

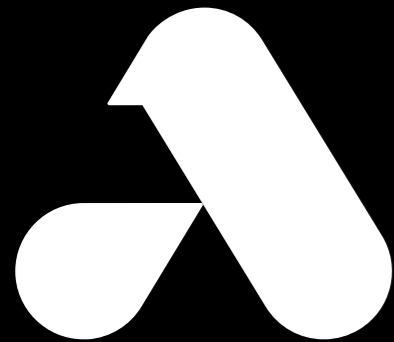


**Anglicare**WA™  
FOR TODAY. FOR TOMORROW.

# COMMUNITY PERCEPTIONS REPORT 2015

## PUBLIC HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS





## ABOUT ANGLICARE WA

Anglicare WA is a not for profit community service organisation. We support people, families and their communities to cope with the challenges of life

Our services assist people with relationship issues, financial problems, and housing difficulties and are available from more than 60 locations around the State – from Kununurra in the north to Albany in the south.

We seek to influence policy makers through advocacy and our work is achieved in a spirit of reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Western Australians.

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Anglicare WA recognises the work of these staff who made significant contributions to the report:

- Research
  - Ian Carter AM
  - Desiree Nangle
- Design and Copy Writing
  - Amber Grant
  - Sam Cecins

Painted Dog, our valuable market research partner, designed and conducted the survey and undertook the data analysis.

We thank all respondents who participated in the survey.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In Western Australia over 10,000 individuals go to sleep homeless every night. The availability and affordability of housing is an increasingly crucial issue facing our State with far-reaching implications for our families, economy and society at large.

However, the level of public awareness and understanding around affordable housing does not necessarily match the importance of the issue. Mapping public perceptions is an important undertaking for organisations in the housing sector. Public perceptions play a crucial role in determining Government policy priorities as well as defining cultural stereotypes and stigmatisms.

Based on a survey of 1031 Western Australians located across the State, the Anglicare WA Community Perception Report: Public Housing and Homelessness strives to:

- Ascertain the level of understanding the community has about what constitutes homelessness and public housing.
- Understand the perception of the causes of homelessness.
- Measure the tolerance towards public housing within the community.
- Assess past experiences with homelessness and public housing.

- Measure the awareness of housing information and services available to the community.

The survey was developed by a reference group within Anglicare WA with guidance from a range of external stakeholders including the Department of Housing. Data collection was completed between November 7 and December 11, 2014 through an online survey. The survey included unprompted questions, which allowed the respondents to speak off the top of their mind, and prompted questions, which asked the respondents to rate or select items from a list.

## HOMELESSNESS

### What is the Public Perception of Homelessness?

The survey found that the majority of the public were sympathetic towards homeless people; however, they were not necessarily well informed about the variety of forms that homelessness can take. The most dominant perception of homelessness was that of a person sleeping rough on the streets. When we asked the survey's respondents what first came to mind when they thought about homelessness, 30% mentioned people living on the streets.

Many respondents gave empathetic answers. Eighteen per cent of respondents mentioned

vulnerability and a lack of support for homeless people, 10% said homelessness was out of the person's control, and 6% said the Government does not do enough to help people in need. However, there was a small group of respondents with acutely negative perceptions of homeless people. Eight per cent of respondents stated they thought homelessness could be self inflicted or the result of bad life choices.

When the respondents were presented with a list of 12 housing circumstances and asked which they believed should be classified as homelessness, street presence remained the most strongly identified form of homelessness - with 95% of respondents. Only 27% regarded someone living temporarily with friends to be homeless. Only 22% regarded someone living in overcrowded housing to be homeless.

### What is the Public's Experience with Homelessness?

A quarter of Western Australians had some sort of personal experience with homelessness. One in ten respondents had been homeless at some point in their lives. Eight per cent of respondents knew a family member who had experienced homelessness, and 14% knew a friend who had experienced homelessness.

### What do the Public Think Causes Homelessness?

The strongest perceived causes of homelessness were financial hardship and relationship breakdown. However, well entrenched stereotypes about substance abuse and mental illness persist across the community.

When asked what they think are the main causes of homelessness, almost half of the survey's respondents mentioned drug and alcohol addictions. Forty-one per cent mentioned debt and a low income, and 41% mentioned marriage and relationship breakdown. Comparatively few respondents were aware of the impact of the high cost of living, with only 16% speaking about costly everyday expenses such as rent and utilities.

When presented with a list of causes and asked to rate out of 10 to what extent each contributes to homelessness, the issue of alcohol and drug abuse was again the strongest response. Ninety-three per cent of respondents agreed that alcohol and drug abuse was a definite cause. Eighty-six per cent agreed that mental illness was a cause.

Eighty-nine per cent of respondents agreed that family and domestic violence was a cause. This included 93% of all female

respondents, and 85% of all male respondents; perhaps reflecting the disproportionate effect of domestic violence on the genders.

## PUBLIC HOUSING

### How is Public Housing Perceived by the Public?

There is a general perception that the quality of public housing is quite low, with some disparity over the perceived cause of this - some people blame the provider, others blame the tenants. Fifteen per cent of respondents said they thought the dwellings were small and their standard of living low, and 13% saying they were high density housing with no privacy.

Many respondents believed that poor management by tenants led to the properties falling into disrepair; 28% of respondents said tenants did not adequately respect the properties, and 6% said that tenants were ungrateful and lacked pride in their home.

Some people were highly positive about public housing. Seven per cent of respondents said it is a community asset that can be highly beneficial to people's survival and future. Six per cent of respondents said they wished there was more public housing available. On the flip-side there were a subset of respondents who believed public housing, and its tenants, were

potentially dangerous to the local community. Eight per cent said public housing was a crime hot spot, 8% mentioned anti-social behaviour from tenants, and 7% mentioned violence and threats by tenants against their neighbours.

### How do the Public Perceive the Impact of Public Housing?

Public opinion is highly polarised when it comes to the impact that public housing has on the community overall.

When asked to rate from 0-10 how positive or negative the effect of public housing was on their community, 37% of respondents said that public housing had a positive influence on the community, with 15% rating it as extremely positive (8-10). However, there was a near mirror image of the opposite perception. Thirty seven per cent of respondents believed public housing had a negative impact on the community, with 14% rating it as extremely negative (0-2).

Respondents who felt public housing had a positive impact on the community generally showed a strong social conscience. When asked why they felt positive or negative about public housing, 16% said it gives people who have experienced misfortune a chance to get their lives on track. Negative feelings towards public housing

were largely attributed to the poor condition of public housing or to perceived indiscretions of the tenants such as substance abuse or exploitation.

### How does the Public Perceive Public Housing Tenants?

While some of the public's perceptions of public housing tenants are accurate, there were points where the consensus conflicted with reality – in particular regarding age and race.

When presented with a list of descriptors and asked to indicate which they felt described a 'typical public housing tenant', 74% of respondents indicated that they would consider a typical public housing tenant to be Indigenous. We know that in reality, a far smaller proportion of public housing residents are Indigenous. Only 32% of respondents said they would consider a public housing tenant to typically be over the age of 50, and 30% said they would consider a typical tenant as someone who lives alone. To compare to current data, the latest Department of Housing figures show that more than half of public housing tenants in Western Australia are over the age of 55, and the 2009 Social Housing Taskforce Final Report (More than a Roof and Four Walls) found that 74% were single (25% single parents). The single largest demographic that makes up public housing residents are single seniors – with 34% of all public housing occupied by someone over 65 living alone.

When it came to the make-up of household structures in public housing the respondents generally

underestimated the proportion of tenants who are single and vastly overestimate the proportion of tenants with multiple adults, such as couple with children and extended families.

### What is the Level of Public Support for Public Housing?

Western Australians largely recognise the need for public housing in the community, but are significantly less likely to advocate for its establishment in their own neighbourhoods.

Seventy-two per cent of respondents indicated that they support the establishment of public housing in the community. Nearly half of respondents indicated strong support. Only 13% of respondents would not support public housing in their community, with 6% indicating strong disapproval. However, when respondents were asked if they would support public housing being built in their neighbourhood only 46% agreed, with only a quarter showing strong support. The number of respondents who would object increased to 38%, with 26% strongly disapproving.

### What is the Public's Experience with Public Housing?

One in six survey respondents had lived in public housing at some point in their lives. The majority of these were housed in Western Australia.

Eleven per cent of respondents had lived in public housing as a child. Nine per cent of respondents had lived in public housing as an adult.

### What is the Public Level of Awareness of Housing Services?

Most Western Australians are aware of Government agencies and departments that provide housing services. There is a much lower level of awareness of not-for-profit agencies and services in the housing sector.

We provided the respondents with a list of housing service providers and asked if they had heard of them. Ninety-three per cent were aware of the Department of Housing and 90% were aware of the Department of Child Protection and Family Services – demonstrating the high level of penetration of Government departments. Conversely, 57% of respondents were aware of Anglicare WA's Family Housing Service; 45% were aware of the Crisis Care Unit; 45% were aware of Family Support; 18% were aware of Shelter WA; and 16% were aware of the Homeless Advisory Service.

When we asked the respondents what their first port of call would be if they needed help with their housing situation a variety of formal and casual options were mentioned. The most common answer was Centrelink with 33% of respondents. Twenty-one per cent of respondents said they would go to their friends or family for help; 20% said they would use the internet; 14% said they would go to a charity; 14% named the Department of Housing and 12% named HomesWest; 6% said they would go to their local Church.

Greater detail on our findings are contained in the following report.

# OUR RESPONSE

Affordable Housing remains a key issue facing Australia on both the State and Federal levels. The Community Perceptions Report: Public Housing and Homelessness has helped to identify and articulate some of the issues that contribute to this crisis.

In response to the findings of the Community Perceptions Report: Public Housing and Homelessness, Anglicare WA has the following recommendations to make:

1. State and Federal Governments need to work towards an agreed approach

in terms of overall targets, capital funding requirements and support services funding for public housing and homelessness support. This should include a flexible but well-funded outcomes framework to be put in place to support people facing homelessness and housing stress.

2. Western Australia needs to set a target of 5% of total housing stock to be public housing by 2025.
3. Strategies to increase housing affordability levels and reduce

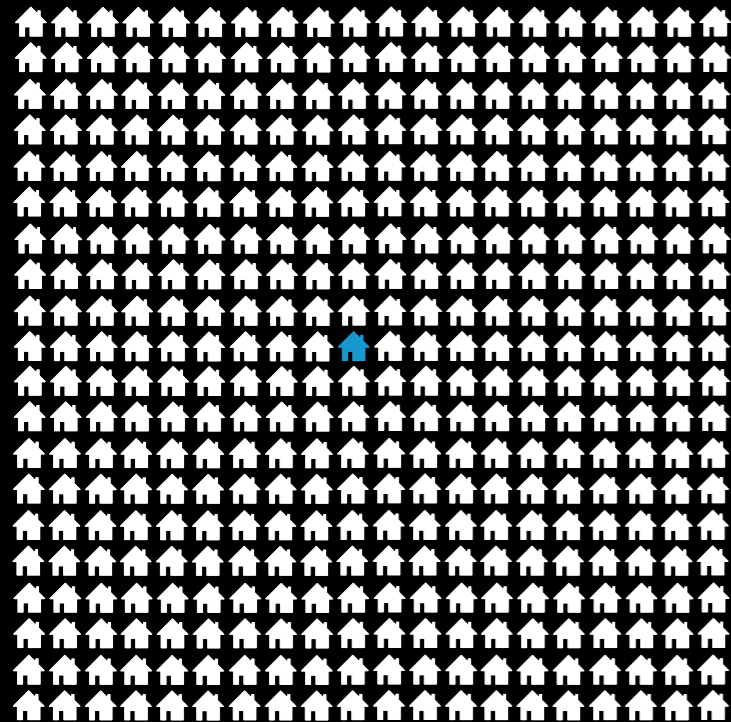
housing stress need to involve all levels of government, the community benefit sector and the private sector.

