# Evaluation of the Reintegration Housing Support Program

## Final Evaluation Report

## Evaluation Period: July 2023 - June 2025

**Prepared by CRC's Advocacy, Research and Policy Unit (ARPU)**

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CRC community restorative centre

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The evaluation team would like to acknowledge and pay respect to the Traditional Custodians of the land on which our offices at CRC stand, to Elders past and present, and to all Aboriginal peoples within these boundaries.

CRC's Canterbury office is on the land of the Wangal and Bediagal peoples, our Broken Hill and Wilcannia offices are on the land of the Wiljkali and Baarkintji peoples, and our co-located offices in Penrith/Nepean are on the land of the Darug and Wiradjuri peoples. We also have co-located offices in Coniston/Dubbo/Liverpool/Mt Druitt/Newcastle/Strawberry Hills on the lands of the Dharawal, Wiradjuri, Darug, Awabakal, Worimi and Gadigal Peoples.

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# DEFINITIONS AND ACRONYMS

## Definitions and Terminology

| Term | Definition |
|---|---|
| **Case Plan** | A structured plan developed collaboratively between a client and transition worker outlining goals, needs, and steps toward stability. |
| **Criminal legal system** | The criminal legal system is any department, agency or institution that relates to criminal justice. Primarily, this refers to police, Courts, Community Corrections, and prisons. We use the term 'criminal legal system', as opposed to 'criminal justice system' to reflect that the 'justice system' in Australia has been imposed on First Nations communities without their consent through settler colonialism. The term 'criminal legal system' also highlights the way the system- including police, courts, and prisons- frequently fails to deliver justice for communities. |
| **Housing first approach** | A model of housing support that prioritises providing long-term housing to people experiencing homelessness without pre-conditions such as sobriety or treatment compliance. |
| **Institutionalisation** | A condition where individuals become dependent on institutional structures (e.g., prisons) due to prolonged exposure, making reintegration into society challenging. |
| **Priority Housing List** | A government-managed list that ranks individuals based on urgency and need for public housing. |
| **Reincarceration** | The act of returning to prison after being released, often used as a measure of recidivism. |
| **Step-down Approach** | A model of support where the intensity of services is gradually reduced as the client becomes more independent. |
| **Support period** | The duration during which a client receives services from the RHSP program. |
| **Wrap-around psychosocial support** | Comprehensive support services that address multiple aspects of a person's wellbeing, including mental health, substance use, social connection, and practical needs. |

# Acronyms

| Acronym | Definition |
|---|---|
| **ADHD** | Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder |
| **AOD** | Alcohol and Other Drugs |
| **ARPU** | CRC's Advocacy, Research and Policy Unit |
| **AUD** | Australian Dollars |
| **CALD** | Culturally and Linguistically Diverse |
| **CIMS** | Client Information Management System |
| **CPR** | Child Protection Register |
| **CRC** | Community Restorative Centre |
| **CSNSW** | Corrective Services New South Wales |
| **DCJ** | Department of Communities and Justice (NSW) |
| **DFV** | Domestic and Family Violence |
| **DSP** | Disability Support Pension |
| **FACS** | Family and Community Services (NSW) |
| **MIN** | Master Index Number |
| **NDIS** | National Disability Insurance Scheme |
| **NGO** | Non-Government Organisation |
| **NSW** | New South Wales |
| **OAT** | Opioid Agonist Treatment |
| **PRF** | Paul Ramsay Foundation |
| **PTSD** | Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder |
| **RHSP** | Reintegration Housing Support Program |
| **SHS** | Specialist Homelessness Services |
| **WDO** | Work and Development Order |

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## 1.1 Introduction

The Community Restorative Centre's (CRC) Advocacy, Research and Policy Unit (ARPU) conducted this outcomes evaluation of the Reintegration Housing Support Program (RHSP).

The RHSP provides wrap-around psychosocial support to improve overall wellbeing among people exiting prison and to reduce their risk of recidivism and homelessness. Taking a housing first approach, the program supports people exiting prison who are at risk of homelessness to access housing and sustain their tenancies. Importantly, the program does not have any allocated housing stock, meaning RHSP staff must advocate for housing within an already stretched system. The RHSP is funded by the NSW Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) and delivered by the CRC. The program model sees two RHSP transition workers co-located within DCJ Housing offices in metropolitan and regional locations.

CRC conducts evaluations of its programs to learn and adapt its services, demonstrate the effectiveness of its support models, and advocate for research-led solutions that reduce recidivism and improve people's lives. A previous evaluation of the RHSP project was conducted for the period July 2021 – May 2023, and recommendations made were adapted. This evaluation relates to the period between July 2023 – June 2025.

This evaluation aims to answer the question **'Did the RHSP reduce homelessness and improve wellbeing and recidivism outcomes amongst people exiting prison in NSW?'** through addressing the following key evaluation questions:

1. What are the client experiences of receiving support through RHSP?
2. What are the RHSP staff experiences of providing support?
3. To what extent does RHSP respond to its intended client base?
4. To what extent has RHSP impacted long-term housing outcomes for clients?
5. To what extent has RHSP impacted client wellbeing outcomes?
6. To what extent has RHSP reduced client risk of re-incarceration?
7. What are RHSP's cost savings to the criminal legal system?

## 1.2 Methods

This was a mixed methods process and outcomes evaluation.

A desktop review of key program documentation to understand the program and its operations was conducted. To further provide policy background to the evaluation, a targeted and rapid review of literature highlighting the unique intervention that NGOs like CRC can make for people exiting prison compared to government was conducted, to illustrate best practice for post-release housing programs in the Australian context.

The evaluation qualitative study, which addressed questions 1 and 2, included: i) client case studies to provide examples of some clients' journeys and experiences of receiving support through RHSP, and ii) a speech by an RHSP staff member to demonstrate staff experiences of providing services.

The evaluation quantitative component included a descriptive analysis of secondary administrative data from the Client Information Management System (CIMS) to answer the evaluation questions 3 - 6.

The costing data used was from the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) report on the inquiry into enhancing the coordination of housing supports for individuals leaving institutional settings (Martin et al., 2021), the analysis compares criminal legal system costs for individuals receiving long-term housing through RHSP against those receiving private rental assistance or homelessness services. Costs were adjusted in a sensitivity analysis to account for any further RHSP program costs of providing wrap-around psychosocial services. The net benefit per individual five years post housing is estimated. RHSP's total cost savings to the criminal legal system five years post housing per annual cohort, based on the number of individuals that received long-term housing between 2023-2025, are estimated. Costs are reported in 2025 Australian dollars.

## 1.3 Key findings

1. **Demand far exceeds capacity**

The program registered an increase of 52% in the rate of referrals since the last evaluation report, from an average of 54 referrals per month (976 referrals between September 2021– February 2023) to approximately 82 referrals per month (1,970 referrals between July 2023 – June 2025).
Only 29% of referrals were accepted, leaving 71% referrals unassisted. The primary reason for unassisted referrals was insufficient program staff (49% of referrals). **This showed that RHSP is experiencing an overwhelming demand that far exceeds its current resources.**

2. **Clients with multiple, intersecting needs**

The data revealed **a growing engagement with clients who identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander**, who now represent 44% of RHSP's clientele, up from 36% in the last evaluation report period (2021 – 2023). In comparison 28% of all Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) clients identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.
The majority of clients (88%) were already experiencing homelessness at the time of their referral, while the remaining 13% were at risk of homelessness. Overwhelmingly, 73% of clients had a prior mental health diagnosis, a rate significantly higher than the 32% reported across all SHS clients. **This highlights the multiple, intersecting needs of the RHSP client base.**
Most referrals came pre-release (58%), indicating that **the program's services are most often engaged before a client leaves custody.**

3. **Housing Outcomes**

Of the 574 accepted clients in the reporting period, 46% were assisted with long-term housing, representing **a significant success in providing stability for nearly half of program participants**.
The percentage of enrolled referrals that were assisted with long-term housing at each location ranged between 28% - 54%. The Mount Druitt location achieved the highest success rate, successfully housing 54% of clients. **Conversely, the data highlighted significant regional disparities.** Dubbo recorded the highest percentage of clients who were not housed long-term at 72%, followed by Newcastle at 61%.

The majority of clients who were housed long-term, 53%, were referred pre-release, showing **a greater success in long-term housing outcomes when clients' support journey began before they left custody**.

### 4. Impact on client wellbeing

The holistic services provided by RHSP address multiple dimensions of wellbeing, from emotional stability to practical needs. Every case study showed that securing safe and stable housing was not only a pivotal first step in breaking the cycle of homelessness and reoffending, but enabled clients to focus on recovery, reconnect with family, and engage in community life.

> *With a secure home, Gerald[1] has been able to focus on other critical areas of his life, including strengthening bonds with his children, continuing his substance use treatment, and meeting his obligations with Community Corrections* – extract from Gerald's case study, Dubbo location.

> *Shawn[1] has built the confidence to use public transport and engage in community activities like fishing, gardening, and going to cafes - extract* from Shawn's case study, Newcastle location.

A consistent finding across all case studies in the evaluation is the profound impact of the case worker - client relationship. The trust built through relationship provided the motivation needed to make difficult changes. This unwavering commitment to clients was further seen in a staff speech included in the report.

> *We've housed clients with acquired brain injuries, whose condition contributed to their repeated incarceration, to access NDIS and get the right care in place. Care that allows them not just to stay housed, but to live with dignity and support.* - Kirsty Trethowan, RHSP Staff member.

Having a completed case plan was used as an evaluation proxy measure for client wellbeing. A completed case plan indicates that clients are actively engaging with their goals, building structure in their lives, and working toward stability, all of which are factors that contribute to improved mental health and self-worth. At the time of reporting, **76% of clients had a completed case plan, which is an indication of their commitment to make positive life changes, therefore improving their well-being.**

### 5. Impact on recidivism

The RHSP has demonstrated a powerful impact in breaking the cycle of incarceration. **Just 2% of clients housed long-term returned to custody, compared to 26% of those without stable housing**.

### 6. Cost implications

[1] Pseudo names have been used to protect client identities.

Over a five-year period, RHSP yields a net-benefit to the Criminal Legal System of:

- $6,424 per individual when compared to private rental assistance
- $43,162 per individual when compared to homelessness services

With RHSP assisting approximately 131 individuals annually with long-term housing, the total savings to the criminal legal system are:

- $841,503 five years post housing per annual cohort when long-term housing is compared to private rental subsidies.
- $5.65 million per year five years post housing per annual cohort when long-term housing is compared to homelessness supports.

A missed opportunity was identified: 682 eligible individuals were not assisted due to staffing limitations. If RHSP had supported these individuals, the potential additional savings could have been $6.9 million five years post housing per annual cohort.

A sensitivity analysis accounting for RHSP's wraparound service costs confirms that the program remains cost-effective, with adjusted net savings ranging from $70,401 to $3.97 million five years post housing per annual cohort.

## 1.4 Recommendations

**1.4.1 Secure urgent, substantial, and sustained funding:** The evaluation highlights the success of the program in improving client outcomes and significantly reducing recidivism rates. However, the program is only funded until June 2026. Sustained multi-year funding would ensure that the program continues to support clients at risk of homelessness and re-incarceration.

**1.4.2 Staffing and resourcing:** The evaluation clearly demonstrates that the RHSP's ability to meet demand and deliver positive outcomes is fundamentally limited by current staffing levels. Increasing the program's staff numbers through recruitment and funding commitments will expand capacity and reduce the number of unassisted referrals.

**1.4.3 Service availability:** Continued advocacy for increased housing opportunities and services is needed to expand access to long-term housing for the 50% of clients not housed.

**1.4.4 Regional strengthening:** Strengthen regional presence by creating tailored regional strategies and increasing service availability to address the disparities.

**1.4.5 Highlight program success:** The results of this evaluation are compelling. The program should leverage data to demonstrate program impact by highlighting key metrics- for example, the program's impact on recidivism, success in early intervention, and cost savings to the criminal legal system.

**1.4.6 Staff data training**: Provide continuous data entry training to staff and encourage data completeness.

**1.4.7 Stronger future evaluations**: While the previous 2021/2023 report had a more robust evaluation method, this report lacked a comparison group. RSHP should plan for a more robust future evaluation of the program. A more robust evaluation would also provide the opportunity for a better estimation of the program's net benefit to the criminal legal system and beyond.

# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1. Program background

### 1.1.1. Program background

The Reintegration Housing Support Program (RHSP) commenced on 1 July 2021 and was planned to run until 30 June 2023. The pilot was extended to 30 June 2024 and then extended for another two years until June 2026. It is delivered by the Community Restorative Centre (CRC), the lead provider of specialist diversion and throughcare programs in NSW (supporting clients pre, during and post-release from custody) and funded by the NSW Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ).

The program model sees two (CRC) transition workers co-located within six metropolitan and regional DCJ Housing offices. The program was intended to provide support to clients for a period of six to twelve months, with workers able to respond flexibly to provide longer periods of support to clients with greater support needs. The RHSP is available to people exiting adult custodial settings who are at risk of homelessness and seeking housing support from one of the six DCJ Housing offices where the program operates including Strawberry Hills, Mount Druitt, Liverpool, Dubbo, Coniston, and Newcastle.

The RHSP takes a housing first, holistic approach to supporting people exiting prison who are at risk of homelessness to access housing and sustain their tenancy. By providing wrap-around psychosocial supports, it aims to improve overall wellbeing among people exiting prison and reduce the risk of recidivism and homelessness.

The program design draws on principles from local and international literature on the housing, recidivism and reintegration of people exiting prison. It aims for better housing, wellbeing, and recidivism outcomes for correctional clients, as well as enhanced capacity in local service systems.

### 1.1.2. Program aims and objectives

The RHSP aims to connect people who are leaving custody, or who have been released in the last month, and are at risk of homelessness with specialist transition workers who will assist with securing access to suitable accommodation, as well as wrap around psychosocial support, including but not limited to:

- Connection with Community Corrections (parole and probation) and Centrelink
- Alcohol or drug support
- Physical and mental health services
- Help obtaining identification, connecting with friends and/or family in the community
- Obtaining emergency items such as clothing, mobile phones, and transportation.

### 1.1.3. Program components

Program clients are referred to a specialist transition worker who can assist with securing access to suitable accommodation and connecting clients to services, including but not limited to:

- Community corrections (parole and probation)
- Help with financial stability (e.g., accessing Centrelink, other financial supports)
- Substance use support
- Physical and mental health services
- Help obtaining identification documents
- Connecting with friends or family in the community
- Cultural connection
- Obtaining emergency items such as clothing
- Help furnishing housing
- Brokerage for other supports.

There are four key elements to the delivery of the RHSP:

- Coordinated referrals
- Integrated service response
- Person-centred engagement
- Wrap-around psychosocial support.

### 1.1.4. Previous evaluation of the RHSP program and responses to recommendations

A previous evaluation of the RHSP was conducted for the period July 2021 – May 2023 with a report submitted to the Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) in December 2024. Key findings from the evaluation included the following:

- The RHSP was largely implemented as intended. The program was operating in the six intended locations within the DCJ Housing offices.
- A total of 377 clients were accepted to the program during the evaluation period. The client base included 36% who identified as Aboriginal. About 14% of clients were female, 9% were young people aged between 18 and 25, and approximately 17% were older clients aged 56 years or over.
- The most common presenting reason for clients was support relating to their transition from custody. Program referrals were sufficient, and early evidence showed that RHSP was effective in achieving long-term housing outcomes for clients and improving their wellbeing. However, because the evaluation was conducted at an early stage of the program, there was limited evidence regarding the impact of RHSP on client's recidivism rates.
- Following the evaluation results, recommendations were suggested to improve RHSP. Table 1 below provides an outline of the recommendations made and CRC's actions taken.

