

# LAUNCH HOUSING CAPITAL CITIES HOMELESSNESS INDEX 2023

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## APPENDIX: CITY PROFILE SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA



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Sydney regularly featured in the top 10 most liveable cities in the world, according to the Economist Intelligence Unit's Global Liveability Index (based on a total of 140 cities worldwide) for the past several years. But in 2021, it dropped just outside the top 10, into 11<sup>th</sup> place.

Sydney is one of the most expensive cities for housing, whether buying or renting, and out of reach for a growing number of the poorest households, including anyone on the JobSeeker Payment, Youth Allowance or Parenting Payment. A lack of affordable rental properties as well as high rental stress among low-income households has emphasised the inability of the private rental market to respond to the housing needs of poor and vulnerable households.

The private rental crisis is further exacerbated by the lack of social housing, which represents just 4.2% of total dwellings in Greater Sydney, well below the 7% average in the OECD. Overall investment in social housing has slowly dwindled over the years, leading to increased waiting times even among households deemed a priority, including households experiencing homelessness.

Between 2011 and 2016, overall homelessness in New South Wales increased by a substantial 37%, which was similarly reflected in the rise in rough sleeping (35%) across the state, for the same period. In contrast, the 2021 census data indicated a drop in overall homelessness (7%) across the state. A count of people sleeping rough for the 2021 census did not proceed due to lockdowns, with administrative data used instead. The rough sleeping data, particularly for Greater Sydney is tricky to interpret in a meaningful way. As an alternative, the numbers of people sleeping rough are informed by the 2021 street count data for Greater Sydney.

The COVID-19 health crisis illustrated the urgent need for more safe and appropriate housing. In 2020, the New South Wales Government provided funding to prevent homelessness and to move people sleeping rough into temporary hotel/motel accommodation. From April 2020 to January 2021, more than 4,300 vulnerable people experiencing rough sleeping were provided with short-term accommodation.<sup>1</sup>

The New South Wales Government has committed to build more social housing in the future, up to 9,386 dwellings by 2026.<sup>2</sup> But this is inadequate to address the current level of need or to keep up with increasing demand. Advocates have called for more investment to deliver 5,000 new social housing dwellings per year, over the next 10 years.<sup>3</sup>

## Geographical area

On the traditional lands of the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation, Greater Sydney covers an area of 12,368.2 square kilometres and is made up of 35 local government areas (LGAs).<sup>4</sup> The 2021 Census estimated a resident population of 5,259,764 for Greater Sydney<sup>5</sup>, making it the most populous city in Australia.

The city of Sydney is the capital of New South Wales and is the biggest city in Australia. The city covers an area of 25 square kilometres comprising 33 suburbs. In 2021, the city had a resident population estimated at 217,795 people, representing 4.2% of the total population of Greater Sydney.<sup>6</sup>

Data presented in this report are, in the main, based on the geographical area of Greater Sydney, also known as metropolitan Sydney.



1 Pawson, H., Martin, C., Thompson, S., Aminpour, F. (2021) 'COVID-19: Rental housing and homelessness policy impacts' ACOSS/UNSW Poverty and Inequality Partnership Report No. 12, Sydney (p.85).

2 <https://www.anglicare.asn.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Rental-Affordability-Snapshot-Regional-Reports.pdf>

3 Pre Budget Submission 2022-23 January 2022, Homelessness NSW, available at: <https://homelessnessnsw.org.au/our-work/submissions/>

4 <https://www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/guides/city-at-a-glance>

5 <https://dbr.abs.gov.au/region.html?yr=gccsa&rgn=1GSYD>

6 <https://abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/11703>

## Definition of rough sleeping and homelessness

The official definition from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) states that homelessness refers to anyone who has no dwelling, or is in an inadequate dwelling, provides no tenure or tenure is short or limited or prevents them from having control of, and access to, space for social relations.<sup>7</sup> This broad definition recognises that while homelessness is about the lack of shelter, importantly, it is also about the loss of home (security, privacy, warmth, connection, and belonging).

