

Challenges experienced by people with disability who are renting and recommendations to address these challenges as identified by members of the Building Tenancy Skills Project.

A response to the **Housing and Homelessness Agreement Review**

[Housing and Homelessness Agreement Review - Productivity Commission \(pc.gov.au\)](https://www.pc.gov.au/research/indicators/housing-and-homelessness-agreement-review)

## Building Tenancy Skills – a statewide homelessness prevention project

Assisting a tenant to sustain their tenancy is an important strategy in preventing homelessness. People with disability in rental properties have been considered ‘vulnerable renters’ when their experience of disability intersects with low income, a lack of employment opportunities and barriers to accessing services.<sup>1</sup> Tenants with disability are more likely than others to be forced to move from their rental.<sup>2</sup> Tenants with disability are more likely than others to seek homelessness prevention services only once their tenancy situation has become critical.<sup>3</sup> Only 31 per cent of clients of Specialist Homelessness Services with disability had all of their needs met directly by a service, in contrast to 42 per cent of clients without disability.<sup>4</sup> For this reason, Shelter WA, and People With disability WA (PWdWA), are working together to identify opportunities to prevent the homelessness of tenants with disability. Our Project is called Building Tenancy Skills. We are working alongside people with lived experience of disability and working with relevant peak bodies and providers of advocacy, financial counselling, real estate, disability, consumer protection, community legal, housing and housing support to develop skills and resources that will help reduce the risk of homelessness.<sup>5</sup> This submission has emerged based on the experiences and knowledge of the Project Team Members. The Project is still underway, with further information to emerge, but Team Members felt this inquiry was an important opportunity to contribute their learnings.

This submission highlights the importance of considering the needs of people with disability more holistically and argues that people with disability should be considered a priority cohort in NHAA and that consideration of legislation and policy other than the National Disability Strategy is vital to ensuring NHAA funded services are fully accessible to the diverse needs of people with disability. In our response, the focus is on tenants with disability renting in WA.

### 411,500 people in WA experience disability

In Western Australia, an estimated 411,500 people identify as having a disability that impacts on their every day activities.<sup>6</sup> Approximately 75 per cent of people with disability reported a physical condition as the main issue and around 25 per cent reported their main challenge was a psychosocial or behavioural issue.<sup>7</sup> People stated that as a result of their disability, they needed assistance with a range of tasks associated with maintaining a tenancy such as household chores (23%) and property maintenance (27%).<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Productivity Commission 2019, Vulnerable Private Renters: Evidence and Options, Commission Research Paper, Canberra

<sup>2</sup> Productivity Commission 2019, Vulnerable Private Renters: Evidence and Options, Commission Research Paper, Canberra

<sup>3</sup> AIWH. 2021. People with Disability in Australia.

<sup>4</sup> AIWH. 2021. People with Disability in Australia.

<sup>5</sup> The Building Tenancy Skills Project has been funded through DSS with an Information Linkages and Capacity Building Grant. It is delivered in a partnership between People With disability WA and Shelter WA. [Building Tenancy Skills \(shelterwa.org.au\)](https://shelterwa.org.au)

<sup>6</sup> ABS. 2019. Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers.

<sup>7</sup> ABS. 2019. Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers.

<sup>8</sup> AIWH. 2021. People with Disability in Australia.

**Table 1. Housing tenure of tenants with and without disability, WA, 2018**

Housing tenure (000's)	Renter	Owner without a mortgage	Owner with a mortgage	Rent-free	Other	Not applicable	Total
Has a disability	111.6	147	113.2	16.7	6.9	15.8	<b>411.5</b>
Does not have a disability	595.7	414.7	944.2	120.4	22.5	0.4	<b>2096.2</b>

Source: Source: ABS. 2019. Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers.

### 111,600 Western Australians with disability are renting their home

Just over a quarter of people with disability, approximately 111,600 people, are renting their home.