5. The current processes of taxation review need to ensure that in a tight fiscal environment, one of the major outcomes should ensure an increase in new affordable housing stock across Australia. This includes reviewing Negative Gearing, Capital Gains Tax, First Home Owners Grants and Land Tax and Stamp Duty.

*"I cannot believe that in 2014 there are still homeless people in Australia. It is wrong. Where is the system going so wrong that we are forgetting about a whole section of our society? Where is the support for these people? How are we allowing it to get to the point that people have no homes? Where is the help before that? Where is the mental health? The financial help? HELP and support full stop. I think as a society we should be ashamed."*

- Female, 30-34 years, Pilbara

# BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVE



The most recent ABS Census of Housing and Population (2011) shows that **over 100,000 people are homeless in Australia. That is one in 200.**

Ten thousand of these live in Western Australia.

The availability of affordable housing is amongst the most pressing concerns facing our State.

However, the issues associated with housing affordability are poorly understood by the wider public. Social stigmatisms remain a serious barrier to many attempting to transition to independent accommodation. Mapping the public's awareness

of issues around housing is therefore an important task.

Anglicare WA is one of Western Australia's leading providers of housing and accommodation services. With six specialised Housing services, four Youth Homelessness services, and a Centre for women escaping family and domestic violence – Anglicare WA utilises a diverse range of strategies to address the issue of housing stress.

In 2014-2015 Anglicare WA commissioned Painted Dog Research to conduct an investigation into the perceptions and experiences that Western Australians have with regards to homelessness and public housing.

The primary goals of this investigation were to:

- Ascertain the level of understanding the community have about what constitutes homelessness and public housing.
- Understand the perception of the causes of homelessness.
- Measure the tolerance towards public housing within the community.
- Assess past experiences with homelessness and public housing.
- Measure the awareness of housing information and services available to the community.

The results of that research are contained within this report.

# ABOUT THE RESEARCH

This project was overseen by an internal reference group. Guidance was also provided through external consultation with a range of stakeholders including the Department of Housing.

After the survey questionnaire was drafted for the project, data collection was completed between 7 November and 11 December, 2014. It was conducted through an online survey, which was undertaken by 1031 community members across WA. Recruitment was conducted via online community panels, inviting respondents to take part in the survey.

All of the 1031 respondents were:

- residents of WA
  - o 623 from the Perth Metropolitan Region
  - o 83 from the Kimberley
  - o 77 from the Pilbara

- o 151 from the South West
- o 97 from the Goldfields
- over the age of 18

Data was post-weighted to reflect the population distribution with each region and Metropolitan area based on ABS 2011 Census data.

Of our respondents:

- 50% were male
- 50% were female
- 47% reported working full time
- 28% owned their home outright
- 46% were buying a home or paying off a mortgage
- 19% were renting
- 2% were in public housing

The survey took, on average, 24 minutes to complete. In this report percentages have been rounded and in some instances multiple responses to some questions were allowed. Not all results necessarily add up to 100.

\*Asterisks throughout this report identify statistically significant results between the groups being compared (e.g. female vs. male). This signifies that the difference is unlikely to be due to chance and reflects an important discrepancy.

## KEY FINDINGS ►



# HOMELESSNESS

## WHAT DO THE PUBLIC THINK OF HOMELESSNESS?

### Question:

To begin with, when you think about the term 'Homelessness', what thoughts, words, images or feelings first come to mind?

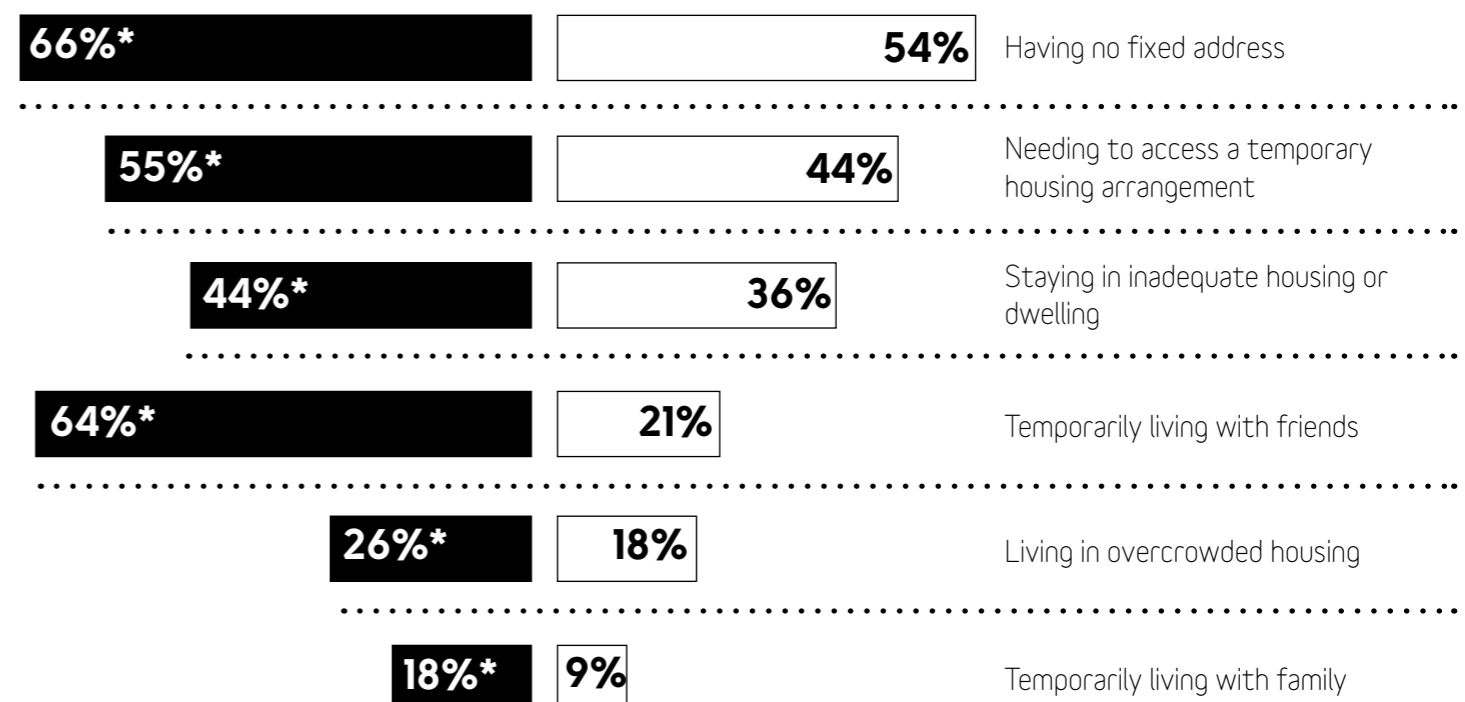
When mapping the Western Australian public's perception of homelessness we found that many people were sympathetic to homeless people, but not necessarily well informed about their experiences.

The most dominant perception of homelessness was that of a person sleeping rough on the streets. When we asked the survey's respondents what first came to mind when they thought about homelessness, 30% mentioned people living on the streets. Respondents from regional areas were significantly more likely to mention sleeping rough; with 46% compared to 28% of respondents from metropolitan areas. On the flipside, 30% of metropolitan respondents mentioned a lack of a fixed or residential address, compared to only 5% of regional respondents.

A clear vein of compassion ran through many of the answers. Eighteen per cent of respondents mentioned vulnerability and a lack of support for homeless people, 10% said homelessness was out of the person's control, 7% said they were sympathetic to homeless people, and 6% said the Government does not do enough to help people in need.

However, there were a minority of respondents who were harshly condemning of homeless people; 8% of respondents stated they thought homelessness could be self inflicted or the result of bad life choices.

### Females tend to strongly associate more circumstances with homelessness than males:



A list of 12 housing circumstances was presented to the respondents, and they were asked which they believed should be classified as homelessness. The results showed some discrepancy between popular perception and reality.

Street presence remained the most strongly identified form of homelessness. Ninety-five per cent of respondents said they

would consider someone sleeping rough outdoors to be homeless. Ninety-one per cent said they would consider someone living out of their car as homeless. However, only 27% of respondents regarded someone living temporarily with friends, known vernacularly as couch surfing, to be homeless. Only 22% of respondents regarded someone living in overcrowded housing to be homeless.

According to the 2011 Census of Housing and Population, 39% of Australia's homeless live in severely overcrowded dwellings and 17% sleep at friend's houses, while only 6% of homeless people sleep on the streets or in improvised dwellings.

In general, women were more likely than men to identify any of the 12 situations as homelessness.

*"The movies have made homelessness a dirty thing. In a lot of cases it's not. It can be a family sleeping in the back of their car, because they cannot find a rental property. It can be a mate couch hopping. It can be a teenager that has run away from home. Single words that come to mind: cold, alone, afraid, scared."*

- Female, 25-29 years, South West

# HOMELESSNESS

## WHAT IS THE PUBLIC'S EXPERIENCE WITH HOMELESSNESS?

### Question:

Have you, a family member or a friend ever experienced a period of homelessness?

**1 in 4 WESTERN AUSTRALIANS** have personal experience with homelessness

**1 in 10** had been homeless at some point

**9%**

Have experienced homelessness themselves

**8%**

Have a family member who has experienced homelessness

**14%**

Have a friend who has experienced homelessness

The majority of Western Australians have no experience with homelessness. Around a quarter have had some sort of personal experience with homelessness, including the direct experience of being homeless, as well as the secondary experience of knowing a friend or family member who was homeless.

Nearly one in ten respondents had been homeless at some point in their lives. Those currently renting or living in public housing were more likely to have personally

experienced homelessness.

Eight per-cent of respondents knew a family member who had experienced homelessness, and 14% knew a friend who had experienced homelessness.

Three quarters of respondents had no experience at all with homelessness.

Relationship breakdown was a common theme in people's experiences of homelessness. When we asked the people who had experienced or knew someone who had experienced homeless to talk about the circumstances surrounding this period, 24% mentioned a break-up. One in ten respondents mentioned an abusive family or living situation.

Financial pressure also featured commonly, with 13% of respondents mentioning a lack of money or savings, 9% mentioning eviction, and 8% mentioning a rental becoming too expensive.

The primary reported impact of homelessness was increased anxiety and depression. Of the respondents who had experience with homelessness, 28% said anxiety and depression was an impact. Often homeless individuals would find their relationships coming under stress as they asked for help and housing from friends and family. Relationship strain was reported by 16% of respondents. Fifteen per cent of respondents mentioned a loss of self worth and 9% mentioned mental breakdown.

### Question:

What, if any, was the impact of this homelessness?