Rough sleeping, the most extreme form of homelessness, refers to people who are destitute on the streets, sleeping in cars, parks, tents, or in derelict buildings. But homelessness also includes anyone staying in specialist homelessness services, anyone staying temporarily with other households, living in boarding houses or other temporary lodgings, or living in 'severely crowded' dwellings.

## Population and ratio of rough sleeping and homelessness

According to the 2021 census, the level of rough sleeping in New South Wales dropped by 1,625 people (63%), over a five-year period, from 2,588 people in 2016 to 963 people in 2021. This contrasts with a 35% (664 people) increase in the number of people sleeping rough between 2011 and 2016.<sup>8</sup>

As a point-in-time count, the census provides a snapshot of the number of people sleeping rough at a particular time every five years. As such, it does not reflect the dynamics of rough sleeping over time. This can include, for example, people moving between different categories of homelessness, from rough sleeping to couch surfing to specialist homelessness services and back to rough sleeping. Such changes are not captured by a point-in-time census conducted every five years. Nevertheless, the census provides important insights into homelessness trends over time.

The 2021 Census, however, is an exception, given the extraordinary circumstances resulting from the COVID-19 global pandemic and the range of policy measures introduced by a number of states/territories across the country.<sup>9</sup> The 2021 Census homelessness estimates have been impacted by these measures particularly for rough sleeping, supported accommodation, temporary accommodation, and boarding houses.<sup>10</sup>

Further, the 2021 census count of people sleeping rough did not proceed as initially planned in New South Wales due to COVID-19 related lockdowns.<sup>11</sup> Given the difficulty with interpreting the data meaningfully, the data presented in [Table 1](#) are informed by Street Counts<sup>12</sup> of people sleeping rough in Greater Sydney in February 2021. Street Counts were completed in 27 of the 33 Local Government Areas (LGA) that make up the Greater Sydney area. Given that some LGAs were not included, along with some suburbs within selected LGAs, the street count does not reflect the full scale of rough sleeping in Greater Sydney at that time.<sup>13</sup>

Nevertheless, and in contrast to the five-yearly census estimates of rough sleeping, and homelessness generally, the New South Wales annual Street Count provides a more timelier account of the number, experiences, and needs of people sleeping rough.

As [Table 1](#) shows, more than 500 people were counted as sleeping rough in Greater Sydney in February 2021, giving a rate of 10 people sleeping rough per 100,000 residents.

**Table 1. Rough sleeping (point-in-time)**

Greater Sydney (2021)	
<b>Estimated number sleeping rough:</b>	539 persons*
<b>Rate of rough sleeping per 100,000 residents:</b>	10 persons**

**Sources:**

\* 2021 NSW Street Count, Greater Sydney (based on counts in 27 local government areas), Point-in-time (PIT).

\*\* Based on 2021 estimated population for Greater Sydney: 5,231,147, Census of Population and Housing 2021, TableBuilder: Person's Place of Usual Residence by GCCSA.

7 Cat. No. 4922.0 – Information Paper – A Statistical Definition of Homelessness (2012), <https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/mf/4922.0>

8 Estimating Homelessness, 2021 Census of Population and Housing: Estimating Homelessness, <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/housing/estimating-homelessness-census/2021#homeless-operational-groups>

9 <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/analysis/brief/what-2021-census-data-told-us-about-homelessness>

10 Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic: <https://www.abs.gov.au/methodologies/estimating-homelessness-census-methodology/2021>

11 Discussions with Ending Street Sleeping Collaboration, NSW

12 Street Counts are localised counts that began in 2010 and usually take place in February (summer) and August (winter) each year. Due to COVID restrictions, street counts were not undertaken in August 2020 and August 2021; further details available at: <https://www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/public-health-safety-programs/street-counts>

13 2022 NSW Statewide Street Count Technical Paper, <https://www.facs.nsw.gov.au/download?file=829276>

## Overall homelessness

In 2021, Census data show that homelessness in New South Wales was down to 35,011 people, a 7% decrease over the five-year period to 2016. This contrasts to a marked increase of 37% in overall homelessness across the state as reported in the 2016 Census, up from 22,479 people in 2011 to 37,715 people in 2016.<sup>14</sup>

In Greater Sydney, a total of 25,142 people were estimated to be experiencing homelessness on census night 2021, 3,853 fewer people compared with 28,995 people in 2016, a drop of 13%.

