



SHELTER
because housing matters

Mental Health and Housing

Position Statement

October 2021

Our call to action

Together, Queensland Alliance for Mental Health (QAMH) and Q Shelter are calling for coordinated action by both the Department of Communities, Housing and Digital Economy and Queensland Health, to commit to increased investment in supported accommodation programs. This is to ensure better access to safe, supported and long-term housing for people with lived experience of mental illness particularly in Queensland's regional areas.

Specifically, we are calling for more funding to appropriately resource and expand existing programs, which have already demonstrated success across Queensland. Therefore, we recommend:

1. That increased funding for head-leased housing options is available for targeted access by people with lived experience of mental illness.
2. That growth funding is available for subsidised housing options aimed at addressing the needs of people with lived experience of mental illness.
3. That support agencies addressing the needs of people with lived experience of mental illness are encouraged and supported to engage directly with Community Housing Providers to help shape their Growth Plans.
4. That increased funding for support programs is provided that ensure a focus on tenancy sustainment and that also have scope address diverse wellbeing domains depending on assessed needs.
5. That the partnership between Department of Communities, Housing and Digital Economy and Queensland Health is strengthened to:
 - ensure increased housing and mental health literacy across funded services
 - advance preventative approaches to people leaving institutions
 - develop shared service delivery frameworks and models across Housing Service Centres, the Hospital and Health Services (HHS), and community-based mental health services.

Our calls to action are not independent but rather work hand in hand to provide people with appropriate supports and programs to meet their needs.

At a state level, the 2021-2024 Queensland Housing and Homelessness Action Plan provides a new opportunity to expand integrated responses to housing and support needs among people who have lived experience of mental health. At a national level, it is essential that responsibility for the provision and integration at the interface of mental health and housing services is clearly articulated in the [National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Agreement](#) (due November 2021) and the existing [National Housing and Homelessness Agreement](#).

Why action is needed

Australia's current mental health and housing systems are inadequate and crisis-driven, perpetuating instability for individuals and reliance on more costly services for governments. In a recent media release, QAMH CEO Jennifer Black said, "having the security of safe and affordable housing is a major factor in supporting individual mental health and wellbeing, particularly at a time when we see high rates of mental distress brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic."

The pandemic has had a significant impact on the mental health and substance use of the nation, with people experiencing higher rates of anxiety and stress, pressure on relationships, workplace changes and job losses. Queensland has experienced a significant reduction in the availability of affordable housing, as rental properties have been reclaimed by returning owners to reside in, use as holiday rentals or sell for profit in the current house price spike. Regional Queensland has been significantly impacted with vacancy rates reduced to less than 1% in most towns¹, severely impacting the availability of suitable housing options for people with a mental illness who are at risk of homelessness. Figures from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) on the delivery of specialist homelessness services to nearly 14,000 clients in June 2021 in Queensland, reveal that 3,395 had a mental health issue and 871 reported a problematic alcohol or drug issue.²

¹ Real Estate Institute of Queensland. (2021). Extremely low vacancy rates endure across 80% of Queensland. Media Release: REIQ. <https://www.reiq.com/articles/vacancy-rate-report-mar-21/>

² Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2021). Specialist Homelessness Services: monthly data. AIHW. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/homelessness-services/specialist-homelessness-services-monthly-data/contents/monthly-data>

Member organisations have highlighted particular concern for culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities³ and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples⁴ who are more likely experiences mental distress, and be at risk of, or experience homelessness compared to other Queenslanders. This is partly due to the unique challenges they face, such as language barriers, cultural differences, stigma and experiences of trauma, making it difficult to secure housing and access mental health services.

The substantial efforts of housing providers, support providers and the Government agencies that fund them are acknowledged. We welcome the Queensland State Government's recent commitment of \$1.9 billion to increase supply and upgrade stock of social housing and the \$1 Billion housing investment fund. However, further investment is needed to meet the diverse and growing needs of Queenslanders.