### Impact of homelessness

**28%**  
Anxiety and depression

**16%**  
Pressure or strain on family and friends to help

**16%**  
The experience made me stronger

**15%**  
Lost sense of self worth

**9%**  
Suffered irreparable damage

**8%**  
Led to poor health and living conditions

**5%**  
Unable to keep a job

### Circumstances surrounding personal experiences of homelessness

**24%**

Relationship break-up

**13%**

Had no money or financial support

**11%**

Were in abusive family or living situations

**8%**

Rental became too expensive

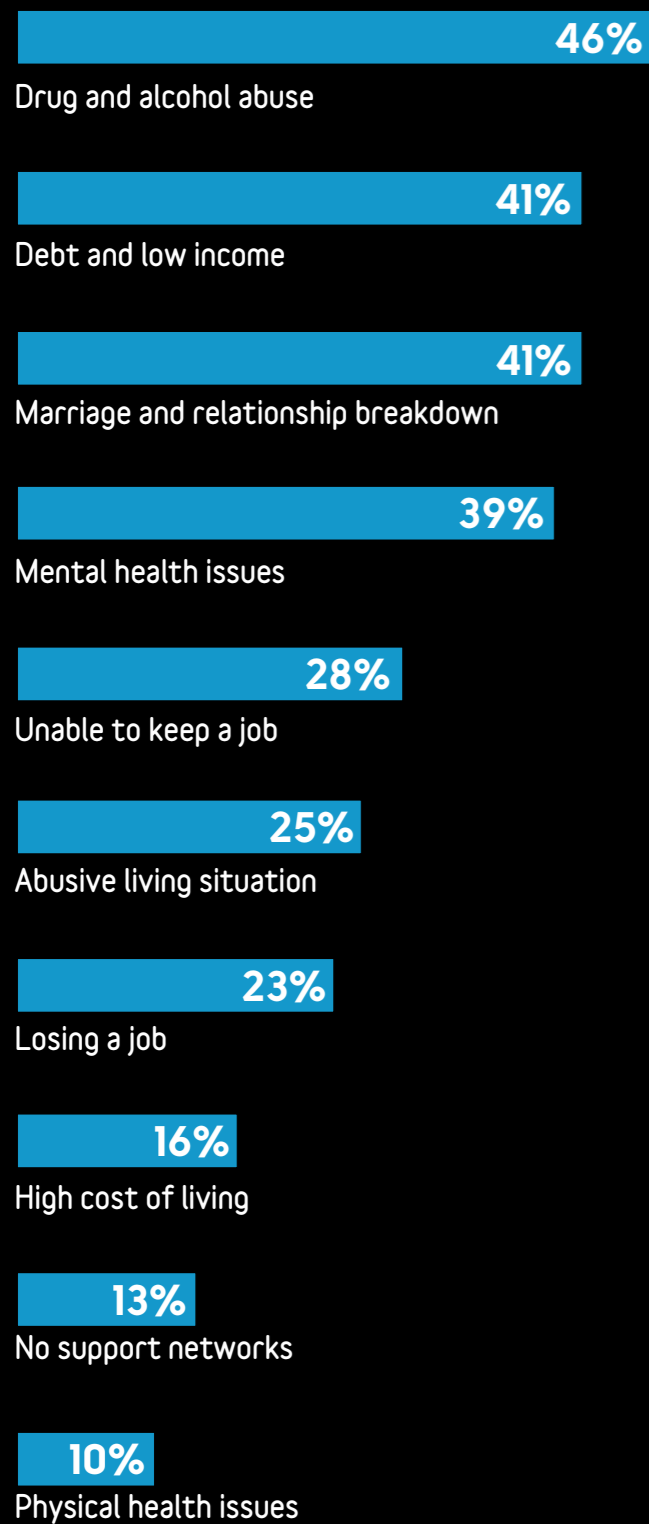
**7%**

Moved and could not find somewhere to stay

# HOMELESSNESS

## WHAT DO THE PUBLIC THINK CAUSES HOMELESSNESS?

Western Australian's top ten perceived causes of homelessness



### Question:

What do you think are the main causes that may lead to someone becoming homeless?

*"Homelessness is often the result of a downturn in the economy, resulting in young people either losing jobs or not being able to secure new jobs. A downturn in the economy also affects older adults through redundancies and lack of opportunities due to age. Family relationships can also be a cause of homelessness for young people as they often don't have jobs. I feel sad to see people pleading for help on the streets of Perth due to homelessness. Their sense of worth must take a dive; thank goodness for those that do their best to help them."*

- Male, 55-59 years, Perth Metro

The Western Australian public demonstrated a clear understanding that financial hardship and relationship breakdown are key causes of homelessness. However, well entrenched stereotypes persist; there is a strong perception that the primary causal factors are drug and alcohol abuse and mental health issues.

When asked what they think are the main causes of homelessness, almost half of the survey's respondents mentioned drug and alcohol addictions. Forty-one per cent mentioned debt and a low income, and 41% mentioned marriage and relationship breakdown. Comparatively few respondents were aware of the impact of the

high cost of living, with only 16% speaking about costly everyday expenses such as rent and utilities.

Women were significantly more likely than men to mention relationship issues as causes of homelessness. Forty-six per cent of women named relationship breakdown as a cause, compared to 36% of men, and 31% of women named abusive relationships, compared to 19% of men.

There remained a minority of respondents who answered with

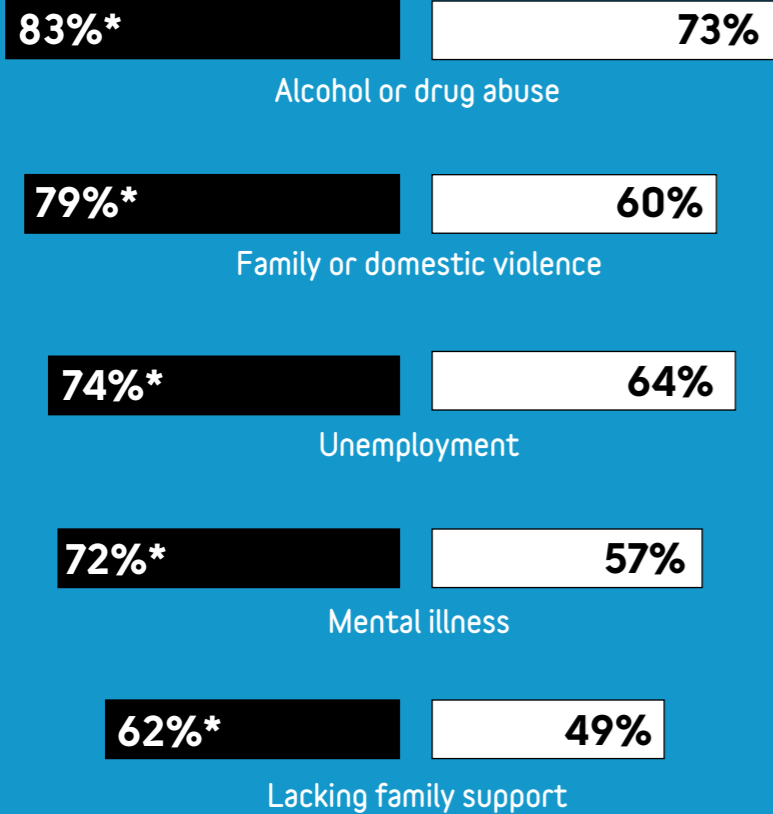
strong condemnation of homeless people themselves. Nine per cent of respondents named poor choices as a cause, and 7% named gambling.

When presented with a list of causes and asked to rate out of 10 to what extent each contributes to homelessness, alcohol and drug abuse was again the strongest response. Ninety-three per cent of respondents agreed that alcohol and drug abuse was a definite cause. Eighty-six per cent agreed that mental illness was a cause. This

demonstrates a wide gap between accepted public opinion and academic and professional consensus in the field. While it is generally accepted that there is a correlation between homelessness and substance abuse, the nature of the relationship is highly contentious. The series of five Journeys Home Research Reports indicate that substance abuse and homelessness are likely correlated, but not necessarily causal. Each contributes to the other to some degree, and both may be concurrent symptoms of certain



Women and men's perceptions of contributors to homelessness vary



Footnote: percentages based on those who rated items as 8-10 on 0-10 scale representing the item 'definitely does' contribute to homelessness

*"Homelessness is caused by a number of complex, interrelated issues such as relationship breakups, job loss, poor health, substance abuse and mental health issues. I imagine being homeless must be a terrifying experience - being subject to violence, sickness, misunderstanding by members of the general public."*

-Female, 50-54 years, Perth Metro

childhood circumstances or trauma. There are large proportions - Journeys Home suggests 72% - of the Australian homeless population who do not regularly use street level drugs.

Ninety per cent of respondents agreed that financial hardship was a cause.

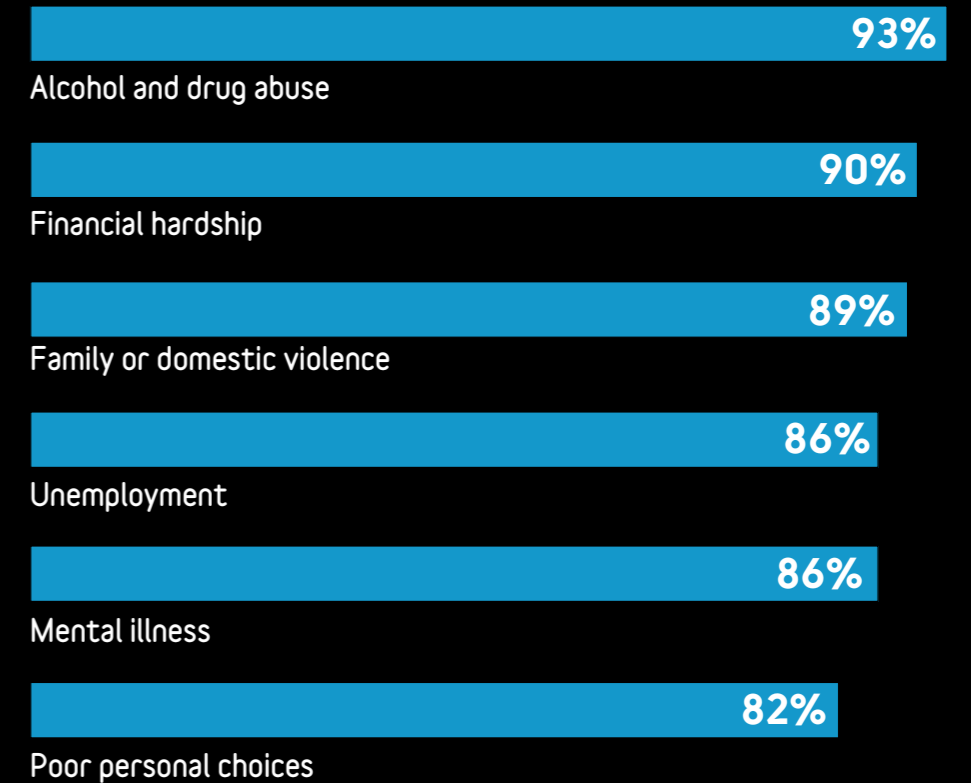
Eighty-nine per cent of respondents agreed that family and domestic violence was a cause. This included 93% of all female respondents.

The role of support structures and networks in preventing homelessness received some recognition from respondents. Seventy-nine per cent agreed that a lack of family support was a contributor, and 55% agreed that a lack of Government support was a contributor. This was particularly pronounced in single parent families. Seventy-four per cent of respondents in single parent households strongly agreed that a lack of family support was a key cause.

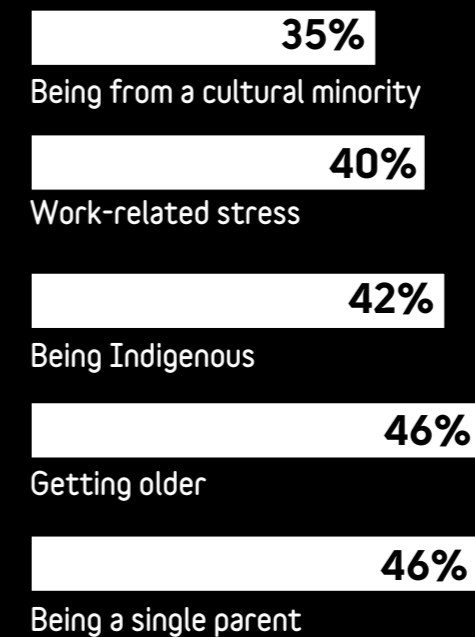
Eighty-two per cent of respondents said that poor personal choices were a contributor to homelessness.