**TABLE 1: CRC'S RESPONSE TO THE 2021 – 2023 RHSP PROGRAM EVALUATION RECOMMENDATIONS**

| Area for improvement | Recommendations | CRC's actions in response |
|---|---|---|
| **Awareness and understanding of the program** | 1. Increase awareness of the program with correctional services and centres and services that reach into correctional services, through continuing to develop relationships and connections with agencies and individuals making referrals. | CRC and HOMES NSW collaborated to develop and distribute fact sheets, guidelines and an updated referral form to relevant agencies and individuals. |
| | 2. Ensure eligibility criteria are clear for agencies and services making referrals. | All current fact sheets include RHSP's eligibility criteria. The intake worker follows up with referrers to clarify any missing or ineligible referral data and communicates outcomes to ensure transparency. |
| **Program guidelines** | 3. Develop tools or clear guidelines to support transparency and consistency of intake decisions, particularly for clients released from custody who are not eligible for DCJ Housing products. | CRC collaborated with DCJ to develop program guidelines informed by evaluation findings and recommendations. |
| | 4. Continue to develop guidance regarding the roles of DCJ Housing and RHSP staff in accepting referrals and ensure these policies and processes are clearly documented. | Program guidelines now clearly outline staff roles and decision-making processes. |
| | 5. Ensure that program knowledge is shared with new DCJ Housing staff to sustain momentum of program knowledge and implementation e.g., RHSP workers presenting about the program to new staff. | CRC staff deliver presentations and information sessions to DCJ Housing staff as needed.<br>Regular team meetings support ongoing knowledge sharing. |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | 6. Co-locate RHSP workers with the Access and Demand team at DCJ Housing where possible, or other teams that are responsible for pathways into housing and TA. | RSHP staff are currently co-located with Access and Demand teams across all sites. |
| **Program capacity and extension** | 7. Consider the intensity of clients' support needs when assessing RHSP worker capacity to take on new clients, ensuring that caseworkers have a balance of clients with lower and higher support needs. | CRC and DCJ continue to consider the intensity of support clients require when assessing CRC worker capacity to take on new clients, ensuring that caseworkers have a balance of clients with lower and higher support needs to ensure that all clients' needs can be met.<br>However, it should be noted that client's level of support can shift throughout their engagement with the program. |
| | 8. Consider the time required for proactive, flexible and outreach engagement approaches when planning caseloads. | Where possible, CRC aims to give RHSP workers a balanced case load where clients have varied needs and are in a different stage of their RHSP case plan- for example, people being pre- and post-release and having staggered release dates.<br><br>Caseloads (approx. 10 - 12 clients per worker) are based upon overarching program KPI, and caseload numbers were designed to align with other CRC transition programs. Caseloads will continue to be monitored, and the intensity of the needs of clients will be balanced.<br>RHSP requires flexibility around determining caseloads. |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | 9. Continue to fund the program and expand where possible, given the program's success in providing housing to those exiting prison at risk of homelessness. | Expansion of the program would be welcomed. This could be the expansion of caseworkers at current sites, as well as additional sites.<br><br>CRC will continue advocating to DCJ to consider expanding the program to new locations, provided that the current (successful) managerial model can be maintained (for example, a notable increase in program sites would require funding additional managerial role (s). |
| | 10. Consider flexibility to extend the period of support for clients who require longer periods of support, and/or introduce a step-down approach. | A step-down approach is central to the current RHSP model.<br><br>With current funding and caseload constraints, RHSP recommends a 12-month support period for all its transition programs. Extending support would limit the ability to take on new unassisted referrals.<br><br>Exit planning is part of RHSP casework. This involves referral and introduction to other services where required and accepted by the client.<br><br>Clients can be re-referred to RHSP if they go back into custody<br><br>CRC emphasises the importance of warm referrals in a step-down approach. |
| | **Other reflections** | CRC is working on developing a client reference group. |

## 1.2. Policy background

### 1.2.1. Imprisonment and homelessness

Homelessness and incarceration are intricately connected, making support services that adequately address this intersection crucial. People in prison experience homelessness at a rate of 66 times that of the general population (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2019), and 48% (almost half) of people exiting prison expect to be homeless on release (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2023). Homelessness and unstable housing are social determinants (or drivers) of incarceration (McCausland & Baldry, 2023, p. 43). In addition to homelessness being a driver of incarceration, it can also be an outcome of it (Drake et al., 2025). Incarceration can precipitate homelessness due to people being removed from public housing lists when incarcerated, people accruing rental arrears, one's absence from a dwelling, the inability to comply with strict supported housing conditions post-incarceration, and people being discriminated against when attempting to access housing due to their criminal record (Community Restorative Centre, 2025a, pp. 2–3; Doyle et al., 2024, p. 1404). Due to the cyclical relationship between homelessness and incarceration, homelessness is the second-highest indicator for reincarceration in Australia (Baldry et al., 2003).

Homelessness and incarceration are also imbricated in other ways. People are denied bail based on not having a fixed address (Drake et al., 2025), and some who are homeless deliberately commit crimes to enter the prison system, which, in the context of the housing crisis, will provide a roof over their heads (Melville, 2024).

The necessity of services that address the intersection of homelessness and incarceration is evident in the fact that homelessness for those in contact with the criminal legal system lasts longer and is likely to recur more often than for other people experiencing homelessness (Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, 2021, p. 114).

Homelessness exacerbates the cycle of re-offending and re-imprisonment, resulting in significant financial and social costs. Mitchell et al. (2023) reported that among formerly homeless individuals in New South Wales, three-quarters reoffended within two years, generating approximately $11.3 million Australian dollars (AUD) in court-related costs. Evidence shows that housing support for people leaving custody can significantly reduce these burdens. BehaviourWorks Australia (Kellner, et al., 2023) found that housing assistance is effective in preventing adult reoffending, and delivering measurable social and economic benefits. Programs that provided additional services e.g. wraparound services were even more effective. Further, McCausland et al. (2025) demonstrated that intensive reintegration support programs achieved a 62% reduction in proven offences and saved AUD $10–16 million annually per cohort through decreased criminal legal system involvement.

### 1.2.2. Effects of the housing crisis on housing outcomes

The ability of RHSP to connect people to housing is notably challenged by the housing crisis, which includes housing shortages, limited affordable housing, and high waiting lists for community and social housing (Drake et al., 2025). As of July 2025, 66,556 households were waiting on the public housing

register in NSW (Department of Communities and Justice, 2025). For areas that RHSP services, such as Penrith and Inner Sydney, expected wait times for public housing properties range from 5 to 10 years and beyond (Department of Communities and Justice, 2025a). Additionally, a current CRC research project on the Miranda Program, a CRC service supporting people at the intersection of domestic and family violence (DFV) and prison system involvement, revealed that a woman seeking stable accommodation to escape the effects of DFV was told the government waitlist for priority housing was 2 years. While this evaluation demonstrates beneficial housing outcomes achieved by the RHSP, the capacity of the program to connect people to housing is inhibited by the broader landscape of the housing crisis- a pressing issue outside the scope of CRC's control.

### 1.2.3. Effects of stigma and discrimination on acquiring housing

While housing shortages are a major barrier to positive housing outcomes for people exiting prison, stigma and discrimination associated with criminal legal system involvement also impact housing opportunities (Australian Human Rights Commission, n.d., p. 7; K. Martin et al., 2020). This can be encountered in a range of circumstances, including when individuals seek a private rental (Doyle et al., 2024, p. 1415) and when they attempt to access housing services (ACSO, 2020). Recognising the barriers to housing services that people who have been incarcerated face, CRC produced a factsheet on the intersection of housing and homelessness for community workers (Community Restorative Centre, n.d.a), and runs training for practitioners across NSW on 'Working with people impacted by the prison system', to help challenge the stigma and discrimination people face when attempting to access housing supports (Community Restorative Centre, 2025b).

### 1.2.4. The unique intervention that NGOs like CRC can make compared to government

Managers of the RHSP program communicated that NGOs like CRC are uniquely positioned to support people exiting prison and experiencing homelessness in ways that the government cannot replicate. These include:

a) CRC programs have outreach as a key component (ARTD Consultants, 2023, p. iv; Sotiri et al., n.d., p. 4), wherein CRC staff meet individuals where they are in the community. This is not generally offered by Homes NSW and Corrective Services, but is significant to people CRC supports, particularly as they may be hesitant to enter organisational or institutional spaces for fear of exclusion or discrimination, based on anticipated or past experiences.

c) People who have involvement with the prison system can experience systemic abuse by, inter alia, government bodies like Corrective Services (Mcgee et al., 2024, pp. 6–8; Sisters Inside, n.d., p. 2; Survivor Leadership Group et al., n.d., p. 22), which may lead to mistrust of, discomfort around, or avoidance of, government services. Notably, research on trust in Australian public services found that while people can distinguish between public services, 'trust in service delivery is typically perceived as a "whole of government" perception. If one Department provides poor service delivery, this affects the trust perceptions in other public services' (Evans et al., 2019). Such research helps explain how, while a person in NSW might experience systemic abuse within a government-run prison (Mcgee et al., 2024; Survivor Leadership Group et al., n.d.), discomfort around, or a mistrust of other government services, may occur as a result.

d) CRC programs are voluntary, not mandated. Government-run services, such as correctional facilities and the requirements of Homes NSW to receive temporary accommodation, lack the voluntarism which philosophically underpins CRC's service approach. CRC's voluntarist approach supports key components of trauma-informed care, including choice and collaboration (meaning 'doing with' as opposed to 'doing to')(Lehrer, 2021, p. 122; NSW Health, 2022). Given trauma is a risk factor for criminal behaviour (Liu et al., 2021), and trauma-informed care has been linked to reduced recidivism (Lehrer, 2021, p. 121), the trauma-informed, voluntaristic nature of CRC's programs can offer notable benefits.

e) CRC's person-first approach differs to government services like correctional facilities, where people's names are replaced by their MIN (Master Index Number) (Quayle, 2020), and where people are commonly referred to as 'inmates' and 'prisoners', which can be objectifying and dehumanising (Community Restorative Centre, n.d.; Harney et al., 2022). The language CRC uses in its work, informed by CRC's Language Guide, moves away from language like 'prisoner' and 'inmate', to person-first language such as 'person who has experienced incarceration' or 'person who is incarcerated', to respect people's humanity, promote belonging, and reduce stigma (Community Restorative Centre, n.d.).

# 2. METHODOLOGY

## 2.1. Key Evaluation Questions

The main evaluation question is: to what extent has the RHSP effectively supported people transitioning from custody to secure stable housing and reduce their risk of re-incarceration?

Specific questions are:

1. What are the lived experiences of individuals seeking support from the RHSP?
2. What are the CRC staff experiences in supporting RHSP clients?
3. To what extent does RHSP respond to its intended client base?
4. To what extent has RHSP impacted long-term housing outcomes for clients?
5. To what extent has RHSP impacted client wellbeing outcomes?
6. To what extent has RHSP reduced client risk of re-incarceration?
7. What are RHSP's cost savings to the criminal legal system?

## 2.2. Qualitative methods

Qualitative methods were used to answer evaluation questions 1 and 2.

To provide lived experiences of people seeking support from the RHSP program we provide six case studies of CRC clients, one from each of RHSP's locations. Each case study provides a look into the client's journey before and after contact with RHSP. The case studies have been de-identified to protect the privacy of the clients. The names used in each case study, including any names of transition workers, are pseudo names. Each client and case worker provided consent for these stories to be included in this report.

To provide staff experience of providing support to program clients, we include a speech delivered by Kirsty Trethowan (real name), a staff member at the Dubbo RHSP office to CRC staff at an all-staff meeting in July 2025. The speech highlighted the significance and impact of RHSP's work. Kirsty provided consent to include her speech in this report.

## 2.3. Quantitative methods

Quantitative methods were used to answer evaluation questions 3, 4, 5, and 6.

Program data included de-identified, individual-level data from the Client Information Management System (CIMS). The CIMS is a tool managed by Specialist Homelessness Services to help its funded providers of homelessness services in NSW to deliver faster, more consistent support to people who are homeless or at risk. Providers can use CIMS to manage client records, make referrals and access service information. Data for RHSP clients from 1 July 2023 to 30 June 2025 was accessed on CIMS by the evaluation team for analysis. Some of the data, particularly client demographics, was recorded by referrers and RHSP staff then collected missing and additional data. Data was regularly updated with changes in client circumstances at every contact meeting between staff and clients. When staff failed to get in contact with a client or the client did not turn up for a scheduled appointment, using the client's MIN number, the staff checked the DCJ's Just Connect web-based collaborative software that

allows contact with people in custody. This was used in addition to communication from other sources e.g. parole officers and service providers, to confirm a client's return to custody. Descriptive analyses of administrative data from the CIMs data set were conducted.

To respond to evaluation question 3, an analysis was made of the number of clients referred to RHSP, the number of clients enrolled, and the reasons provided for clients being unattended to. A further analysis of the enrolled client demographics, and support periods provided by RHSP was conducted.

To respond to evaluation question 4 the data was analysed to show the percentage of enrolled clients who were assisted with long-term housing. Data for clients assisted with long-term housing was further analysed to make comparisons between i) clients referred pre and post release, ii) RHSP locations, iii) client Indigenous and non-Indigenous status, and iv) gender. A further analysis was conducted to show the changes in clients' housing statuses during their support period.

To respond to research question 5, client data was analysed to show the percentage of clients with and without a completed case plan. In the absence of client wellbeing outcome measures, having a completed case plan was used as a proxy for wellbeing. When a client successfully works through their case plan, it shows they are taking steps toward stability, addressing needs, and building a more structured life. This process can significantly reduce stress and increase feelings of self-worth and control.

In response to research question 6, client data was analysed to report re-incarceration rates, and the comparison rate between clients housed and those not housed long-term.

## 2.4. Costing Analysis

A costing analysis was conducted to respond to research question 7. The costing method used costs and cost outcomes data reported in the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) report on the inquiry into enhancing the coordination of housing supports for individuals leaving institutional settings (Martin et al., 2021). The methodology is detailed in the AHURI report. Costs estimated included cost savings to the criminal legal system and the cost of providing public housing. Cost savings for the legal system included the cost of police incidents, court appearances, time in custody, time on supervised community orders, and social costs of crime. The costs per individual who received public housing were compared to the costs per individual who did not (they either received rental assistance or homelessness services) to arrive at the incremental cost and net-benefit per individual for each year and up to five years post public housing. Using the total number of individuals that RHSP housed over the 2-year evaluation period (2023 – 2025), the total savings from RHSP to the criminal legal system was estimated. Costs were estimated in 2025 Australian dollars using the Australian Taxation Office (ATO) consumer price index (CPI). According to the ATO CPI table, the CPI index as at 30th June 2019 and 30th June 2025 was 114.8 and 141.7 respectively (Australian Taxation Office, 2025), which makes the inflation factor 1.2346.

# 3. FINDINGS

## 3.1. Qualitative Findings

### 3.1.1. Case Studies

***The journey to stability: A case study of Alex from the Coniston location***

***Alex's background***

Alex is a 38-year-old Aboriginal man who has navigated a life shaped by significant trauma and systemic challenges. A client of RHSP, he has repeatedly sought assistance following his releases from prison. Diagnosed with PTSD, anxiety, and depression, his mental health struggles are rooted in a history of profound adversity, including physical, emotional, and sexual abuse he endured as a child and while in child and youth incarceration system. After serving an eight-year sentence for armed robbery, Alex has faced immense hurdles in his efforts to reintegrate into society.

***Overcoming barriers to reintegration***

Alex's story is one of resilience despite frequent setbacks. His life has been marked by a cycle of short prison sentences, driven largely by a lack of stable housing. Being on the Child Protection Register (CPR) severely limited his options for temporary accommodation with Homes NSW. This instability has often left him homeless, living on the streets, or in precarious situations with his family, which has contributed to reoffending and substance use, including methamphetamine use.

Despite these challenges, Alex maintains a strong and trusting relationship with his RHSP case worker. This connection is a lifeline; he calls his case worker daily, even when not an official client, demonstrating the deep rapport and trust they have built. This consistent engagement has been a critical factor in his progress. His case worker's unwavering support has provided a sense of security and a reliable point of contact in an otherwise chaotic life.

Alex's challenges are compounded by his low literacy level, which has created additional barriers to accessing support services and employment. While in custody, he suffered a severe burn injury while protecting a nurse, an event for which a compensation case is ongoing. This trauma has only added to his mental health struggles. However, a turning point came after the death of his father. Alex made a resolute commitment to his recovery, fully engaging in an Opioid Agonist Treatment (OAT) program. He has since achieved abstinence from all substances, a significant milestone in his journey.