Member organisations report that regional towns are overlooked and undersupplied when it comes to increasing social housing stock. For example, the last budget provided up to 10 houses in Mackay yet up to 480 people are currently on the waiting list, many of whom have been waiting for 12 months or more. A similar number of properties are required across Central Queensland (CQ) and Rockhampton, where the vacancy rate is 0.4%. A member in Rockhampton (Anglicare Central Queensland) reports that nearly one third of people accessing their support service following a suicide attempt have experienced a situational crisis that is associated with their housing circumstances. The current waitlist in Townsville is approximately 2,000 while Cairns is also experiencing significant housing issues with almost no vacancy, partly due to people relocating from southern states and the conversion of rental accommodation into places used for holiday stays, such as Airbnb's. Another experience unique to Cairns is people from Torres and Cape relocating to Cairns despite low vacancy rates. People may also face barriers in the private rental market including lack of rental history and discrimination. Members also report that single men living with a mental illness are vulnerable to the current housing crisis even though they do not always fit identified target groups.

³ SBS Learn & St Vincent de Paul Society. (2018). Fact Sheet: Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Peoples' Experiences of Homelessness.

https://www.sbs.com.au/sites/sbs.com.au/home/files/sbs_learn_frh_cald_fact_sheet.pdf

⁴ Queensland Government. (2019). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing Action Plan 2019-2023.

https://www.chde.qld.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0012/5214/atsihousingactionplan.pdf

In April 2021 Mental Health Australia (MHA) published a [position paper](#) outlining the priority policy reforms required to improve access to appropriate housing for people with lived experience of mental illness across the nation.

These reforms were informed by The [Trajectories](#) Research, followed by a Delphi consultation process with key stakeholders, including QAMH and Q Shelter, supported by MHA in partnership with Mind and Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI). The paper concluded: “We know the solutions; it is now time for governments to act.”

These priorities are:

- Increase availability of housing options
- Support to sustain tenancies
- Early intervention and prevention.

In consultation with members, QAMH, in partnership with Q Shelter, has reviewed these reforms to identify the challenges and solutions specific to Queensland (See Attachment 1). Queensland already has in place several successful programs and best-practice initiatives that must be better resourced and expanded to address these challenges.

Key success factors in solutions

We know that successful models are those that are person-driven, and recovery focused, support choice, and are localised but align with a national, evidence-based approach. Better communication with decision makers, and cross-sector collaboration and service integration is required to support local sustainable housing solutions for people with lived experience of mental illness.

Some important elements from across these programs include:

- Examples of housing growth through developing new supply which is fit for purpose
- Models that deliberately integrate housing and support through direct provision or through highly structured partnerships (such as Common Ground, Sustaining Young Tenancies and MADEC in Mackay).

- Support programs with a key focus on sustaining tenancies and which link to various housing choices through bespoke partnerships but which do not necessarily generate new housing supply.
- Service integration responses that seek to integrate inputs across diverse organisations based on the assessed and identified needs for a person or household with lived experience of mental illness.
- Workforce development to increase housing literacy among mental health specialists, and mental health literacy among housing and homelessness specialists is also important so that shared frameworks about sustainable housing outcomes are developed.

ATTACHMENT 1: Examples of successful housing and support initiatives across Queensland

1. Integrated housing and support

Housing First model

Common Ground Housing Model provides people experiencing chronic homelessness with access to supportive housing. According to the evaluation of the initiative⁵, Brisbane Common Ground has saved the community approximately \$13,100 per annum, per tenant. The program has also led to reductions in service use resulting in significant savings across the health, criminal justice, and homelessness sectors. While the outcomes are positive, at present the model can only benefit a small number of people and requires investment to expand.

Housing and support models

MADEC is investing retained funds to build 26 modular homes in Mackay, which people who are seeking affordable and sustainable housing can rent. The homes will provide low-cost rental accommodation which will support people to build a rental history and enter the open market in the future. This approach presents significant financial risk for the organisations investing capital in the project; however, it does offer a long-term solution. Capital investment is urgently required to implement approaches such as this in other regions across Queensland.

