

# How does the concept of social inclusion play a role in housing policy?

**HOUSING-RELATED POLICIES AND PROGRAMS CAN PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN PROMOTING SOCIAL INCLUSION BY ADDRESSING HOMELESSNESS, CONCENTRATIONS OF DISADVANTAGE AND HOUSING STRESS.**

## KEY POINTS

- Social inclusion remains a useful concept in whole-of-government approaches to improve housing service delivery. It is widely accepted across levels of government and portfolios, and the not-for-profit sector.
- The term social inclusion can not be interchanged with disadvantage, as disadvantage is influenced by a range of additional economic and social processes.
- Housing policy interventions address different types of social exclusion, which can be categorised as: deep or embedded (e.g. homelessness), concentrated (e.g. by location) or wide (e.g. housing stress).
- In both Australia and the UK, the emphasis is on addressing deep social exclusion through homelessness strategies. The UK also has a strong focus on addressing concentrated social exclusion.
- In the UK, the role of home (a safe and private environment) and place (community, access to facilities, jobs and services) provided a link between place-based programs and those targeting individuals and the social inclusion agenda.
- The most effective interventions target both people and wider systemic processes, particularly when interventions are aimed at addressing locational disadvantage.
- A strategic evaluation program was part of the social inclusion agenda in the UK which resulted in the development of indicators for policy outcomes. However, this evaluation was complex and did not produce any definitive causal connections between interventions and outcomes.

*This bulletin is based on research conducted by **Professor Kath Hulse, Associate Professor Keith Jacobs, Dr Kathy Arthurson and Dr Angela Spinney** at the AHURI Swinburne-Monash and Southern Research Centres. Using case studies in Australia and the UK, it provides a critical exploration of housing policy and its role in enhancing social inclusion.*

## CONTEXT

Australia's governments employ coordinated interventions to target people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. These interventions promote social inclusion by focussing on place and location.

This project explored how people are excluded through housing processes and the extent to which housing-related policies and programs can enhance social inclusion.

## RESEARCH METHOD

The first stage of the research involved a literature review and interviews with key stakeholders examining links between housing processes and social inclusion.

The second stage of the research explored the influence of social inclusion on housing policy in Australia and the UK. Australian data was collected from South Australia, Tasmania and Victoria. A review and analysis of policy documents and evaluation material was undertaken, as well as 34 semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders: 25 in Australia and 9 in the UK.

## KEY FINDINGS

### ***How does social inclusion relate to housing?***

In the context of housing, social inclusion means more than being housed. It also includes access and proximity to services, facilities, jobs and transport. Social exclusion can include poor quality and insecure accommodation, unsafe neighbourhoods, poor transport links, few job prospects and inadequate services and facilities.

The social inclusion agenda in the UK placed considerable emphasis on evaluating outcomes, cost efficiency and the effectiveness of social policies. Policy initiatives included plans to develop clear and robust evaluation frameworks, establish baseline data and develop clear indicators to measure change over time.

Previous UK studies categorised forms of social exclusion relating to housing policy as:

- Deep (or embedded), where multiple and overlapping factors accumulate over time (e.g. homelessness).

- Concentrated, where the problem is clustered in particular places.
- Wide social exclusion, where a large number of people are excluded by one or two dimensions of disadvantage, such as housing stress.

### ***Deep social exclusion***

In both the UK and Australia, increased resourcing to enhance social inclusion has fostered cooperation across levels of government and the not-for-profit sector. Both countries emphasise top-down approaches, as well as bottom-up services and local partnerships, such as support workers co-located with public housing.

Top-down approaches have signaled priority issues, but questions remain about effective connections with bottom-up approaches. There is little independent evidence about the effectiveness of social inclusion in addressing homelessness, however there have been encouraging results from bottom-up initiatives. Overall, there is growing evidence that the most effective strategies are those where support follows people, rather than requiring people to relocate to access services.