***The path to permanent housing***

Upon his most recent release, Alex's mental state was notably improved. His case worker immediately re-enrolled him as a client and assisted him with securing temporary accommodation. Alex excelled in this transitional period, engaging well with support staff and actively participating in his 'Homes NSW' case plan.

Recognising his long-standing need for stability, his case worker took a decisive step, advocating directly to the Homes NSW Letting Team. The case worker highlighted that despite being on the priority housing list for three years, Alex had not been offered a permanent home. While

acknowledging the challenges his CPR placement presented, she argued that stable housing was essential for his long-term success. This powerful advocacy paid off, and Alex was offered a unit in the local area.

The transition, however, was not without its anxieties. The day after signing the lease, Alex expressed doubts about keeping the unit. His case worker, understanding his mindset, suggested that the anxiety was likely due to the overwhelming nature of moving from long-term homelessness to stability. Alex agreed, and with that reassurance, he decided to keep the unit.

He quickly took ownership of his new space, proactively furnishing it with a few items and accepting household goods, including a washing machine and curtains, provided by RHSP. With his dedicated effort, he transformed the unit into a true home.

***Sustained support and future success***

This progress was tested by a recent court appearance for prior offenses. His case worker accompanied him to court, providing a visible sign of support and answering the judge's questions. The case worker's presence and willingness to speak on his behalf made a significant difference, and Alex was spared a custodial sentence.

Alex is now living in the community, supported in his goals and continuing to move forward. His journey is a testament to the power of consistent support, personal resilience, and the critical role of stable housing in breaking the cycle of reoffending. RHSP looks forward to continuing to support him as he builds a new life.

***From trauma to tenancy: Gerald's reintegration case study from the Dubbo location***

***Gerald's background***

Gerald is an Aboriginal man whose life has been shaped by a complex history of trauma, institutionalisation, and significant health challenges. Diagnosed with a neurological brain disorder from a traumatic brain injury, an intellectual disability, schizophrenia, anxiety, and depression, Gerald's conditions have severely impacted his ability to manage daily life and navigate social systems.

***A foundation of trauma***

Gerald's childhood was marked by profound hardship. At just five years old, he lost his mother to cancer. He was then raised by his father; a man Gerald describes as "the hardest man I've ever met." Gerald endured daily emotional, physical, and sexual abuse in a home defined by his father's violence and substance use. This early trauma and lack of safety drew him into the juvenile justice system at a youthful age, long before he had the opportunity to build a stable life.

The cycle of incarceration and homelessness became Gerald's reality. With no consistent housing or support upon release, he was left vulnerable and at constant risk of reoffending. Over time, the prison system became the only place where he could rely on routines, meals, and a bed. This institutionalisation took a deep emotional toll.

***A turning point with CRC***

Gerald's journey took a crucial turn when he was referred to CRC's RHSP following a custodial sentence. At this point, Gerald was facing the combined impacts of trauma, grief, mental illness, and

years of institutional living. When he began working with his case worker, he was cautious but also determined to create real change.

Together, they secured temporary accommodation, which Gerald managed exceptionally well. His commitment to the process was clear through his honesty, consistency, and willingness to follow through. This success paved the way for a comprehensive case plan tailored to his complex needs, including navigating his NDIS plan, complying with Community Corrections, and preparing to join the OAT program for substance use. Despite the many obstacles, Gerald approached each step with courage and focus, supported by the structure and guidance of CRC.

***The fight for a home***

Securing permanent housing was Geralds's most significant challenge. Despite his high-priority status on the housing waitlist, he faced numerous rejections due to a lack of rental history. His past in custody also made shared living arrangements, such as group housing or hostels, unsuitable and overwhelming, as his history of violent behaviour meant he could not even share a cell. Furthermore, mandatory ankle-monitor checks during housing inspections added to the stigma and isolation he felt.

Recognising these barriers, CRC's case worker stepped in with strong advocacy at Homes NSW. The case worker made a compelling case for independent, stable housing as the only viable long-term solution for Gerald's recovery and reintegration. Their advocacy was successful, and Homes NSW agreed to offer Gerald a two-bedroom property.

The transition, however, was not without anxiety. The day after inspecting the property, Gerald expressed significant doubts about signing the lease, questioning whether he was ready for such a big responsibility. His case worker gently suggested that his anxiety was likely rooted in the long years of homelessness and instability. Gerald reflected on this and, with a new sense of understanding, chose to sign the lease. To further ease his transition, CRC provided brokerage funding to cover the costs of his bond and water bill, removing immediate financial stress.

***Building a new Life***

To help Gerald make the new space his own, the case worker organized additional support from other partner services to provide essential furniture. For the first time, Gerald had a place that was not temporary; a real home where he could start fresh.

Gerald's journey is a powerful testament to his resilience, determination, and the life-changing impact of holistic support. With a secure home, he has been able to focus on other critical areas of his life, including strengthening bonds with his children, continuing his substance use treatment, and meeting his obligations with Community Corrections.

Gerald's story highlights the profound importance of consistent advocacy and practical support in breaking the cycle of incarceration and homelessness. His future, once uncertain, is now filled with the promise of hope and healing, thanks to his own strength and the unwavering support of CRC.

***Breaking the cycle of instability with compassionate support: Tod's case study from the Liverpool location***

***Tod's challenging past***

Tod's journey began with a difficult childhood. At just 8 years old, he experienced significant sexual and physical abuse. Unable to confide in anyone, he internalised this trauma, leading him to begin using drugs at age 12. This path resulted in him spending 23 of the last 25 years in custody, a cycle of incarceration and active addiction. Understandably, this lengthy period of confinement and unaddressed childhood trauma led to significant mental health challenges.

***A new beginning with RHSP***

**Before completing a 10-year sentence, Tod was referred to RHSP by his parole officer.** Determined to create a different future for himself, Tod engaged exceptionally well with the program, meeting with his case manager one to two times a week to work on his goals.

Within the first four months of his release, RHSP provided comprehensive support to Tod, including:

- Housing Advocacy: Advocating for his placement in a Temporary Accommodation Program property to help him build a rental history.
- Essential Services: Assisting with Homes NSW temporary accommodation terms, opening a bank account, and applying for Centrelink and a photo identity document.
- Health and Well-being: Arranging transport and reminders for pharmacotherapy appointments, and connecting him with a General Practitioner, psychologist, and alcohol and other drugs (AOD) support.
- Long-Term Planning: Referring him to psychiatrist services and a specialist organisation for a Disability Pension and NDIS application.
- Liaison: Maintaining close contact with his parole officer.

***Finding stability and hope***

The RHSP team worked closely with the Homes NSW Access and Demand team to secure a 2-bedroom property for Tod in Liverpool. Now, six months into his journey with RHSP, Tod is thriving. He has reconnected with his family, regained a sense of purpose, and is committed to his personal growth. His story powerfully illustrates how effective, compassionate support can break the cycle of incarceration and homelessness.

Below is a quote from Tod he wrote to his case workers James and Caroline:

> *"Thanks James. You're the best. I honestly would be back in jail if it wasn't for you and Caroline. The way you help people is great and I appreciate everything you do."*

RHSP is proud to support Tod on his continued path forward. His journey underscores that programs like RHSP are not just necessary, they are truly life changing.

***A story of resilience and transformation: Michael's case study from the Mt. Druitt location***

***Michael's troubled past***

Michael's past was marked by significant hardship. He endured over 20 stints in jail, which left him feeling disconnected and isolated. On top of that, he struggled with mental health issues, addiction to substances, and the deep scars of sexual abuse he experienced as a teenager. All of this made it difficult for him to trust others or find stability.

***Referral to RHSP***

When Michael was referred to the RHSP, he was ready to face his challenges head-on. He also requested to join the AOD program to address his substance use. From the very beginning, his determination to make real, lasting changes was clear, and his progress in just seven months has been extraordinary.

***Key milestones and achievements***

Michael has celebrated numerous significant achievements on his path to recovery:

- Beating Addiction: After years of struggle, Michael made the courageous decision to join the OAT program. Today, he is living a drug-free life, which is a massive achievement.
- Financial Stability: Thanks to the Disability Support Pension (DSP), Michael now has the financial security he needs to meet his basic needs and focus on his recovery without added stress.
- A Place to Call Home: One of Michael's most meaningful milestones was moving into his very first public housing property in New South Wales. It's the longest he's ever stayed out of custody, and having his own space has brought him a profound sense of peace and stability.
- Healing from the Past: Michael has been actively working on his mental health, particularly the trauma he experienced as a teenager. With ongoing therapy and support, he is learning to manage his emotions and move forward in a healthier way.
- Reconnecting with Family: Rebuilding his relationship with his family has been a huge part of his recovery. Spending time with his grandchild has given him a new sense of purpose, and his family's support has been invaluable.
- Paying Off Debts: A substantial state revenue debt was a major financial burden, but through the Work and Development Order (WDO) program, he has paid it off. This has been a huge weight off his shoulders, allowing him to focus on his future.
- Newfound Independence: In an exciting new achievement, Michael obtained his learner's driver's license for the first time. This milestone opens new possibilities for greater independence and opportunities. Michael is now saving up to purchase his own car, which will give him the flexibility to go where he needs without relying on others for transportation.

***Looking toward the future***

Of course, Michael's path has not been without its challenges. The trauma from his past can sometimes resurface, making it hard to trust others or build healthy relationships. But through it all, Michael has remained focused on his goals and continues to push forward.

Now that Michael has settled into a stable home and has ongoing support for his mental health and recovery, he's starting to think about the future. His story is a true testament to resilience and growth. In just seven months, he has faced and overcome challenges most people could never imagine. With the support of his community and family, and his own determination, Michael is well on his way to lasting stability and a brighter future.

***Shawn's journey from incarceration to independence: A case study from the Newcastle location***

***Shawn's background***

Shawn, a 44-year-old man, was released into the community on a four-year parole order after serving an eight-year sentence in various correctional facilities across NSW. Due to his extended period of incarceration, he struggled immensely with reintegration into society. Shawn also has significant cognitive impairment, which, combined with diagnoses of anxiety, depression, and PTSD, made him highly vulnerable and easily overwhelmed.

***Initial challenges and barriers***

Upon his release, Shawn faced a multitude of challenges:

- Lack of Support: An existing NDIS assessment was never communicated to his parole officer, housing provider, or other support services, leaving him without crucial support for six months.
- Housing Instability: Shawn was living in an illegal shared house, where the provider took financial advantage of him through an "occupancy agreement." He was at high risk of homelessness.
- Financial Vulnerability: Despite being eligible for the Disability Support Pension (DSP), he was only receiving the Jobseeker payment. After rent deductions, he was left with just $160 per fortnight.
- Social Isolation: Due to his fear of re-incarceration and not understanding his parole conditions, Shawn rarely left his room, leading to social isolation. He also lacked essential identification documents.
- Multiple, Intersecting Needs: Shawn required support with literacy, numeracy, technology, daily living skills, and transportation.

***The RHSP intervention and key milestones***

Since his referral, the CRC's RHSP in Newcastle has provided intensive case management to Shawn, focusing on housing, health, and other psychosocial supports. Over eight months, they achieved several key milestones:

- Secured NDIS Support: The RHSP team sourced Shawn's historical NDIS assessment from Justice Health and, in collaboration with a NDIS planner, secured a formal diagnosis and plan. They advocated for his autonomy, empowering him to choose how his plan was implemented and building his capacity to navigate the system.

- Obtained Stable Housing: The team assisted Shawn with an emergency move when he was given only three days' notice to vacate his illegal housing. They then helped him secure a safe, private rental agreement while his social housing application was being assessed.
- Achieved Financial Security: The team supported Shawn in navigating his Centrelink payments, ensuring the illegal housing provider could no longer deduct funds. The DSP was approved, providing him with financial stability to cover basic needs, including nutritious food and medication.
- Improved Well-being and Independence: RHSP assisted Shawn in obtaining essential identification documents, which allowed him to access a companion card, apply for social housing, and change banking providers. He is now successfully meeting his parole obligations, and the team is advocating for his schedules to be lifted. Shawn has also built the confidence to use public transport and engage in community activities like fishing, gardening, and going to cafes.
- Building Long-Term Support: The team introduced additional, long-term support for Shawn through his NDIS support workers, a support coordinator, an allied health team, and a General Practitioner, ensuring he will continue to thrive after his time with RHSP ends.

***Outcomes and impact***

Through the collaboration between CRC and Homes NSW, including their partnership on the Co-existing Disorders Accord (CEDA), Shawn has seen a significant reduction in the mental health and multiple needs triggered by housing stress. His social housing application is currently being assessed for a high-priority classification. Shawn has seen a significant reduction in the mental health and complex needs triggered by housing stress. His social housing application is currently being assessed for a high-priority classification.

Shawn's journey is a powerful example of how consistent, holistic support can empower a person to leave a history of incarceration behind and build a positive, independent future. His capacity has been built to advocate for himself and engage in positive future planning, demonstrating the profound impact of programs like RHSP.

***A journey to stability through collaborative care: Kevin's case study from the Strawberry Hills location***

***Kevin's background***

Kevin is a 40-year-old man whose life has been defined by chronic homelessness, incarceration, and extensive trauma. Having spent most of his adolescence in prison, out-of-home care, and boys' homes, followed by recurring adult incarceration, K's re-entry into the community after serving a two-year custodial sentence in July 2024 presented extreme challenges.

***A life defined by instability***

Diagnosed with complex mental health conditions including severe anxiety, bipolar disorder, PTSD, and suspected ADHD, Kevin's risk of homelessness and reoffending upon release was significant. Despite being abstinent from substance use for two years and actively engaged with psychological and

AOD supports, the instability of his living situation continued to threaten his recovery and reintegration.

***The power of a co-located approach***

Kevin was referred to the RHSP, a pilot program delivered by the CRC that is co-located within the Housing NSW office. By working directly alongside Housing staff, the CRC case worker was able to provide real-time advocacy, coordinated responses, and efficient communication that otherwise would not have been possible across separate services.

***From crisis to a permanent home***

Kevin initially spent over 65 nights in temporary accommodation, during which his mental health sharply deteriorated. He experienced heightened paranoia, episodes of aggression, and suicidal ideation. However, through collaborative planning between CRC and Housing NSW, the team secured a 'hard to let' single-occupancy property that addressed Kevin's specific needs. This avoided placing him in shared accommodation, which had previously triggered severe distress and volatile behaviours.

The CRC case worker played a critical role in stabilising Kevin during this period, de-escalating crisis behaviours and advocating firmly with Housing staff. Since being housed, Kevin has maintained his tenancy, continued his abstinence, complied with community supervision, and remained engaged with support services.

***Sustained success and a brighter future***

Kevin's journey highlights how the CRC-Housing NSW co-location model enables swift, informed, and empathetic intervention for some of the most marginalised individuals in our community. Without this integrated approach, Kevin's path would likely have led back to custody or chronic homelessness. His case reflects not only the efficacy but the necessity of the RHSP in securing long-term, sustainable outcomes.

### 3.1.2. A Speech by a CRC RHSP Staff member

A speech delivered by Kirsty Trethowan, a staff member at the Dubbo RHSP office, to CRC staff at an all-staff meeting in July 2025.

***From custody to community: The reality on the ground***

Hello, I'm Kirsty Trethowan. For us, RHSP is not just about compliance or ticking boxes, it's about walking alongside individuals as they transition out of custody, often with very little, supporting them in rebuilding their lives from the ground up.

I want to speak honestly today, not from a report, but from what we see every day on the ground. I want to speak about our clients, the barriers they face, and the role we play walking alongside them.

We work with people up to three months before release, three weeks after release and stay with them for 12 months post-release, sometimes longer. In that time, we do whatever we can to support them into safety, stability, and connection.

The truth is, most of our clients don't leave prison with essential life skills, because they've never had the chance to learn them. Many have grown up in trauma, in institutions, and in constant survival mode. Yet somehow, they're expected to 'fit back in' to a world that is often unfamiliar, unforgiving, and unprepared to support their transition.

A lot of our clients are institutionalised. When they leave prison, it's not a fresh start, it's often another chapter of crisis. We see men and women walking out of custody with nothing but a garbage bag and a few belongings.