**Table 2. Number of renters by disability status and housing sector WA, 2018**

Rental housing sector WA (000's)	Private	Public	Community	Other	Totals
Has a disability	76,000	25,200	5,100	2,900	111,600
Does not have a disability	533,400	30,700	5,500	24,000	595,700
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>609,400</b>	<b>55,900</b>	<b>10,600</b>	<b>26,900</b>	<b>707,300</b>

Source: ABS. 2019. Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers.

The majority of people with disability who are renting, almost 70 percent, are living in privately rented accommodation. People with disability are more likely than those without to live in public or community housing., Close to 25 per cent of renters with disability are in public housing and almost five per cent are in community housing. Less is known about the number of people with disability in less regulated housing such as boarding and lodging houses, caravan parks and other less formal tenancy arrangements.

**Table 3. Household type, tenants with disability and tenants without disability, WA, 2018**

Relationship in household (%)	Lone person	Spouse/partner	Lone parent	Child under 15	Dependent student	Non-dependent child	Other related individual	Non-family member
Has a disability	30.82	28.94	10.04	10.39	0.90	10.04	3.58	4.03
Does not have a disability	8.90	37.84	6.30	24.29	4.05	6.09	3.59	9.05

Source: ABS. 2019. Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers.

People with disability who are renting more likely to live on their own than people without disability.

People with disability are much more likely to be renting in their older age than people without disability

Older people with disability are more likely to be renting in later life than older people who do not experience disability. For example, fewer than 5 per cent of 55-64 year olds without disability are renting in contrast to almost 15 per cent of those of the same age with disability.

**Table 4. Percentage of people in the rental market by disability status and age groups, WA, 2018**

Age Group (%)	0 to 14 years	15 to 24 years	25 to 34 years	35 to 44 years	45 to 54 years	55 to 64 years	65 to 74 years	75 to 84 years	85 years and over
Has a disability	11.1%	7.4%	11.8%	16.1%	13.9%	14.8%	13.0%	7.0%	3.1%
Does not have a disability	24.2%	17.4%	26.6%	15.2%	8.9%	4.5%	2.0%	0.9%	0.5%

Source: 2018 Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers (ABS, 2019).

This group of people who experience age related chronic health issues may not identify with the term disability and may not have experienced any disability when they initially moved into their property. This makes it even more important that services are able to assist the person to identify and work through any needs or issues in relation to their tenancy situation that are linked to their disability.

#### A lack of disability awareness can contribute to tenancy failure

One of the Project Team Members who experiences intellectual disability is unable to read the notices mailed by the Housing Authority. This tenant will ask neighbours and other people in their network to read the letters. These letters are about important matters, including the dates of rental

inspections. Not being able to easily recall the date and time of the rental inspection has left the tenant cancelling most other appointments in the lead up to the time of the inspection. The tenant has explained that they feel increasingly stressed approaching the inspection date, and they find it more and more difficult to retain their calm and manage their emotions. They have explained that they would have liked a much more detailed induction to the property when they first moved in. They would have liked to meet the relevant staff member so they could explain their needs as a tenant with disability. They feel this would have assisted in them managing the property better and being less distressed by the rental inspections. The tenant is now worried that their behaviour will lead to them being reported by a neighbour. The attention this will bring will only worsen their current distress.

*'I tried to get into the housing office, it was closed. I didn't know it was closed, no-one told me before I got there. One person told me I couldn't get in. This was upsetting as I needed to speak to someone. Then another person said look you can't get in. I sometimes get upset and angry when things get too much. It affects me for a long time.'*<sup>66</sup>

Several other Project Team Members said that communication with front line housing staff was not straightforward with the only communication option being a phone call where they usually had to leave a message but would not know when the call would be returned. An email was a preferred option for some people but this was not made available.

One Project Team Member who lives in a Housing Authority property was increasingly affected by a physical health condition which made it difficult to continue to maintain the garden. A comment about the garden was made to the Tenant during the property inspection. The Tenant asked whether the garden could be modified to be more low maintenance. This request was refused despite the Tenant explaining the nature of their disability. The Tenant was left to source gardening services from a faith-based organisation. If this voluntary assistance had not been forthcoming, the Tenant feared being evicted or moved to a property away from an area they knew well. This scenario could have been quite different if the housing officer involved was 'disability aware' and able to provide supportive information to the tenant about ways to keep the garden maintained or had been able to advise the tenant of free or low cost gardening services. The housing officer could also have advocated within the Department for changes to the garden to be considered as a 'modification' that would have supported the tenant to sustain their tenancy. For this reason, several members of the Project Team have identified the value of front facing staff in the Housing Authority to be provided with training on disability awareness and to have access to information about relevant tenancy support services that they can pass on to tenants.

