



SAFE, ACCESSIBLE & AVAILABLE?

Examining the temporary accommodation system in NSW

December 2023



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for Homelessness NSW

About Homelessness NSW

Overview

Homelessness NSW is a not-for-profit Peak Body working to end homelessness in New South Wales. Our 200+ members include specialist homelessness services, allied organisations and services. We work with our members, people with lived experience and a broad network of partners to understand drivers of homelessness, advocate for solutions, build skills and knowledge and scale innovation.

Mission

We exist to build the capability of people and capacity of systems to end homelessness.

Vision

We have a vision for a future where everyone has a safe and secure home and connection to community.

We acknowledge

We work on Indigenous lands and that sovereignty was never ceded. We pay respect to Elders, past and present, and acknowledge the pivotal role that First Nations people continue to play within our communities.

We embrace diversity and are committed to creating a safe environment for all people, irrespective of their age, gender, cultural identity, sexuality, abilities, language, economic status, profession or location.

www.homelessnessnsw.org.au/

We are grateful to our partners at Domestic Violence NSW for their contributions and collaboration on this work.

D O M E S T I C
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GLOSSARY

Temporary accommodation is short-term, emergency housing provided by the Department of Communities and Justice to people who are homeless, at risk of homelessness, low-income earners seeking social or affordable housing, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals, and those experiencing family or domestic violence.

Supported temporary accommodation is temporary accommodation in which Specialist Homelessness Services are engaged by the Department of Communities and Justice to provide support services to those residing in temporary accommodation.

The Specialist Homelessness Services program is the primary NSW Government response to homelessness. Specialist Homelessness Service providers support people who are experiencing, or who are at risk of homelessness, through early intervention, crisis, and transitional support; and post crisis support services.

Link2Home is the state-wide information and referral telephone service, which operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It provides information, assessment, and referrals to Specialist Homelessness Services and temporary accommodation for people at risk of or currently experiencing homelessness.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides an in-depth analysis of temporary accommodation services provided by the Department of Communities and Justice NSW (DCJ), based on data collected from a survey conducted by Homelessness NSW in June 2023.

DCJ's temporary accommodation program aims to provide short-term accommodation options for people who are homeless, at risk of losing their homes, low-income earners seeking social or affordable housing, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and those experiencing family or domestic violence.

Typically, temporary accommodation just refers to the provision of the accommodation (such as a hotel room), although people in such temporary accommodation may also be receiving additional support and services from various organisations. The survey was designed to gather information from Homelessness NSW's members on the current operation of the temporary accommodation system in NSW. A total of 237 individual surveys were completed.

It is helpful to distinguish between 'supported' temporary accommodation, wherein individuals receive targeted support such as casework and essentials (e.g., hygiene and food items) as integral components of the temporary accommodation model, and the more conventional temporary accommodation funded by DCJ, which constitutes the primary focus of this report.

The report is structured into four sections, each of which presents the viewpoints of Homelessness NSW members about different facets of the temporary accommodation system.

In the first section, the report examines the application process for people experiencing homelessness, as well as the current supply and availability of temporary accommodation across NSW.

The second section of the report examines Homelessness NSW members' perspectives on the accessibility, safety, appropriateness, and overall support provided by the temporary accommodation system.

The third section of the report presents survey findings related to the effectiveness and fairness of the administration of the temporary accommodation system, including its flexibility and trauma-informed approach.

Lastly, the report examines the process of clients transitioning out of the temporary accommodation system.

The report offers a set of twenty-six recommendations aimed at improving access to and client experiences within the temporary accommodation system. In addition, it outlines strategies to assist people in transitioning out of the system. These recommendations include supporting the full implementation of recently announced changes to the temporary accommodation system, such as removing the 28-day limit for temporary accommodation per person per financial year and revising the asset cap for entry into temporary accommodation.

The report also provides guidance on streamlining and expediting the application process to make it more accessible for applicants in crisis situations. Additionally, it provides recommendations to make temporary accommodation options more accessible and appropriate, particularly for specific groups of people, such as women and children escaping domestic and family violence, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals, people who are not Australia residents, and people with disabilities. Finally, the report highlights the need for both increases in the number of temporary accommodation providers and the availability of social and supported housing and wraparound support to provide pathways out of homelessness.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS



Recommendations for improving access to temporary accommodation.

1. Improve skills and knowledge of Link2Home staff through provision of training and resources, particularly in the areas of:
 - Trauma-informed approaches
 - Knowledge of accommodation options across NSW, including in rural and remote areas
2. Bolster the capacity of the Link2Home hotline by increasing staffing levels and availability of interpreters.
3. Provide clear guidance to DCJ Housing staff on steps to implement temporary accommodation reforms and ensure such guidance and information is shared with homelessness service providers and people seeking to access temporary accommodation.
4. Revise the limitations on the eligibility and duration of temporary accommodation for individuals who are not residents of Australia. This should be done in consultation with key stakeholders from homelessness, refugee and asylum seekers, domestic violence and other community services, as well as government agency representatives and people with lived experience.
5. Publish clear information online regarding the eligibility of people on temporary visas for temporary accommodation.
6. Review the temporary accommodation application process with the aim of reducing complexity and delays. Conduct this review in consultation with service providers (including homelessness, domestic violence and youth services) and people with lived experience and publish clear and transparent guidelines at the conclusion of the review.
7. Ensure DCJ and SHS providers receive regular training on eligibility and evidence requirements for temporary accommodation.

8. Where evidence and identification cannot be immediately produced, allow for temporary accommodation to be provided based on the initial assessment of approved SHS and domestic and family specialist services.
9. Ensure applicants are not excluded from temporary accommodation based on an inability to provide evidence of experiencing/fleeing domestic and family violence. This includes accepting a declaration of an experience of domestic and family violence from a person connected with a specialist domestic and family violence service.
10. Undertake analysis of availability of temporary accommodation based on local need and undertake regular audits and reviews of accommodation options for safety, accessibility, and quality.
11. Increase the supply of safe and high-quality temporary accommodation options across all regions of the state, with a specific emphasis on accommodations that can be directly managed and provided by SHSs.



Recommendations for improving services for people residing in temporary accommodation.

12. Develop specific policies and guidelines on provision of TA for people with a disability, women and children escaping domestic violence, young people, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. These must be developed via a collaborative process including people with lived experience and service providers.
13. Expand the provision of supported temporary accommodation models.
14. Expand availability of pet-friendly temporary accommodation across the state.
15. Increase the number of disability accessible temporary accommodation options with a specific focus on addressing shortages in regional and remote areas.

16. Enable approved SHS and domestic and family violence services to assess people's needs and request additional temporary accommodation days via phone or email, without a person having to physically attend the Housing Office.
17. Increase the accessibility and safety of temporary accommodation for women and children experiencing domestic and family violence by:
 - Conducting a state-wide assessment of availability of suitable temporary accommodation options;
 - Auditing current providers to ensure they are meeting safety and hygiene standards; and
 - Allocating 20% of all temporary accommodation exclusively to women and children experiencing domestic and family violence.
18. Embed cultural safety in all parts of the temporary accommodation system. This should include employment and workforce development for more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, training for all staff in Link2Home, DCJ and service provider agencies and more culturally appropriate complaint mechanisms.
19. Develop a comprehensive, collaborative response to address the needs of unaccompanied children in the homelessness system, in consultation with peak agencies and services working with children and young people.
20. Employ local temporary accommodation triage and outreach support teams to improve coordination across agencies to reduce risk of homelessness and support transitions between prisons and hospitals and temporary accommodation.
21. Provide resources to temporary accommodation providers in regional and remote areas to ensure transportation can be provided to people who access temporary accommodation.

22. Increase the resources available to homelessness, and domestic and family violence services to enable greater provision of support during people's stays in temporary accommodation.



Recommendations for improving the administration of the temporary accommodation system.

23. Conduct a comprehensive audit of the entire temporary accommodation system, examining all its components, including policies and procedures, with a focus on ensuring they are trauma informed. After the audit, initiate necessary changes to enhance the system and align it with trauma informed practices.
24. Permanently remove the requirement for temporary accommodation participants to provide a rental seeker diary.



Recommendations for exiting out of temporary accommodation.

25. Implement reforms to the available days of temporary accommodation consistently across New South Wales (NSW). To achieve this, clear and accessible guidance should be provided to Housing Officers, as well as homelessness and domestic violence service providers.
26. Increase the supply of transitional accommodation, social housing, and affordable rental options to support pathways out of temporary accommodation.

REPORT BACKGROUND

About Homelessness NSW

Homelessness New South Wales is a not-for-profit organisation that operates as a peak agency for its member organisations, working to end homelessness across NSW. Our mission is to build the capability of people and the capacity of systems to end homelessness. We envision a future where everyone has a safe home and the support to keep it. Our membership of more than 200 organisations and individuals includes specialist homelessness services, people with lived experience, allied organisations, and services dedicated to ending homelessness. We collaborate with our members, lived experience experts, and a wide network of partners to understand the causes of homelessness, advocate for solutions, foster skills, and knowledge, and promote innovation.

Homelessness NSW has developed this research paper in response to frequent concerns raised by our members regarding various aspects of the temporary accommodation system.

RECENT CHANGES TO THE TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION SYSTEM

In July 2023, following the release of the interim version of this report, the NSW Premier and NSW Minister for Homelessness announced several changes to the temporary accommodation system (DCJ, 2023b).

These changes include:

- Individuals who contact Link2Home are now eligible to access seven days of temporary accommodation before requiring a full housing needs assessment.
- The limit of 28 days of temporary accommodation per person per financial year has been removed.
- The asset cap on eligibility to temporary accommodation has been increased to \$5000 instead of \$1000, and this requirement has been removed altogether for those fleeing domestic or family violence.
- A 12-month freeze on the requirement to complete seeker diaries started on 1 July 2023 (DCJ 2023b).

TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION SYSTEM IN NSW

System overview

This report examines temporary accommodation services provided by the NSW Government Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ).

The main objective of the temporary accommodation program is to offer short-term, emergency housing options to people who are homeless, at risk of homelessness, low-income earners seeking social or affordable housing, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals, and those experiencing family or domestic violence (DCJ n.d).

Typically, temporary accommodation is provided in low-cost hotels, motels, caravan parks, boarding houses, and similar facilities (NSW Ombudsman 2022). When providing temporary accommodation to people at risk of or experiencing homelessness, it is often coordinated with Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) that are funded to deliver a range of support services (supported temporary accommodation) (DCJ n.d).

