tenure type, could contain toxic materials. Rent assistance gives some individual choice over the type of housing, but low-income people are often confined to the worst housing and may suffer worse health outcomes. Older stock might be hotter, colder, damper, or more likely to contain toxic materials.

### **Indigenous health**

Some subpopulations have higher morbidity and mortality rates than others. The most glaring example of this in Australia is the much higher morbidity and mortality rates among Indigenous Australians compared to non-Indigenous Australians. Poorer housing might be just one factor in this. However, Moran notes that relatively less is spent by governments in Australia on Indigenous housing than in the USA or Canada. Housing assets can be maintained in the USA even if rent arrears exist (Moran 2000)<sup>10</sup>, which is not the case in Australia, where many Indigenous housing providers struggle to undertake repairs and maintenance because of rent arrears. However, repairing

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<sup>10</sup> This higher level of recurrent funding permits housing organizations in the USA to undertake maintenance regardless of rental arrears. This contrasts markedly with the difficult position of many housing organizations in Australia, who are forced by financial constraints to delay maintenance on houses until rent arrears are paid (Moran 2000).

houses and providing water, electricity, etc., is not enough to improve health among Indigenous Australians (Moran 2000).

A study by Walker and others (2001) looks at possible wellbeing indicators in relation to a regeneration program in Western Australia which involved the relocation of Indigenous tenants. The authors emphasize the importance of housing conditions: “[p]revious studies (Walker 2001) have shown that a far greater percentage of Indigenous households live in public housing than their non-Indigenous counterparts and that they are more likely to live in substandard housing or experience overcrowding and other negative consequences associated with poor housing condition”. The new houses provided by the regeneration program were considerably bigger and able to accommodate large Indigenous families.

### **Mental health**

Mental health is correlated with (not necessarily caused by) certain tenure types. For example, lack of secure housing, or any housing, is strongly correlated with very poor mental health and general health. Studies of homeless people repeatedly show this. Hodder, Teesson and Buhrich (1997) found that 75% of a sample of homeless people were living with a mental illness. Homelessness is also associated with poorer nutrition and worse outcomes for children’s cognitive development (Phibbs 2002).

### **Stress and overcrowding**

The study by Phibbs and Young (2005) asked people to report how they felt after being moved into public housing. Respondents reported a decrease in stress levels after moving, as often prior to moving they had been sharing with friends or relatives sometimes in overcrowded dwellings. Overcrowding can be detrimental to mental health because of the lack of privacy and space, and the exacerbation of conflicts between occupants. They also reported that their new housing was quieter and afforded more privacy (Phibbs & Young 2005: 40).

The benefit of allocation of public housing to people with a mental illness have been identified as creating a greater sense of independence and stability and helped alleviate financial stress (O’Brien and others 2002) in their assessment of the Victorian Housing and Support Program. Stability of tenure contributes to the rehabilitation process and increases accessibility of support and treatment. Robinson (2003) concurs on the importance of rehabilitation and ‘working through’ of past trauma is necessary to allow a homeless person to ‘settle’. Support is often crucial. O’Brien and others (2002) found that the provision of support from a sympathetic worker and availability of psychiatric treatment is vital to the ongoing well being of the person and maintaining a tenancy.

To summarize, in examining the links between housing and health, the evidence is characterized by weak casual links and contradictory empirical findings (Wilkinson 1999). Some assert that health has no relationship with tenure at all (McDonald & Merlo 2002). Others assert that tenure is a predictor of health, independent of social economic status and many other factors, “suggesting that tenure is not simply acting as a marker of income or social position” (Waters 2001: 21). Waters acknowledges that housing condition could be a factor; however, she notes that this data was not available for her study (Waters 2001: 21). Phibbs (2002) suggests that, even though health and