[Table 2](#) details the different forms of homelessness experienced by people in Greater Sydney on census night 2021.

- More than 25,000 people experienced homelessness in Greater Sydney on 2021 census night, resulting in a rate of 481 people homeless per 100,000 residents.
- Nearly all were living in some form of insecure or precarious accommodation on the night of the 2021 census.
- Close to 3,000 people (12%) were in specialist homelessness services, and those in boarding houses accounted for 30% of overall homelessness.
- Use of administrative indicated that people in temporary lodgings increased by 658 people (from 71 people in 2016) mostly because of additional funding provided in response to COVID-19 to move people into short-term hotel/motel accommodation.<sup>15</sup>

- Almost half were living in 'severely' crowded<sup>16</sup> dwellings (48%). Extreme living conditions such as severe crowding can potentially lead to other forms of homelessness such as rough sleeping.<sup>17</sup>

**Table 2. Type of homelessness (point-in-time)**

	Greater Sydney (2021)
<b>People living in improvised dwellings, tents, or sleeping out (rough sleeping)</b>	179 (0.7%)
<b>People in supported accommodation for the homeless</b>	2,931 (12%)
<b>People staying temporarily with other households</b>	1,644 (7%)
<b>People living in boarding houses</b>	7,492 (30%)
<b>People in other temporary lodgings (hotels/motels)</b>	729 (3%)
<b>People living in 'severely' crowded dwellings</b>	12,154 (48%)
<b>Total number homeless</b>	<b>25,142 (100%)*</b>
<b>Rate of homelessness per 100,000 population</b>	<b>481 people**</b>

**Sources:**

\* 2021 Census of Population and Housing, Estimating Homelessness (Enumerated), TableBuilder, Homelessness Groups by Greater Capital City Statistical Area (GCCSA) Point-in-time (PIT).

\*\* Rate per 100,000 based on 2021 estimated population for Greater Sydney: 5,231,147, Census of Population and Housing 2021, TableBuilder: Person's Place of Usual Residence by GCCSA.

14 Australian Homelessness Monitor 2018, available at: [https://data.launchhousing.org.au/app/uploads/2018/05/LaunchHousing\\_AHM2018\\_Report.pdf](https://data.launchhousing.org.au/app/uploads/2018/05/LaunchHousing_AHM2018_Report.pdf)

15 <https://www.abs.gov.au/methodologies/estimating-homelessness-census-methodology/2021>

16 A severely crowded dwelling needs an extra four or more bedrooms to accommodate a household's usual residents, as defined by the Canadian National Occupancy Standard, <https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsl/Lookup/4922.0main+features62012>

17 What is overcrowding and severe overcrowding and what can be done about it? Policy Evidence Summary, September 2019, AHURI, available at: [https://www.facs.nsw.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0015/810123/overcrowding-and-severe-overcrowding-policy-evidence-summary.pdf](https://www.facs.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0015/810123/overcrowding-and-severe-overcrowding-policy-evidence-summary.pdf)

18 <https://www.oecd.org/els/family/PH4-2-Social-rental-housing-stock.pdf>

19 Homelessness NSW submission to NSW Ombudsman's Office Review October 2020, available at: <https://homelessnessnsw.org.au/our-work/submissions/>

## Structural factors affecting homelessness

### Social and affordable housing

As shown in [Table 3](#), the overall supply of housing for low-income families in Greater Sydney is inadequate:

- There were fewer than 78,000 social housing dwellings in Greater Sydney, representing just 4.2% of total dwellings, and below the OECD average of 7%.<sup>18</sup> Thousands more were on a waitlist, with waiting times over 10 years.<sup>19</sup>
- Further, affordable private rental housing is scarce for the poorest households; just 251 lettings were available to households on income support, but nothing was accessible to a single-person household on Jobseeker.
- Also, the majority of all low-income families (around 139,000) in Greater Sydney were experiencing rental stress and, as a result, were at increased risk of losing their housing and ending up homeless.