A Building Tenancy Skills Project Team Member described a stressful situation in a private rental. The staff at the real estate agency did not understand the disability the tenant experienced, an acquired brain injury. They questioned whether the tenant even experienced disability. This is not uncommon for people whose disability is not visible.<sup>67</sup> Information was not provided to the tenant in a way that was helpful, and short time frames for communication did not give adequate time for the tenant to consider their options. The tenant was able to gain the support of an advocate but found the experience unnecessarily stressful and felt 'frustrated, overwhelmed and worthless' as a result.

Another private residential sector situation that led to the eviction of a tenant with disability occurred when the tenant, who experiences a medical condition that limits their mobility, was unable to move their belongings from their car port and into the unit in the timeframe advised by the Property Manager. A much higher proportion of tenants with disability live alone and may not have family or friends to call on to assist with moving. This was the case here. The tenant explained the reasons for the delay and asked that consideration be given to their physical restrictions with an extension of time. An agreement was unable to be reached and the tenant was evicted. The tenant, who now has alternative rental accommodation after a difficult period of insecure tenancy, feels that her eviction into homelessness could have been avoided, and a more positive outcome would have emerged if the Property Manager had greater awareness of the impact of disability and had provided the tenant with a list of support services that the tenant could have accessed to get assistance with moving their remaining belongings.

We realise that Property Managers must act according to the code of conduct and according to the requirements of the Residential Tenancies Act. However, in the instances where Property Managers do have awareness of tenancy support services, and do provide this information to tenants, then good outcomes have been achieved. For example, in some areas, the providers of the Private Tenancy Support Services funded by the Department of Communities, have good networks with real estate agents. This has led to real estate agents proactively advising the tenant of where to get support and has led to the tenant being able to sustain their tenancy. However, this networking takes time and staff may not have capacity to do the networking. We feel there is an opportunity here for additional resourcing to the Private Tenancy Support Services so they can undertake this valuable preventative work. There is also an opportunity to ensure that Property Managers are provided with information about tenancy support services which they can pass on to tenants in order to prevent the tenancy issue from becoming an eviction. Our Project has engaged with REIWA and we are looking forward to assisting in this regard.

Previous poor experiences with property managers or tenancy officers can result in property inspections becoming a source of anxiety and tension. One Building Tenancy Skills Project Team member asked why front line housing staff often have the word 'officer' in their title. 'Why are they even called 'officers'? Why do they use this word that sounds like they are in charge and have power over us – like police officers or prison officers. Why can't they have a title that shows they are here to be a support to the tenant'.<sup>68</sup> As property inspections have been mentioned by tenants as a source of distress our project is developing a Workshop to assist tenants so that they have more information about the process of property inspections and we are collating tips from tenants about how best to prepare. We will be delivering this Workshop statewide with the goal that tenants feel more confident and more informed about their rights and responsibilities under the Residential Tenancies Act.

[People with disability use mainstream community services – these need to be accessible to people with diverse experience of disability](#)

Only a small number of people with disability in WA, 43, 475 out of 411,500, currently have an active NDIS plan.<sup>69</sup> Most people with disability, including tenants with disability, need to access mainstream support services if they require assistance to sustain their tenancy. These include legal advocacy and non-legal advocacy services provided through community legal centres; financial

counsellors, private and public tenancy support services, various philanthropically funded homelessness prevention services and financial counselling services along with advocacy services funded in the disability sector.