housing has been the most studied area, results are doubtful, since socioeconomic factors cannot be controlled for. Waters' study, on the other hand, asserts that socioeconomic factors can be controlled for and are not good predictors (Waters 2001: 21). While decent housing is necessary for good health (Mullins & Western 2001b; Waters 2001) and housing conditions can have effects on health (such as to exacerbate asthma or respiratory illness), in Australia major diseases are not caused by housing factors (unless they are diseases directly caused by toxic building materials). Poor health is correlated with low incomes, which means that poorer public housing tenants and private renters exhibit worse health outcomes than most homeowners or well-off private renters. In this way certain tenures are associated with poorer health but this does not necessarily mean the tenure type causes poorer health, although substandard housing does exacerbate certain conditions. Given that public housing is often of a better quality than low-end private market rental housing, it could provide a healthier environment.

### **Regeneration**

Ambrose (2001a) followed the self-reported health of residents before and after regeneration of the neighbourhood in a study of the Stepney Health Gain project 1995-2000 in the East End of London. Before the regeneration, housing was in a poor condition. The research team commissioned to undertake the study surveyed a randomly selected 10% of the residents of two estates. The health problems identified were: coughs and colds, aches and pains, asthma and bronchial problems, digestive disorders and depression. The areas in Stepney were compared to another area in Paddington. The comparator study found that the rate of 'Illness Days' in Paddington was about one seventh that in Stepney (Ambrose 2001a: 6). A year after the completion of the regeneration, the original residents were re-interviewed. The study found a seven-fold reduction in self-reported 'Illness Days' (Ambrose 2001a: 1), meaning that Stepney resident's health was now on a par with the control group in Paddington. There was a documented decrease in visits to doctors after housing conditions improved. "The results of the 'after' survey indicate very clear and dramatic improvements in health standards" (Ambrose 2000: 1). While there was still some argument about housing's causal effect, "nevertheless evidence gathered from many studies shows clear patterns of association between poor conditions – for example cold, damp, infestation, noise, poor air quality and overcrowding – and an increased incidence of ill health" (Ambrose 2001a: 2).

### **Family functioning**

When families are unable to function well, the social and economic costs are extended to the wider community (Walker, Ballard and Taylor 2003: 30). Bridge and others (2003: 129) quote conclusions from a US study that showed that young people from non-intact families were, compared with children from intact families, more than twice as likely to drop out of school early, two to four times as likely to have a child outside marriage before the age of 20 (girls), and one and a half times to be unemployed in early adulthood (boys).

Low-income parents are more likely to neglect and abuse their children, and to engage in inconsistent, erratic and harsh discipline, and they are less likely to be nurturing and to closely supervise their children (Weatherburn & Lind 1998). These behaviours are

exacerbated by exposure to social stress, such as absence of a supporting partner, but softened where there are strong social supports, such as close relationships with family or neighbours.

The nature of a parental relationship is also correlated with youth crime. Weatherburn and Lind (1998) suggest that disrupted parenting might provide a pathway between economic stress and crime. This view is reinforced by analysis of data that links areas that are economically disadvantaged, with reports on child neglect or abuse, and youth crime: NSW postcode areas with high levels of poverty have higher levels of child neglect or abuse reported to the Department of Community Services, and postcode areas with high levels of child neglect or abuse have high levels of youth involvement in property and violence offences. Child neglect had the greatest causal influence on youth participation in crime in these areas: it did this because disrupted parenting enabled children to be more susceptible to the influence of 'delinquent' peers. For this reason young people from poorer families living in poorer neighbourhoods are more likely to become involved in crime than young people from poorer families who do not live in poorer neighbourhoods. This has implications for the management of public housing estates where there are concentrations of poorer people, more than for public housing dispersed in socioeconomically-mixed neighbourhoods.<sup>11</sup> Weatherburn and Lind suggest that crime prevention strategies should include family and child support programs aimed at preventing and social stress disrupting the parenting process.<sup>12</sup>

Public housing tenants have spoken of being able to leave their children with a neighbour and be with others in the same situation. Security of tenure and affordable rent may also free sole parents from the necessity to look for work or to work too many hours. This might mean they can spend more time caring for their child. Lack of stress about paying private rent could be one of the reasons sole parents who are public housing tenants work less hours a week on average than those in private rental housing (Burke & Hulse 2001: 4). Phibbs and Young (2005) also reported that after allocation of public housing, some parents reduced working hours in order to spend more time with their children.