**Table 3. Social and affordable housing measure**

	Greater Sydney
<b>Number of social housing rented dwellings (% of total dwellings) (2021)</b>	77,556 (4.2%)*
<b>Number of new private rental listings affordable for households on income support (2021)</b>	251 (1.0)**
<b>% of low-income households in rental stress (bottom 40% of income distribution paying more than 30% of gross income on housing) (2019-20)</b>	53.5% (138,593)***

**Sources:**

- \* (2021 data) Social Health Atlas of Australia, 2022, available at: <https://phidu.torrens.edu.au/social-health-atlases/data#social-health-atlases-of-australia-local-government-areas>, Total private dwellings: 1,828,859.
- \*\* Anglicare Rental Affordability Snapshot 2021, Summary Report Greater Sydney and the Illawarra, (27-28 March), total private rentals advertised in Greater Sydney: 24,978, [https://www.anglicare.org.au/media/7769/2021\\_rental\\_affordability\\_snapshot\\_summary\\_sp.pdf](https://www.anglicare.org.au/media/7769/2021_rental_affordability_snapshot_summary_sp.pdf).
- \*\*\* Housing Occupancy and Costs, Australia, 2019-20, Table 13.1, available at: <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/housing/housing-occupancy-and-costs/2019-20#data-download>, % based on total number lower-income renter households: 258,813.

**Level of income and poverty**

During the last financial year (2020-21), 70,600 people sought support from specialist homelessness services in New South Wales, with more than a third (37%, or 25,547 people) needing help because of financial difficulties.<sup>20</sup>

Further, the main source of income for clients aged 15 years and over was some form of income support payment, reported by more than three-quarters of clients aged 15 years and over (78%, or 37,302 people).<sup>21</sup>

Table 4 shows the level of income inequality, financial difficulty, and poverty, indicating the extent of the potential homelessness risk in Greater Sydney:

- The average weekly income for households in Greater Sydney was \$1,231.00 compared with just \$459.00 for low-income households.
- Even for households on the average weekly income, the median weekly rent in Greater Sydney cost them 41% of that income, leading to rental stress.
- The poorest households, most of whom were likely to be on income support, were completely priced out of the private rental market; the weekly income of \$459.00 fell short of the \$500.00 per week needed to rent a typical dwelling in Greater Sydney.
- Poverty in Greater Sydney is relatively widespread, but families with children were more likely to experience poverty than other households. Living with considerable disadvantage, these families do not have enough money for food, clothing, health needs, housing, or to take part in school activities, exposing adults and children to severe stress.<sup>22</sup>

- For children, the effects of growing up in poverty increases the likelihood of experiencing poverty as an adult, as well as increasing the risk of homelessness.<sup>23 24</sup>

**Table 4. Income and poverty measures**

	Greater Sydney
<b>Median weekly rent (2019)</b>	\$500.00*
<b>Mean weekly equivalised disposable household income (2019-20)</b>	\$1,231.00**
<b>Mean weekly equivalised disposable household income – bottom 20% income distribution (2019-20)</b>	\$459.00**
<b>Poverty rate – overall (2019)</b>	12.6%***
<b>Poverty rate – children (under 15 years) (2019)</b>	17.2%***

**Sources:**

- \* Median weekly rent, December Quarter 2019, [https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/facs.statistics/viz/Rentandsales\\_15565127794310/Rent](https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/facs.statistics/viz/Rentandsales_15565127794310/Rent).
- \*\* Data cube 13: States and Territories, <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/economy/finance/household-income-and-wealth-australia/latest-release#:~:text=ln%202019%E2%80%9320%2C%20the%20average,income%20was%20%241%2C124%20per%20week>.
- \*\*\* Vidyattama, Y., Tanton, R., and NSW Council of Social Service (NCOSS), (2019), Mapping Significant Economic Disadvantage in New South Wales, NATSEM, Institute for Governance and Policy Analysis (IGPA), University of Canberra. A report commissioned by NCOSS, available at: <https://www.ncoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Web-Version-Mapping-Economic-Disadvantage-in-New-South-Wales-report1.pdf>.