2. Specialist support that links to housing options

Integrated mental health support with a housing focus

Assistance with Care and Housing (ACH) is designed to “support people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, to access appropriate and sustainable housing as well as community care and other support services specifically targeted at avoiding homelessness or reducing the impact of homelessness.” Funded by the Australian Government as part of the Commonwealth Home Support

⁵ Parsell, C., Petersen, M., Moutou, O., Culhane, D., Lucio, E., & Dick, A. (2015). *Evaluation of the Brisbane Common Ground Initiative*. Institute for Social Science Research: University of Queensland.
<https://issr.uq.edu.au/files/4003/BrisbaneCommonGroundFinalReport.pdf>

Program, the ACH program, delivered through Footprints Community and currently expanding across South East Queensland, from Sunshine Coast to Ipswich and Gold Coast.

[The Mental Health Demonstration Project](#) trialed “a new integrated housing, mental health and welfare initiative to assist people in social housing to sustain their tenancies whilst managing mental illness or related complex needs.” The Project was a collaborative approach between Queensland Health, the (then) Department of Public Works and Housing, and NGO partner Footprints Community. The Project was conducted over a two-year period and evaluated by the University of Queensland. The service model included:

- case coordination and case-management approach
- non-clinical, psychosocial support and tenancy support provided through Footprints
- clinical mental health support provided HHS
- educational component which included e-modules on mental health, and housing and homelessness to enhance capacity of Housing Service Centre staff.

Evaluation revealed almost all tenants:

- experienced improved housing situations
- received fewer complaints, breaches and warnings (indicators of tenancy problems)
- improved relationship with their housing office
- accessed and engaged more with clinical mental health services
- Experienced significant improvements in health and social functioning
- Experienced improved mental health (felt happier, more confident, less dependent on medication, set achievable goals, felt more capable of managing tenancy). A combination of clinical and non-clinical health support provided throughout the Project, and reduced anxiety about their tenancies contributed to improvements in their mental health.

This is an example of a pilot project that successfully integrated and coordinated housing, mental health and psychosocial supports to achieve improved tenancy, health and social functioning outcomes. The partnership approach of the project between Footprints, mental health and housing was able to provide additional benefits for people accessing services and further demonstrated the value of cross sector collaboration.

The Transition from Correctional Facilities Program provided across Queensland by Richmond Fellowship Queensland (RFQ), Bridges Health and Community Care, and Neami offers recovery focused support services (including support to find and maintain housing) for people with a mental illness released from an adult correctional facility. RFQ report, the program faces ongoing challenges, including limited accommodation options for people leaving incarceration and those that become homeless. This has been exacerbated by the indefinite closure of crisis accommodation (Pindari, OzCare) and the permanent closure of Roma House. To help confront these ongoing challenges, the program has:

- Used some Queensland Health COVID-19 funding for short term accommodation.
- Worked more closely with other NGOs (Hart4000, Micah, Sisters Inside) to source and maintain accommodation.
- Identified limited but innovative options, one example is the ‘tiny houses’ project funded by Annerley Baptist Church/ Community Plus+ that supports people who are homeless with a safe space to stay for no cost.

Individuals at Risk of Homelessness Program (IRHP) are mental health community support services funded by Queensland Health in five catchment areas across the state. The programs support adults living in boarding houses, hostels or crisis accommodation referred by the HHS Mental Health Services. The IRHP is designed to offer a range of non-clinical psychosocial wraparound supports that focuses on breaking the cycle of homelessness and supporting individuals to transition to secure and stable tenancy and housing.

RFQ, a non-government provider of IRHP, highlighted key challenges of the program. For example, the low vacancy rates in Townsville (close to zero) creates significant problems for their IRHP client group who generally have little to no income and are unable to compete with the open market. Placing people in accommodation that suits their needs is another ongoing challenge, particularly for single people and families. In some cases, people have to stay in accommodation that is too small, in a poor location, is substandard or is designed for short term stays such as emergency accommodation. More access to suitable housing is required to support people while longer term accommodation is identified.