People wishing to apply for temporary accommodation can commence an application via Link2 Home, the DCJ's Housing office or Community Housing Providers (Audit Office of NSW 2021).

At the time of the survey (June 2023), to be eligible for temporary accommodation, individuals must:

- be a citizen or Australian resident, 16+ years old (or accompanied by parent or guardian).
- meet the social housing income eligibility limit.
- have no more than \$1,000 in assets (the asset cap).
- be facing imminent homelessness; and
- be unable to find alternative accommodation and demonstrate situations in which their personal safety or mental health may be at risk (or that of another household member), and/or be facing a short wait for a more permanent housing solution (Audit Office of NSW 2021).

Currently there is no separate, standalone application form for temporary accommodation. People seeking temporary housing are instead required to complete components of the full application for social housing to be considered for temporary accommodation (DCJ 2023a).

In assessing an application for temporary accommodation, DCJ considers several factors to determine eligibility. These factors include whether the applicant:

- has a housing need that is urgent or if it could be addressed through Rentstart, a financial assistance program for rental costs, or temporary accommodation.
- can resolve their housing need independently.
- has the option to live with family or friends (DCJ n.d).

At the time of the survey, people were initially provided with two nights of accommodation. After these two nights they would need to attend a DCJ housing office for a full housing needs assessment, which could potentially lead to an extension of the number of temporary accommodation nights provided (Audit Office of NSW 2021).

Also, at the time of the survey, there was a limit of 28 days of temporary accommodation per person per financial year (Audit Office of NSW 2021). As mentioned above, in July 2023, the New South Wales Government announced changes to the number of days for which eligible people could obtain temporary accommodation.

Data from the *DCJ Statistical Report 2021-22* indicates that in 2021-22, a total of 27,550 households were assisted with temporary accommodation (DCJ 2022). This represents an increase of 7.9% from 2020-21 and continues an upward trend in the number of households assisted with temporary accommodation over the last ten years (DCJ 2022).

Temporary accommodation and COVID lockdowns

Important context to this report is the provision of temporary accommodation to people experiencing homelessness that occurred during the lockdown periods of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In NSW, the temporary accommodation system underwent significant modifications during the 2020 and 2021 COVID-19 lockdowns (Hartley et al. 2021). During the initial period of the pandemic, the NSW Government placed people sleeping rough in hotels of a much higher standard than traditional temporary accommodation (Pawson et al. 2020). In addition, DCJ implemented ‘relaxed policy provisions’ in relation to accessing the temporary accommodation system. The relaxation of rules included important changes to the provision of temporary accommodation for people who were sleeping rough:

1. Enabling people who self-identified as sleeping rough through NSW to access an initial period of 30 days of temporary accommodation. This policy had previously been applied in inner-City of Sydney but from April to June 2020 was extended throughout NSW.
2. Excluding temporary accommodation taken prior to 1 April 2020, when calculating entitlements.
3. Increased access to temporary accommodation for those on temporary visas/seeking asylum.
4. Extending temporary accommodation entitlements beyond 30 days if the applicant was engaging in DCJ services (Hartley et al. 2021).

As the pandemic continued, these changes were gradually wound back by DCJ. However, in the small amount of time higher quality accommodation and relaxed policy approaches were in place they made significant differences in outcomes for people experiencing homelessness (See Hartley et al. 2021; NSW Ombudsman 2022). These changes also provide important context for this report and the changes (and their winding back) were frequently raised in survey responses.

RESEARCH METHODS

In June 2023, Homelessness NSW initiated a survey with its members on the current operation of the temporary accommodation system in NSW. The primary objectives of this survey were to gain insights into members' perspectives on the system's current state, identify potential areas of improvement to enhance the experience of individuals using temporary accommodation, and to explore strategies for improving pathways out of the system.

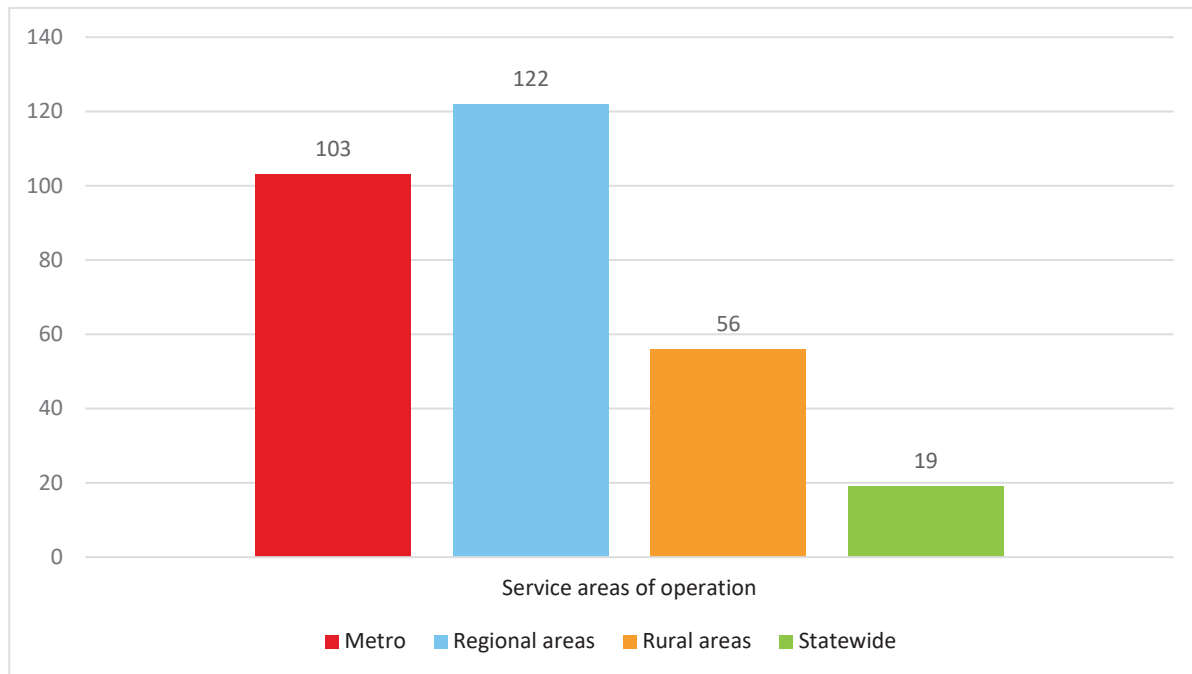
The survey consisted of 12 questions which asked participants if features of the temporary accommodation system such as the application process were fit for purpose and whether temporary accommodation is accessible and appropriate for certain cohorts of people, such as people who hold temporary visas. Participants were also asked to rate the safety and effectiveness of temporary accommodation options, wraparound supports, transport, and administration processes. The survey further asked about the supply of temporary accommodation in respondent's districts and if it was sufficient to meet the demands of people currently in need of support.

The survey questions were designed to capture both quantitative and qualitative responses. Following each survey question, an open text response was offered so that respondents could expand on reasons for the rating they had provided. Respondents were able to skip questions (hence smaller numbers of respondents for some questions).

In total 237 individual survey responses from Homelessness NSW's members were collected. The following sections provide an overview of the collected demographic information of survey respondents.

Demographics of survey respondents

Figure 1 Service areas of operation



Survey respondents were asked to indicate the primary areas in which their services operate in NSW. Respondents were allowed to select multiple options from metro, regional, rural, and statewide areas. There were a diverse range of service areas represented in the survey (refer to Figure 1).

Most survey respondents selected only one area, with 32.5% (n=77) operating in metro areas, 31.2% (n=74) in regional areas, and 8.45% (n=20) in rural areas. Some respondents operated in more than one area, with 16.9% (n=40) operating in either metro and regional, or regional and rural, or metro and rural areas. Additionally, 5.1% (n=12) of respondents operated in all three areas. Moreover, 8% (n=19) of respondents indicated that their organisations operated statewide in NSW.

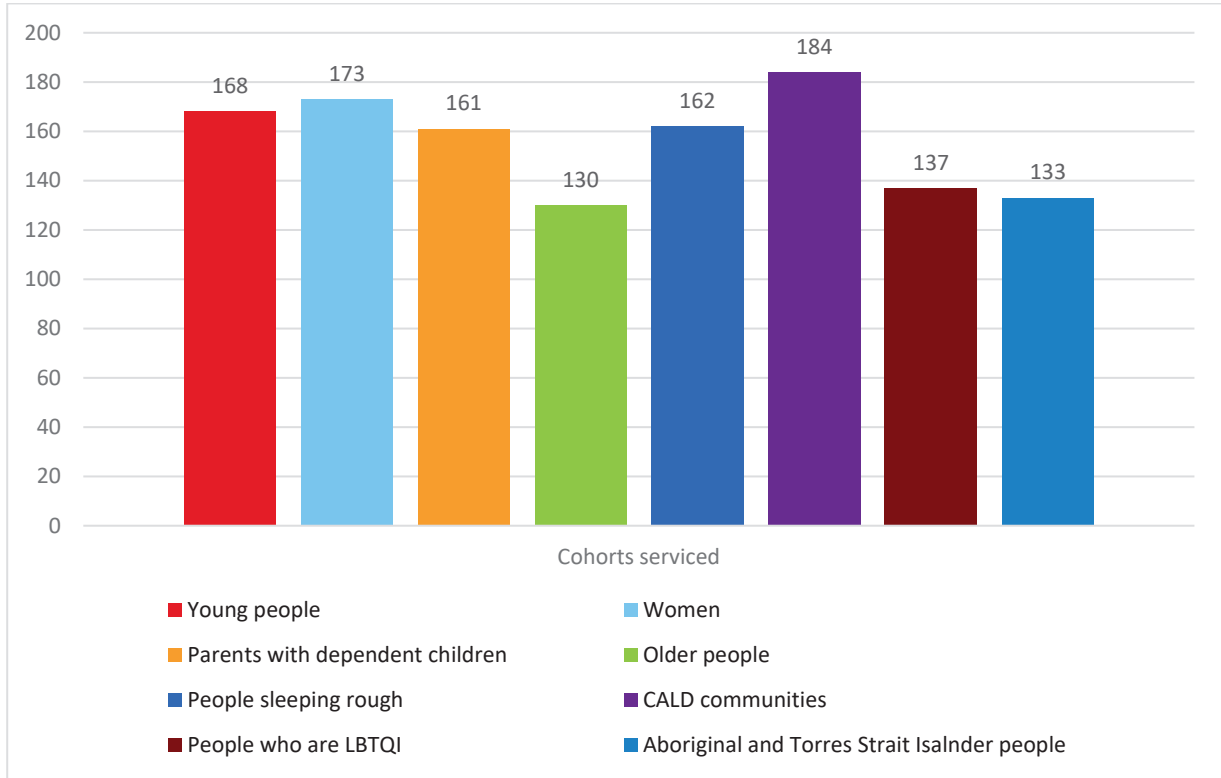
Respondents were also asked to identify the district area in which their service predominantly operates. Table 1 displays the district areas in NSW and the number of survey respondents from each area, with majority of respondents (40% n=95) from the Sydney and surrounding district areas. This is followed by the Hunter England district (11% n=27) and the Illawarra district (9% n=11).