The role of cultural and racial marginalisation was met with a broader range of responses. While 42% of respondents agreed that being Indigenous could contribute to one's likelihood of homelessness, 26% said that it definitely does not. Similarly, 35% of respondents said being from a cultural minority of any kind could contribute, while 24% said it definitely does not.

Most likely circumstances to be seen as contributors to homelessness



Least likely circumstances to be seen as contributors to homelessness



Footnote: percentages based on combined ratings of items as 6-7 and 8-10 on scale of 0-10 with 6-7 representing the item 'does' contribute to homelessness and 8-10 representing the item 'definitely does' contribute to homelessness

# PUBLIC HOUSING

## HOW IS PUBLIC HOUSING PERCEIVED BY THE PUBLIC?

Most people understand that public housing is accommodation provided by the Government. There is a general perception that the quality of public housing is quite low, with some disparity over the perceived cause of this – some people blame the provider, others blame the tenants.

When asked what came to mind when thinking about public housing, 30% of respondents said subsidised accommodation and 12% said it is supplied by the government.

The standard of public housing was not regarded favourably, with 15% of respondents saying they thought the dwellings were small and their standard of living low, and 13% saying they were high density housing with no privacy.

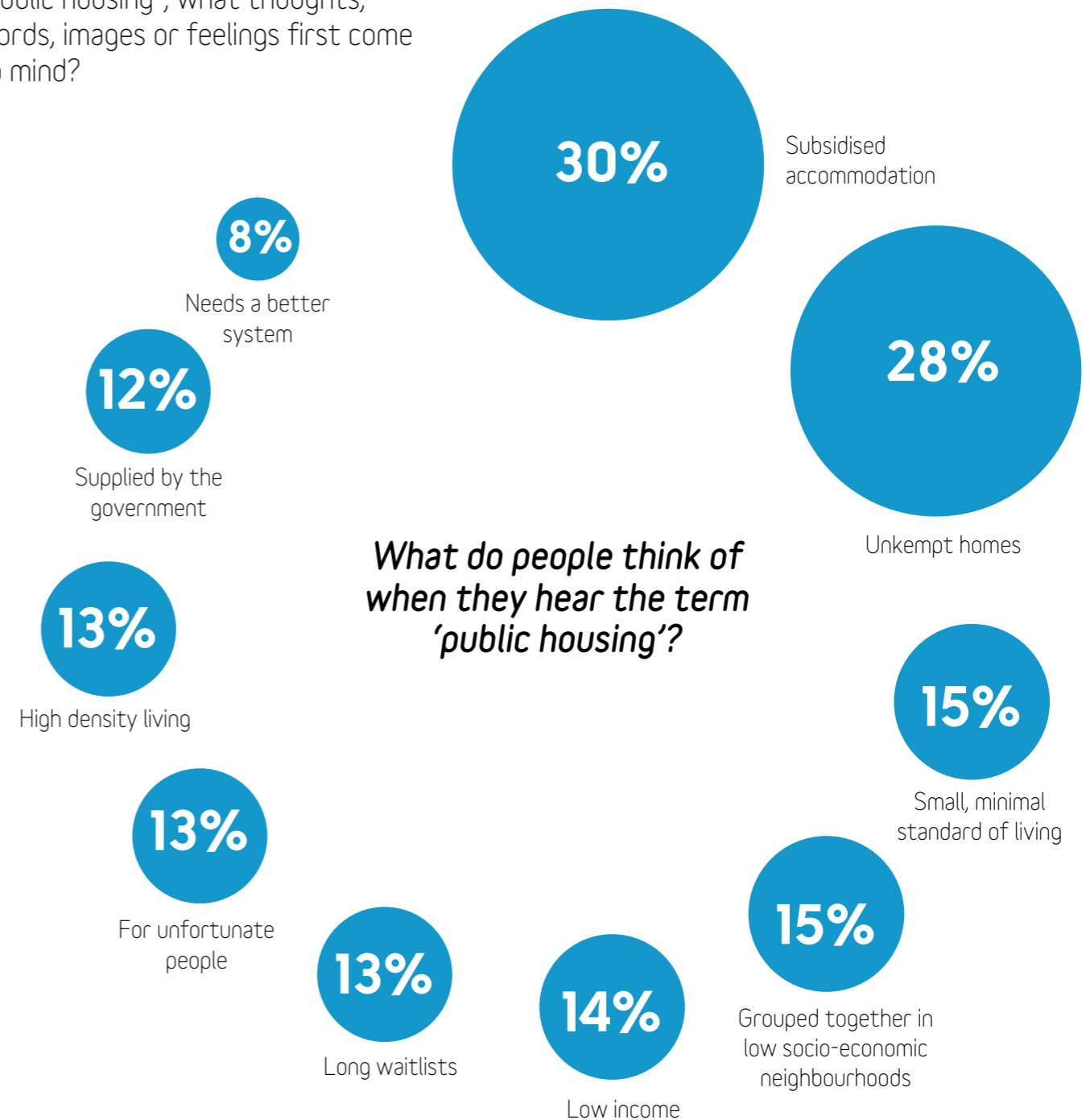
There was a strong perception that poor management by tenants led to the properties falling into disrepair; 28% of respondents said tenants did not adequately respect the properties, and 6% said that tenants were ungrateful and lacked pride in their home. Eight per cent of respondents believed the public housing system needed better management to improve the standard.

Some people were highly positive about public housing. Seven per cent of respondents said it is a community asset that can be highly beneficial to people's survival and future. Six per cent of respondents said they wished there was more public housing available. On the flip-side there were a subset of respondents who believed public housing, and its tenants, were potentially dangerous to the local community. Eight per cent said public housing was a crime hot spot, 8% mentioned anti-social behaviour from tenants, and 7% mentioned violence and threats by tenants against their neighbours.

Notably, 7% of respondents associated public housing with Homeswest, an outdated name for the Department of Housing.

### Question:

When you think about the term "public housing", what thoughts, words, images or feelings first come to mind?



*"[Public housing is] housing provided to people who have little or no income and subsidised by the government through agencies. Thoughts of cheaper rental accommodation come to mind, poverty in the area. Possibly indigenous people within groups or poverty stricken migrants on low incomes. Cramped conditions with a depressing outlook."*

– Male, 50-54 years, Perth Metro







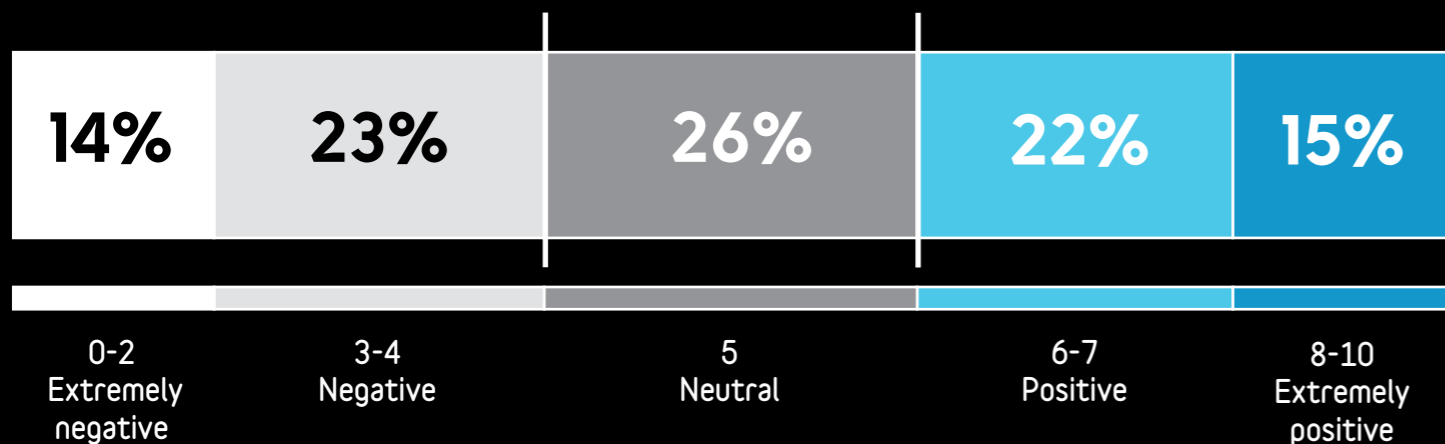
# PUBLIC HOUSING

## HOW DO THE PUBLIC PERCEIVE THE IMPACT OF PUBLIC HOUSING?

### Question:

What impact, if any, do you think public housing has on the community overall?

### Perceived impact of public housing on the community



Public opinion is highly polarised when it comes to the impact that public housing has on the community overall. People's perceptions are coloured by a range of factors including ideology, appearance, and personal experience.

When asked to rate from 0-10 how positive or negative the effect of public housing was on their community, 37% of respondents said that public housing had a positive influence on the community, with 15% rating it as extremely positive (8-10).

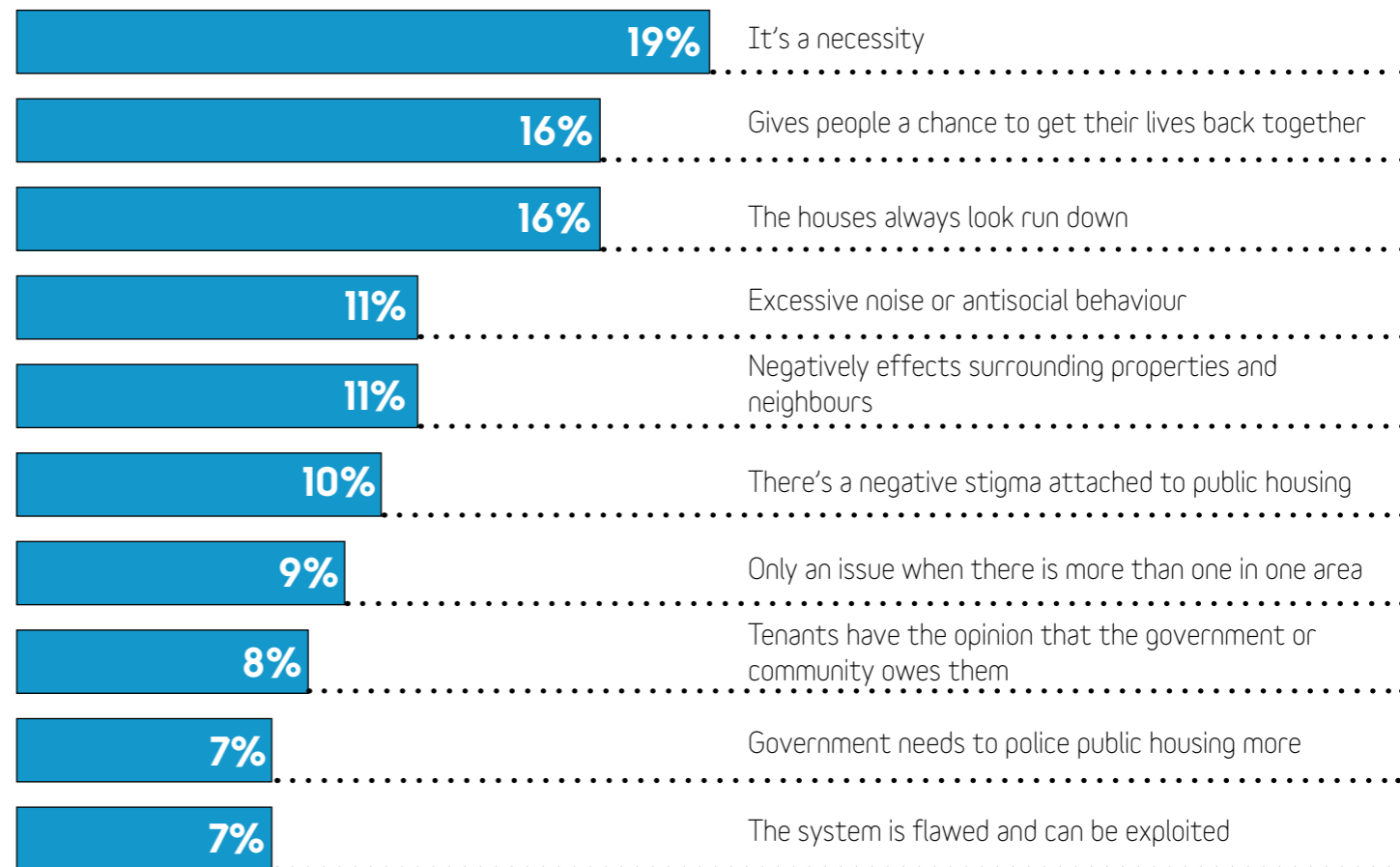
There were a range of reasons as to why respondents were positive about public housing. When asked why they felt positively or negatively about public housing, 19% of respondents said that they believed public housing was a necessity and 16% said it gives people who have experienced misfortune a chance to get their lives on track. Eight per cent of respondents had enjoyed positive personal experience with public housing tenants. Six per cent noted that public housing prevents larger community problems from developing.