Sustaining tenancy program

Brisbane-based [Sustaining Tenancy Program](#) is delivered in partnership between Community, Bric Housing and Brisbane Housing Company. Funded by the Brisbane City Council's *Pathways out of Homelessness* Program, it provides support for people living in the Brisbane City Council catchment area to find long-term housing, manage a new tenancy or sustain an existing one. The program also helps people navigate pathways to a range of health services including mental health, and alcohol and other drugs support, offering targeted psychosocial approaches for people living with a dual diagnosis of addiction and mental health conditions. This program addresses a gap in service delivery across housing, homelessness and dual diagnosis space.

Community's Sustaining Tenancies Team received additional funding under the COVID-19 Immediate Support Measures as an Emergency Housing Action Response (EHAR). This enabled Community to provide flexible outreach mental health and alcohol and other drug services, supporting 16 people out of homelessness and into secure dwellings. It also linked people with their local community to access health and wellbeing supports and resulted in a 97% decrease in rental breach notices. The assertive outreach model engaged people with complex social issues that did not want to engage previously.

Sustaining young tenancies program

This [program](#) is delivered by Brisbane Youth Service in collaboration with several housing providers provides intensive support to assist young people to find, get and keep housing. The quality and intensity of support is essential to achieving sustained tenancy outcomes with some young people also sustaining private rental market tenancies. The program has been evaluated to demonstrate a high level of tenancy sustainment and therefore reduced homelessness as well as strengthened partnerships between support and housing providers.

Localised responses

The Junction Clubhouse in Cairns has extensive local knowledge yet is largely underutilised when it comes to addressing the housing crisis. Recognising the social issues in the community and the impact this can have on stable housing, the outreach team works closely with people to help maintain leases and overcome challenges. While outside its area of focus, the community organisation recognises the need to provide this type of support. Working with local organisations to identify solutions is essential.

3. Service integration

[Service Integration Initiative](#) is part of the four-year housing action plan operating across nine regions in Queensland. Funded by the Department of Communities, Housing and Digital Economy, the initiative is auspiced by a number of place-based organisations, supported by Q Shelter in providing the backbone support role. Focused on providing coordinated responses to households requiring supports from a range of services in addition to housing, the initiative to date has supported more than 1,100 households, from singles to households of up to 10. Initial data found that one third identified as living with problematic or unmanaged mental illness, and 16% have both problematic or unmanaged alcohol and other drug and mental health issues, demonstrating the association between housing, alcohol and other drugs, and mental health.

Formalised structures across the service system including alcohol and other drugs, mental health and aged care, have been established through this initiative in breaking down silos and creating a potential platform for other programs to leverage and be part of a wider network to tackle the mental health and housing issue together.

4. Workforce development

[Q Shelter Foundation Training Series](#) is a “series of online sessions that provide a core platform of skills training that form the basis for the Queensland housing and homelessness sector.” Topics covered include:

- tenancy sustainment
- trauma informed care micro-training
- housing and homelessness sector introduction
- residential tenancies training.

The intention is to offer people entering housing and support roles, including allied sectors such as mental health, with a foundation and literacy in housing and homelessness solutions. This recognises that many people present with housing and homelessness needs to diverse organisations such as neighbourhood centres, mental health and disability support services.

Attachment 2: More about capital subsidies and head-lease programs

Head leasing arrangements

This involves organisations renting private rental properties and on-letting the property to a low income or disadvantaged tenant. Not-for-profit community organisation MADEC is using this option to provide solutions to the housing crisis in Mackay. The organisation is currently renting 12 properties, including multiple bedroom dwellings, to provide shared accommodation. This solution can provide safe shelter for some, however, has limitations due to cost, insecurity of tenure, and because of the intensity of support needed to match people for shared accommodation and sustain those tenancies.

Capital investment

Capital investment through the not-for-profit sector allows for growth projects that deliver housing solutions to people who face barriers to private tenancies. Current capital investment through the Queensland Budget is acknowledged. It is important however to ensure a growing funding pipeline to address the need for highly subsidised capital projects that can be integrated with support services to deliver long-term, secure, affordable and appropriate housing solutions.