Table 1 Districts areas of operation

District area	Number of respondents
Sydney	40
Hunter New England	27
Western NSW	24
Southeastern Sydney	23
Illawarra Shoalhaven	21
Western Sydney	15
Central Coast	13
Nepean Blue Mountains	11
Southwestern Sydney	11
Mid North Coast	10
Northern NSW	10
Murrumbidgee	9
Southern NSW	8
Far West	8
Northern Sydney	6

Survey respondents were asked to indicate the specific cohorts their organisations provide services for. A total of 237 responses were collected for this question, indicating surveys were completed by a diverse range of service providers working with different groups of people experiencing homelessness. Out of the total responses, 17% (n=46) of survey respondents reported working with only one or two of the cohorts depicted in Figure 2, while 71% (n=209) worked with three to seven of the cohorts. Additionally, 12% (n=32) of survey respondents reported providing services to all eight cohorts.

Figure 2 Cohorts supported



SURVEY FINDINGS

Section One: Accessing the temporary accommodation system.

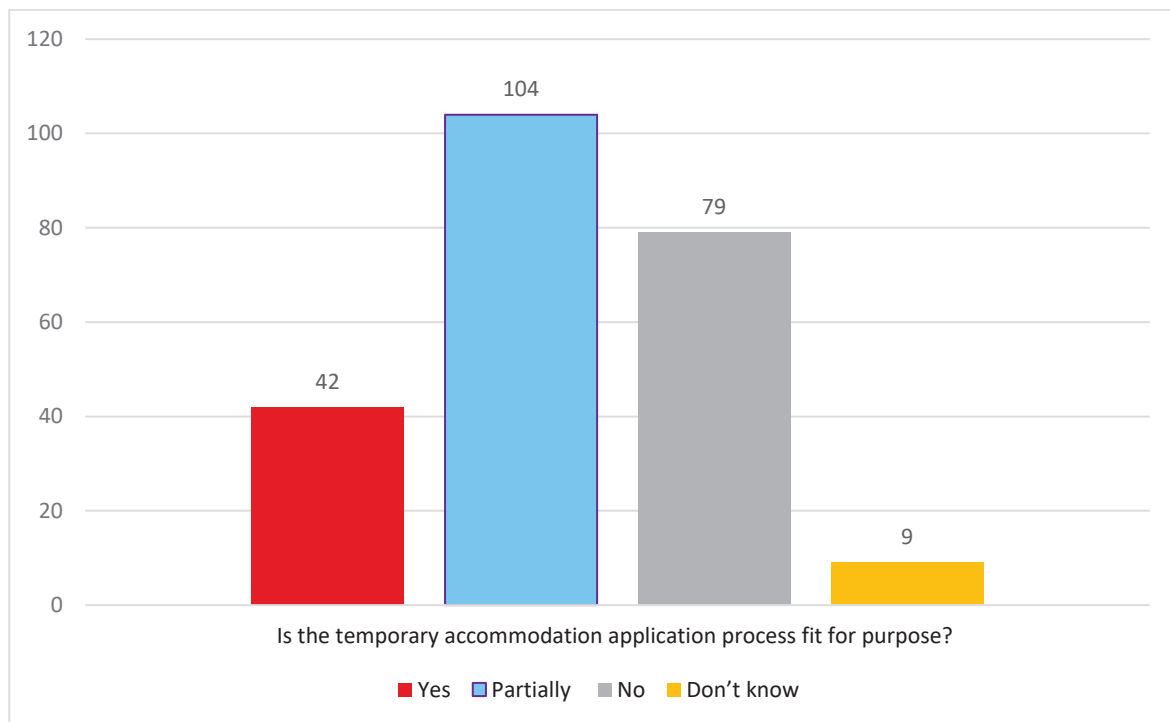
Applying for temporary accommodation

Survey respondents were asked to provide feedback on various components of the application process for temporary accommodation and whether they were currently 'fit-for-purpose'.

Respondents were asked to assess the suitability of each listed feature for its intended purpose by selecting one of the following options: 'yes', 'no', 'partially', or 'don't know'. Additionally, respondents had the option to offer free-text responses to provide a more detailed explanation of their choice. The survey results and selected qualitative responses collected from this question are presented below.

The process of applying for temporary accommodation

Figure 3 Is the temporary accommodation application process fit for purpose? (Total responses n=234)



As detailed in Figure 3, out of the 234 respondents who completed this question, 45% (n=104) considered that the application process for temporary accommodation was only partially fit-for-purpose. Furthermore, 34% (n=79) of respondents indicated that the application process was unfit for purpose.

A substantial number of respondents provided detailed explanations in the free-text section regarding why they perceived the current temporary accommodation application process being unfit or partially fit for purpose.¹

The role of Link2Home and DCJ Housing Offices in the application process

Survey respondents expressed varying opinions regarding the role of Link2Home in the application process. Several comments lauded the accessibility of the Link2Home system and praised the thoroughness of assessments conducted by the staff on the Link2Home helpline:

“Link2Home assessments are comprehensive and provide in a lot of cases a lot of useful information to the SHSs who takes over case managing this case”.

However, these positive assessments were not universally shared. Some responses indicated the need for both the Link2Home system and the staff at the DCJ Housing Office to have better understandings of the specific needs of people in crisis situations:

“Interactions with the Link2Home workers usually elevate the clients further with repetitive and personal questions and often not asked with any level of empathy or understanding”.

Many respondents expressed concern about the prolonged waiting times experienced when contacting Link2Home. They indicated that the waiting times lead to feelings of frustration and distress, both among people seeking assistance and the service providers attempting to assist them.

Other respondents indicated that staff members on the Link2Home helpline frequently lacked a thorough understanding of the complexities involved in securing temporary accommodation in regional and remote areas.

¹ Note: No ‘free text’ responses were provided by those who identified the application process as being fit for purpose.

"[The application process] takes too long, can be waiting for 45 minutes [and the] team sometimes doesn't understand rural areas and distance."

Respondents also noted that many people experiencing homelessness face challenges in accessing temporary accommodation due to their lack of access to phones:

"I understand that there needs to be a system for applying but for many people sleeping rough they have limited access to phones etc and find it difficult to apply via phone."



1. Improve skills and knowledge of Link2Home staff through provision of training and resources, particularly in the areas of:
 - Trauma-informed approaches
 - Knowledge of accommodation options across NSW, including in rural and remote areas
2. Bolster the capacity of the Link2Home hotline by increasing staffing levels and availability of interpreters.

Difficulties in understanding the current application form.

As detailed above, there is no application form specifically for temporary accommodation. Instead, applicants for temporary accommodation are required to complete sections of the application form for social housing.

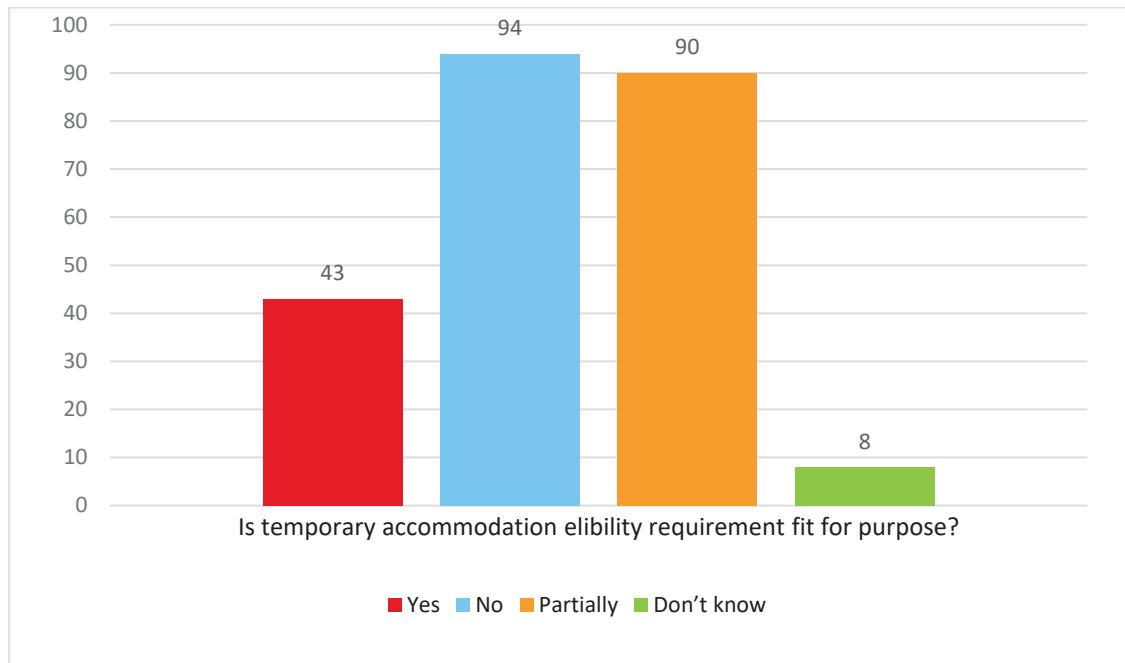
Survey respondents detailed that this application form is difficult and particularly challenging for people with low literacy, English as a second language, intellectual disabilities, or cognitive impairments and those experiencing emotional distress. One respondent detailed:

"[The application form] is laborious and difficult for people who are in crisis. Access to technology and literacy skills are assumed, often incorrectly."

Respondents also highlighted the complicated nature of the evidence requirements within the form (discussed in more detail below).