The data on impact of public housing on family functioning is very limited. We could assume that the stability associated with public housing, compared with the private rental market, offers a sounder base for less 'dysfunctional' families (better relations with children, and better relationships with partners). This could be tempered by location of the dwelling in estates characterized by lack of socioeconomic diversity, lack of diversity of household type, and criminal behavior, etc.

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<sup>11</sup> Bridge et al. (2003: 97) note that there is no Australian study of the long-term relationship between being raised in public housing and the criminal activities of the person as an adult.

<sup>12</sup> They also suggest policies to reduce the level of economic stress and to prevent geographic concentration of poverty.

## Community-connectedness

Communities can contribute to the positive wellbeing of individuals and families by providing social networks and creating a sense of belonging and cohesion (Walker, Ballard and Taylor 2003: 30). Two of the Australian studies gave some consideration to indicators of community-connectedness, cohesion or engagement.<sup>13</sup>

Mullins and Western considered a number of factors to measure the existence of a community, which they defined as a group of people living in the same locality who have close-knit ties (Mullins & Western 2001b: 9). Those factors were:

- having friends or family members living in the same suburb
- doing your main shopping in the same suburb you live in
- having a doctor who is based in the same suburb you live in
- attending a public meeting about a local issue in the previous five years

Respondents who were better off economically and were better educated had less community ties. On the other hand, Mullins and Western found an association between social exclusion indicators and community: people's lives are concentrated locally because of disadvantage (Mullins and Western 2001b: 22). Public housing tenants had the strongest community-connectedness than people in the other tenures, because they were more likely to have strong local ties. This was related to many public housing tenants being clustered together geographically (on estates).

In Burke and Hulse's survey of sole parents over a third (38%) of those in public housing reported they felt 'part of the local community' (see Table 8), though Burke and Hulse note that, typically, between 25 and 40% of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed to various questions about community, which could reflect a lack of engagement (2002: 38). Their respondents showed a low level of community engagement or social capital: most had low participation in activities like local clubs or voluntary work (see Table 9). The findings on social capital measures in this study contrasts with those of Mullins and Western: the difference might be explained by the profile of respondents in the two studies – Mullins and Western analysed a broader data set, whereas Burke and Hulse surveyed sole parents who have specific time commitments (caring for children without a partner) and financial circumstances that might affect community engagement.

Nearly half (46%) of the Brisbane respondents in Phibbs's survey reported that when they moved into public housing, it was into a better neighbourhood (Phibbs & Young 2005: 65). The single most important factor (21%) in coming to that opinion, when respondents were interviewed after moving in to a newly-allocated house, was that it was safer. The single most important factor (15%) in coming to that opinion, when respondents were interviewed some six months later, was that they had better neighbours (Phibbs & Young 2005: 66).

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<sup>13</sup> Bridge and others (2003: 97-115) discuss the concept of social capital and its relation to housing, and note that housing can contribute to social capital and that social capital can shape housing outcomes.

**Table 8: Sole parents' attitudes to aspects of local community**

Statement	Percentage of sole parents strongly agreeing or agreeing with the statement	
	Public housing tenants	Private renters in receipt of Centrelink rent assistance
People are friendly and help each other	52.2	55.8
The community has a distinct character; it's a special place	32.7	34.9
An active community	30.8	30.2
Range of community and support groups	47.3	47.9
People feel safe and secure	36.0	48.1
Good age, income and social mix	64.1	62.8
I feel part of the local community	38.7	31.1
	N = 1,046 valid cases	N = 644 valid cases

Source: Adapted from Burke and Hulse (2002: 39, Table 17).