Often, Centrelink payments or 'Set to Go' plans haven't been arranged in time. We're left scrambling, trying to secure temporary accommodation, reinstate their Centrelink payments, and get to the bank before it closes, just so they can eat and have somewhere safe to sleep that night.

After release, we see women and men walk straight back into domestic violence, or forced into rough sleeping and couch-surfing, sometimes in garages, often with their children. They're living on low incomes, with no safety and no certainty.

We work with people living with complex mental health conditions, including chronic schizophrenia, PTSD, bipolar disorder, and substance use disorders, as well as intellectual disabilities and acquired brain injuries. These are often undiagnosed, unmedicated and completely unsupported.

Many of the people we work with have lived through a lifetime of trauma: childhood abuse, time in state care, domestic and family violence, sexual assault, intergenerational trauma, and incarceration. They don't just need a house. They need healing.

We've housed clients in their mid-40s who have never had a home before. People who've spent most of their lives in custody, starting from childhood. Many first entered the system as juveniles, simply looking for somewhere safe to sleep and escape the violence they were surviving.

We've supported clients who have cycled in and out of prison and mental health wards, who now have full-time jobs, are engaged in counselling and are active parents.

We've housed clients with acquired brain injuries, whose condition contributed to their repeated incarceration, to access NDIS and get the right care in place. Care that allows them

not just to stay housed, but to live with dignity and support.

We've helped clients access mental health services so they can stabilise, stay on parole, and function in the community.

We've linked people to AOD treatment while they're still in crisis, not waiting for them to fall apart again before we act.

We've helped parents get their children into therapy; these kids have lost their parents to custody, witnessed family violence, and feel like the world has left them behind.

We've referred children to speech therapists because trauma has taken their voice and no one else has asked why.

We've stepped in when unethical NDIS providers tried to take advantage of our clients to make sure that when they do get housing, they have the right supports around them.

We advocate, and we work closely with Housing, helping our clients understand their rights and responsibilities so they can remain stably housed and the broader community remains safe.

We provide wraparound support. We walk with them through crisis and make sure they're not doing it alone. And people notice.

Corrections have told us directly: "We don't refer clients anywhere else anymore. We only see real change when we refer to CRC." That's because we show up. We hold people steady. We stay consistent. But we're doing all of this in the middle of a housing crisis.

Refuges no longer take waitlists. Private rentals are out of reach especially if you're on parole, living on a low income, or judged before you even speak. And this program has no dedicated housing stock so we're constantly chasing a moving target.

Our clients want to do better. They want stability. But they're up against overloaded systems and personal histories that make even the most basic tasks feel overwhelming. That's why our role matters so much. Because when things get hard, when someone can't get out of bed, or catch a bus to an appointment …. we're the ones they call. We don't walk away. We don't judge. We walk with them.

Let me finish by saying this: our clients aren't statistics. They're not just a MIN number, or a file. They're people. Like the mum trying to get to a housing appointment, but frozen in flashbacks of her ex pouring petrol on her and trying to kill her. Or the dad doing everything he can to stay out of jail, but still carrying the pain of being flogged as a child for crying after his mum died of cancer. Or the son grieving his mother's death, who passed while he was locked up, never getting the chance to say goodbye. These are the people we support. And this program works because it's built on real relationships, real action, and unwavering consistency.

Thank you.

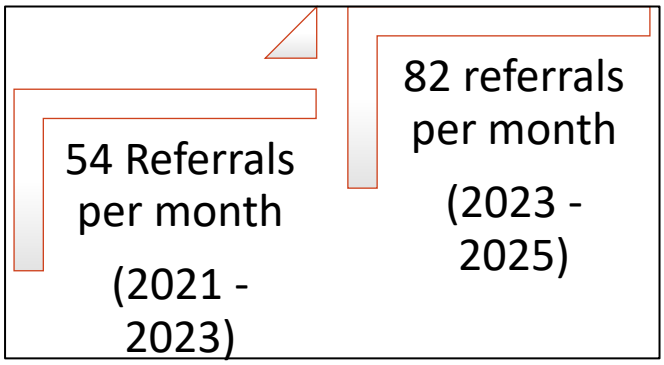
## 3.2. Quantitative Findings

### 3.2.1. RHSP's response to its intended client base

The RHSP intended to develop a system of coordinated referrals by establishing working relationships and protocols between DCJ Housing and Corrective Services. The referral pathways into the support program were for people exiting custody at risk of homelessness and people who have been recently released from custody who are experiencing homelessness.

Between July 2023 and June 2025, a total of 1,970 referrals were made to RHSP. This included:

- 574 accepted referrals (29%)
- 1,396 referrals unattended to (71%)




The program has registered an increase in the rate of referrals since the last evaluation report, from an average of 54 referrals per month (976 referrals between September 2012 – February 2023) to approximately 82 referrals per month between (July 2023 – June 2025). This is an increase of 52%.

Reasons for unassisted persons are provided in Table 1. **The primary reason for unassisted referrals was insufficient staff at the agency (49%).** This was followed by clients who did not accept the service and those who did not meet the criteria, both at 16%. The remaining 15% were categorized as "Other."

Similarly, the previous 2021-2023 evaluation reported insufficient staffing as the primary reason for unassisted referrals (61%).

**TABLE 2: REASONS FOR UNASSISTED PERSONS**

| Reasons for not receiving assistance | N | % |
|---|---|---|
| Agency had insufficient staff | 682 | 48.9% |
| Person did not accept the service | 222 | 15.9% |
| Person did not meet criteria | 221 | 15.8% |
| Other reason | 211 | 15.1% |
| Agency had no other services available | 40 | 2.9% |
| Agency was in the wrong area | 15 | 1.1% |
| Agency was inappropriate, wrong target group | 2 | 0.1% |
| Person wanted different services | 1 | 0.1% |
| Agency had no accommodation available | 1 | 0.1% |
| Services available were not appropriate for a person with disabilities | 1 | 0.1% |
| **Total** | 1396 | 100.0% |

A total of the 529 clients were accepted, and 574 periods of support were provided by RHSP over the two-year evaluation period: July 2023 – June 2025. Table 2 shows the demographic characteristics of the clients and their status at the start of the support period.

In this reporting period, **the data reveals a growing engagement with clients who identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, who now represent 44%** of RHSP's clientele, up from 36% in the last evaluation report period (2021 – 2023). An additional 9% of clients had a CALD background.

The program continued to support a majority of clients recorded as male (88%), though the percentage of clients recorded as female saw a slight decrease to 12% (a 2% decrease from the previous evaluation period). Only one client (0.2%) preferred not to have a gender stated.

Similar to the previous evaluation report, the largest age group supported was 26 – 45-year-olds (67%). Young people aged 18 – 25 made up 7%, while clients over 45 represented 26% of all clients.

RHSP's Coniston location registered the highest number of accepted referrals (136 clients or 24% of total RHSP clients), followed by Mount Druitt (106 or 19%). The total number of referrals enrolled at each of the other locations (Dubbo, Liverpool, Newcastle, and Strawberry Hills) ranged between 77 – 88. No location was recorded for one referral.

**The vast majority of clients (88%)[2] were already experiencing homelessness at the time of their referral, while the remaining 13%[2] were at risk of homelessness.** Overwhelmingly, 73% of clients had a prior mental health diagnosis. This highlights the high support needs of the client base.

**The majority of referrals came pre-release (58%),** indicating that the program's services are most often engaged before a client leaves custody.

[2] The total percentage does not sum up to 100% due to whole number rounding off.

**TABLE 3: DEMOGRAPHICS FOR PERSONS WITH SUPPORT PERIOD CURRENT IN REPORT PERIOD (JULY 2023 - JUNE 2025)**

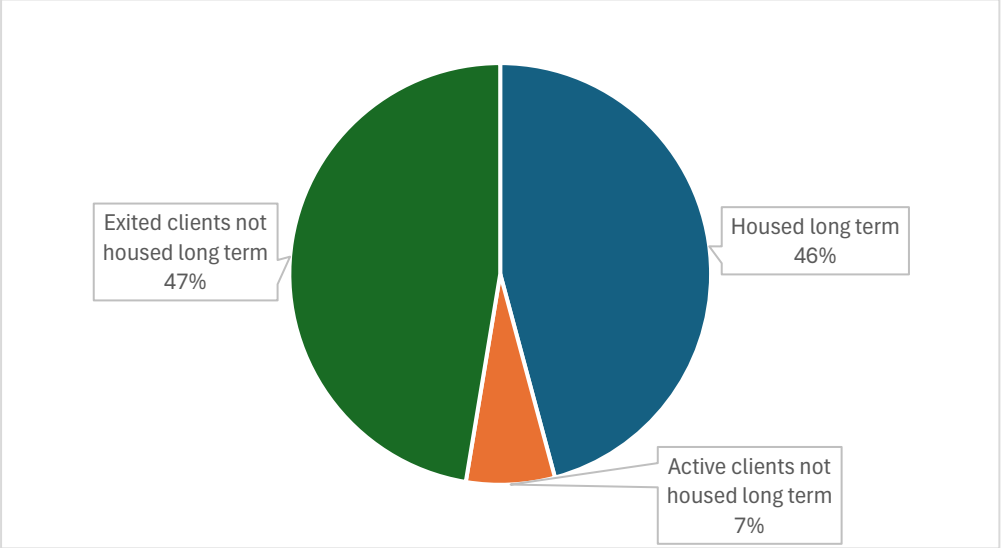
| Demographic | N | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Cultural background* | | |
| Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander | 231 | 43.7% |
| Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) | 49 | 9.3% |
| Other | 249 | 47.1% |
| Gender recorded* | | |
| Female | 63 | 11.9% |
| Male | 466 | 88.1% |
| Prefer not to say | 1 | 0.2% |
| Age Range* | | |
| 18 - 20 years | 3 | 0.6% |
| 21 - 25 years | 35 | 6.6% |
| 26 - 35 years | 168 | 31.8% |
| 36 - 45 years | 187 | 35.3% |
| 46 - 55 years | 95 | 18.0% |
| 56 - 65 years | 34 | 6.4% |
| 66 - 85 years | 7 | 1.3% |
| Location** | | |
| Coniston | 136 | 23.7% |
| Dubbo | 86 | 15.0% |
| Liverpool | 77 | 13.4% |
| Mount Druitt | 106 | 18.5% |
| Newcastle | 88 | 15.3% |
| Strawberry Hills | 80 | 13.9% |
| Blank | 1 | 0.2% |
| Presenting tenure** | | |
| Homeless | 502 | 87.5% |
| At risk of homelessness | 72 | 12.5% |
| Prior mental health diagnosis** | | |
| Yes | 420 | 73.2% |
| No | 66 | 11.5% |
| Don't know | 88 | 15.3% |
| Referral Source for ** | | |
| Pre-release | 333 | 58.0% |
| Post release | 241 | 42.0% |

*N = 529 (Number of clients)

**N = 574 (Number of periods of support)

### 3.2.2. Client long-term housing outcomes

**FIGURE 1: PERCENTAGE OF ENROLLED CLIENTS HOUSED LONG-TERM (N = 574)**




Of the 574 accepted clients in the reporting period, **263 (46%) were assisted with long-term housing, representing a significant success in providing stability for nearly half of program participants**. However, 47% had exited the program without having received long-term housing, and 7% were active clients awaiting housing assistance (Figure 1).

Figure 2 shows the period of referral for the 263 clients that were housed long-term. **The majority of clients who were housed long-term, 53%, were referred pre-release, showing a greater success in long-term housing outcomes when clients' support journey began before they left custody.**

**FIGURE 2: PERCENTAGE OF LONG-TERM HOUSED CLIENTS WHO WERE REFERRED PRE/POST RELEASE (N = 263)**

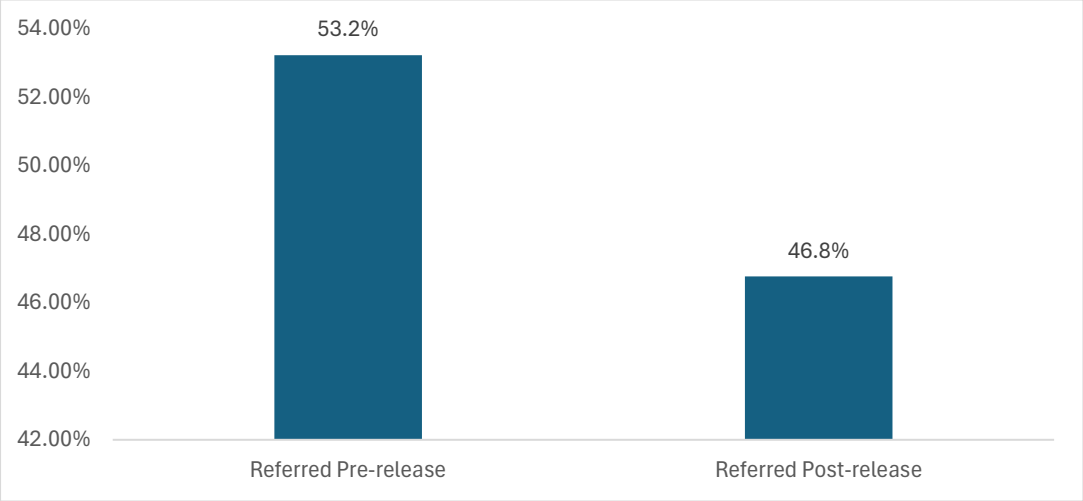
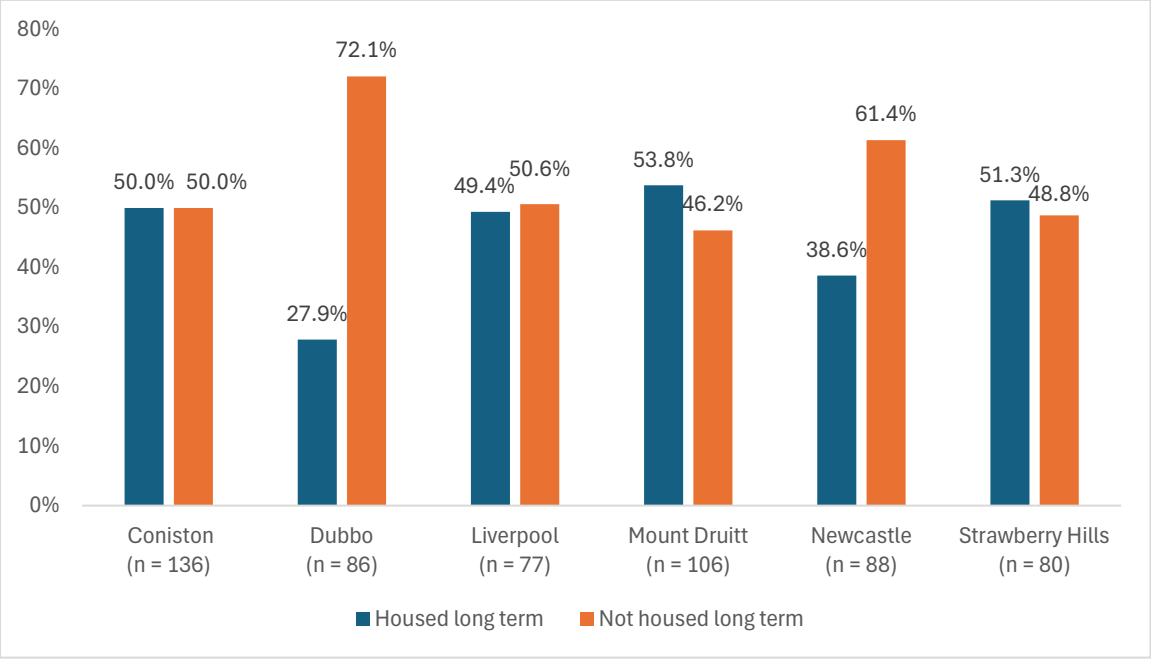


**FIGURE 3: CLIENT LONG-TERM HOUSING OUTCOMES BY LOCATION (N=573)**




Note: No location was indicated for 1 client

The percentage of enrolled referrals that were assisted with long-term housing at each location ranged between 28% - 54% (Figure 3). The Mount Druitt location achieved the highest success rate, successfully housing 54% of clients. **Conversely, the data showed regional challenges. Dubbo recorded the highest percentage of clients who were not housed long-term at 72%, followed by Newcastle at 61%.**