Eligibility for temporary accommodation

Figure 4. Are the eligibility requirements for temporary accommodation fit for purpose? (Total responses n=235)



As indicated in Figure 4, a total of 235 participants responded to this question. The findings reveal that 40% (n=94) of the respondents did not believe that the current eligibility process for temporary accommodation as fit for its intended purpose. Additionally, 38% (n=90) of the participants indicated that the processes were only partially fit for purpose.

The 'free text' responses provided valuable insights into the areas that require reform in the current eligibility criteria for temporary accommodation.

Restrictive asset cap

As detailed above, at the time of the survey DCJ had an asset cap which prevented people accessing temporary accommodation if they had more than \$1000 in assets (Audit Office of NSW 2021). Respondents expressed concerns regarding this cap, highlighting that it was unnecessary and restrictive for people who have modest savings which could be used to secure long-term accommodation after their time in temporary accommodation:

“The \$1000 maximum in the bank account is asking people to put themselves into abject poverty before they can access emergency accommodation. This defeats the object of having people in a financial position to accept accommodation if they find it in the private rental market as they need to have a deposit and advance rent ready to go and enough money to move.”

The asset cap for temporary accommodation was also identified as having a punitive effect on women who had received payments to help them leave situations of violence, such as the Escaping Violence Payment or funds from Victims Services.

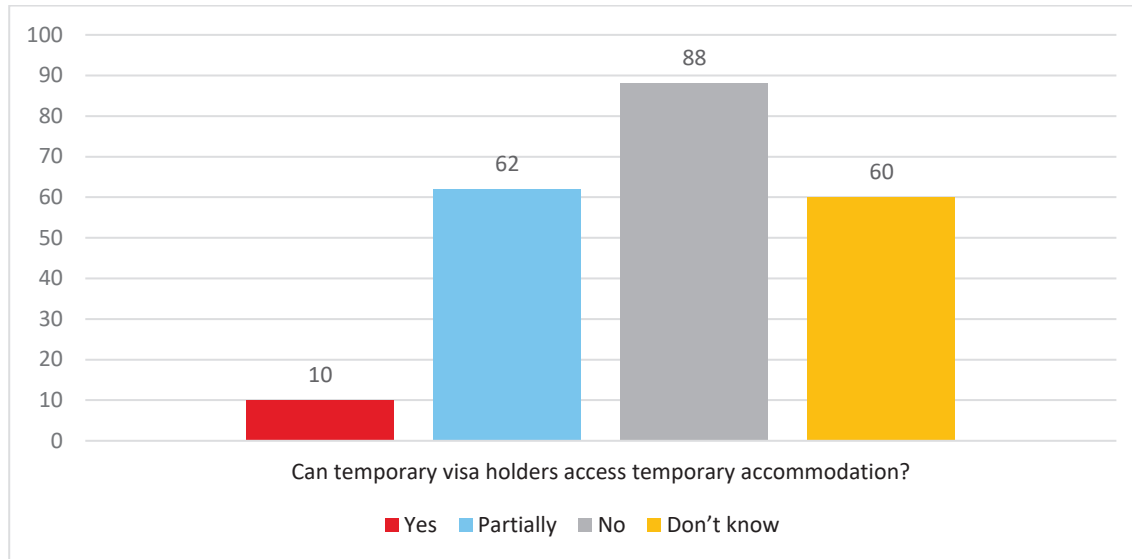
As noted above, in July 2023 the NSW Government made changes to the temporary accommodation system including increasing the asset cap to \$5000 instead of \$1000 and removing this requirement altogether for those fleeing domestic or family violence. Homelessness NSW supports these announced changes and recognises the importance of swift, consistent implementation of the reforms. However, it is also recognised that these are short-term measures that don't address long-term shortages of accommodation options and other pressures on the system.



3. Provide clear guidance to DCJ Housing staff on steps to implement temporary accommodation reforms and ensure such guidance and information is shared with homelessness service providers and people seeking to access temporary accommodation.

Temporary visa holders' eligibility for temporary accommodation

Figure 5 Temporary visa holder access to temporary accommodation (Total responses n=220)



Eligibility requirements for people who are not residents of Australia, including those on temporary visas, are not clearly or consistently described in program guidance. The social housing application form (currently used for temporary accommodation applications) lists evidence requirements including the requirement for applicants to provide proof of citizenship and/or visa status. (DCJ 2023a).

In contrast, the SHS Program specifications state that 'the program does not impose any restrictions linked to citizenship or residency, such as people who are on temporary or spousal visas' (NSW Gov 2021, p.15).

This lack of clarity, amidst an environment of high demand and low resources, has led to confusion among homelessness services, as highlighted in the survey findings.

Survey respondents expressed uncertainty regarding the eligibility of temporary visa holders, including women and children escaping domestic and family violence, to access temporary accommodation. As presented in Figure 5, 40% (n=88) of respondents believed that temporary visa holders were ineligible for temporary accommodation, while an additional 28% (n=62) considered them only partially eligible. Only a small percentage, 5% (n=10), believed that temporary visa holders were able to access temporary accommodation in NSW.

Respondent's 'free text' responses in this section provide further insights into Homelessness NSW's members' uncertainty surrounding the eligibility of temporary visa holders for temporary accommodation. Reflecting several responses, one person indicated:

"In my experience I have had no luck supporting women on temporary visas to access temporary accommodation."

Several other respondents indicated that whether they were able to secure a limited amount of temporary accommodation for those on temporary visas was "dependent on who answers the phone". Those who were able to secure temporary accommodation for clients holding temporary visas reported that they were able to obtain only one to two days accommodation at best.

Studies have demonstrated the considerable impact of the limited ability of those on temporary visas to access government services such as temporary accommodation. The *Path to Nowhere* report highlighted the specific vulnerability of a subgroup within this population: women seeking asylum or holding temporary visas who are fleeing domestic violence. The report found that their ineligibility to access housing assistance often compels women in this category to face the challenging decision of staying with or returning to an abusive partner (National Advocacy Group on Women on Temporary Visas Experiencing Violence 2018).

Homelessness NSW has previously emphasised a further repercussion of restricted access to housing assistance for people on temporary visas (Homelessness NSW 2021). SHSs are required to provide essential support and referral services to all clients in need of assistance, including people on temporary visas, in accordance with the government's 'no wrong door' requirement (NSW Government 2021). However, as people on temporary visas cannot be transitioned into permanent housing or temporary accommodation, they endure extended stays within the SHS system. This situation, in turn, impairs the SHS's ability to support other clients.

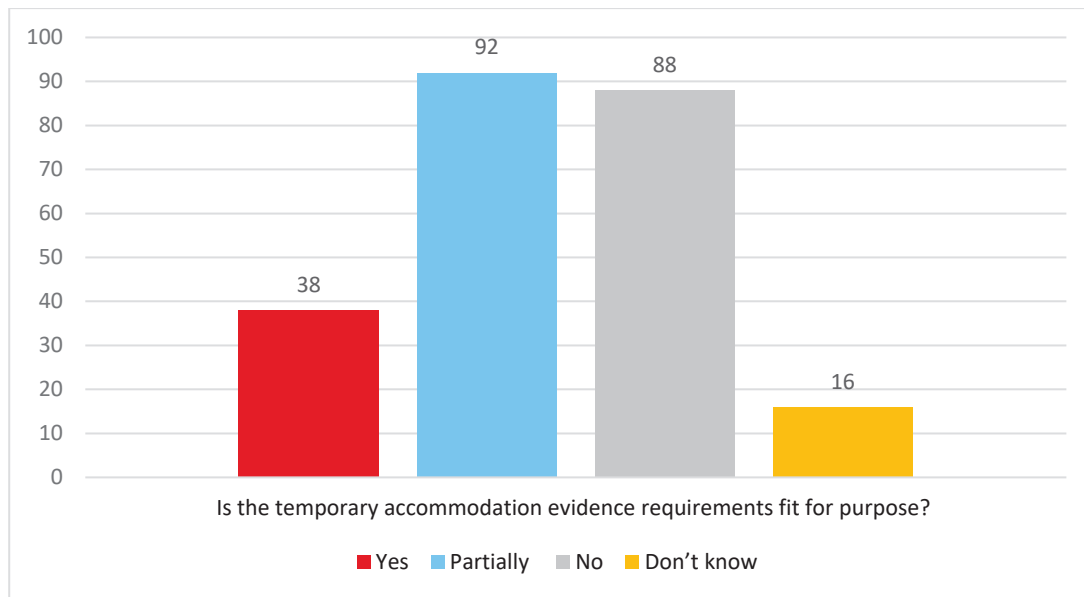


4. Revise the limitations on the eligibility and duration of temporary accommodation for individuals who are not residents of Australia. This should be done in consultation with key stakeholders from homelessness, refugee and asylum seeker, domestic violence and other community services, as well as government agency representatives and people with lived experience.

5. Publish clear information online regarding the eligibility of people on temporary visas for temporary accommodation

Evidence requirements

Figure 6 Are the evidence requirements fit for purpose? (Total responses n= 234)



As detailed in Figure 6, out of the 234 respondents who completed this question, 38% (n=88) did not believe that the evidence requirements for temporary accommodation were fit for purpose. 39% (n=92) partially believed they were, while only 16% (n=38) indicated that it was fit for purpose.²

Excessive evidence requirements

Many survey respondents pointed out evidence requirements for temporary accommodation applications were excessive, creating an overwhelming experience for both service providers and people they support. Respondents stressed that people who were already in crisis situations, found the application process to be confusing and, at times, distressing. Consequently, some people opted not to engage with the temporary accommodation system altogether:

² Note: No responses were provided by those who identified the evidence requirements process as being fit for purpose.

“People with numerous complexities and mental health find the process to challenging and would sometime prefer to be homeless then to try to understand the process.”

Additionally, survey respondents pointed out the specific challenges faced by particularly vulnerable groups during the application process, including individuals with a history of trauma, young people, and those with intellectual disabilities or cognitive impairments. As one respondent detailed:

“People with an intellectual disability or with a mental health issue are unable to comprehend the complicated process of applying for temporary accommodation by themselves.”

Women experiencing domestic and family violence were also identified as facing additional barriers to providing the required identification and evidence documents due to their experience of violence and having to flee from an unsafe home quickly. It is hoped that recent reforms to remove the asset cap eligibility requirement for people escaping domestic and family violence will alleviate concerns such as that described here:

“As a domestic violence service, we have noted that women are asked to provide identification/bank statement to access temporary accommodation and often women who leave violent situations do not have this with them as they have left with nothing.”