However, the experience of some people with disability is that they can find it difficult to access information about these services, and they have expressed concern that the services will not be able to assist them if the service does not have an understanding of the needs of people with disability. My 'anxiety and mental illness is exacerbated by staff... (there is a) lack of empathy from staff and failure to understand the physical limitations' of my condition.<sup>70</sup>

In important domains of life, people with disability can experience discrimination and reduced access to education, employment opportunities, health care and can be subject to various types of abuse. As a result: 'People with disability experience and witness repeated trauma more often than people without disability (Jackson 2015).'<sup>71</sup>

This experience of trauma can shape people's interactions with services, leaving people reluctant to approach services, delaying making contact until the situation is critical and the person is facing homelessness.

Reluctance to approach services is particularly evident among Aboriginal people whose experience of trauma is widespread. 'Lack of cultural safety is a well-documented and critical barrier to Aboriginal people successfully accessing services, including in the housing and homelessness sectors.'<sup>72</sup> The experience of disability and caring for family members with disability are additional needs that create a barrier to accessing services.

'Many Aboriginal people told us that they are fearful of government and mainstream agencies and struggle to ask for help. A welcoming and culturally safe environment sets the tone for the ongoing relationship between the client and the community housing organisation. Trauma, grief and loss and fear of failure severely impact on people's confidence'<sup>73</sup>

'Because I'm Aboriginal, people just make assumptions. You can't ever get away from the assumptions. You're always worried about them making a decision to move you on because of those assumptions.'<sup>74</sup>

Input into the design and delivery of services is important to ensuring they are culturally safe and welcoming for Aboriginal people.

### The role of the Disability Services Act 1993

The Disability Services Act 1993 is Western Australian legislation that speaks to the rights of people with disability to access services in a format that meets their needs.

'People with disability have the same right as other members of society to access services that will support their choices, assist them to be as independent as possible and enable them to participate in all aspects of life.'<sup>75</sup>

‘Programmes and services are to be flexible and responsive to the individual choices and needs of people with disability, their families, carers and significant others.’<sup>76</sup>

This means that homeless prevention services, and information about the services, should be accessible to people with diverse experience of disability. The availability of the National Relay Service and interpreters, including Auslan interpreters should be clearly noted; web based information should be accessible by screen reader software and should be downloadable in accessible formats. The content of information should be able to be understood by most people and definitions provided of technical or legal terms that cannot be avoided. This is referred to as ‘plain English’.

## Responses to selected questions

### Outcomes of the Agreement

Are the priority homelessness cohorts and homelessness priority policy areas in the NHHA the right priorities? If not, what should the priority homelessness cohorts and homelessness priority policy areas be?

People with disability, and family members/friends in a caring role for a person with disability, are not priority cohorts under the NHAA. We believe they should be.

In 2012, research highlighted the need for greater emphasis to be placed on supporting people with disability in the delivery of homelessness and homelessness prevention services.<sup>9</sup> The research uncovered that many people with disability were not identified as such by mainstream tenancy sustainment services. More recent evaluations of otherwise successful tenancy sustainment services have identified that tenants with intellectual disability were not as successfully supported.<sup>10</sup> This speaks to the need for people with disability to be considered a priority cohort in their own right.

Specialist Homelessness Services data indicates that only 22,000 out of 290,300 clients, around 8 per cent, were identified as experiencing disability. The prevalence of disability in the Australian population overall is around 18 per cent.<sup>11</sup> The SHSS data indicates people with disability approach services later, when arrears have accumulated and a notice has been sent. This reduces the chances of sustaining the tenancy.

Given the shortfall of supply of social housing, there is likely to be continued growth in the number and needs of private sector tenants with disability, in particular those who are not eligible for NDIS and those who are ageing into disability. Each of these cohorts is likely to be on a fixed and low income.<sup>12</sup> Tenants experiencing poor health, illness, disability and/or

<sup>9</sup> Beer, A, Baker, E, Mallett, S, Batterham, Pate, A, Lester, L. 2012. Addressing homelessness amongst persons with a disability: Identifying and enacting best practice.

<sup>10</sup> Beer, A, Baker, E, Mallett, S, Batterham, Pate, A, Lester, L. 2012. Addressing homelessness amongst persons with a disability: Identifying and enacting best practice.

<sup>11</sup> AIHW. 2020. People with disability in Australia 2020.