However, there was a near mirror image of the opposite perception. Thirty seven per cent of respondents believed public housing had a negative impact on the community, with 14% rating it as extremely negative (0-2).

Negative feelings towards public housing were largely attributed to poor conditions or to perceived indiscretions of the tenants such as substance abuse or exploitation. When asked why they felt positively or negatively about public housing, 16% of respondents mentioned that the houses look run down. Another 11% complained about noise and anti-social behaviour from tenants. Eight per cent said they believe the tenants feel overly entitled and another 7% that the Government needs to do a better job screening tenants. There were some economic concerns, as 7% of respondents said that they believe public housing will bring down surrounding property value.

Twenty-six per cent of respondents gave a neutral rating.

### Top ten reasons for positive and negative perceptions of public housing



The public perception in the Kimberley is much more positive overall than in other regions, including the Perth-Metro area. Over 60% of respondents from the Kimberley indicated that they believed public housing had a positive impact on the community, with a quarter rating its impact as extremely positive. This may indicate there is a higher acceptance and appreciation of public housing in areas where it is more prevalent.

*“Providing vulnerable people a stable place to live increases their chances of holding employment and contributing to the community in general. It provides a safety net for victims of domestic violence and gives the children a chance at an education. To some degree it reduces crime and provides a more stable society.”*

- Male, 35-39 years, Perth Metro

# PUBLIC HOUSING

## HOW DOES THE PUBLIC PERCEIVE PUBLIC HOUSING TENANTS?

### Question:

What characteristics describe a “typical public housing tenant”?

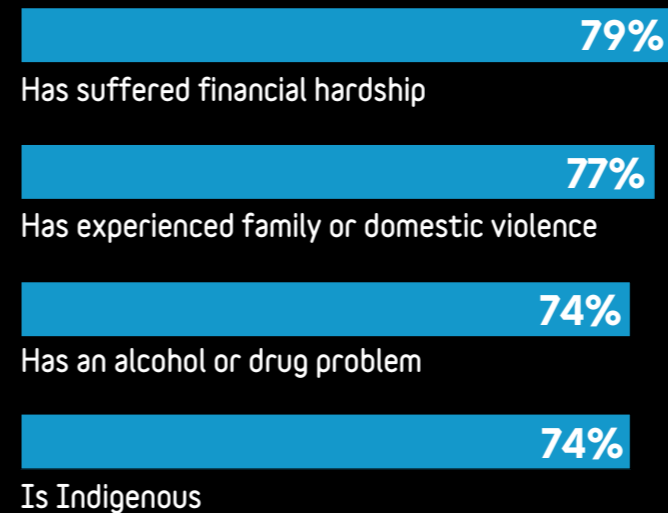
The public imagine public housing tenants as aggrieved individuals, usually marginalised in some way. While many common public perceptions are accurate, there were points where the consensus conflicted with reality – in particular regarding the age and race of the tenants.

There was a pronounced lack of awareness around the demographic composition of public housing tenants. When presented with a list of descriptors and asked to indicate which they felt described a ‘typical public housing tenant’, 74% of respondents indicated that they would consider a typical public housing tenant to be Indigenous. We know that in reality, a far smaller portion of public housing residents are Indigenous.

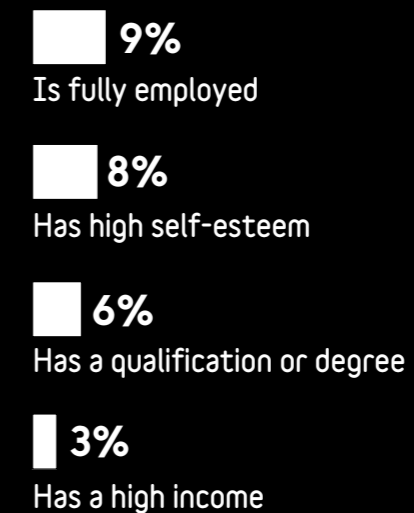
Only 32% of respondents said they would consider a public housing tenant to typically be over the age of 50, and 30% said they would consider a typical tenant as someone who lives alone. To compare to current data, the latest Department of Housing figures show that more than half of public housing tenants in Western Australia are over the age of 55, and the 2009 Social Housing Taskforce Final Report (More than a Roof and Four Walls) found that 74% were single (25% single parents). The single largest demographic that makes up public housing residents are single seniors – with 34%.

For the most part, respondents were more likely to regard public housing tenants as unfortunate – having suffered adversity, bad luck or disadvantage – rather than to prescribe personal blame to them. Seventy-nine per cent of

### Highest agreed upon characteristics the community perceives to be typical of a public housing tenant



### Least agreed upon characteristics the community perceives to be typical of a public housing tenant



*Footnote: percentages based on combined ratings of items as 6-7 and 8-10 on scale of 0-10 with 6-7 representing the item ‘does’ contribute to homelessness and 8-10 representing the item ‘definitely does’ contribute to homelessness*

respondents indicated they thought typical public housing tenants had suffered financial hardship, 77% thought typical tenants had experienced family and domestic violence, and 60% thought typical tenants had a long term illness.

However, negative stereotypes still punctuated the survey’s responses. A majority of respondents attributed traits such as laziness,

exploitative, entitled or dangerous to public housing tenants. Seventy-four per cent of respondents associated drug and alcohol abuse with typical public housing tenants, and 61% of respondents went as far as to say a typical public housing resident would have a criminal conviction. Fifty-seven per cent would identify typical tenants as lazy and non-productive.

There was a strong belief that public housing tenants were from marginalised backgrounds or cultural minorities. As mentioned before, 74% of respondents would regard a typical public housing tenant as Indigenous, 65% a person with a mental illness, 64% a person with a disability, and 49% a person from a cultural minority.

*“I have single parent friends that use public housing and I see the wonderful chance that they have been given to live a comfortable life. Public housing gets people off the streets and gives them a great incentive to make their lives better.”*

– Female, 25-29 years, Perth Metro



## HOW DOES THE PUBLIC PERCEIVE PUBLIC HOUSING TENANTS?

There was an obvious disconnect between the experiences of public housing tenants and the perceptions of the rest of the public. The responses of people who are currently in public housing differed significantly from those who are housed privately.

In general, respondents who lived in public housing were more likely to defy stereotypes.

When asked if a “typical public housing tenant” had a criminal conviction: 32% of respondents living in public housing strongly disagreed, compared to only 6.3% of other respondents.

When asked if they thought typical public housing residents suffered financial hardship: 21% of respondents who lived in public housing strongly disagreed, compared to only 3% of other respondents.

When asked if they thought typical public housing residents were disabled: 69% of respondents who lived in public housing strongly agreed, compared to 29% of other respondents.

*“I feel that, in theory, public housing is a fantastic thing. Unfortunately, a small but very visible minority have led to it having a bad name in the wider community due to media exposure.”*

*- Male, 25-29 years, Goldfields*



# PUBLIC HOUSING

## WHAT IS THE PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF THE TYPICAL HOUSEHOLD STRUCTURES IN PUBLIC HOUSING?

“As a child of a single parent with no income, having access to public housing meant that we were able to live closer to family support which provided security and assistance to my parent and us children. It also helped my mother to escape an abusive relationship with my biological father and therefore gave her a safe place to raise my sister and me.”

– Female, 30-34 years, Pilbara

### Question:

What type of household structure do you think a ‘typical public housing home’ is comprised of?

When it came to the make-up of household structures in public housing, the reality is far removed from the public perception.

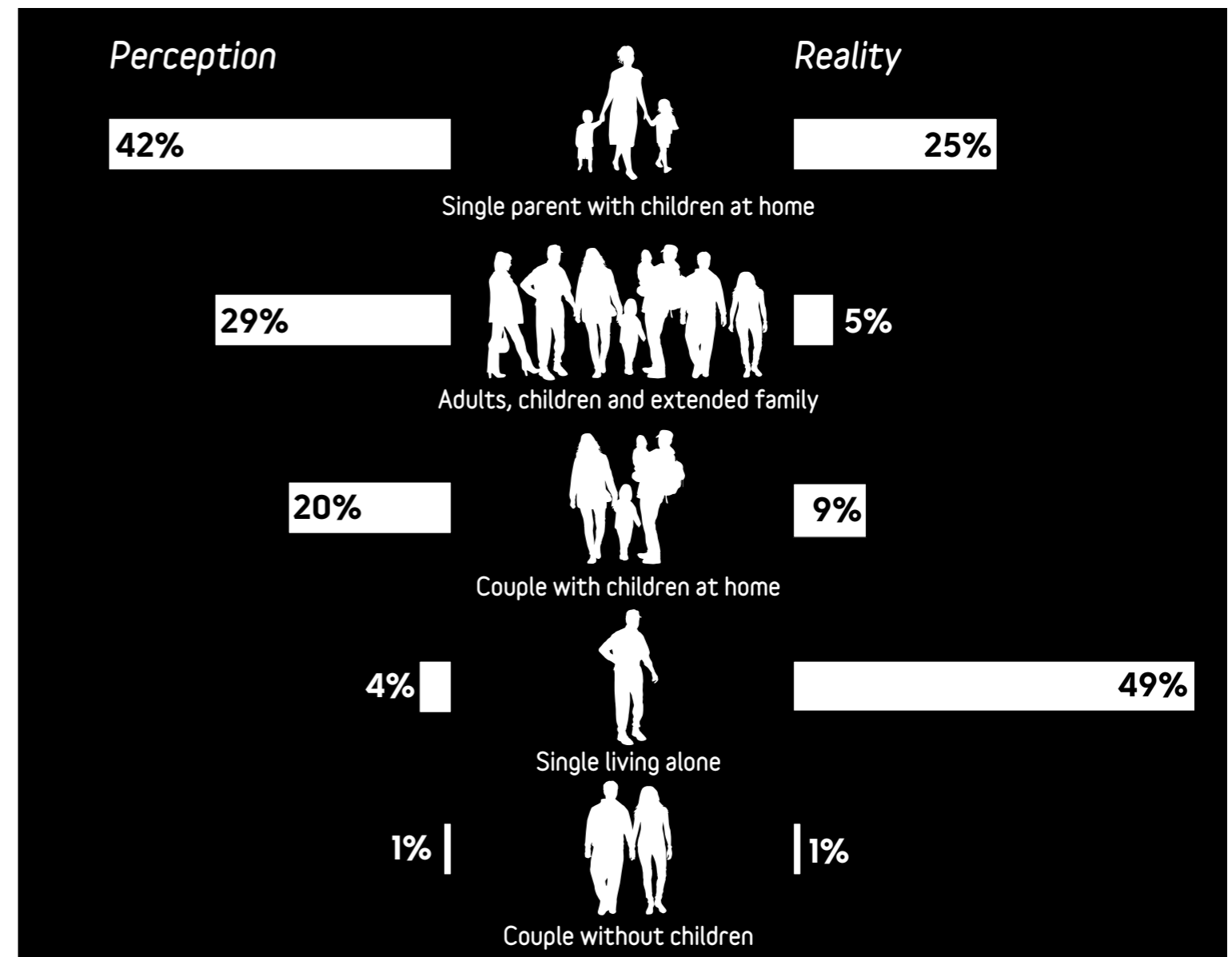
When asked what they think the household structure a typical public housing home is comprised of:

- 42% of respondents said a single parent with a child
- 29% of respondents said adults, children and extended family
- 20% of respondents said a couple with children
- 4% of respondents said multiple adults sharing
- 4% of respondents said a single person living alone
- 1% of respondents said a couple without children

When we compare this to current public housing demographic data, we see this dominant perception is virtually the inverse of the truth. The 2009 Social Housing Taskforce Final Report (More than a Roof and Four Walls) found that of Public Housing residents:

- 34% were single seniors
- 25% were single parents with children
- 15% were singles with no children
- 9% were couples with children
- 8% were senior couples

### Perception vs. Reality: Typical public housing home



- 5% were multiple family groups
- 3% were defined as other
- 1% were couples without children

The public recognise that single parent families make up a significant proportion of public housing demographics. However, they vastly underestimate the proportion of

tenants who are single and vastly overestimate the proportion of tenants in families with multiple adults, such as a couple with children and extended families.

# PUBLIC HOUSING

## WHAT IS THE LEVEL OF PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR PUBLIC HOUSING?

*“If it gives people a roof it has to be good.”*

– Female, 50-54 years, Perth Metro

*“A well maintained and funded public housing sector is important as it shows that the community is willing to look after the most vulnerable members of the community by providing a safe place to live. It also gives people a sense that there is another option for living arrangements especially in a city where house prices for buying or renting are so ridiculously expensive.”*

– Female, 50-54 years, Perth Metro

Western Australians largely recognise the need for public housing in the community, but are significantly less likely to advocate for its establishment in their own neighbourhoods.

Seventy-two percent of respondents indicated that they support the establishment of public housing in the community. Nearly half of respondents indicated strong support.

Only 13% respondents would not support public housing in their community, with 6% indicating strong disapproval.

However, there was a notable shift when respondents were asked if they would support public housing being built in their neighbourhood. The number of respondents supportive of public housing dropped to 46%, with only a quarter strongly supportive. The number of respondents who would object increased to 38%, with 26% strongly disapproving.

In response to both questions, 15% of respondents gave neutral answers, perhaps indicating the existence of a middle group who could be persuaded either way.

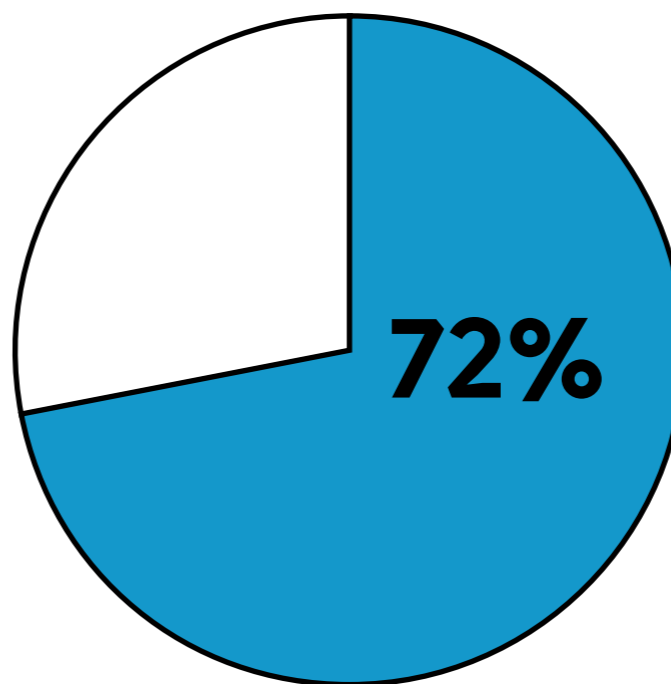
Respondents from the Kimberley were noticeably more likely to support the establishment of public housing – with 85% stating their support of greater public housing in the community and 75% stating their support of greater public housing in their neighbourhood.

Single parents were generally more likely to support the establishment of public housing. Seventy-seven per cent of respondents who were single parents advocated for greater public housing in their community, and 56% advocated for greater public housing in their neighbourhood.

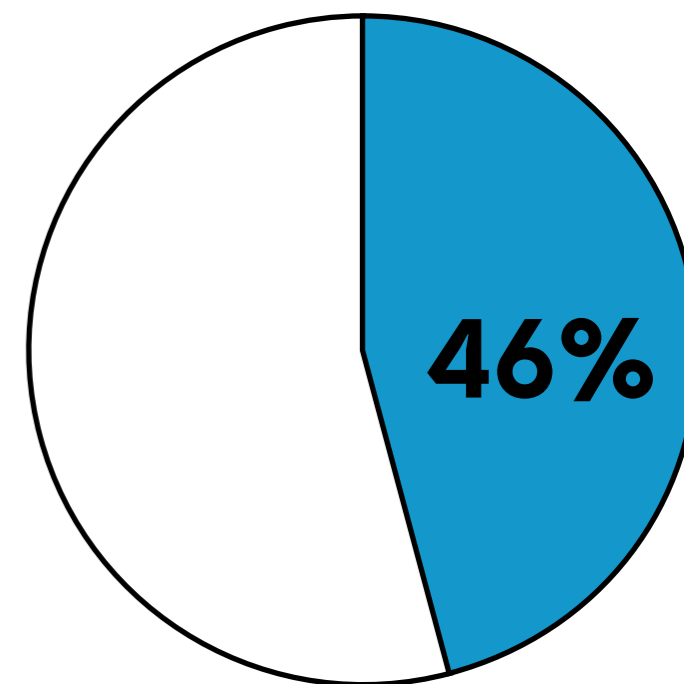
### Question:

To what extent do you support the establishment of public housing in the community and in your local neighbourhood?

*Community support for public housing drops when it’s in our own neighbourhood*



Support for public housing in the community



Support for public housing in your neighbourhood

Footnote: percentages based on combined ratings of 6-10 on 0-10 scale, representing ratings showing support (6-7) and ratings showing strong support (8-10) of public housing in these locations







**Question:**

Have you ever lived in public housing at any time in your life?

**1 in 6 WESTERN AUSTRALIANS** have lived in public housing

*"I was able to change my life entirely. It gave me the opportunity to study, hold down full time employment and save. I now have a much better future for myself. I now also have children and because I was able to get my life on track I can provide the best care for them. I have broken the cycle so to speak. Without public housing I really don't know where I would be at this stage in my life..."*

- Female, 25-29 years, Perth Metro

# PUBLIC HOUSING

## WHAT IS THE PUBLIC'S EXPERIENCE WITH PUBLIC HOUSING?

One in six survey respondents had lived in public housing at some point in their lives. The majority of these were housed in Western Australia.

Eleven per cent of respondents had lived in public housing as a child. Of those respondents: 68% lived in public housing in Western Australia; 16% lived in public housing in another Australian State; and 19% lived in public housing overseas.

Nine per cent of respondents had lived in public housing as an adult. Of those respondents: 79% lived in public housing in Western Australia; 15% lived in public housing in another Australian State; and 6% lived in public housing overseas.

When we asked the respondents who had lived in public housing about the impact it had on their lives, most described it as positive - either serving as a transitory space or a safety net. Twenty-two per cent of respondents with experience living in public housing said it served as a stepping stone for them to better their lives; 16% said it provided them with a safe home environment; 12% said it created opportunities that they otherwise would not have enjoyed; 10% said their experience overall was very positive in general.

However, the singularly most common response was that staying in public housing had little or no impact. Of respondents who had lived in public housing, a quarter said that their stay had very little impact on their lives. It is possible this represents a sizeable cohort to whom public housing is culturally and socially typical and thus not regarded as affording particularly unique opportunities.

A relatively smaller proportion of former or current public housing residents reported a negative impact from their experiences. The source of their complaints varied from their neighbours, to social stigmatisms to the quality of the properties. Nine per cent of respondents who had lived in public housing reported feeling unsafe or having heightened caution due to anti-social neighbours; 7% reported negative stigma and teasing; 4% mentioned that the properties were run down.

**Question:**

You mentioned you lived in public housing, in what location was this?