Respondents detailed that people who successfully navigate the application process often require intensive support from SHSs. This necessitates case workers and managers allocating substantial amounts of time assisting clients in completing the application process:

“The application process is too lengthy, and case managers and clients end up having to wait in the housing offices for long periods of time. [This could be time spent] out working on other client matters.”

Respondents believed that to streamline the application process and to prioritise the safety of applicants who have experienced domestic violence, temporary accommodation should be granted based on an initial assessment conducted by an approved SHS or domestic and family specialist services:

“As it is not always possible for people to gather such evidence on the day they need accommodation, it would be more humane to secure the accommodation and then have someone work with them to provide the evidence.”

Inconsistency in the application of acceptance of supporting evidence.

Survey respondents also raised concerns regarding significant inconsistencies in the acceptance of various types of evidence by DCJ Housing Office staff. Many members detailed that the response to what evidence was considered valid in a temporary accommodation application was often dependent on the specific DCJ Housing Office staff member reviewing the application:

“The evidence requirements for accessing temporary accommodation seem inconsistent. Evidence that is accepted by one housing officer will then be rejected by another housing officer the next day.”



6. Review the temporary accommodation application process with the aim of reducing complexity and delays. Conduct this review in consultation with service providers (including homelessness, domestic violence and youth services) and people with lived experience, and publish clear and transparent guidelines at the conclusion of the review.
7. Ensure DCJ and SHS providers receive regular training on eligibility and evidence requirements for temporary accommodation.
8. Where evidence and identification cannot be immediately produced, allow for temporary accommodation to be provided based on the initial assessment of approved SHS and domestic and family specialist services.

Evidence of Apprehended Domestic Violence Orders.

While an Apprehended Domestic Violence Order (ADVO) or police report is not stated as being mandatory in the eligibility requirements for temporary accommodation, some respondents identified supporting clients whose application for temporary accommodation was refused as they could not provide an ADVO as evidence of domestic and family violence:

“Some women have been refused temporary accommodation without proof of an ADVO; however, it is not safe for all women to have an ADVO.”

Other respondents highlighted that it was unsafe for people experiencing domestic and family violence to report to the police or to obtain an ADVO. This could be due to concerns about potential retaliation by the perpetrator or broader fears related to law enforcement, especially for individuals from migrant and refugee backgrounds and Aboriginal women.



Recommendations for accessing temporary accommodation.

9. Ensure applicants are not excluded from temporary accommodation based on an inability to provide evidence of experiencing/fleeing domestic and family violence. This includes accepting a declaration of an experience of domestic and family violence from a person connected with a specialist domestic and family violence service.

The supply of temporary accommodation

The following section of the report details respondents' perspectives on the ability of the current supply of temporary accommodation to meet demand in their respective housing districts. The survey asked Homelessness NSW members to rate temporary accommodation supply against demand out of 5, from 1 (not good) to 5 (great).

Table 2 provides an overview of the average scores assigned by survey respondents, indicating their assessment of the temporary accommodation supply in meeting the needs of people seeking assistance in their districts across NSW.

Supply in Housing Districts

Table 2 Capacity of supply to meet demand for temporary accommodation in survey respondents' districts

NSW District areas	Average score out of 5
Nepean Blue Mountains	1.0
Southwestern Sydney	1.1
Northern NSW	1.2
Far West	1.2
Southern NSW	1.2
Hunter New England	1.2
Mid North Coast	1.4
Murrumbidgee	1.4
Illawarra Shoalhaven	1.4
Western NSW	1.4
Northern Sydney	1.4
Sydney	1.7
Southeastern Sydney	1.9
Western Sydney	2.0
Central Coast	2.3

As depicted in Table 2, most respondents assigned ratings below 2 out of 5 to the supply of temporary accommodation in meeting the demand within their respective Housing Districts. These low ratings indicate a significant concern regarding the availability of suitable temporary accommodation options. Qualitative responses further supported this, highlighting the presence of very limited choices and, in some instances, the existence of only one available option for temporary accommodation in their areas.

In the Western Sydney region, survey respondents rated the supply of temporary accommodation slightly higher than other districts (2 out of 5). One respondent highlighted however, that the accommodation was unsafe and not suitable for young people and stated that they “Generally are able to get 1-2 nights temporary accommodation however, many places unsafe and unsuitable for young people.”

The Central Coast district rated slightly higher than the other areas with 2.3 out of 5, however, as one participant summarised:

“Some of the temporary accommodation providers are slum lords, which create negative experiences. Clustering temporary accommodation clients in high density temporary accommodation motels creates social issues. Due to the geographical size of the Central Coast, getting to temporary accommodation can be hard, and forces some people to leave their communities and any support they have. This is particularly hard for families that have children in school, and no transport.”

The above findings support the need for increased investment to secure additional supply of temporary accommodation. This becomes especially crucial considering the recently announced reforms by the NSW Government to the temporary accommodation system. While these reforms are needed and supported by Homelessness NSW, extending the duration that people can stay in temporary accommodation without simultaneously increasing the supply will inevitably reduce the availability of places available for other applicants. This is particularly the case for non-residents, with stakeholders reporting that recent changes have resulted in less temporary accommodation availability for this cohort.



10. Undertake analysis of availability of temporary accommodation based on local need and undertake regular audits and reviews of accommodation options for safety, accessibility, and quality.
11. Increase the supply of safe and high-quality temporary accommodation options across all regions of the state, with a specific emphasis on accommodations that can be directly managed and provided by SHSs.

Section Two: Residing in temporary accommodation.

Accessibility and appropriateness

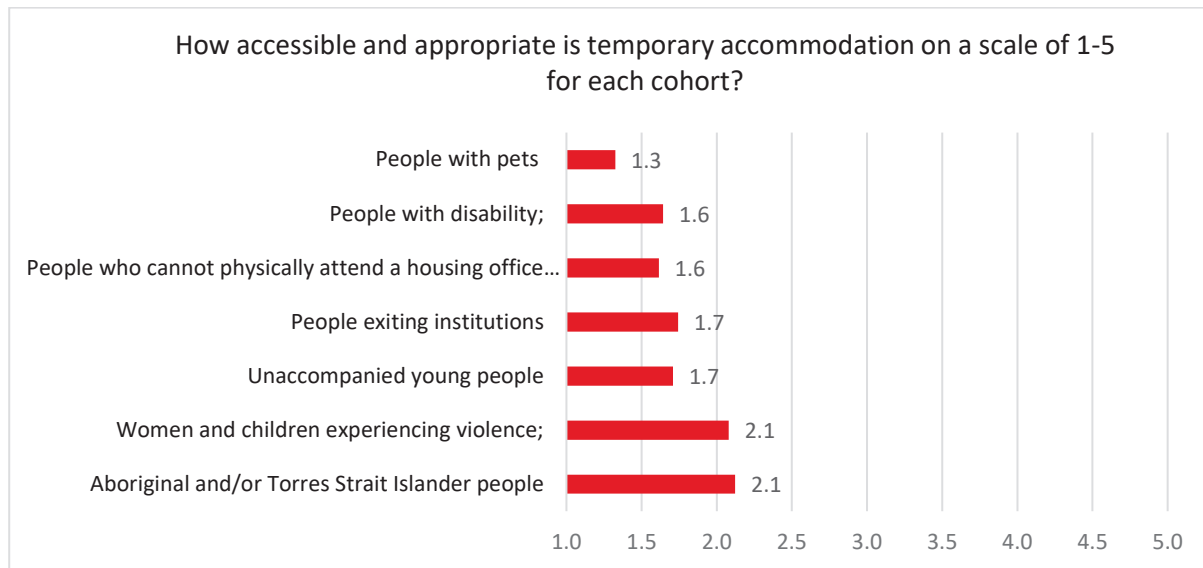
Homelessness NSW members were asked in the survey to provide feedback regarding the accessibility and appropriateness of the current temporary accommodation system for various cohorts of people experiencing homelessness. Respondents were asked to rate on a scale of 1 (not good) to 5 (great) how accessible and appropriate they believed temporary accommodation to be for the following groups of people known to experience disproportionate rates of homelessness:

- People with a disability.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- Women and children escaping domestic violence.
- Unaccompanied young people.
- People who cannot physically attend a housing office within business hours.
- People exiting institutions (such as people exiting prison/ hospital); and
- People with pets.

Rating the temporary accommodation for accessibility and appropriateness

Survey respondents were asked to rate on a scale of 1- 5 how accessible and appropriate temporary accommodation was for each of the listed cohorts. The cohorts of women and children experiencing domestic and family violence and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people received an average rating of 2.1 out of 5, while all other cohorts received an average below 2 out of 5 (see Figure 7).

Figure 7 Rating temporary accommodation's accessibility and appropriateness for cohorts



Based on these findings, reforms to the temporary accommodation system are required to make it a more inclusive, accessible, and well-suited solution for a diverse array of groups experiencing homelessness. Offering support individually tailored to the needs and preferences of *all* people in temporary accommodation (not just those fortunate enough to access supported models of temporary accommodation) would enhance accessibility of temporary accommodation and improve pathway planning out of temporary accommodation and into a home.

Homelessness NSW also believes these findings support potential expansion of the supported temporary accommodation model.



12. Develop specific policies and guidelines on provision of TA for people with a disability, women and children escaping domestic violence, young people, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. These must be developed via a collaborative process including people with lived experience and service providers.

13. Expand the provision of supported temporary accommodation models.

The survey also provided an optional free-text response after each question in this section, enabling participants to indicate why they felt the current system was not accessible or appropriate for the above groups.

Accessible and appropriate for people with pets

Many Homelessness NSW members expressed the need for reforms to enable people with pets to access temporary accommodation. Responses highlighted that most existing temporary accommodation providers did not permit people to bring their pets with them, leading to a significant number of people opting not to access temporary accommodation altogether. One respondent detailed:

“We have so many women that do not leave violent relationships as they don’t have an option of taking their pets with them [into temporary accommodation].”

Respondents detailed high rates of pet ownership in amongst people experiencing homelessness, with pets playing an integral role in providing companionship and emotional support in the face of considerable trauma. Respondents shared:

“For people who have experienced trauma, a pet is often a very necessary emotional support.”