<sup>12</sup> Stone, W, Sharam, A, Wiesel, I, Ralston, L, Markkanen and James, A. 2015. Accessing and sustaining private rental tenancies: critical life events, housing shocks and insurances. AHURI Final Report no. 259.

caring for family members with disability, 'require additional, integrated support as well as interventions to enable households to live with relative stability in appropriate dwellings.'<sup>13</sup>

Additionally, it is these households that are less competitive in the rental market and more likely to be forced into less regulated, and less protected, tenure types including boarding and lodging houses.<sup>14</sup>

### Recommendations

People with disability and people in a caring role for people with disability should be considered a priority cohort within NHAA. If states and territories introduced strategies that specifically addressed the tenancy sustainment and other housing needs of people with disabilities and carers, we expect services could be better funded and otherwise supported to respond by ensuring the design and delivery of services address and support the needs of tenants with disability. Further, information about the services would be more accessible, increasing the likelihood that people with disability will be able to access the services.

By providing more information about services and rights in accessible formats, such as plain English, support workers and advocates will also have improved tools to support their clients with disability in pursuing their rights and options in relation to renting.

The evaluation of tenancy sustainment programs<sup>1516</sup> indicates those that are more successful include outreach with frequent visits and time spent connecting the individual/family to other services they are in need of. This reality needs to be acknowledged, funded and built into service design and funding.

Explore options to ensure SHS clients with disability are identified. However, many people do not identify with the term 'disability'. For example, people ageing into disability and people with mental health or problematic alcohol and other drug use may not use the term 'disability' to describe themselves. People from different cultural backgrounds may not use the term disability. It is important that the identification of disability is done with the use of language that is based on functional needs.

### How does the NHHA align with other policy areas?

**In what ways does the NHHA intersect with other policies, agreements and strategies?  
Are there changes that could be made to ensure the NHHA is better aligned with them?**

It is important that NHAA aligns with the National Disability Strategy. There are additional policy areas in relation to tenancy sustainment by people with disability that should be considered in relation to the NHAA. At the Commonwealth level, the NHAA should align

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<sup>13</sup> Stone, W, Sharam, A, Wiesel, I, Ralston, L, Markkanen and James, A. 2015. Accessing and sustaining private rental tenancies: critical life events, housing shocks and insurances. AHURI Final Report no. 259.

<sup>14</sup> Stone et al page 78.

<sup>15</sup> Moskos, M., Isherwood, L., Dockery, M., Baker, E. and Pham, A. (2022) 'What works' to sustain Indigenous tenancies in Australia, AHURI Final Report No. 374, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited, Melbourne, <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/374>, doi: 10.18408/ahuri3122901

<sup>16</sup> Habibis et al 2007

with the Disability Discrimination Act, the Carer Recognition Act 2010, and the Government Digital Strategy. At the state level, the NHAA should align with the Equal Opportunity Act, the Disability Services Act and the Carers Recognition Act 2004.

By acknowledging and aligning with this legislation, the goal is to explicitly focus on addressing accessibility issues, overcome barriers to service access and incorporating best practice in working with people with disability. This should be reflected in the commissioning, funding, delivery and evaluation of services.

### Recommendation

That NHAA be aligned to state and Commonwealth legislation and standards in relation to the rights of people with disability, and where appropriate, their family members and carers, to have equitable access to services, including NHAA funded services.

### Social housing

**What changes could be made to make the social housing system more equitable for tenants and better targeted to people in greatest housing need?**

**Do tenants feel safe in their social housing properties? Do the non-housing services provided to social housing tenants meet their needs?**

Changes that could be made to social housing systems to make a more positive impact on the lives of tenants with disability include:

### Recommendations

Training and support for front line housing staff to ensure they are able to identify and support the needs and preferences of tenants with disability. In NSW and Qld, a Cert IV in Housing is available which includes modules on Tenancy Sustainment and a Trauma Informed Approach.<sup>17</sup> Consideration should be given to developing training in WA that is appropriate to the state based legislation and contract requirements of the state government.