**FIGURE 4: PERCENTAGE OF CLIENTS HOUSED LONG-TERM BY INDIGENOUS STATUS AND GENDER (N = 263)**

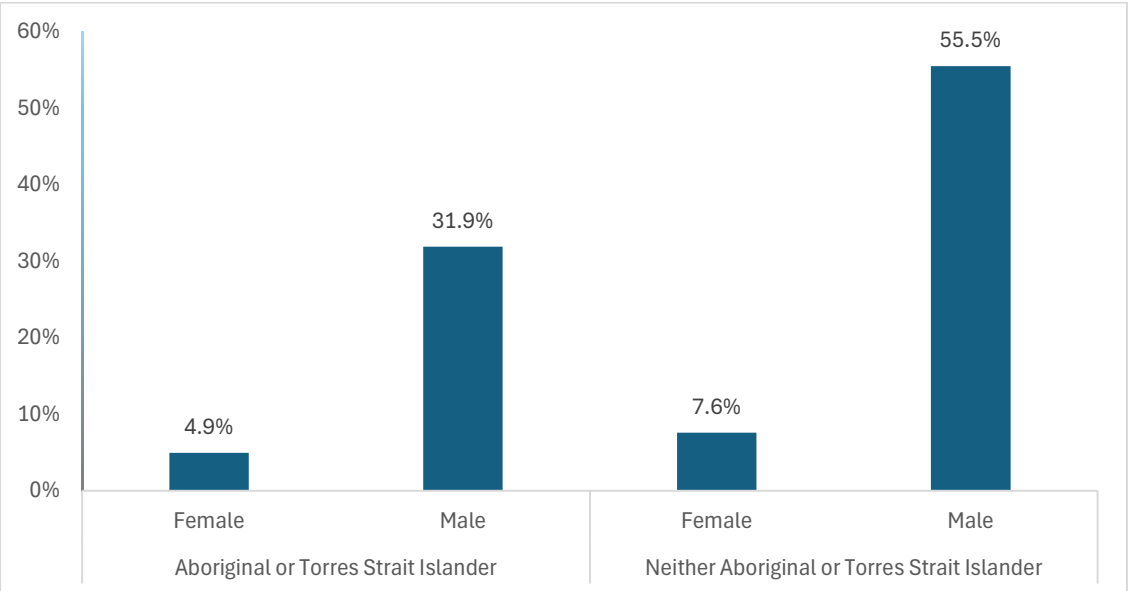


Figure 4 shows the Number of clients who were supported with long-term housing by gender and Indigenous status. Of the 263 supported clients, 36.9% of these were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander clients. Among clients assisted with long-term housing, 12.5% were recorded as female and 87.5% were recorded as male by staff.

**FIGURE 5: CHANGES IN HOUSING STATUS DURING SUPPORT PERIOD (N = 574)**

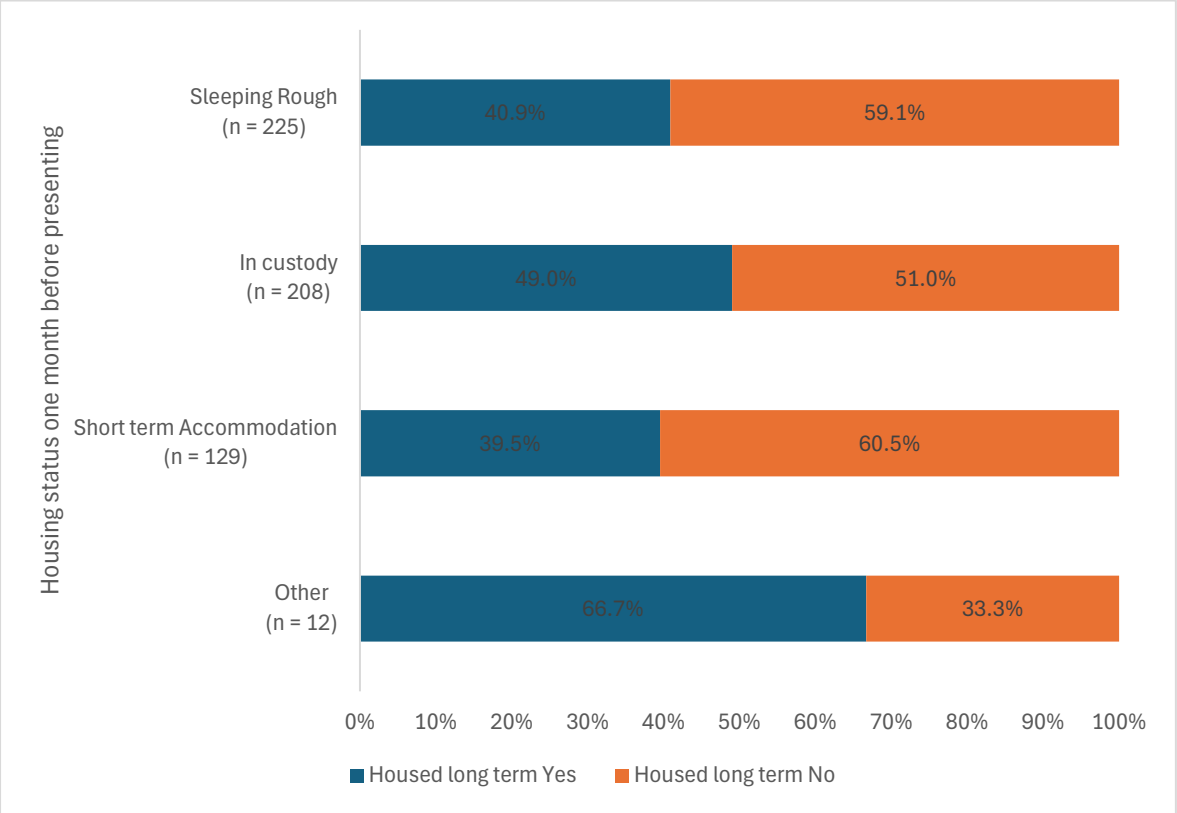



Figure 5 shows the percentage of clients who were housed long-term versus those who were not, based on their housing situation one month before they began receiving support.

All clients (n = 574) were transitioning from custody and either homeless or at risk of homelessness. The biggest number of clients were sleeping rough (n=229). 41% of these clients were assisted with long-term housing. Clients who were in short-term accommodation (n = 129) had a 40% success rate for long-term housing. **Clients who were in custody at the time of their referral were housed long-term at a rate of 49.0%. This is a particularly strong result, indicating the program's effectiveness in preparing incarcerated individuals for successful reintegration.**

### 3.2.3. Client wellbeing outcomes

**FIGURE 6: PERCENTAGE OF CLIENTS WITH AND WITHOUT A COMPLETED CASE PLAN (N = 574)**

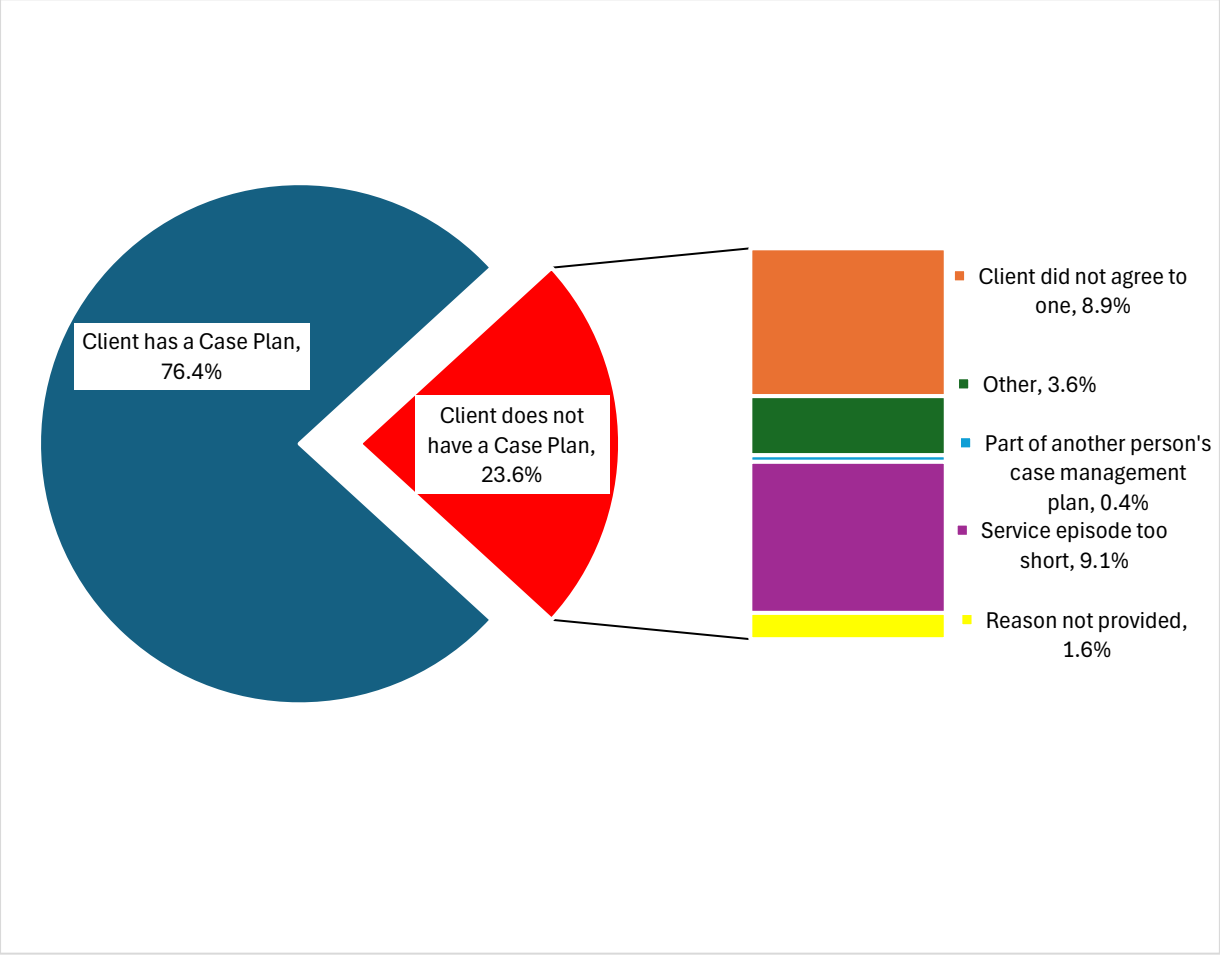



Figure 6 shows the percentage of clients who had a completed case plan, and the reasons provided for those that did not have one.

**At the time of reporting, 76% of clients had a completed case plan.** The reasons provided for the 24% of clients who did not have a case plan included: client did not agree to one (9%), client was part of another person's case plan (0.4%), client had a very short service episode (9%), no reason provided (2%) and other (4%).

### 3.2.4. Client Recidivism Outcomes

**FIGURE 7: RE-INCARCERATION RATES AMONG CLIENTS HOUSED AND NOT HOUSED LONG-TERM (N = 574)**

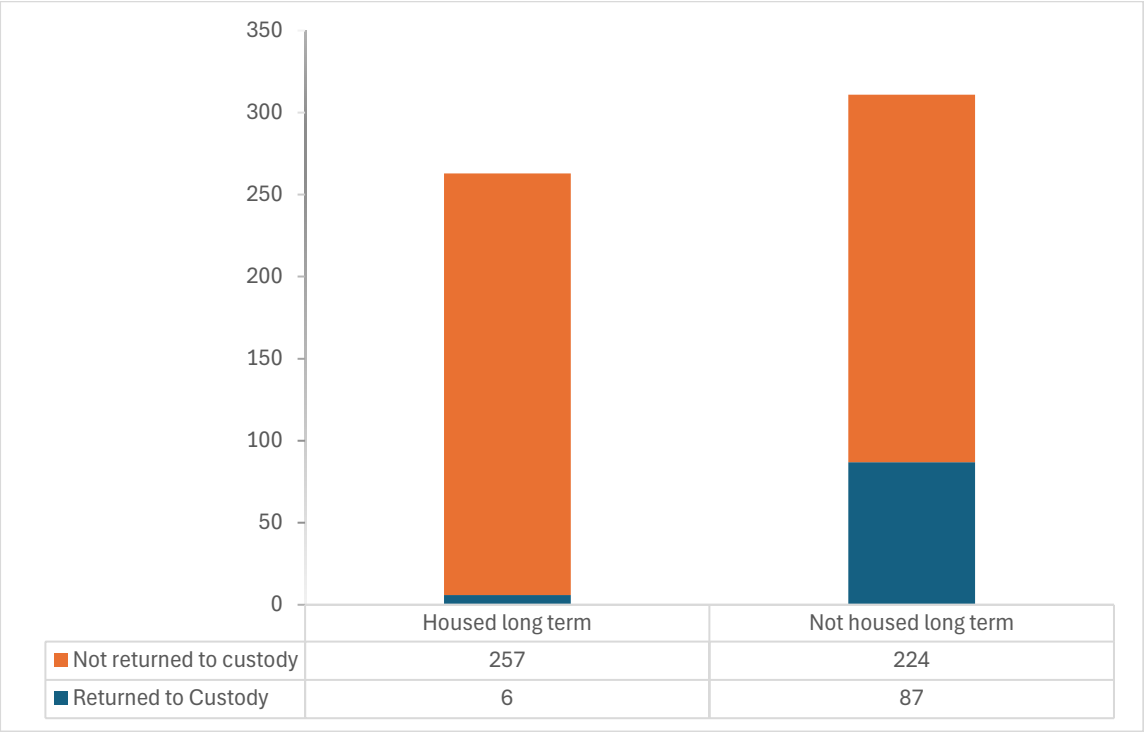


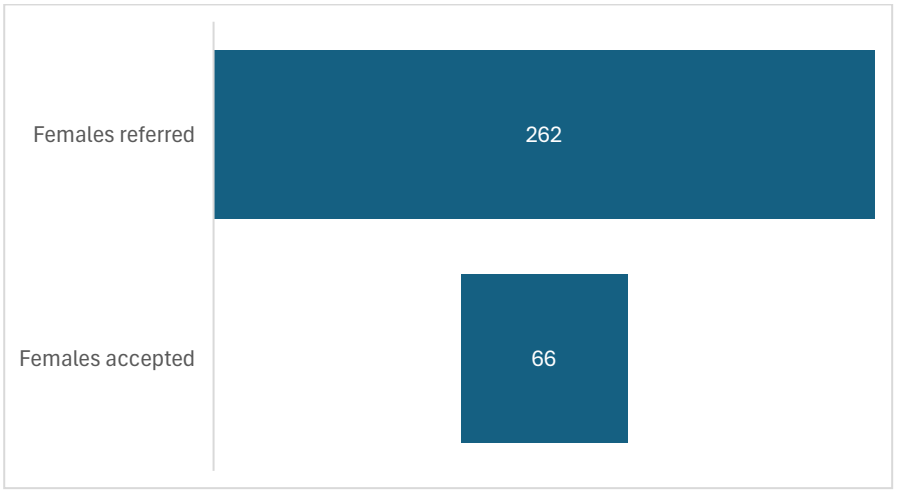

Figure 7 presents the client re-incarceration rates for the 574 RHSP clients during the support period. Of the 574 client support periods, only 93 (16.2%) returned to custody.

There is a strong correlation between securing long-term housing and a client's risk of returning to custody. Of the clients who were successfully housed long-term, the vast majority (257) did not return to custody, with only six clients (2%) returning. In stark contrast, among clients who were not housed long-term, a significant number (87) returned to custody, compared to the 224 who did not (26%).

## 3.3. Quantitative Findings – Focus on Females

### 3.3.1. Key demographics of RHSP Females

**FIGURE 8: NUMBER OF FEMALES REFERRED, ENROLLED, AND ASSISTED WITH LONG-TERM HOUSING (JULY 2023 – JUNE 2025)**




The total number of females referred to RHSP during the period July 2023 – June 2025 was 262. Of these, only 66 were accepted to RHSP, leaving 196 women (75%) unassisted (Figure 8). Of the 66 accepted females, 68% were referred pre-release while 32% were referred post-release (Figure 9). Approximately 46% of females accepted in RHSP identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (Figure 10).