14. Expand availability of pet-friendly temporary accommodation across the state.

Accessible and appropriate for people with a disability

Evidence indicates that 8.1% of people who access SHSs have a disability, with 34% of these people reporting disability at severe or profound level (AIHW 2022). Despite this, respondents to this survey indicated that there is a lack of temporary accommodation options that are appropriate and accessible for people who have a disability. Reflecting many other responses, one respondent detailed:

“There is a very limited amount of temporary accommodation providers in our region. Most of these are not disability accessible. The ones we have are not suitable, safe, or accessible.”

Members detailed that the lack of appropriate and accessible accommodation was a significant issue within regional and remote areas. Several respondents indicated that in regional and remote areas:

“When a person with a disability cannot access the local temporary accommodation provider [as it is not accessible] they are expected to relocate to a provider that does accommodate their needs, which can cause a lot of stress and anxiety on a client who has always been local.”

The limited temporary accommodation options for people with a disability do not align with the *Disability Inclusion Act 2014* (NSW) which aims to promote and protect the rights of people with disabilities and ensure their full and equal participation in all aspects of society.



15. Increase the number of disability accessible temporary accommodation options with a specific focus on addressing shortages in regional and remote areas.

Accessible and appropriate for people who cannot physically attend a housing office within business hours.

Respondents emphasised that it was difficult for many people to access a DCJ Housing Office during regular business hours.

At the time of the survey, people were required to physically attend a Housing Office when reapplying for temporary accommodation following the initial two-day allocation. It is recognised, however, that this requirement changed following announced temporary accommodation changes in July 2023.

Respondents believed that requiring in-person attendance at a DCJ Housing office was inappropriate and distressing for several groups who are already vulnerable to homelessness. This included individuals with disabilities, those who have experienced trauma, young people, women with caring responsibilities who have experienced domestic and family violence, and those seeking temporary accommodation after leaving an institution or hospital. Physical attendance was also difficult for people who were employed:

“For clients who work business hours, it is impossible for them to get to a housing office to extend temporary accommodation and they should not be made to choose between keeping their job and the little income they have or being homeless.”



16. Enable approved SHS and domestic and family violence services to assess people’s needs and request additional temporary accommodation days via phone or email, without a person having to physically attend the Housing Office.

Accessible and appropriate for women and children escaping domestic and family violence.

Respondents believed that the current temporary accommodation options for women and children escaping domestic and family violence are often unsafe and inappropriate.

Numerous respondents indicated that people who had escaped domestic violence and family violence refused to apply for temporary accommodation believing it to be dangerous and unsafe:

“Women escaping domestic violence are often unable to cope with a lot of temporary accommodation environments when they are still so close to their experiences of violence.”

“A lot of women voice that they do not feel safe going into temporary accommodation with men and we know there are women who will not leave the violent relationship due to this.”

Many other respondents detailed traumatic and unsafe experiences in the temporary accommodation system for women and their children who have fled domestic violence:

“Safety at temporary accommodation becomes an issue for women escaping domestic violence as they will turn up and are sharing the building with men and general homelessness. Putting a woman with young children in a facility with drug use and people exiting jail etc can be unsafe and cause women to stay at home with the violent partner rather than be in this environment.”

Respondents also detailed instances in which women escaping domestic violence had been placed in the same temporary accommodation as the perpetrator or a person associated with the perpetrator of that violence. This was noted as occurring frequently in regional and remote areas where there are limited temporary accommodation options available:

“In [respondents’ area] there is one accommodation provider. This provider accepts people escaping domestic violence as well as perpetrators of domestic violence. The hotel itself is unkept and rundown. There are bed bugs, blood-stained mattresses as well as broken plumbing systems.”



17. Increase the accessibility and safety of temporary accommodation for women and children experiencing domestic and family violence by:

- Conducting a state-wide assessment of availability of suitable temporary accommodation options;

- Auditing current providers to ensure they are meeting safety and hygiene standards; and
- Allocating 20% of all temporary accommodation exclusively to women and children experiencing domestic and family violence.

Accessible and appropriate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people make up over one-quarter or 28% of the clients of SHS (AIHW 2023). Further, the experience of homelessness has been found to be culturally distinct for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (HRSC 2021).

Despite this, respondents indicated that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were experiencing discrimination and exclusion from the temporary accommodation system. These issues were observed in interactions with staff at different levels of the system, as well as in the presence of various structural barriers that rendered temporary accommodation processes and services culturally unsafe for these communities. Respondents also highlighted a lack of choice and control for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people accessing temporary accommodation.

To address this, it is recommended that cultural safety be embedded in all parts of the temporary accommodation. This should include:

- ensuring that there are temporary accommodation options that are appropriate to specific cultural experiences of home and homelessness.
- employment and workforce development for more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff.
- training for all staff in Link2Home, DCJ and service provider agencies; and
- more culturally appropriate complaint mechanisms that ensure experiences of discrimination and exclusion are reported and actioned.



18. Embed cultural safety in all parts of the temporary accommodation system. This should include employment and workforce development for more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, training for all staff in Link2Home, DCJ and service provider agencies and more culturally appropriate complaint mechanisms.

Accessible and appropriate for unaccompanied young people

Many respondents highlighted the temporary accommodation system as being unsafe and inappropriate for unaccompanied young people. Although the survey did not specify an age range for ‘young people’, it is recognised that there are distinct challenges associated with the homelessness experiences of children aged 10 to 17.

In 2021–22, 12,812 children aged 10 to 17 years presented alone to a SHS in Australia (AIHW 2023). These figures fail to capture the full scope of unaccompanied child and youth homelessness in Australia, as the prevalence of couch surfing and the absence of services specifically tailored to this younger cohort contribute to an underestimation of the issue (Robinson 2023a).

Homelessness NSW draws attention to the efforts of Yfoundations and research conducted by Professor Catherine Robinson into the area of unaccompanied children in the homelessness system (Robinson 2023b). These efforts underscore the imperative for clear policy responses that recognise the unique characteristics of unaccompanied child homelessness. This recognition is achieved through collaborative approaches involving multiple agencies, facilitated by a designated lead agency to coordinate efforts. Furthermore, there is an emphasis on the importance of implementing mechanisms that promote transparency and accountability to effectively address the challenges associated with unaccompanied child homelessness (Robinson 2023a).



19. Develop a comprehensive, collaborative response to address the needs of unaccompanied children in the homelessness system, in consultation with peak agencies and services working with children and young people.

Accessible and appropriate for people exiting institutions (such as people exiting prison/hospital)

Respondents identified that people exiting institutions (such as hospitals and prisons) are currently insufficiently supported through the temporary accommodation system to re-establish stable lives. Respondents indicated that people are often exited from prison without identification documentation which then restricts their ability to obtain accommodation:

“People are exited out of prison with no identification, given two nights in temporary accommodation and then [have] no idea on what to do to get an extension.”

Respondents also raised concerns that clients who are discharged from hospitals are often released to temporary accommodation without necessary paperwork, pathway planning or support such as a NDIS review or medical assessment:

“Having to attend the local office for temporary accommodation in business hours is very hard for vulnerable clients - especially straight out of hospital.”

Recognising the vulnerability of those exiting institutions, the *NSW Homelessness Strategy 2018-23* determined one of its key focus areas as preventing ‘exits from government services into homelessness’ (NSW Government 2018).

The ability of the NSW Government to prevent exits into homelessness would be strengthened through the employment of local outreach support teams to provide intake and triage support to people in temporary accommodation. Cross agency approaches to supporting people as a ‘shared client’ have been developed through mechanisms such as the Housing and Mental Health Agreement between NSW Health and DCJ. These types of cross agency agreements offer valuable lessons for ongoing improvement of transitions between various institutions and homelessness support services (NSW Health 2022).



20. Employ local temporary accommodation triage and outreach support teams to improve coordination across agencies to reduce risk of homelessness and support transitions between prisons and hospitals and temporary accommodation.

Safety and support

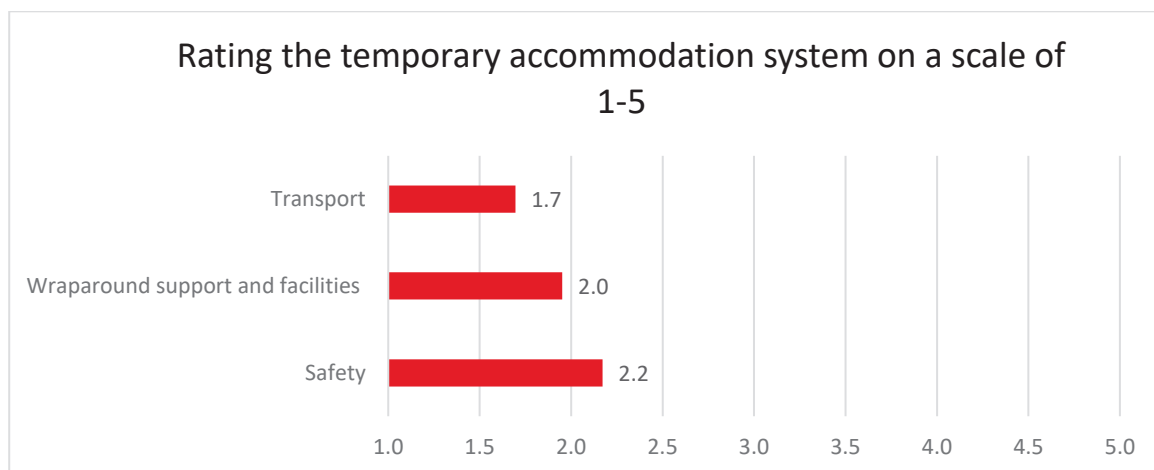
Homelessness NSW members were asked in the survey to provide feedback on how effective the temporary accommodation system was in providing safety and wraparound support. Survey participants were asked to rate on a scale of 1 (not good) to 5 (great) how appropriate temporary accommodation was in relation to providing:

- Transportation to the accommodation venue.
- Wraparound support to temporary accommodation clients; and
- Safety for those residing in temporary accommodation.

Rating temporary accommodation for safety and support

Figure 8 presents a summary of the average scores assigned by survey respondents to different aspects of the temporary accommodation system, including safety, wraparound support, facilities, and transport. The lowest rating was given to transport, scoring 1.7 out of 5. This was followed by a rating of 2 out of 5 for both wraparound support and facilities. Safety received a slightly higher rating of 2.2 out of 5.