**Table 9: Sole parents' involvement in their local community**

Statement	Percentage of sole parents strongly agreeing or agreeing with the statement	
	Public housing tenants	Private renters in receipt of Centrelink rent assistance
Have close friends/family living locally	68.2	70.5
Do most of my shopping locally	81.8	89.0
Children go to school locally	71.9	71.4
Take part in local clubs/organizations	20.1	16.8
Go to local cafes, pubs, restaurants	27.4	34.2
Go to local church, temple, mosque	15.5	10.4
Try to keep informed about local issues	61.0	64.3
Do voluntary or community work locally	16.9	13.0
Take active interest in, or vote on, local issues	31.7	25.5
	N = 1,046 valid cases	N = 644 valid cases

Source: Adapted from Burke and Hulse (2002: 40, Table 18).

## Conclusion

This section summarizes the positive and negative nonhousing outcomes associated with public housing, for each of the six areas discussed. It then makes some final comments on the issues of causation and correlation to clarify the nature of those outcomes with the provision of public housing.

Living in public housing is strongly correlated with poorer outcomes in crime, education, employment, health, and family functioning. This is because being in receipt of housing assistance generally, indicates other things about a person. For example, that they are on a low income, might not be working, might be homeless, etc. Being of low socioeconomic status is correlated with being a public housing tenant; current eligibility policy ensures this.

In regards to crime, public housing tenants are much more likely to be criminal offenders. Government data show that violent crimes and thefts occur much more often in and among people living in a relatively small proportion of postcode areas (as a proportion of all postcode areas) and these areas have high proportions of public housing. Tenants on low incomes (public housing and private renters) are more likely to commit offences than other groups, such as homeowners.

There is a weak causal effect between crime and public housing, however. Certain crimes are more prevalent among those in public housing, but other crimes are not. There is little evidence that public housing tenancy itself causes crime and there is a great variation in crime rates across public housing estates. There might be a 'concentration' effect, where criminals can consort more easily in areas of disadvantage – this is a proven risk factor for crime. There is little evidence that environment impacts one way or another, since there are few empirical studies showing any effect of urban renewal or physical modifications on crime. The best predictors of crime are poor parenting, low educational levels, low socioeconomic status, youthfulness, maleness, and associating with offenders.

While some crimes are correlated with coming from or living in an area characterized by poverty and disadvantage, the tenure or housing conditions do not in themselves cause crime. There are 'neighbourhood effects' where clustering of offenders occurs. The commonly cited risk factors for criminal activity are not housing tenure type but are related to parental neglect. Most criminals who commit pretty crimes are on low incomes with low levels of education, and as such, more likely to rent publicly or privately rather than be homeowners. Therefore while certain crimes are more often committed by public housing tenants or low income private rental market tenants, the tenure type is a minor indication of being at risk of offending rather than a cause of criminal behaviour.

Poorer educational attainment is correlated with being from low socioeconomic status households, and having parents with low educational attainment. Residents of public housing are in overrepresented in these categories. Higher educational attainment is associated with high socioeconomic status, and parents who are homeowners or purchasers and have a high level of education themselves. Individual ability is an

independent factor, but quality of schooling and easy access to higher education can also make a difference.

There is some evidence for a positive causal effect between public housing provision and better outcomes in education. In general changes in housing might have a small positive effect where there was a situation of overcrowding or noise, and this is removed. This can marginally improve educational outcomes. Housing stability (i.e. being allocated public housing after a period of moving around) might improve educational outcomes if this means the child attends the same school continuously. However, the best predictor of educational attainment is parent's level of education, socioeconomic status and innate ability.