The provision of information to tenants in a format that is accessible to the tenant including information about the rights and responsibilities of tenants, property inspections, breaches and fines.

In particular, tenants with intellectual disability have advocated for the provision of a staged induction to the property and to various Housing Authority processes, such as reporting maintenance issues. They have suggested this would be useful in supporting them to absorb information at a pace that suits their needs. This information should be provided in accessible formats including plain English and Easy Read.

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<sup>17</sup> [CHC42221 Certificate IV in Housing \(training.gov.au\)](https://www.training.gov.au/courses/CHC42221)

## Affordable housing and assistance for low-income renters

### **What are tenants' experiences with the different types of housing assistance?**

One of the barriers to help seeking identified by the Building Tenancy Skills Project is the concern of people with disability that their needs will not be understood by the service and that this will be a negative interaction.<sup>18</sup> This can delay contact with the service until the situation reaches a crisis point and the tenant is at risk of eviction.

#### The importance of identifying invisible disability

Many disabilities are not immediately apparent and will require an individual approach to the client in order to understand how best to support the tenant.

Examples include psychosocial disability, intellectual disability and acquired brain injuries arising from stroke or other trauma.

'Interview data shows that intellectual disability can be a contributing factor in tenancy failure and that additional specialist supports may be required.'<sup>19</sup>

#### *Recommendations*

Appropriate promotion of services with easy pathways to contacting the service would enhance the ability of tenants with disability to make contact early rather than wait until the situation is at crisis level and requires more intensive and extensive intervention including, for example, larger amounts of arrears.

Ensure information about the service is available in accessible formats include plain English information on the website, suitable for download and accessible to technologies such as screen readers and screen magnifiers.

## The private rental market

### **Are residential tenancy laws in each jurisdiction appropriate? How might residential tenancy laws better support renters, while not increasing the cost of renting?**

The experience of renters involved with the Building Tenancy Skills Project is that the Residential Tenancies Act 1987 does not provide for reasonable adjustments to be made where a tenant has disability.

As examples,

prescribed documents are not required to be available in plain English or Easy Read or other accessible formats. This includes the Residential Tenancy Agreement.

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<sup>18</sup> Unpublished data, *Building Tenancy Skills Project*. Currently underway. Delivered in partnership between Shelter WA and People With disability WA. Funded by DSS through an Individual Capacity Building and Information Linkages Grant.

<sup>19</sup> AHURI. 2019. Evaluation of the Sustaining Young People's Tenancies Initiative, p. 33.

there is a requirement to turn around the Property Condition Report (PCR) within 7 days. A tenant with disability may require formal or informal supporters to provide assistance to complete the PCR. A failure to meet the deadline may result in a tenant incurring make good costs if pre existing damage is attributed to them.

the definition of disability is clinical rather than based on a functional understanding and requires the disability to be permanent or likely to be permanent.

The termination of social housing tenancy agreements due to objectionable behaviour (75A) does not mention the impacts of disability.

Many communications between real estate agents and tenants/prospective tenants are now completely online but not necessarily in accessible formats. This has created barriers and reduced the independence of tenants/potential tenants who are sight impaired or blind.

Finally, the Residential Tenancies Act does not offer protection to people residing in Boarding and Lodging Houses. An unknown number of people with disability live in these establishments.

#### *Recommendations*

That the Residential Tenancies Act be reviewed to better meet acknowledge and support the needs of tenants with disability.

That the Residential Tenancies Act provide protection for people living in Boarding and Lodging Houses.

## Home ownership

### **What are the implications of declining rates of home ownership, both for individuals and the economy as a whole?**

Declining rates of home ownership and increased likelihood of renting are evident for older people with disability and for family members/friends in a caring role.<sup>20</sup> This means that in future, an increasing proportion of people with disability and their family members in a caring role, will be living in private rental properties.

#### *Recommendation*

Increased investment in tenancy sustainment programs for private rentals ensuring that the programs are accessible and explicitly designed to meet the needs of people with diverse experience of disability.

## Housing outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People

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<sup>20</sup> ABS. 2019. Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers.