Figure 8 rating temporary accommodation in relation to transport, support and safety



In addition to the rating scale questions, participants were given the opportunity to provide optional free-text responses in this section, to indicate reasons for their rating. The following sections provide a summary of the responses provided.

Transport to accommodation

Most responses indicated that transport is rarely considered or provided by DCJ or other agencies when someone is placed in temporary accommodation. Consistent with many other responses, one person detailed:

“In my experience I've never seen a client offered assistance with transport to a temporary accommodation provider.”

Respondents spoke of the impact of a lack of transportation to temporary accommodation on vulnerable people:

“Clients are expected to get to and from temporary accommodation and the housing office by their own means. This can consist of a client having to walk kilometres with children and bags of belongings.”

Other respondents indicated the impact of a lack of transportation had in regional and regional areas where large distances can be involved:

“[respondents’ area] is large geographical area so getting to temporary accommodation particularly with no transports, kids and pets can be challenging. As a result, this can be a massive barrier to accessing safety, but also displaces many from their community and little support they have.”

Another respondent detailed:

“Within regional NSW there are many communities that struggle to have more than one temporary accommodation provider, this then brings barriers of transport to enable a person to access temporary accommodation in another town.”



21. Provide resources to temporary accommodation providers in regional and remote areas to ensure transportation can be provided to people who access temporary accommodation.

Wraparound support

Many survey respondents emphasised the need for comprehensive wraparound support for people residing in temporary accommodation. This support includes access to health and mental health services, long-term housing assistance, and employment support. However, respondents indicated a current lack

of availability of such wraparound support and facilities for clients in temporary accommodation. One response detailed:

“Many temporary accommodation facilities don’t offer wraparound support for housing pathways and people tend to return to rough sleeping after the initial first two nights due to lack of advocacy and pathway support.”

Other respondents detailed that in place of wraparound support, clients were routinely only provided with details of local support services that they should contact upon exiting temporary accommodation:

“There is no wraparound support provided at temporary accommodation. Clients are just given referrals out to services but with no follow up.”

Several respondents also highlighted the contrast between the current lack of wraparound supports and what was provided during the COVID-19 lockdowns. During this period, ‘pop-up’ services were established in the hotel foyers of seven inner city hotels used for temporary accommodation. These pop-up services provided a wide range of health assistance, assistance with applying for permanent housing, legal services and providing material support such as phones and food vouchers (Hartley et al.2021).



22. Increase the resources available to homelessness, and domestic and family violence services to enable greater provision of support during people’s stays in temporary accommodation.

Section Three: Administration of the temporary accommodation system

The third section of this report focuses on the perspectives of Homelessness NSW's members on the extent to which the temporary accommodation system is being effectively and fairly administered by DCJ.

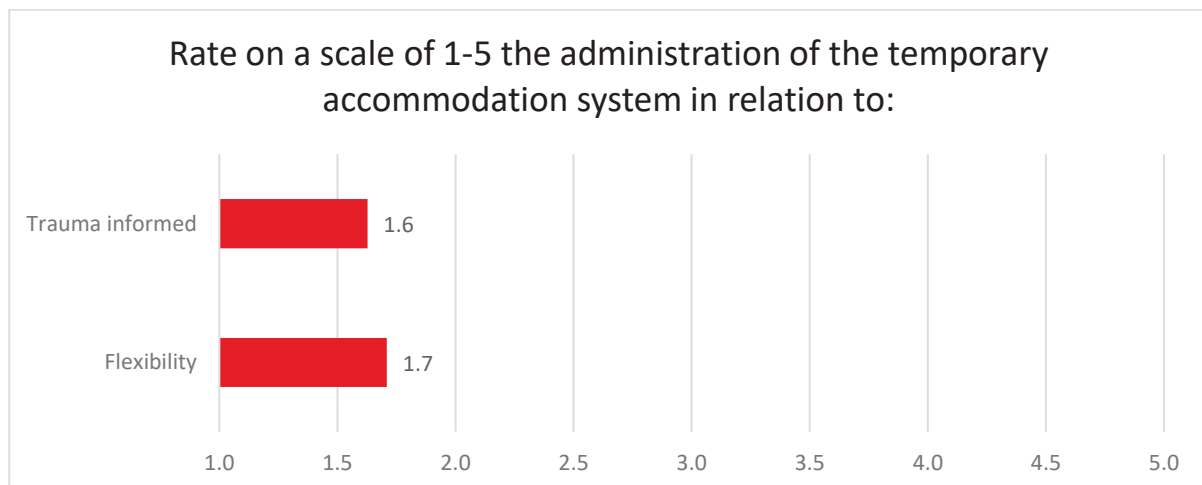
Survey respondents were asked to rate on a scale of 1 (not good) to 5 (great) the administration of the temporary accommodation system in relation to being:

- Trauma informed; and
- Flexible.

Rating the administration of the temporary accommodation system

As detailed in Figure 9, survey respondents did not consider the temporary accommodation system to be flexible or trauma informed.

Figure 9 Rating the administration of temporary accommodation



In addition to the rating scale questions, respondents were able to provide free-text responses in this section, to indicate reasons for their rating. The following sections provide a summary of the qualitative responses.

Trauma-informed care and temporary accommodation

Qualitative responses from respondents strongly indicated that the current administration of the temporary accommodation system lacks a trauma informed approach.

“I do not believe the temporary accommodation system is trauma informed at all. I work with women and children who have experienced domestic and family violence, and the temporary accommodation system is something we try to avoid at all costs due to the added trauma it will cause women and children who access it.”

Participants highlighted a notable absence of trauma informed engagement during the application process for temporary accommodation, particularly concerning the interactions with Link2Home and staff in the DCJ Housing Offices.

“Staff are not trauma informed on the phone when dealing with clients in crisis. They challenge clients and tell them off even though they have nowhere to stay. They act as if temporary accommodation is a luxury for clients.”

While the lack of trauma informed care from staff via telephone was an issue, respondents clearly indicated that it was the system, more so than individuals, that was not trauma informed.

“The trauma clients are facing by being without a home and other complexities that impact their lives, is not considered when temporary accommodation options are offered, the case plans that are developed and the other unrealistic requirements that are imposed on the clients.”

Several respondents reflected positively on the previous temporary accommodation processes during the COVID-19 lockdowns and were frustrated the positive gains in this period had been wound back:

“We have seen temporary accommodation be very trauma informed and wonderfully flexible; that's the frustration.”



23. Conduct a comprehensive audit of the entire temporary accommodation system, examining all its components, including policies and procedures, with a focus on ensuring they are trauma informed. After the audit, initiate necessary changes to enhance the system and align it with trauma informed practices.

Flexibility of temporary accommodation

Respondents were also critical of the lack of flexibility within the administration of the temporary accommodation system. One respondent detailed:

“There is no flexibility in the temporary accommodation requirements. As DCJ workers must work to guidelines it is difficult for them to be flexible with clients who are in distress.”

Respondents highlighted that the current temporary accommodation system imposes requirements on people without considering their vulnerability and the unsuitability of these requirements for their specific circumstances. Examples included, the application process, eligibility criteria, and re-application procedures after the initial period of temporary accommodation. Respondents frequently expressed that the temporary accommodation process lacked flexibility to accommodate individual circumstances:

“I see very little flexibility. The process often contributes to an already declining mental health.”

One of the key areas identified as indicative of the lack of flexibility was for the need for keeping rental seeker diaries. At the time of the survey, people in temporary accommodation were required to keep and provide to DCJ ‘rental seeker diaries’ which documented their efforts to seek private rental accommodation. This was taken by DCJ as evidence of their attempting to resolve their housing issues and this was factored into the assessment of eligibility for extended temporary accommodation beyond the initial two days.

Respondents emphasised the inflexibility of the rental diary requirement, particularly for groups such as young people, people with disabilities, and women escaping domestic and family violence:

“Rental diaries are a constant stress for clients. They are battling against 30 other applicants for the same private rental. It puts strains on the clients and strains on the services involved.”

In addition to being an unrealistic and unnecessary expectation, survey respondents also indicated that the removal of rental diaries would enable SHS workers to concentrate efforts on critical actions to access long-term housing, without additional administrative burdens. Requirements to complete rental diaries are particularly unfeasible in current circumstances where affordable rental accommodation for those on the lowest income is estimated to be less than 1% of all available rental accommodation (Anglicare 2023).

Following the release of this survey, DCJ implemented a 12-month freeze on the requirement for people in temporary accommodation to complete rental seeker diaries. However, there are continuing reports from Homelessness NSW members that people accessing temporary accommodation are being asked to provide screenshots of rental applications, considered equivalent to a rental diary.



24. Permanently remove the requirement for temporary accommodation participants to provide a rental seeker diary.

Section Four: Exiting out of temporary accommodation.

The final section of this report focuses on the perspective of Homelessness NSW's members on the process of clients exiting the temporary accommodation system.

As noted above, in July 2023, following release of the interim version of this report, the NSW Premier and NSW Minister for Homelessness announced several changes to the temporary accommodation system (DCJ 2023b). These changes include:

- Individuals who contact Link2Home are now eligible to access seven days of temporary accommodation before requiring a full housing needs assessment; and
- Removal of the limit of 28 days of temporary accommodation per person per financial year.

At the time of the survey, people were initially provided with two nights of accommodation. After these two nights they would need to attend a DCJ Housing Office for a full housing needs assessment, which may include an extension of temporary accommodation (Audit Office of NSW 2021). There was also a limit of 28 days of temporary accommodation per person per financial year (Audit Office of NSW 2021).