There is a strong correlation between being a public housing tenant and not being in the labour force. There is an allocation effect here, insofar as public housing tenants are somewhat more disadvantaged, more disabled and older than those able to sustain themselves in the private rental market. There is no agreement among researchers as to whether private renters on rent assistance or public housing tenants are more likely to be employed. There are suggestions that the interaction between social security payments and public housing rent rules might cause a 'disincentive effect' for those that have to seek or wish to seek employment, as Hulse and others (2003) model in their paper, and tenants' comments confirm this (Phibbs & Young 2005; Nissim 2004). Macro factors (such as changing demand for labour) are important and override individual's desires.

There is a weak causal effect between public housing residency and employment. It is doubtful whether providing public housing has any effect on the likelihood of gaining employment, except where public housing is located a low employment area. However, there is little evidence of a 'spatial mismatch' effect in Australia. Macro factors might be a better predictor of unemployment, as are individual characteristics such as age, disability, education/skill level. Nearly all public housing tenants and those on the waiting list are *ipso facto* (because of eligibility rules) either unemployed, underemployed or not in the labour market. There might be some disincentive effects built into the social security and public housing system that need addressing because the current rules create effective high marginal tax rates.

There is a strong correlation between living in public housing and being in poorer health. Again, socioeconomic status explains a lot of this, as do diet, exercise, age and other lifestyle factors. Those allocated public housing are more likely to have a disability or suffer a mental illness (and allocated because of that). Being a low-income private renter is also correlated with poorer health.

The review of existing studies indicates that there is stronger beneficial impact of housing assistance on health outcomes, especially where: a formerly homeless person has been housed; a person with a mental illness is housed and given adequate support; and spacious, warm, dry housing is provided or housing is upgraded to eliminate cold, wet and mould. Some minor health problems (especially respiratory illnesses) will improve a little as housing improves. Major diseases are better predicted by socioeconomic status or genetic predisposition. The only exception is when toxic materials in the housing itself directly causes disease (e.g. asbestosis, lead poisoning).

The data on family functioning is quite limited. While we might infer that public housing could give a household greater stability, the empirical work has not been done. What work has been done is of a generic sort, linking issues of parenting and ‘dysfunctionality’ of families with windows to criminal behaviour among youths in distressed neighbourhoods – but these associations cannot be linked to public housing as such, but, rather, to neighbourhoods (such as public housing estates) characterized by a number of social exclusion indicators.

The few empirical studies that have considered community-connectedness give mixed messages. On the one hand, in general we could conclude that public housing is associated with a relative higher degree of community connectedness than the other housing tenures (Mullins & Western 2001b). However, the cause of this is likely to be the concentration of much public housing in estates, which, linked with poverty, has a ‘localizing’ impact on residents’ experiences. On a speculative basis, we might also consider the high proportion of older people among the public housing population also has a ‘settling’ effect. Such speculation would fit with the findings of Burke and Hulse (2002) that show little community engagement by sole parent public housing tenants.

Being a public housing tenant is correlated with poorer socioeconomic outcomes, when compared with other tenure groups, in particular homeowners, who tend to be more affluent. Those in public housing are needy and more likely to be poorer, less educated, sicker, older, unemployed and more disabled than other tenure groups. Providing public housing might have some negative effects (i.e. putting someone in an area of concentrated disadvantage such as a dysfunctional public housing estate where they are exposed to criminal behaviour or harmful drug use) which might impact on them badly (for example, they might be the victim of a crime). On the other hand, providing public housing might have strongly positive impacts (if a previously homeless mentally ill person can receive the housing and support they require, or stable housing allows a child to stop moving schools). The qualitative research indicates that there are more positive than negative nonhousing outcomes arising from the provision of public housing.

In summary, a strong ‘base’ such as public housing allows people to improve their circumstances, and especially assists children in continuity of schooling. Qualitative research indicates that most recipients of public housing are pleased with their housing, and that they view it as a better option than an often expensive and volatile private rental market. While public housing itself is not the only factor relevant to quality of life for public housing tenants, the studies indicate it is overall a positive factor.

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