### ***Concentrated social exclusion***

Concentrated social exclusion is best understood as a process rather than a way of describing spatial disadvantage. Appropriate policy approaches require an understanding of the processes underpinning spatial inequalities. These include local and regional economic contexts, housing and planning frameworks, and issues such as stigmatisation. In Australia, policies to address social exclusion target generic services towards disadvantaged places. The approach in the UK is different, focusing on comprehensive area-based approaches to address spatial inequalities, including the lack of resources.

While evaluation of Australian approaches are relatively new, major reviews of the UK's area-based approaches show that funding and sustained commitment over time are required to produce results. Whole-of-government approaches are widely supported, although prove more difficult to put into practice. Despite this, the scale of investment was relatively small in the context of mainstream service provision.

UK evaluations of comprehensive area-based approaches found that expenditure on improving the local physical environment demonstrated a commitment to improve an area. Although this may directly engage only a few people, it helps residents feel more positive about their housing circumstances.

### **Wide social exclusion**

Addressing the shortfall in affordable housing is critical to the social inclusion agenda. In Australia, strategies to address the shortfall include the National Rental Affordability Scheme. Both the UK and Australia have implemented policies to provide additional investment in social

**TABLE 1: COMPARISON OF HOUSING POLICIES, AUSTRALIA AND UK**

Type of policy	Australian examples (federal, Victoria, South Australia, Tasmania)	UK examples
<b>Deep social exclusion</b>		
Homelessness prevention and intervention	Strategies targeting rough sleepers, chronic homelessness and Indigenous households	Strategies targeting rough sleepers and chronic homelessness
At risk populations	Indigenous households (closing the gap) Households nominated in tenancy sustainment programs	Public service agreement 16 (socially excluded adults) Supporting People program
Behaviours associated with disadvantage having an impact on place	Anti-social behaviour strategies	Anti-social behaviour orders Family intervention projects
<b>Concentrated social exclusion</b>		
Targeting services to people in disadvantaged places	Communities for children Centrelink place-based trials Family Centred Employment Project Local Connections to Work	Sure Start
Comprehensive area-based improvement	Victorian Neighbourhood Renewal strategy State-based neighbourhood/ community renewal projects	New Deal for Communities National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal
<b>Wide social exclusion</b>		
Additional investment in social housing	Additional investment in social housing (Nation Building & Jobs Plan)	Additional investment in social housing
Improving housing quality and standard of repair of social housing	Repairs to public housing (Nation Building)	Decent Homes Standard
Increasing the supply of affordable rental housing	National Rental Affordability Scheme Inclusionary zoning for affordable housing	Additional investment in social/ affordable housing Section 106 agreements
Functioning housing markets	Housing Affordability Fund	Housing Market Renewal Pathfinders

Note: the table excludes income support and tax measures

housing. The role of the private rental sector, including its contribution to concentrations of disadvantage, needs to be better understood in terms of affordability but also in terms of residential mobility, housing quality, stability or instability, and effects on local communities.

## POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The concept of social inclusion continues to inform approaches to homelessness in Australia. Housing policy-makers may benefit from also considering concentrated and wider social exclusion, broader systemic processes that maintain inequality and the role of the housing system in these processes.

The use of the concept of social inclusion has limitations including potential politicisation as a result of the concept's malleability. There is also the potential to focus on individual behaviours, rather than on the structural determinants of inequality.

The NAHA explicitly links housing assistance to a social inclusion framework in Australia, but the process of adapting policies remains relatively under-developed. Australian policy-makers can learn from the UK's incorporation of home and place in social inclusion policies, and could benefit from strategic evaluation of the *big picture* in relation to the ways in which home, housing and place affect social inclusion/exclusion.

Some UK policies recognise that social inclusion is not a *catch all* and concepts such as tolerance and diversity are also important. Social inclusion in the current Australian context provides a framework for development of policy and services, which advance coordination across levels of government and portfolio areas, and community organisations.

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## FURTHER INFORMATION

This bulletin is based on AHURI project 50566, *Housing, public policy and social inclusion*.

Reports from this project can be found on the AHURI website: [www.ahuri.edu.au](http://www.ahuri.edu.au) or by contacting AHURI Limited on +61 3 9660 2300



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