**FIGURE 9: REFERRAL SOURCE OF FEMALES ACCEPTED IN RHSP (N = 66)**

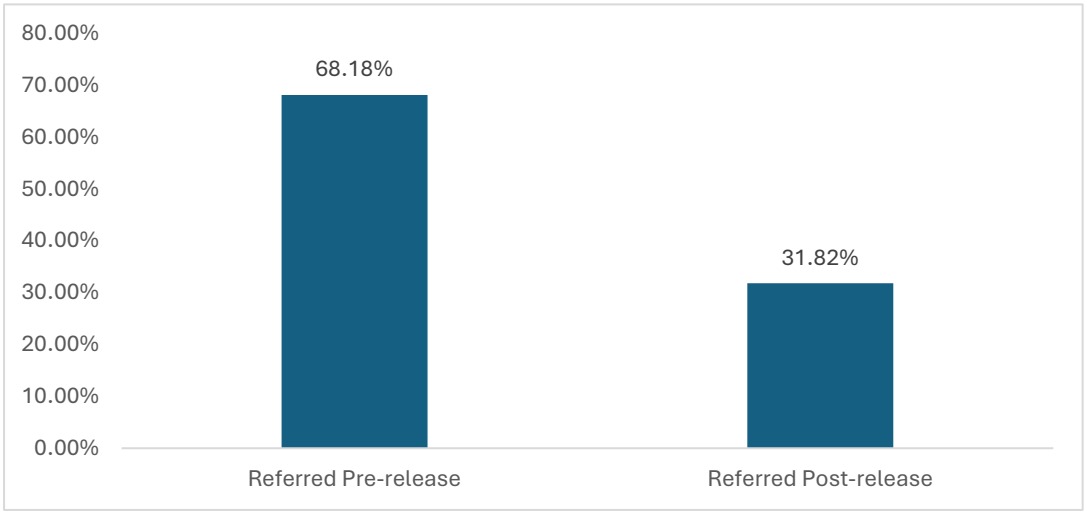
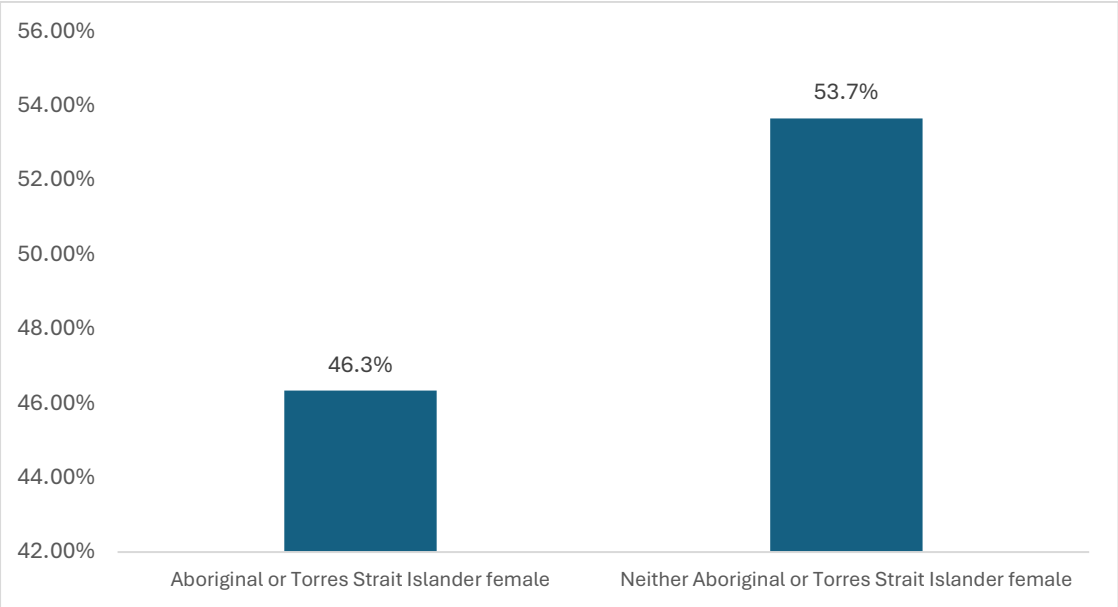
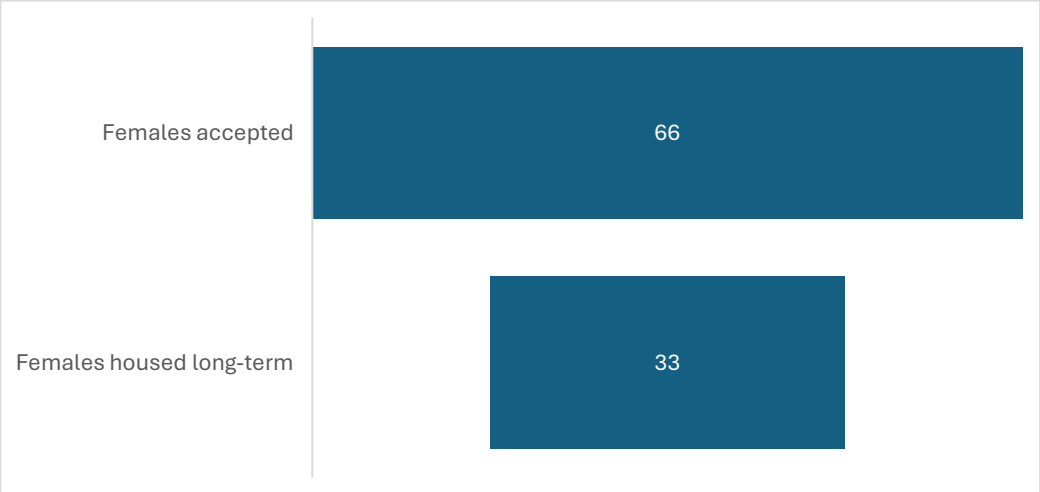


**FIGURE 10: INDIGENOUS STATUS OF RHSP FEMALES (N=66)**




### 3.3.2. Housing Outcomes

**FIGURE 11: NUMBER OF FEMALES ASSISTED WITH LONG-TERM HOUSING**




Of the 66 females accepted into the program, 50% were successfully assisted with long-term housing (Figure 11). Compared to the overall RHSP client group, females were more likely to achieve long-term housing outcomes.

The percentage of females housed long-term varied significantly by location, ranging from 14% - 69%, with Liverpool recording the highest success rate (Figure 12). Regional disparities were evident: while urban locations generally assisted at least 50% of women, regional sites such as Dubbo and Newcastle achieved only 30% and 14%, respectively.

**FIGURE 12: FEMALE LONG-TERM HOUSING OUTCOMES BY LOCATION**

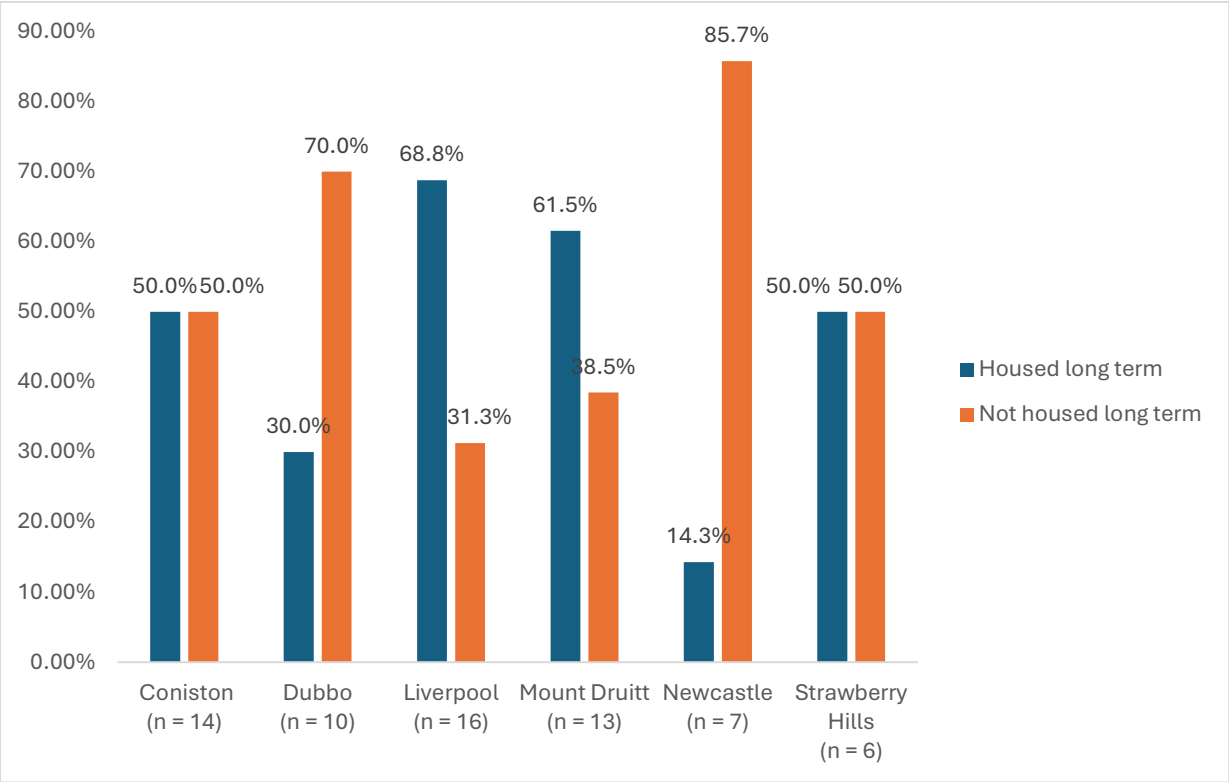
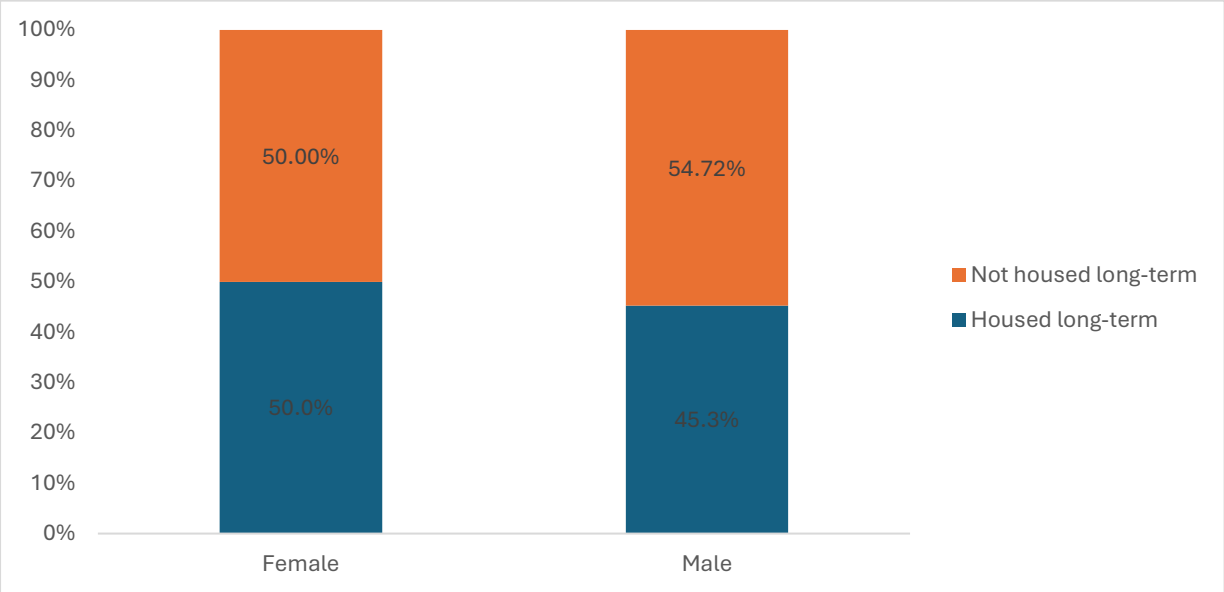


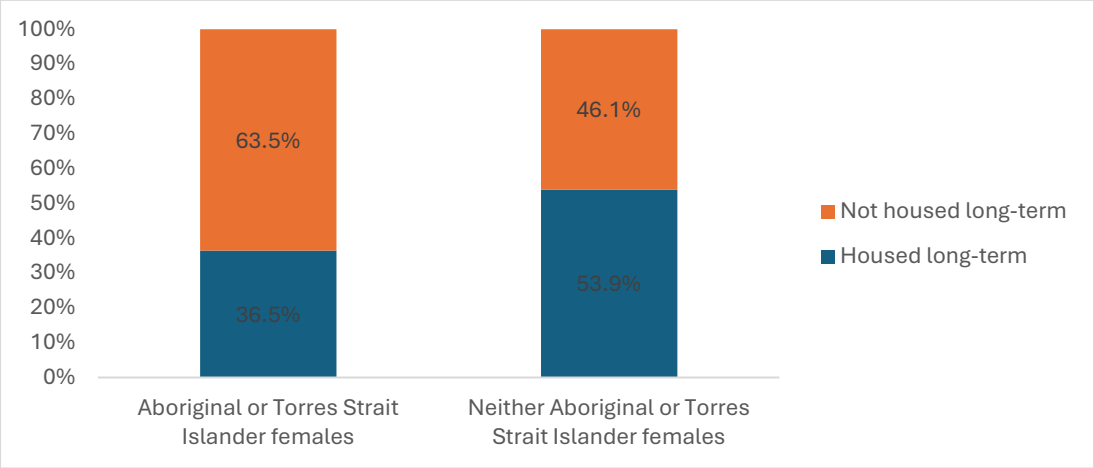

**FIGURE 13: LONG-TERM HOUSING OUTCOMES OF FEMALES COMPARED TO MALES**




Compared to males, females generally had a higher chance of being housed long-term (50% of all females compared to 45% of all males) (Figure 13).

However, females who identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander had a lower chance of being housed long-term (37%) compared to those that did not (54%) (Figure 14).

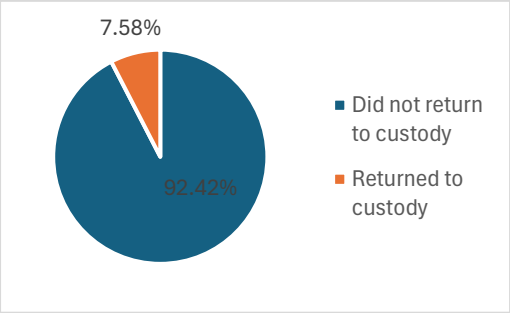
**FIGURE 14: LONG-TERM HOUSING OUTCOMES OF FEMALES BY INDIGENOUS STATUS**




### 3.3.3. Impact on Recidivism

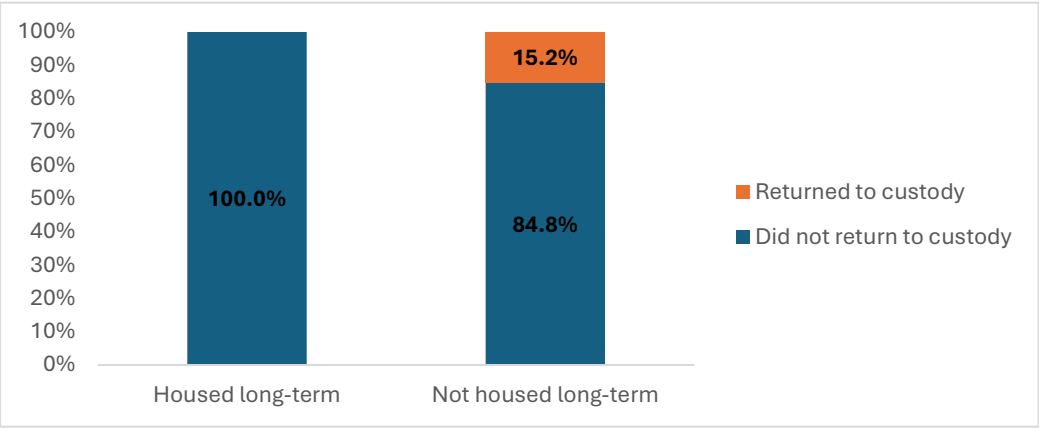
**FIGURE 15: PERCENTAGE OF FEMALE RHSP CLIENTS THAT RETURNED TO CUSTODY (N = 66)**

Overall, only 7.6% of female clients returned to custody during the reporting period (Figure 15).