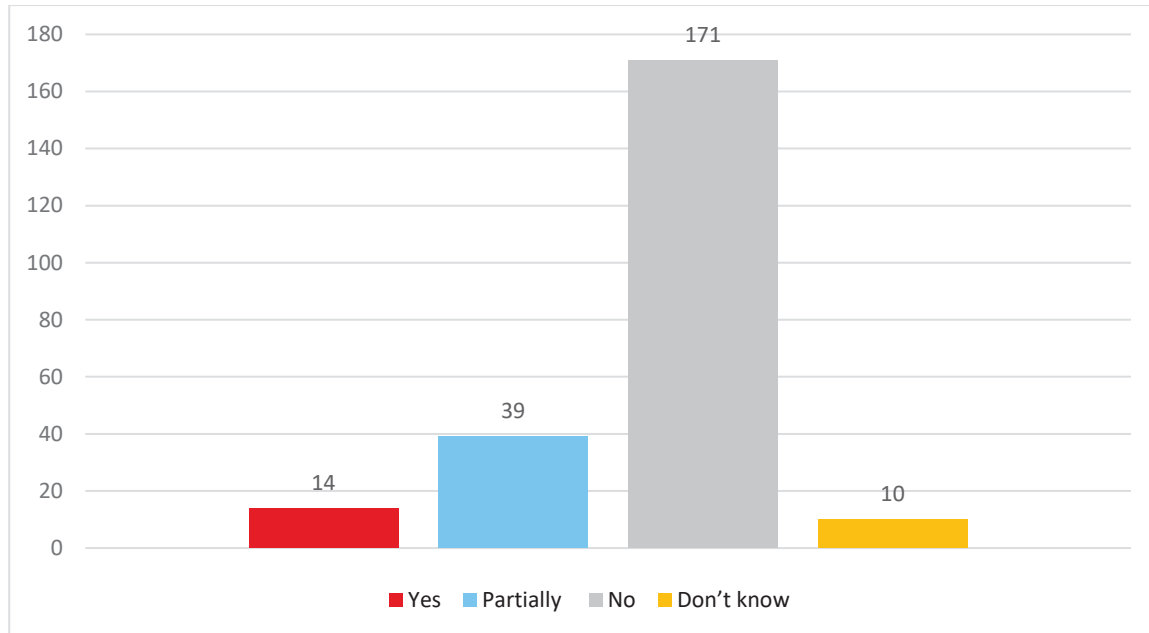
Even with the changes that have been announced, the perspectives of members regarding the functioning of time limits for temporary accommodation at the time of the survey hold significant value. This is mainly because, despite the official announcements, these changes have yet to be fully put consistently into practice. Consequently, the responses from members emphasise the critical need for a thorough implementation of these changes throughout NSW.

Temporary accommodation time restraints

Survey respondents indicated whether they consider current time limits suitable by selecting one of the following options: 'yes', 'no', 'partially', or 'don't know'. The questions also provided an optional free-text response, enabling respondents to indicate why they felt the current time constraints were, or were not, fit for purpose. The quantitative and qualitative responses are detailed below.

Rating time constraints within the temporary accommodation system

Figure 10 Current time constraints fit for purpose (Total responses n=234)



Initial receipt of two days temporary accommodation

Respondents emphasised that the initial limit of two days temporary accommodation (before an application to extend a stay in temporary accommodation was required) places considerable stress and pressure on vulnerable people in temporary accommodation:

"[the extension process] is not trauma informed. I can't imagine trying to get my life together, trying to appease all DCJ's evidence requirements and then leave after 48 hours and not knowing if I am going to get an extension."

One respondent further detailed:

"The 48-hour time frame is too short for this to seem "worth it" for rough sleepers, who usually need to transport both themselves, plus multiple bags, and pieces of luggage to a hostel, and then risk having the mattresses and bedding supplies they were unable to bring being stolen, trashed, or removed by council."

Time limit of 28 days

The qualitative responses from the survey revealed that service providers and the people they assist in temporary accommodation require time to address the intricate and crucial issues affecting a person's homelessness experiences. Respondents detailed that imposing limitations on the number of days individuals can access temporary accommodation hinders their ability to find pathways out of homelessness.

Reflecting the comments of other respondents, one person detailed:

“Solutions to find medium/long term housing during these 28 days come very rarely and now that low-cost accommodation is now more expensive, means that we have had clients with small children, return to sleeping in their cars and other clients pitching tents in suburban areas. It appears cruel to have such minimal number of days afforded and appears as a punishment to our client.”

Other respondents noted that given the current housing crisis many people in temporary accommodation are in the process of trying to resolve their housing needs when their 28 days have expired:

“As for the 28 days capped, clients have been actively looking for private or public housing options and are ending up sleeping rough as they are told their 28 days are finished.”

Responses also highlighted that women and children who are victims of domestic and family violence encounter additional obstacles in obtaining long-term accommodation. These challenges encompass safety apprehensions, legal complications such as lengthy Apprehended Domestic Violence Order court procedures, and financial issues, especially related to financial abuse. Additionally, women in these situations often face limited employment opportunities, especially if they are responsible for caring for children.



25. Implement reforms to the available days of temporary accommodation consistently across New South Wales. To achieve this, clear and accessible guidance should be provided to Housing Officers, as well as homelessness and domestic violence service providers.

Support into longer term accommodation

Homelessness NSW members were asked to provide feedback on the level of support currently provided to people transitioning from temporary accommodation to longer-term accommodation. Survey respondents were requested to rate, on a scale of 1 (not good) to 5 (great), how effectively temporary accommodation facilitated successful transitions to longer term housing.

Figure 11 How well are people supported into long-term accommodation on a scale of 1-5?

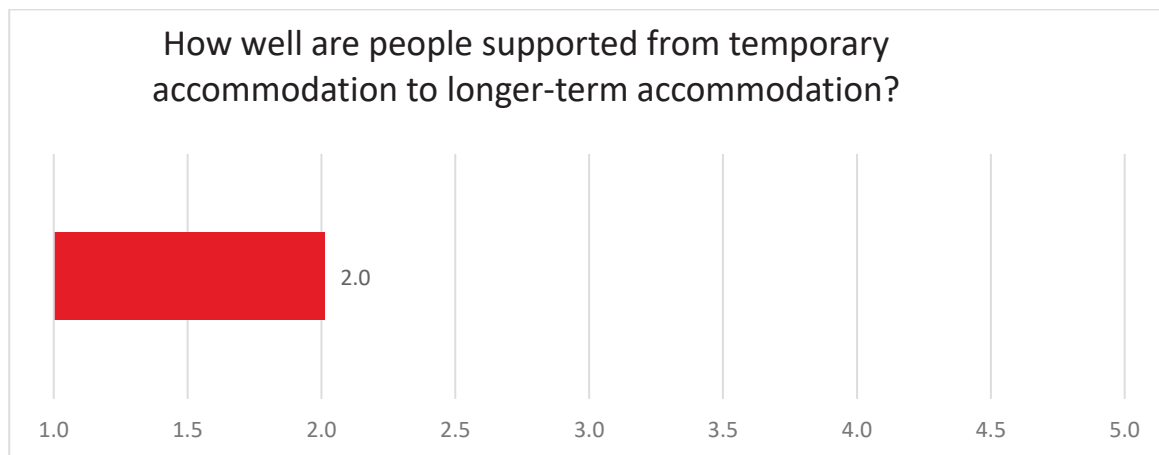


Figure 11 illustrates the average score given by survey participants regarding the effectiveness of temporary accommodation in facilitating transitions to long-term accommodation. Participants rated the support for transitioning from temporary accommodation to long-term accommodation as being low.

Insufficient social, affordable and transitional housing to support transitions.

Qualitative responses highlighted the scarcity of available social housing and affordable rental housing. The lack of housing stock emerged as a prominent concern among participants, as reiterated in their responses:

“There is not enough affordable rentals or access to social housing, for the lower socioeconomic group, or even middle class now, most people are having to move out of area, away from family, extended family and community.”

This issue was further highlighted by the impact on young people and the limited housing options available to them when experiencing homelessness. One respondent stated:

“For young people 16 to 25 this is rarely achievable due to the limited social housing stock allocated to the youth sector. Young people are consistently vying for the same stock as adults and families and are significantly disadvantaged in access. Private market housing products (for example Rent Choice) are designed for low-level needs young people so exclude the crisis cohort. Together Home completely ignores young people 16 to 18 years.”

Respondents also noted that people seeking asylum/non-residents are generally not eligible for the NRAS (National Rental Affordability Scheme), which is an additional challenge to secure affordable accommodation.

The lack of social and affordable housing options in regional and rural areas was also highlighted with one respondent summarised:

“SHSs do their best but options in regional and rural areas are so limited; long term social/community housing rare and rentals very difficult.”

Qualitative responses also highlighted the limited availability of transitional accommodation to support clients upon exit from temporary accommodation:

“They [clients] receive no supports from temporary accommodation providers into longer term options, local SHSs are significantly underfunded and resourced so do not have enough transitional opportunities to offer and local rental prices are unrealistic. We do not have exit pathways.”

Respondents also highlighted that the current unaffordability of the private rental market makes social housing the only feasible option for many clients. Without sufficient social, affordable, and transitional properties available, people tend to cycle from temporary accommodation back into homelessness. As one respondent detailed:

“We literally have to “nurse” people from rough sleeping to temporary accommodation, to weekly accommodation to temporary accommodation to rough sleeping for months.”

Another respondent summarised:

“Clients do not end up with permanent accommodation after temporary accommodation and are still struggling and couch surfing when they leave.”

Respondents expressed frustration that the short-term nature of temporary accommodation is currently not being supported by investment into longer term, supported housing. As detailed under Recommendations 11 and 12, to support pathways out of the temporary accommodation system

Homelessness NSW believes the NSW Government should increase the supply of transitional housing, social housing, and affordable rental options.



26. Increase the supply of transitional accommodation, social housing, and affordable rental options to support pathways out of temporary accommodation.

CONCLUSION

The temporary accommodation system in NSW can provide an opportunity for people experiencing homelessness to have short-term assistance while a pathway to permanent housing is being secured. It is a critical part of the homelessness system, supporting people at times of crisis and emergency when there are no other options for people to be safe and secure. However, the temporary accommodation system is currently failing in terms of accessibility to safe and secure accommodation and in facilitating pathways to longer term housing solutions.

Drawing on insights from Homelessness NSW's members, this report proposes several recommendations aimed at transforming temporary accommodation into an accessible, safe, and effective short-term option for those in crisis situations. The report emphasises the importance of flexible and trauma informed approaches in the delivery of temporary accommodation, as exemplified by the successful outcomes achieved during the COVID-19 lockdowns. It also proposes key measures to make temporary accommodation options more accessible and appropriate, particularly for specific groups, such as women and children seeking refuge from domestic and family violence, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals, and people with disabilities.

Underscoring these changes must be investment to increase the number of temporary accommodation places available for those in crisis situations. This is particularly important given the reforms to the temporary accommodation system recently announced by the NSW Government. While these announced reforms are essential, extending the duration that people can stay in temporary accommodation without simultaneously increasing the supply will inevitably reduce the availability of temporary accommodation for other applicants.

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