*The majority of experiences with public housing occur in Western Australia*



Of those who lived in public housing as a child



Of those who lived in public housing as an adult



**68%**  
Lived in Western Australia



**79%**  
Lived in Western Australia



**16%**  
Lived in other states in Australia



**15%**  
Lived in other states in Australia



**19%**  
Lived in a country other than Australia



**6%**  
Lived in a country other than Australia

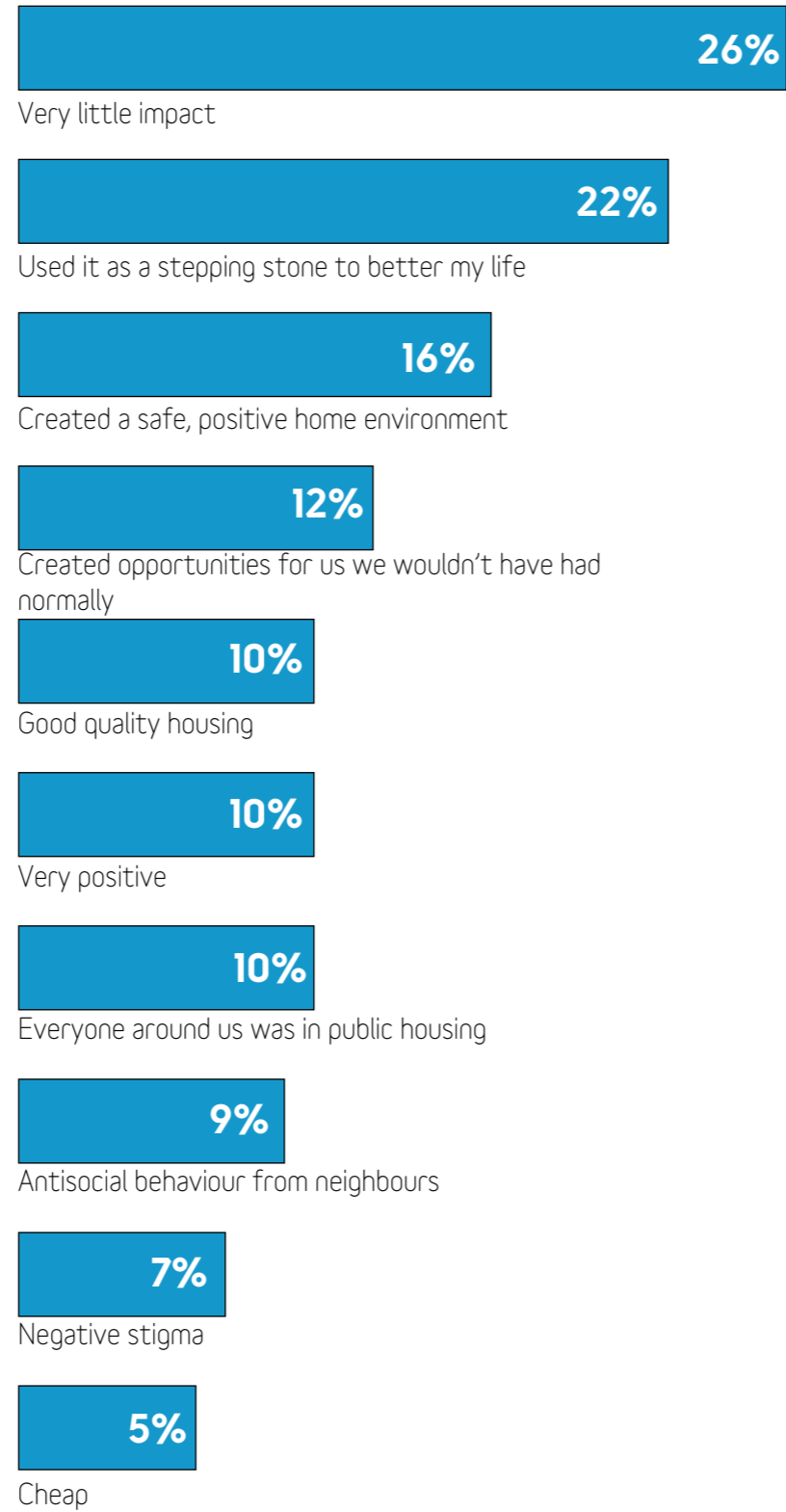


## WHAT IS THE PUBLIC'S EXPERIENCE WITH PUBLIC HOUSING?

*"I was a single parent with low level of speaking English. I lived in public housing for eight years. I focused on my language and got a full time job. After two years I bought my share from Department of Housing. I'm very grateful for that. For me moving out after eight years meant I could give other people the opportunity to feel safe too."*

- Male, 45-49 years, Perth Metro

### Top ten most mentioned impacts of living in public housing



# PUBLIC HOUSING

## WHAT IS THE PUBLIC LEVEL OF AWARENESS OF HOUSING SERVICES?

### Question:

If you found yourself in housing stress and needed information, assistance or advice in relation to housing or accommodation where would you go?

### Community awareness of housing service providers

90%

Department of Housing

90%

Department of Child Protection and Family Services

57%

Anglicare WA Family Housing

45%

Crisis Care Unit

45%

Family Support

18%

Shelter WA

16%

Homeless Advisory Service

Most Western Australians are aware of Government agencies and departments that provide housing services. There is a much lower level of awareness of the role of not-for-profit agencies and services in the housing sector.

We provided the respondents with a list of housing service providers and asked if they had heard of them. Ninety-three per cent were aware of the Department of Housing and 90% were aware of the Department of Child Protection and Family Services - demonstrating the high level of penetration of Government Departments. Conversely, 57% of respondents were aware of Anglicare WA's Family Housing Service; 45% were aware of the Crisis Care Unit; 45% were aware of Family Support; 18% were aware of Shelter WA; and 16% were aware of the Homeless Advisory Service.

It is worth noting that being aware of a service does not necessarily mean one is likely to utilise it. To determine what services or resources Western Australians would be comfortable approaching for help with housing stress, we asked the respondents what their first port of call would be if they needed help with their housing. A variety of formal and casual options were mentioned. The most common answer was Centrelink with 33% of respondents - notably Centrelink are the primary provider of rent assistance payments.

Many respondents would rather seek initial assistance from less formal sources. Twenty-one per cent of respondents said they would go to their friends or family for help; 20% said they would use the internet; 6% said they would go to their local Church.

Government agencies were also named as likely sources of assistance, with 14% of respondents



naming the Department of Housing and 12% naming HomesWest. Eleven per cent of respondents named the Government, without specifying an agency or service.

Fourteen per cent of respondents said they would go to a charitable organisation for help with housing.





# WHAT PROPORTION OF WA'S HOUSING DO THE PUBLIC THINK IS PUBLIC HOUSING?

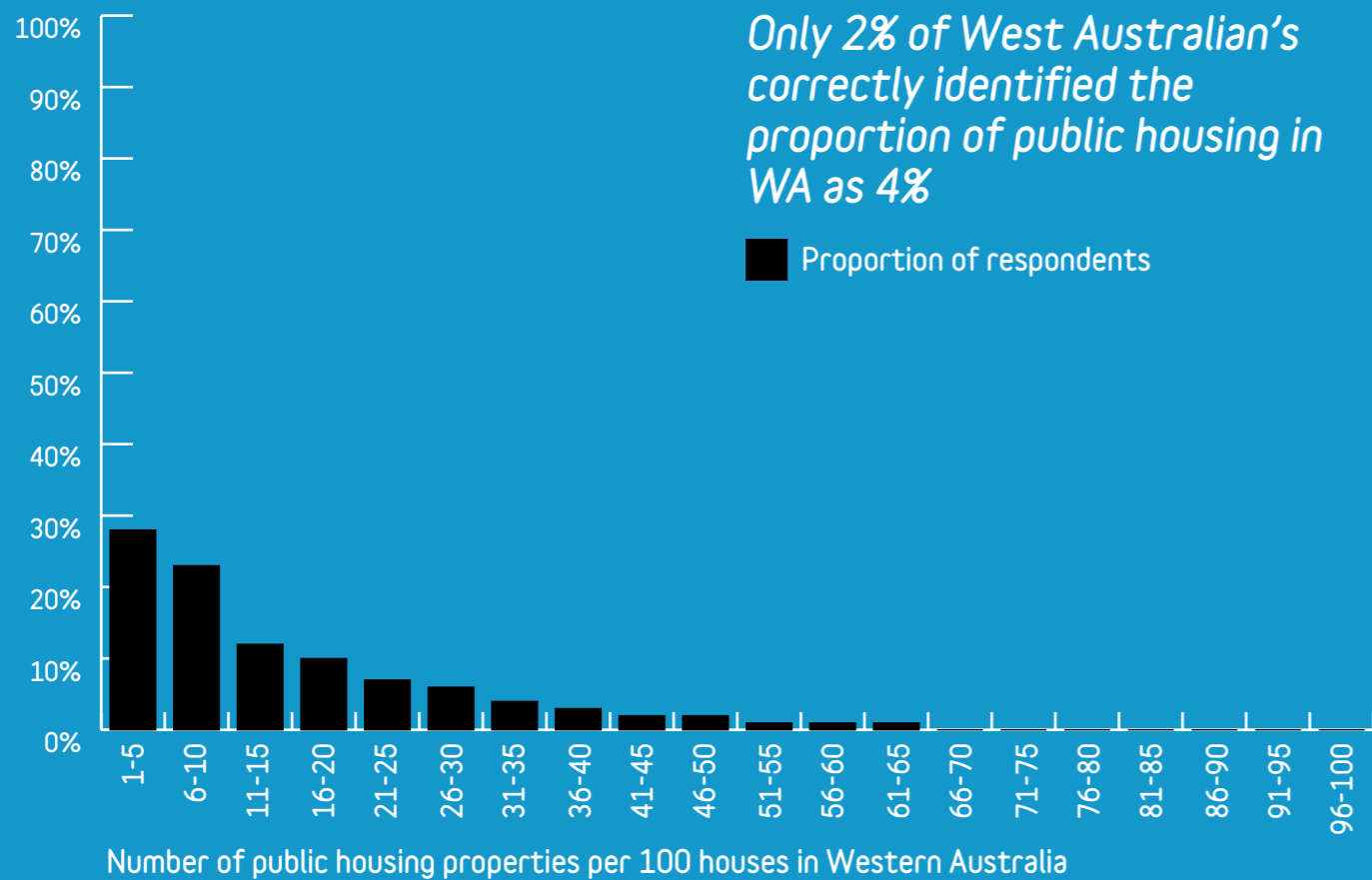
There appears to be a very low level of public awareness regarding the quantity of public housing in Western Australia.

According to the Department of Housing, public housing makes up 4% of housing stock in Western Australia. When we asked the respondents what proportion of the State they thought was designated public housing, only 2%

correctly identified this number.

Just under a third of respondents gave an answer that was relatively close - 1-5%. Many other overestimated, sometimes vastly. Twenty three per cent of respondents estimated between 6-10%, 22% of respondents estimated between 11-20%, and 27% of respondents estimated over 21%.

It is worth noting that in certain regions in Western Australia, such as the Kimberley, public housing stock is much higher than the State average. It is possible some respondents from these areas were overestimating due to a higher concentration of public housing stock in their local communities.



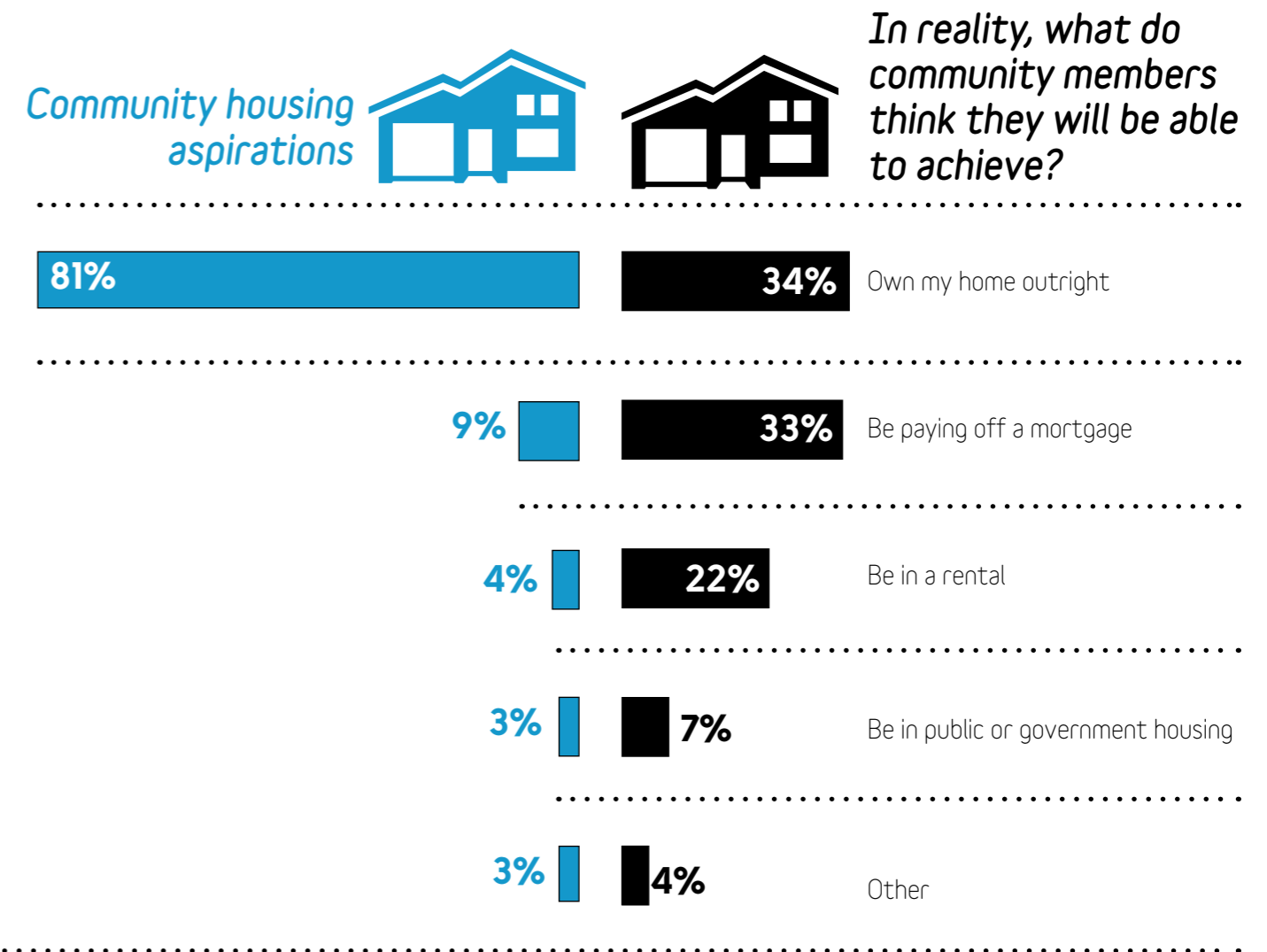
# WHAT ARE THE PUBLIC'S ASPIRATIONS WHEN IT COMES TO HOUSING?