Where there is capital investment, the opportunity exists for targets to deliver housing solutions for people with lived experience of mental illness. This proposal suggests that each region needs targets for housing supply that is available and accessible to people with lived experience of mental illness and that these approaches need to include integrated support to sustain tenancies and address varied wellbeing domains.

A range of organisations are equipped to undertake capital projects including community housing providers in partnership with support providers. It is suggested that a capital funding stream is considered for growth projects that are intentionally inclusive of people with lived experience of mental illness and where support partnerships are featured based on current and emerging evidence.

Attachment 3: Who we are

Queensland Alliance for Mental Health

Queensland Alliance for Mental Health (QAMH) is the peak body representing the community mental health and wellbeing sector in Queensland.

QAMH advocates and supports member organisations to foster better outcomes for people experiencing mental health issues. It is committed to promoting the unique value the community mental health and wellbeing sector offers to the health care continuum within Queensland.

QAMH is proud to work with its members and key partners, to influence system reform and enhance the contribution that the community mental health and wellbeing sector plays in people's lives.

Q Shelter

Q Shelter is the peak body representing the housing and homelessness sector in Queensland. Q Shelter's vision is that every Queenslander has a home. In actioning its vision, Q Shelter's purpose is to lead the sector in solutions that address the housing and homelessness needs of vulnerable Queenslanders. Q Shelter supports its members and stakeholders improve policies, programs and practice in response to the needs of people experiencing, or at risk of homelessness. Q Shelter works with Government, the community sector and private sector to achieve solutions that make a positive difference.

Q Shelter provides training and professional development opportunities that builds strength and capacity across the sector, tools and resources to assist organisations to be effective, as well as supporting the linkage of regional networks in working together on state-wide issues and opportunities. Included in the Queensland Government's Housing Action Plan 2021-25, Q Shelter provides the backbone support role for the state-wide Service Integration Initiative, as well as providing Regional Care Coordination Facilitators in Cairns, Mackay, Brisbane, Redland and Logan.

Contributing member organisations

[Accoras](#) is all about early intervention services that promote long-term good mental health. Accoras get in at the right time to stop serious difficulties from becoming permanent or life-changing problems.

An organisation with truly local roots, [Anglicare Central Queensland](#) is dedicated to leading the way in the community services sector as they pride themselves on empowering and supporting their participants, upholding human rights, and advocating for the removal of unjust structures.

Since 1870, [Anglicare Southern Queensland](#) has been committed to caring for the most vulnerable in the community. Today, Anglicare Southern Queensland continues to provide a wide range of services including mental health and wellbeing programs and supports, and homelessness services across southern Queensland.

As an organisation, [Centacare Far North Queensland](#) has focused on community wellbeing in the broadest sense, not only within the immediate Cairns area but also across the whole of the Far North Queensland region. Centacare FNQ continues to strive to maintain its commitment to supporting and assisting people living within the Far North Queensland community who are most in need.

[Community Queensland](#) supports people to maintain their independence, connect to their community, manage their health and lifestyles, address the challenges and embrace the opportunities life presents.

[Footprints Community](#) is a well-regarded not-for-profit provider of community-based services, working in the community for over 30 years. Footprints Community specialise in working with older people, those that experience disability, mental illness, as well as those who are at risk of homelessness.

[The Junction Clubhouse](#) is a place for people with a lived experience of mental illness to come along, belong and recover. The Junction Clubhouse are a community of people living with mental illness who support each other in our recovery goals.

[MADEC](#) is a local, not-for-profit community organisation, supporting the Mackay region since 1973. They support young people and persons with a disability to be part of the community and empower them to lead rewarding lives.



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[Richmond Fellowship Queensland](#) provides a wide range of programs that keep people healthy in the community including supporting people's transition into the community from hospitals and correctional facilities.

[UnitingCare](#) is a services provider connecting with people in every corner of our community, from Coomera to Katherine, we're here to help address some of the most pressing social issues faced by our communities.