**What barriers do Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people face securing affordable, safe, stable and culturally appropriate housing (including barriers to home ownership and securing private rentals and social housing)?**

**Are there any obstacles for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people accessing mainstream housing programs and homelessness services? What improvements (if any) could be made to mainstream programs to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people?**

A number of intersecting factors combine to create challenges for Aboriginal people and families when trying to sustain their tenancy.<sup>21</sup> In addition to the complexity of factors usually mentioned, it is also the case that Aboriginal people experience higher rates of disability and higher rates of caring for family members with disability than non-Aboriginal people. Aboriginal people are more likely to experience age related disability and chronic health conditions at a younger age than non-Aboriginal people.<sup>22</sup> A disability lens to system design and service delivery and linkages is therefore important to ensure services are appropriately resourced.

It is noted that many Aboriginal people do not use the term 'disability'.

In WA, tenancy arrangements for Aboriginal communities are managed by the Housing Authority. A recently launched resource, Blurred Borders, was developed in collaboration with Legal Aid WA and Consumer Protection within DMIRS. The resource was codesigned with service users. The end product is a series of cards with graphics that are used to build an understanding of legal terms. A tenancy specific version of the resource has been developed.<sup>23</sup> Early evaluation of the resource is that it has improved communication between practitioners and, mainly Aboriginal, clients in remote areas of WA. There is potential for this resource to be expanded in use to produce further tenancy-related resources.

[Blurred Borders \(legaid.wa.gov.au\)](http://legaid.wa.gov.au)

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<sup>21</sup> Habibis, D., Phillips, R., Spinney, A., Phibbs, P. and Churchill, B. (2016) Reviewing changes to housing management on remote Indigenous communities, AHURI Final Report No. 271, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, Melbourne

<sup>22</sup> ABS. 2019. Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers

<sup>23</sup> [Blurred Borders \(legaid.wa.gov.au\)](http://legaid.wa.gov.au)



#### Recommendations<sup>24</sup>

That the needs of Aboriginal tenants with disability, and their family members in a caring role, are addressed by ensuring tenancy sustainment services are built on culturally safe practices.<sup>25</sup>

That the commissioning and design of tenancy support services explicitly acknowledge the experience of disability and high rates of caring by Aboriginal people and communities, and the impact of this on tenancy sustainment.

<sup>24</sup> Moskos, M., Isherwood, L., Dockery, M., Baker, E. and Pham, A. (2022) 'What works' to sustain Indigenous tenancies in Australia, AHURI Final Report No. 374, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited, Melbourne, <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/374>, doi: 10.18408/ahuri3122901.

<sup>25</sup> Vallesi, S et al. 2020. Wongee Mia: An Innovative Family-Centred Approach to Addressing Aboriginal Housing Needs and Preventing Eviction in Australia. *International Journal of and Environmental Research and Public Health*. See also Moskos, M., Isherwood, L., Dockery, M., Baker, E. and Pham, A. (2022) 'What works' to sustain Indigenous tenancies in Australia, AHURI Final Report No. 374, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited, Melbourne, <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/374>, doi: 10.18408/ahuri3122901.

## Definitions

The Australian Government has produced an Easy Read Style Manual<sup>26</sup> which covers Easy Read and plain English. These definitions and explanations are from the Easy Read Style Manual.

### Easy Read

‘Easy Read combines text with layout and imagery to simplify and explain information. Users often print Easy Read materials. The standard layout works as a handout.’

### Plain English

- Write in plain language. This helps all users and is essential for some.
- Avoid (or explain) unusual words, phrases, idioms and so on. Expand all acronyms on their first use.
- Avoid using double negatives.

### Aim for Australian Year 7 reading age

‘Literacy can be a barrier to access for Australian users. Writing to an Australian year 7 level makes content usable for most people.’

### Involve service users in the development of information sources

‘Involve people from your target user group as you write, design and test the materials. They can help you to choose imagery and to use terms they use themselves.’

### Inclusive language encourages engagement and avoids retraumatising people

‘Use language that is culturally appropriate and respectful of the diversity of Australia’s peoples.’

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<sup>26</sup> [Easy Read | Style Manual](#)