The RHSP has demonstrated a powerful impact in breaking the cycle of incarceration for females who are housed long-term. All females (100%) who were housed long-term did not return to custody during the reporting period. In comparison, 15% of females who were not housed long-term returned to custody (Figure 16).

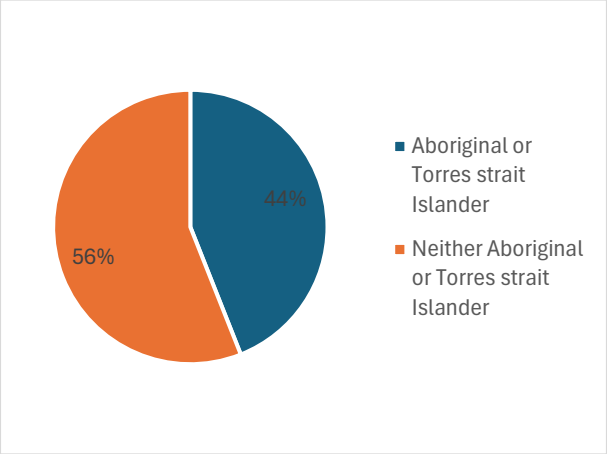
**FIGURE 16: RECIDIVISM RATES AMONG FEMALE CLIENTS BY LONG-TERM HOUSING STATUS.**



## 3.4. Quantitative Findings – Focus on First Nations people

### 3.4.1. Key demographics of First Nations people

**FIGURE 17: INDIGENOUS STATUS OF RHSP CLIENTS (N=529)**




A total of 231 individuals (44% of all RHSP clients) identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander during the reporting period (Figure 17, Table 3).

Table 4 highlights the demographic profile of First Nations clients supported by RHSP during the evaluation period. The majority were male (87.6%), and most referrals occurred pre-release (57.5%), indicating strong engagement before clients left custody. Regional distribution shows a concentration in Dubbo (29.3%) and Coniston (20.3%), with smaller proportions across Liverpool, Mount Druitt, Newcastle, and Strawberry Hills. These figures underscore the program's significant role in supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, particularly in regional areas where housing challenges are most acute.

**TABLE 4: KEY DEMOGRAPHICS FOR FIRST NATIONS PEOPLE SUPPORTED BY RHSP (N = 231)**

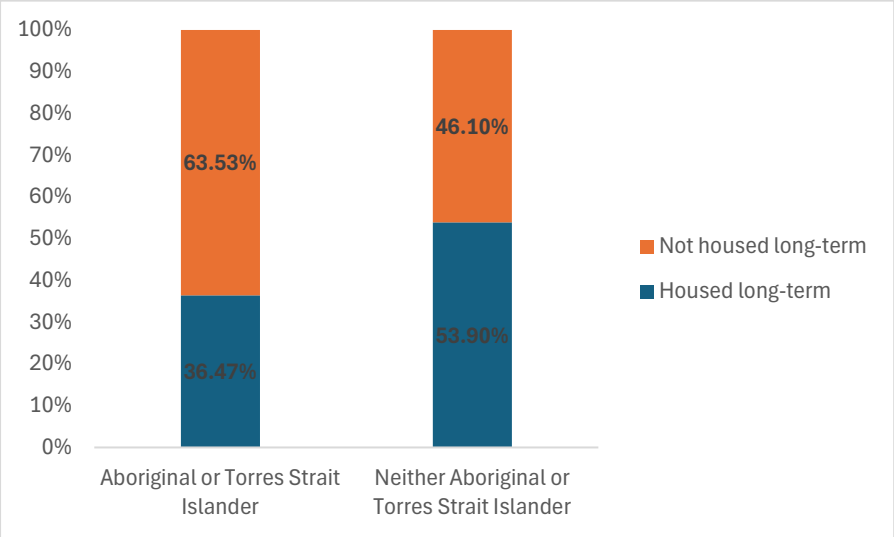
| **Demographic** | | **%** |
|---|---|---|
| **Gender** | Female | 12.4% |
| | Male | 87.6% |
| **Referral Source** | Pre-release | 57.5% |
| | Post-release | 42.5% |
| **Location** | Coniston | 20.3% |
| | Dubbo | 29.3% |
| | Liverpool | 11.7% |
| | Mount Druitt | 15.0% |
| | Newcastle | 13.2% |
| | Strawberry Hills | 10.5% |

### 3.4.2. Housing outcomes

Among the 263 RHSP clients who were assisted with long-term housing, 36.6% identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, comprising 4.9% females and 31.9% males (Figure 4).

Among First Nations clients, only 36.5% were successfully housed long-term, compared to 53.9% of non-Indigenous clients (Figure 18). This indicates a significant disparity in housing outcomes, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients less likely to achieve stable housing through the program.

**FIGURE 18: HOUSING OUTCOMES FOR RHSP FIRST NATIONS CLIENTS (N = 263)**




For First Nations clients overall, 19.2% returned to custody, while 80.8% did not during the reporting period (Figure 19). Although most avoided reincarceration, this rate is notably higher than the overall program average of 20%.

Figure 20 illustrates the profound impact of long-term housing on reducing recidivism among First Nations clients supported by the RHSP. The data shows that only 3% of clients who were successfully housed long-term returned to custody during the reporting period, compared to 28% of those who were not housed long-term. This stark contrast underscores the critical role that stable housing plays in breaking the cycle of incarceration for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

**FIGURE 19: REINCARCERATION OUTCOMES FOR FIRST NATIONS PEOPLE (N = 231)**

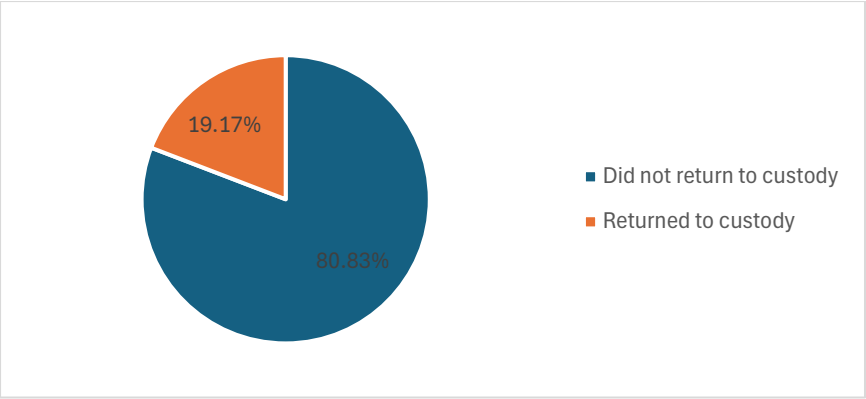
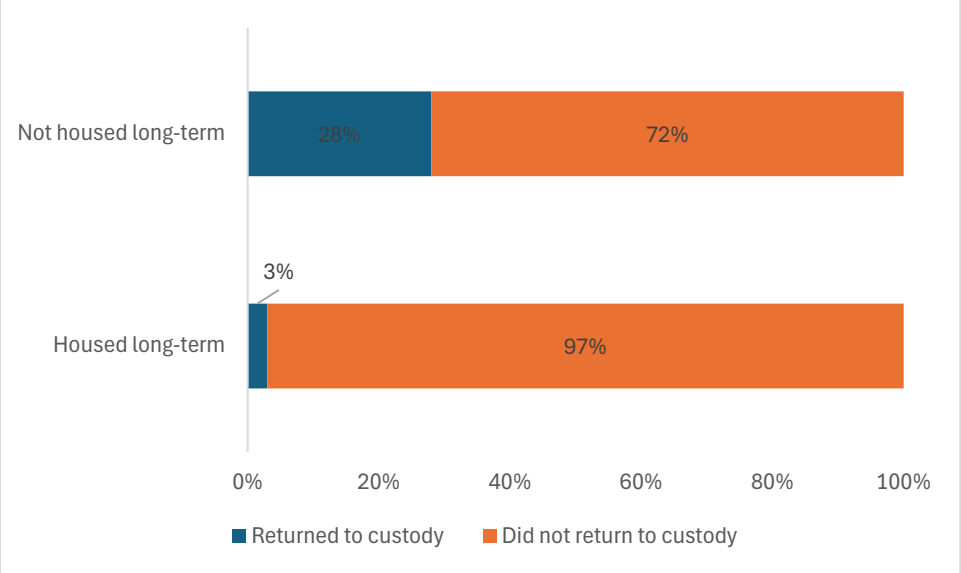



**FIGURE 20: IMPACT OF LONG-TERM HOUSING ON REINCARCERATION AMONG FIRST NATIONS RHSP CLIENTS (N = 231)**




# 3.5. Costing Results

### 3.5.1. Cost-Benefit Analysis

The net benefit to the criminal legal system per individual supported by RHSP increases over time (table 5). When public housing is compared to private rental assistance, the net benefit is realised 3 years after public housing commences. After 5 years, the net-benefit per individual would be $6,424. When compared with homelessness services, the net-benefit per individual is realised immediately, and is estimated at $43,162 per individual after 5 years.

The RHSP assists approximately 160.27 individuals per year with accessing housing. This means that after 5 years, RHSP provides a total net saving of between $841,503 (public housing compared with rental subsidies) and $5,654,277 (public housing compared to homelessness services).

**TABLE 5: COST-BENEFIT ANALYSIS OF THE RHSP PROGRAM**

| Cost/Benefit | Years after public housing | Public housing compared with private rental assistance (Australian dollars) | Public housing compared with homelessness (Australian dollars) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Incremental justice system savings per individual [a] | Year 1 | 8,686.44 | 8,686.44 |
| | Year 2 | 11,205.01 | 11,205.01 |
| | Year 3 | 13,723.58 | 13,723.58 |
| | Year 4 | 16,242.15 | 16,242.15 |
| | Year 5 | 18,760.72 | 18,760.72 |
| | **Total after 5 years** | **68,617.90** | **68,617.90** |
| Incremental cost of public housing per individual [a] | Year 1 | 12,438.84 | 5,091.10 |
| | Year 2 | 12,438.84 | 5,091.10 |
| | Year 3 | 12,438.84 | 5,091.10 |
| | Year 4 | 12,438.84 | 5,091.10 |
| | Year 5 | 12,438.84 | 5,091.10 |
| | **Total after 5 years** | **62,194.21** | **25,455.48** |
| Net-benefit per individual [a] | Year 1 | -3,752.41 | 3,595.34 |
| | Year 2 | -1,233.83 | 6,113.91 |
| | Year 3 | 1,284.74 | 8,632.48 |
| | Year 4 | 3,803.31 | 11,151.06 |
| | Year 5 | 6,321.88 | 13,669.63 |
| | **Total after 5 years** | **6,423.69** | **43,162.42** |
| Total saving from RHSP for each annual assisted cohort [a, b] | Year 1 | -491,565.21 | 470,989.59 |
| | Year 2 | -161,632.33 | 800,922.48 |
| | Year 3 | 168,300.56 | 1,130,855.36 |
| | Year 4 | 498,233.45 | 1,460,788.25 |
| | Year 5 | 828,166.33 | 1,790,721.14 |
| | **Total after 5 years** | **841,502.80** | **5,654,276.82** |

Source: a=AHURI report, b=RHSP Program Evaluation 2025

### 3.5.2. Missed savings opportunity

The RHSP evaluation reported that 682 individuals who had met the program criteria were unassisted due to insufficient staff. If the same housing success rate for RHSP of 47% is applied, this means that there was a missed net-benefit opportunity to the criminal legal system of between $6424 and $43,162 per individual over a 5-year period, and a total savings of $1,029,524 and $6,917,641 over a 5-year period for each annual RHSP cohort (table 3). The cumulative total savings within a 5-year period will be higher given that each year a different cohort is assisted with housing.

**TABLE 6: MISSED SAVINGS OPPORTUNITY FOR THE RHSP**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Total number of individuals who met the criteria for RHSP but were unassisted due to insufficient staff | 682 in two years (2023 – 2025) | 341 |
| Probability of being housed long-term | 47% of RHSP clients housed long-term | 0.47 |
| Total number of people per year who could have been housed long-term | 0.47 ×341 | 160.27 |
| Missed net-benefit per individual not assisted (Public housing compared with rental assistance) | | $6,423.69 |
| Missed net-benefit per individual not assisted (Public housing compared with homelessness) | | $43,162.42 |
| Missed saving after 5 years of housing assistance per RHSP annual cohort (Public housing compared with rental assistance) | 160.27 ×5,203.05 (total cost saving per person) | $1,029,524.08 |
| Missed saving after 5 years of housing assistance per RHSP annual cohort (Public housing compared with homelessness) | 160.27 ×34,960.65 (total cost saving per person) | $6,917,640.81 |

### 3.5.3. Sensitivity analysis

It is assumed that the annual cost to the government of providing housing includes the RHSP funding provided by DCJ to CRC for the costs of this program. However, a sensitivity analysis conducted included an estimated additional cost of the RHSP program to assess any changes to the cost-benefit analysis. This is because unlike many other housing programs RHSP provides a wraparound service to individuals, which means additional costs to providing housing compared to the average cost. This might imply that the rate of reincarceration of individuals in the RHSP program is lower than that of their counterparts who are not in the program resulting to more cost savings for the criminal legal system. The cost savings have however not been changed because for the purpose of this evaluation, the type of offences and length of each custody period for RHSP clients is not available.

The average cost of delivering CRC programs was $7,992.35 per female client and $14,797.62 per male client based on an average time in the program of 450 days (McCausland et al., 2025). During the period 2023 – 2025 RHSP clients who had completed the program had an average length of stay of 150 days. This estimates the cost of the RHSP program per client at $2,664 per female client and $4,932.54 per male client applied to the first year only.

The RHSP assisted 230 males and 33 females with housing between 2023 – 2025. The RHSP cost estimates for those assisted with housing over the two years would be $87,912 for females and $1,134,484 for males, or a total of $1,222,396. This translates to $611,198.1 per year. Subtracting this cost from the RHSP savings in table 1, shows that RHSP would still report a total savings to the criminal legal system of between $70,401.45 and $3,968,647.05 per annual cohort over 5-year period post housing assistance.

# 4. A DISCUSSION FROM THE FINDINGS

## 4.1. Discussion from the Qualitative findings

### 4.1.1. Discussion from the Case Studies

Based on the case studies provided, this discussion section provides key learnings that highlight the most impactful factors in RHSP's successful reintegration and client post incarceration support.

**1. Stable housing is the foundation for reintegration and healing**

Every case study underscores that securing safe and stable housing is the pivotal first step in breaking the cycle of homelessness and reoffending. Without a place to call home, individuals face immense stress and are unable to focus on other critical aspects of their recovery, such as mental health or addressing harmful substance use. The stories of Alex, Gerald, Tod, Michael, Kevin, and Shawn all show that a permanent address is the catalyst for positive change. A recent evaluation of CRC's model of intensive casework support for people with complex needs exiting prison showed that meeting individuals' housing needs was fundamental in reducing contact with the criminal legal system (McCausland et al., 2025).

**2. A holistic approach is essential**

Successful reintegration is never achieved through a single intervention. A holistic framework is recommended in understanding and successfully improving reintegration in individuals of various ages who are transitioning from custody (Hwang, 2025). The most effective support models, like RHSP, address a person's needs from multiple angles simultaneously. Key findings from RHSP's model of care show that success required a combination of support for:

- Mental and Physical Health: Linking clients with GPs, psychologists, and AOD programs.
- Financial Stability: Assisting with Centrelink applications, pensions, and debt management.
- Life Skills: Providing support with literacy, technology, and daily living skills.
- Building Independence: Encouraging positive future planning, gaining identification, and learning to navigate the community.