We identified the survey's respondents who were renting, in public housing or had no fixed address and asked them what their aspirations were with regards to housing. Their responses made it clear that there exists a shared dream to own a home outright. Eight out of ten responded that they aspire to own their own home outright. One out of 10 said they

aspire to be in a position to pay off a mortgage. Four per cent of respondents said they aspire to be in rental accommodation, and 3% said they aspire to be in social or Government housing.

When we asked what these respondents believed they could realistically achieve, the picture changed dramatically. Only a third said they believed they could

realistically own their own home. Another third said they believe they could realistically be in a position to pay off a mortgage; 22% said they believe they could realistically rent; and 7% said they could realistically be in social or Government housing.



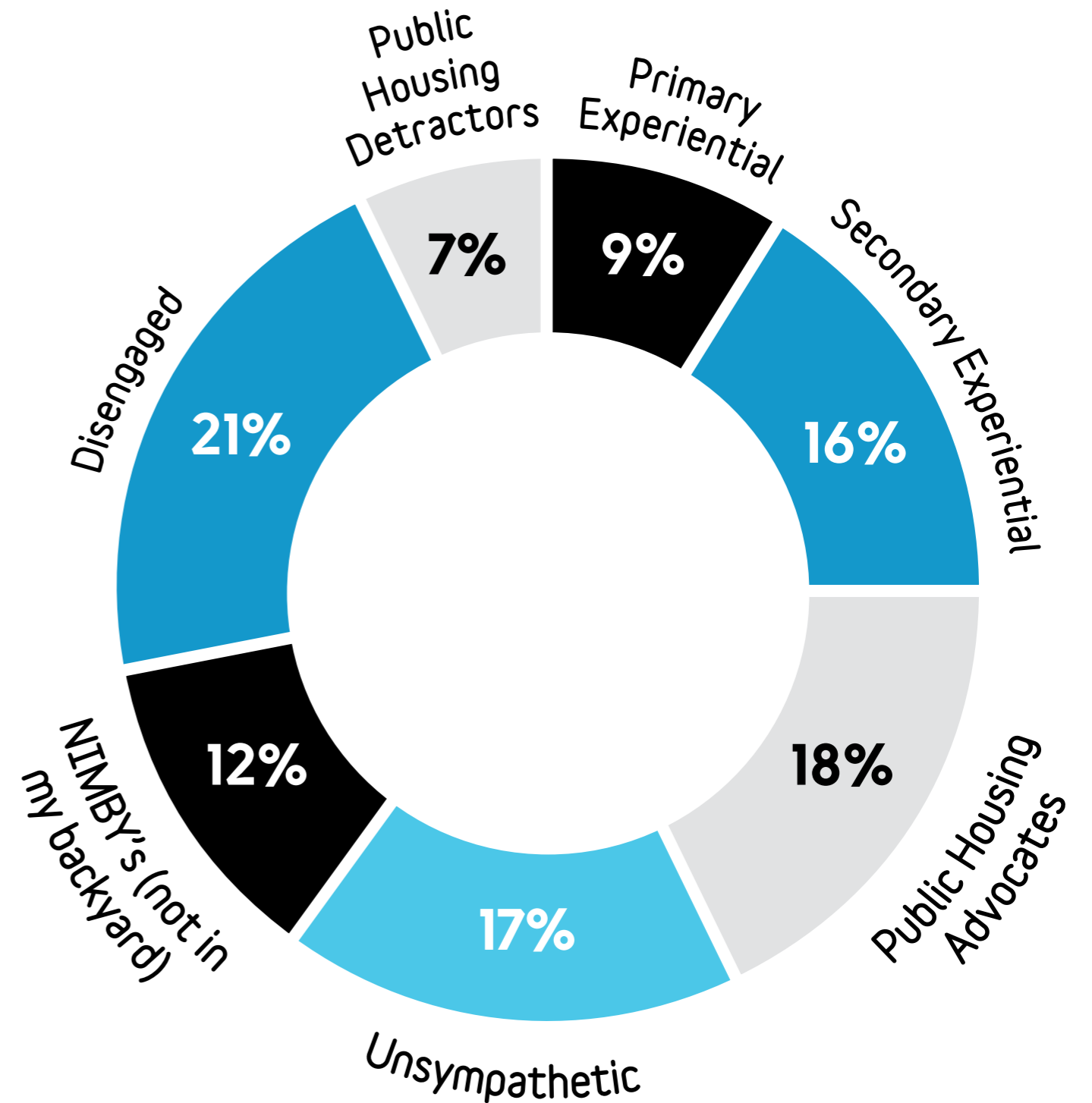
# CLUSTER ANALYSIS

A cluster analysis is a class of statistical techniques used to find patterns in data. It determines if data exhibit "natural" groupings or clusters of relatively homogenous observations. Objects in a cluster are similar to each other and dissimilar to objects outside the cluster, particularly objects in other clusters. Cluster analysis is an interdependent technique; it makes no distinction between dependent and independent variables. The entire set of interdependent relationships is examined.

In order to map the survey respondents' attitudes regarding public housing and homelessness, we provided them with 12 statements about housing and asked them to score their agreement on a scale of 0-10. When running a cluster analysis of the answers, a seven cluster solution emerged.

# SEGMENT PROFILES

*Western Australians broadly fall into seven categories with common attitudes towards public housing and homelessness.*





## PRIMARY EXPERIENTIAL

One in ten Western Australians have personally experienced homelessness. They are highly supportive of public housing and recognise its value to the community. They strongly believe the government should invest more into affordable housing.

## SECONDARY EXPERIENTIAL

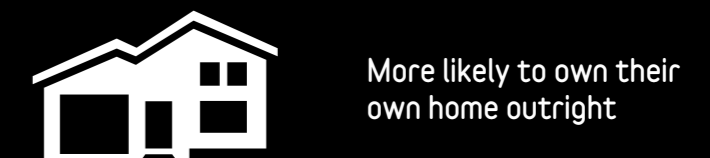
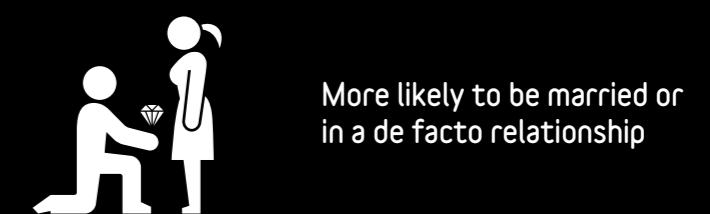
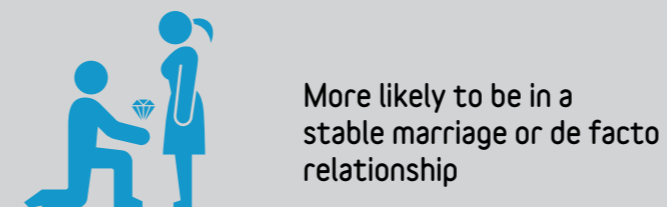
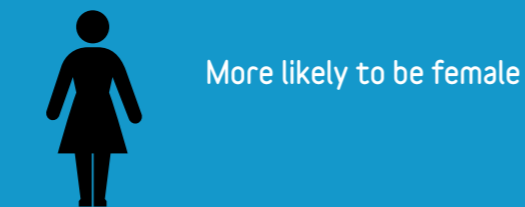
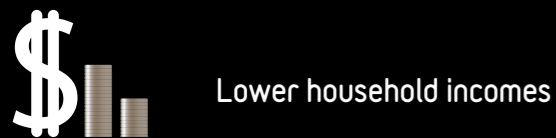
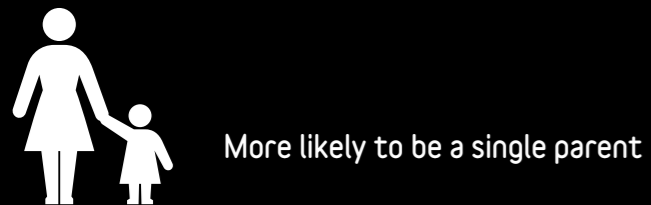
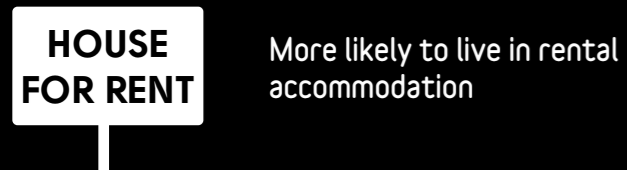
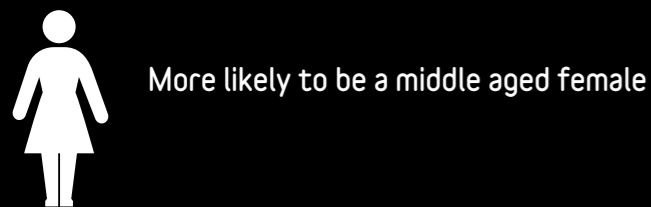
One in six Western Australians fall into this category - having close experience with someone who is homeless, but not necessarily having experienced it themselves. They are supportive of both public housing and its tenants.

## PUBLIC HOUSING ADVOCATES

One in five Western Australians strongly believe that the Government should be doing more to alleviate housing stress. They believe that public housing benefits the community and that its tenants are valuable contributors to society. They may have some experience with homeless people.

## DISENGAGED

One in five Western Australians do not have any particularly strong opinions about homelessness and public housing either way.



## NIMBY'S

NIMBY stands for not in my backyard. One in eight Western Australians fall into the NIMBY category. They are generally supportive of public housing as a principle and believe the Government must do more to create affordable housing. However, they do not want public housing to be built in their local neighbourhood.

## UNSYMPATHETIC

One in six Western Australians generally know people who have been homeless, but are unsympathetic to them. They believe homelessness is the fault of the individual. They are generally less supportive of the establishment of public housing in general.

## PUBLIC HOUSING DETRACTORS

One in fourteen Western Australians are harshly condemning of homeless people and public housing. They believe homeless people have no one to blame but themselves, and that public housing is of little benefit to society and not worth investing in.



More likely to be male  
More likely to be aged 18-29 years



More likely to work full time



Low to medium incomes



Less likely to have been married



More likely to be male  
More likely to be aged under 40 years



Less likely to have children



Higher incomes



More likely to be buying a house or have a mortgage



More likely to be male  
More likely to be aged 30-39 years



More likely to work full time



More likely to hold a Bachelors Degree (or higher)



Less likely to have children at home

# FOR TODAY, FOR TOMORROW.



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