

Understanding Community

Community Housing Providers are tasked with fostering inclusive and sustainable communities. However, little is known about how community is understood, and how staff and tenants engage with community processes. This study explores this by drawing on data from focus groups with tenancy management staff (n9) and interviews with tenants (n11) residing in two community housing sites in Melbourne, Victoria.

This study provides considerations for Community Housing Providers in meeting government and organisational mandates, and to improve the experiences of residents living in community housing.

Tenants

perceiving community

Staff

'neighbourship': informal, everyday interactions that lead to meaningful + supportive social relationships

"That's why I said hi, they said hi, then after couple of years, they start talking, talking, talking, some of them used to come and visit my place, we had a coffee, chat [for] hours and hours... Because of that I have communication, connection" (tenant)

facilitated events + activities: fostering belonging + connection, + sustaining tenancies

"the activities create a better connection between the tenant and the staff member. If we have to have a more difficult conversation later, we already have that relationship with the tenant, and it's not as difficult, so that's a benefit to the organisation" (staff)

enacting community

collect action

improving the physical and social space on site

"We even did research into what plants do well without sunlight. So, we were even getting together, as a community, on our own, outside of the organisation, learning and teaching from each other" (tenant)



place-making

staff regularly based on site
"I think place-making is the biggest thing here...the properties where we're on site, that's where we have the most buy in and the most interaction" (staff)

providing support

material; social; emotional

"I've got dog biscuits in my pantry.. dog food. I've got...tea, coffee, whatever you want, I'm always happy to share"(tenant)



support partners

external psychosocial support

"We are struggling with some pressing anti-social issues on the estate... We're working with the support service on strategies to get the tenants back out and into the"



tenant commonality

life stage; shared interest; tenancy length

"[At one site] there are a lot of long-term tenancies there. The tenants there all know each other so they're comfortable to interact without us bringing them together" (staff)

inhibiting community

Individual factors

Perceived lack of commonality and personal preference limit tenants desire to participate in 'neighbourship'

"I don't know that I could have a really good, in-depth conversation with anyone. It would be just oh how are you, and it would go much deeper than that" (tenant)

"I like my own company. Which has changed over the years. I always needed to be around people, but now.. I've got my cat" (tenant)

Safety

Tenant perceptions of a lack of social + physical safety hinders the opportunity for relationships between tenants

"everyone brings a plate and the kids play together. We bring tea and sit down. She recorded us and then she called the police... The police said to the kids 'just be quiet and play quietly'. [the organisation] talked to her, but now the kids are still scared. They are not going to play outside".(tenant)

Inaction

Tenant perceptions of inaction from the organisation on social + physical safety hinders the relationship between tenants and the organisation

"sometimes it makes me feel in a sense worthless, because I pay my rent and you can't tidy up? There's a few other things around here like that. It's like we're not worth cleaning up for". (tenant)

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