**3. The power of advocacy and trust**

A consistent finding across all case studies in this evaluation is the profound impact of the case worker - client relationship. Trust influences service engagement and can shape post-release outcomes and experiences (Lafferty et al., 2023). The case workers' unwavering trust and support were described as a "lifeline," providing the motivation needed to make difficult changes. This personal connection, combined with skilled advocacy to systems like Homes NSW, Centrelink, NDIS, and the courts, was crucial for overcoming bureaucratic barriers that would have otherwise led to failure.

**4. Overcoming trauma and institutionalisation**

Literature has shown that early histories of trauma is linked to subsequent involvement with the criminal legal system (Baglivio et al., 2015). All individuals across the six case studies in this report had a history of significant trauma, whether from childhood abuse, family violence, or lengthy periods of

incarceration. These experiences led to deeply ingrained mental health issues, and a general lack of trust in government services, which made reintegration incredibly challenging. The most successful outcomes for the RHSP were achieved when the provided support acknowledged this trauma and provided long-term, tailored care to address it.

**5. Integrated service models lead to success**

There is strong evidence that suggests that programs that use integrated service models for individuals with multiple, intersecting needs leaving prison have a positive impact on recidivism and homelessness (Baker et al., 2023). The cases of Kevin and Shawn in the case studies highlight the effectiveness of integrated and collaborative service models. Kevin's story showed how a co-location approach (a case worker and housing staff in the same office) enabled swift and empathetic intervention that prevented his return to homelessness. Similarly, Shawn's success was only possible through close collaboration between RHSP, NDIS, Justice Health, and Centrelink, demonstrating that breaking down silos between services is vital for people with multiple, intersecting needs.

### 4.1.2. Discussion from the Staff Speech

***RHSP's Impact and Role from a staff member's perspective***

1. **Providing holistic support**
   RHSP staff provide "wraparound support," meaning they address every aspect of a client's life, not just housing. This includes securing financial stability, linking clients to treatment pathways, for example, AOD treatment while still in crisis, and connecting them to counselling and therapy. CRC has been known for its throughcare model that provides holistic, person-centred support that begins pre-release and continues post-release, recognising that incarceration itself is criminogenic and that stable housing, psychosocial support, and advocacy are essential to breaking cycles of reoffending (Sotiri & Faraguna, 2025).

2. **Empowering clients**
   The program staff help clients access essential services like NDIS and mental health support and empower them to understand their rights and responsibilities. They also help clients address basic needs like obtaining identification and banking. This model aligns with best practice in psychosocial recovery, which emphasises building capacity, autonomy, and connection to community supports to improve wellbeing and reduce systemic barriers (Majeed et al., 2025).

3. **Building a foundation for life**
   RHSP staff help clients achieve life-changing milestones, such as securing a first-ever home, gaining employment, and becoming active parents. Post release support that incorporates parenting support and employment pathways in reintegration programs is essential for rebuilding family relationships and achieving long-term stability (Breuer et al., 2021).

4. **Intervening for families**
   The program's support extends to clients' children, referring them to therapy and speech pathologists to help them heal from the trauma they have experienced.

5. **Reliability and consistency**
   The speech emphasises that RHSP's effectiveness comes from staff who show up consistently, holding people steady, and not walking away. This consistent approach among CRC staff has been highlighted in a previous evaluation of the organisation's community reintegration model (McCausland et al., 2025).

6. **Humanising the experience**
   The speech concludes by reminding the audience that clients are not statistics or files. They are individuals with deeply personal stories of struggle, grief, and a desire for a better life. The program works because it is built on genuine relationships and unwavering consistency. A previous outcomes evaluation of CRC's reintegration model described the workers' approach as respectful, non-judgemental, and compassionate (McCausland et al., 2025).

## 4.2. Discussion from the Quantitative findings

**A program stretched to its limit**

The RHSP is experiencing an overwhelming demand that far exceeds its current resources. While referrals have increased significantly, from 54 to 82 referrals a month, the program is only able to accept a fraction of those seeking help. The primary reason for this was reported as a lack of sufficient staffing, suggesting that scaling the program's workforce is the most direct way to serve the substantial number of individuals who are currently being turned away. This may also require increased funding to be able to meet the program's staffing needs. The unassisted referrals represent a missed opportunity to intervene and support a vulnerable population before they face the challenges of homelessness and re-incarceration. The AHURI report on the inquiry into enhancing housing supports for individuals leaving custody (RMIT University et al., 2022) confirms that demand for post-release housing support far exceeds supply, particularly for people with complex needs. It highlights that service capacity is a major barrier to effective reintegration and calls for better coordination and resourcing of housing supports for people leaving prison.

**Meeting the unique needs of people exiting prison**

The program is successfully reaching its intended client base of many communities overrepresented in prison, as evidenced by the high percentage of clients with prior mental health diagnoses (73%) and the growing engagement with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander communities (currently 44% of all RHSP clients). According to specialist homelessness services (SHS) NSW, 28% of all SHS clients seeking housing assistance in 2023/2024 identified as Aboriginal or Torres strait Islander, and 32% had a diagnosed mental health issue (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2025). This means that both the proportion of First Nations clients and the rate of mental health issues among RHSP clients is significantly higher, requiring even greater resources. A recent rapid review of literature on the effectiveness of housing to prevent adult reoffending (Kellner et al., 2023) found that people exiting prison often face intersecting challenges including mental illness, cognitive disability, and homelessness, and require tailored, trauma-informed support. Programs that address these needs holistically are more likely to reduce recidivism.

**Regional disparities**

The evaluation highlights significant regional disparities. While locations like Mount Druitt are achieving exceptional housing outcomes, others like Dubbo and Newcastle are facing substantial challenges in their efforts to secure long-term housing. Regional areas like Dubbo have a significantly lower number of support houses compared to those in the urban areas. Success registered in the Coniston and Mt. Druitt locations were also as a result of immense support, commitment, and buy-in from housing partners. The National Regional Housing Summit report (Regional Australia Institute et al., 2024) emphasised that regional housing markets face unique pressures, including limited stock, workforce shortages, and under-resourced local governments. It called for place-based collaboration and tailored long-term planning strategies to address regional housing inequities.

**The Power of Early Intervention**

For the clients who are fortunate enough to be accepted into the program, the outcomes are demonstrably positive. The program's success in providing stability for nearly half of its clients is a testament to its effectiveness. This success is heavily influenced by early intervention, as clients who begin their support journey before being released are more likely to achieve long-term housing and avoid recidivism. This finding validates the program's core strategy of engaging with individuals while they are still in custody. Early intervention, recognised as best practice that engages clients before release (RMIT University et al., 2022), improves housing stability and reduces the risk of reoffending by ensuring continuity of care and reducing the "cliff edge" effect of release (a sudden drop-off in structured support that many people may experience when transitioning from the relatively controlled environment of custody to community).

**RHSP is effective in assisting clients with long-term housing and other needs**

The program was able to provide long-term housing support to approximately half (46%) of clients, which is a remarkable success. Table 7 compares outcomes between RHSP and NSW SHS. Although RHSP serves a different demographic profile than the general SHS population, it is notable that RHSP assisted a higher proportion of clients (46%) in securing long-term housing. By contrast, SHS supported 37% of clients into housing in 2023–24, including public, community, or private accommodation (Table 7A) (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2025).

When comparing RHSP to a similar population group, individuals exiting prison, the difference in housing outcomes is striking. Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) supported only 3.2% of people leaving custody in securing long-term housing, whereas RHSP achieved substantially higher success rates (46%) (Table 7B).

In the previous evaluation of the RHSP, which included a comparison group, RHSP assisted 32% of clients to obtain long-term housing, compared to a success rate of 13% of SHS clients. RHSP registered a higher success rate across different cohorts such as females, males, and First Nations people (Table 7C).

**RHSP is effective in reducing clients' chances of returning to custody**

There is a stark correlation between securing long-term housing and preventing a return to custody. The data shows that for clients who were successfully housed long-term, the re-incarceration rate was extremely low, with only 2% returning to custody. In stark contrast, a significant number of clients

who were not housed long-term returned to custody, at a rate of 26%. This stark difference highlights that stable housing is a crucial factor in breaking the cycle of re-offending.

**First Nations Clients insights**

RHSP engaged a significantly higher proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients (44%) compared to SHS (28%), demonstrating its strong reach into communities most affected by incarceration (Table 7). While housing outcomes for First Nations clients in RHSP (36.5%) were lower than those for non-Indigenous clients (53.9%), they still far exceeded SHS benchmarks, where only 5% of clients exiting custody achieve long-term housing. Recidivism outcomes also reveal disparities: although most First Nations clients avoided reincarceration, 19.2% returned to custody, a rate higher than the overall program average. These findings underscore RHSP's unique role in addressing systemic barriers and delivering better outcomes than mainstream services.

**Gender-specific insights**

Female clients achieved slightly better housing outcomes in RHSP (50%) than males (45%), and critically, none of the females housed long-term returned to custody. This is a striking result when compared to SHS, where only 12% of women exiting custody secure long-term housing.

This study does not provide insights into the housing outcomes of non-binary people (or people who do not identify as exclusively male or female, but do not use the term "non-binary") involved with the prison system. We recognise that collecting and reporting on such data is crucial, given trans and gender diverse people are overrepresented when it comes to homelessness and incarceration. Future improvements in data collection and staff training may provide such insights in future evaluations.

## TABLE 7: RHSP CLIENT OUTCOMES IN COMPARISON WITH SPECIALIST HOMELESSNESS SERVICES (SHS) CLIENTS

### Table 7A: Comparison with general SHS population

| Year | First Nations clients | Clients with a prior Mental Health Diagnosis | Female Clients | Male Clients | Clients housed long-term | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | Total | Female (Percentage of female clients housed) | Male (Percentage of Male clients housed) | First Nations (Percentage of First Nations clients housed) |
| RHSP 2023 - 2025 | 44% | 73% | 14% | 88% | 46% | 50% | 45% | 37% |
| SHS* | 28% | 32% | 60% | 40% | 37% | | | 5% |

*Source: AIHW specialist homelessness services annual report 2023—2024.

Note: Clients exiting custody account for 3.2% of all SHS clients.

### Table 7B: Comparison with SHS clients exiting custody

| Year | First Nations clients | Clients with a prior Mental Health Diagnosis | Female Clients | Male Clients | Clients housed long-term | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | Total | Female | Male | First Nations |
| RHSP 2023 - 2025 | 44% | 73% | 14% | 88% | 46% | 50% | 45% | 37% |
| SHS* | 28% | 24% | 21% | 79% | 3% | | | |

*Source: AIHW specialist homelessness services annual report 2023—2024.

### Table 7C: Comparison with a similar group of individuals at SHS (SHS Comparison group)

| Year | First Nations clients | Clients with a prior Mental Health Diagnosis | Female Clients | Male Clients | Clients housed long-term | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | Total | Female | Male | First Nations |
| RHSP 2021 - 2023 | 42% | 65% | 24% | 75% | 32% | 19% | 37% | 23% |
| SHS* | 37% | | 22% | 78% | 13% | 12% | 14% | 16% |

*Source: SHS Support Period data 2021 - 2023

## 4.3. Discussion from the costing analysis

The RHSP demonstrates a compelling economic and social case for providing long-term housing to individuals exiting custody who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Over a five-year period, the program yields substantial net savings to the criminal legal system ranging from $841,503 when compared to rental assistance, to $5.65 million when compared to homelessness services. These savings are driven by reductions in reoffending, court appearances, and incarceration, alongside the stabilising effects of secure housing.

The analysis also highlights a significant missed opportunity: due to staffing limitations, 682 eligible individuals were not assisted, resulting in a potential loss of up to $6.9 million in savings per annual cohort. Sensitivity testing confirms that even when accounting for the additional costs of RHSP's wraparound services, the program continues to deliver net benefits, underscoring its value as a strategic investment in both justice and housing policy.

It is also important to note that the societal benefits from the program far exceed that included in this analysis. There are spill-over benefits that extend beyond the criminal legal system such as individual, family, and community health and wellbeing.

Overall, the RHSP offers a scalable, evidence-based model for reducing recidivism and achieving long-term cost efficiencies. Strengthening program capacity and expanding access could amplify these benefits, making a compelling case for continued and increased support.

## 4.4. Study limitations

**Lack of a comparison group:**

A significant limitation of this evaluation is the lack of a comparison or control group. A comparison group, composed of individuals with similar characteristics who did not participate in the RHSP, would provide a crucial benchmark for measuring the program's unique impact. Although the data shows a strong correlation, it is not possible to establish a causal link, for example between successful housing and re-incarceration.

Given the program's capacity, it is unlikely that clients were accepted on a purely random basis. There is a risk of selection bias, where the individuals who were successfully admitted into the program may have been more motivated, more compliant, or faced fewer barriers than those who were turned away.

However, from the descriptive analysis provided in this evaluation there is confidence to commend the positive outcomes of RHSP clients.

**Reliance on self-reported data:**

Although invaluable for understanding client and staff experiences, the case studies and the staff speech provided can be subjective and may be based on a few success stories.

**Data limitations:**

A significant limitation of this evaluation is the absence of key demographic variables, including data on gender identity, sexual orientation, and innate variations in sex characteristics. This omission prevents a comprehensive understanding of the diverse experiences and specific needs of the client population. Individuals who identify as transgender, gender diverse, or who have variations in sex characteristics often face unique systemic barriers and discrimination that can impact their housing stability and reintegration success. Without this data, the evaluation cannot analyse how these factors may influence outcomes or whether the program is effectively meeting the needs of these specific groups.

A key limitation of the costing methods used in this evaluation is the absence of detailed RHSP specific client-level offence and custody data. This means that the analysis assumes average justice system costs from people experiencing homelessness rather than calculating actual savings based on the specific offences and sentence lengths of RHSP clients. This limits the precision of the cost-benefit estimates and may overstate or understate the true economic impact. It should however be noted that data from a robust study that looked at cost savings of a similar client group was used as estimates.

It is also important to note that the cost analysis only considers a narrow perspective that is limited to the criminal legal system. There are wider societal benefits of providing housing to people exiting custody. These include spill-over benefit effects that extend beyond the criminal legal system such as individual, family, and community health and wellbeing.

# 5. RECOMMENDATIONS

**Secure urgent, substantial, and sustained funding:**

1. The evaluation highlights the success of the program in improving client outcomes and reducing recidivism rates. However, the program is only funded until June 2026. Sustained multi-year funding would ensure that the program continues to support clients at risk of homelessness and re-incarceration.

**RHSP staffing needs:**

2. Increase the number of program case workers: A direct recommendation is to scale the program's workforce to meet the rising demand. Hiring more case workers would allow the program to accept a greater number of referrals, thereby reducing the number of individuals who are left unsupported and at risk of homelessness and re-incarceration.
3. Secure increased program funding. The evaluation highlights that a lack of staffing is the primary reason for turning away clients. RHSP should use this data to advocate for increased government funding.

**Availability of services:**

4. Increase the number of housing placements available to provide opportunities to the 50% of clients who are not assisted with long-term housing.

**Strengthen regional presence and partnerships:**

5. Tailored regional strategies: RHSP should develop specific strategies for these areas, focusing on building new partnerships with local housing providers and community organisations.
6. Advocate for more regional support houses: The data shows that regional areas have a lower number of support houses. RHSP should use this information to lobby government and other stakeholders to increase the availability of long-term housing options in these regions.

**Leverage data to demonstrate impact:**

7. Highlight key metrics: RHSP should use the stark difference in re-incarceration rates (for example, 2% of RHSP individuals housed long-term vs. 26% of individuals not housed) as a core metric to demonstrate the value of its work to funders and policymakers.
8. Promote the value of early intervention: The finding that engaging with clients before their release leads to better outcomes should be a key part of RHSP's advocacy and program marketing materials. This validates their core strategy and makes a compelling case for continued investment.
9. Demonstrate the cost savings: The analysis shows that RHSP delivers substantial net savings to the criminal legal system. There is value for money in investing in RHSP.

**Staff data entry training:**

10. Provide continuous training to staff and encourage data completeness to allow for a better understanding of client characteristics and their outcomes.

**Stronger future evaluations:**

11. Plan for a more robust future evaluation that allows for comparison with a matched group for the quantitative analysis, and a broader selection of client case studies and staff interviews.

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