20 Specialist homelessness services 2020–21: New South Wales, Fact Sheet, available at: [https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/a095ab32-cd30-45af-9469-74f2b6ee6316/NSW\\_factsheet.pdf.aspx](https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/a095ab32-cd30-45af-9469-74f2b6ee6316/NSW_factsheet.pdf.aspx)  
 21 Specialist homelessness services 2020–21: New South Wales, Fact Sheet, available at: [https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/a095ab32-cd30-45af-9469-74f2b6ee6316/NSW\\_factsheet.pdf.aspx](https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/a095ab32-cd30-45af-9469-74f2b6ee6316/NSW_factsheet.pdf.aspx)  
 22 <https://vcoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Every-suburb-Every-town-Poverty-in-Victoria-VCOSS.pdf>  
 23 Bramley, G. and Fitzpatrick, S. (2017) 'Homelessness in the UK: Who is Most at Risk?'; Housing Studies, vol. 33, no. 1: 96-116, 10.1080/02673037.2017.1344957: 10.1080/02673037.2017.1344957.  
 24 Esperanza Vera-Toscano and Roger Wilkins (2020) Does poverty in childhood beget poverty in adulthood in Australia? Melbourne Institute: Applied Economic & Social Research, University of Melbourne, available at: [https://melbourneinstitute.unimelb.edu.au/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0008/3522482/Breaking-Down-Barriers-Report-1-October-2020.pdf](https://melbourneinstitute.unimelb.edu.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0008/3522482/Breaking-Down-Barriers-Report-1-October-2020.pdf)

## Family Violence

Family violence is a leading cause of homelessness for women and children. Women and children fleeing violence are a priority cohort under the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement.<sup>25</sup>

Among the 70,600 people who accessed specialist services in New South Wales last financial year (2020-21), more than a third (36% or 25,350 people) sought assistance due to family violence (including domestic violence).<sup>26</sup>

- [Table 5](#) details the number of recorded family violence assaults (not total incidents) in Greater Sydney between 2020 and 2021, and indicates the number of people potentially at risk of homelessness.
- Overall, police recorded nearly 70,600 family violence assaults (not total incidents) in Greater Sydney, representing a rate of more than 1,300 family violence assaults per 100,000.

**Table 5. Family violence measure**

	Greater Sydney
<b>Number of family violence-related crimes (2020-21)</b>	70,544*
<b>Reported family violence crimes per 100,000 population</b>	1,314.4**

**Source:**

NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, NSW Domestic Violence Quarterly Report, NSW Recorded Crime Statistics October 2016 to September 2021, Table 'NSW Recorded Crime Statistics October 2020 to September 2021', Number of recorded domestic violence-related assault incidents by Local Government Area: Number, rate and rank

Retrieved from <https://www.bocsar.nsw.gov.au>.

Correspondence file reference: ABS (2018) ASGS Geographic Correspondences (2016), ABS Geospatial Solutions, Commonwealth of Australia. Available at: <https://data.gov.au/data/dataset/asgs-geographic-correspondences-2016>, accessed 17/3/2022.

\* Relates to family violence assaults, not total family violence incidents, estimation based on reported 17,636 assaults per quarter x 4 quarters.

\*\* Estimation based on rate or 328.6 per 100,000 per quarter x 4 quarters.

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.dss.gov.au/housing-support-programs-services-homelessness/national-housing-and-homelessness-agreement>

<sup>26</sup> Specialist homelessness services 2020-21: New South Wales, Fact Sheet, available at: [https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/a095ab32-cd30-45af-9469-74f2b6ee6316/NSW\\_factsheet.pdf.aspx](https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/a095ab32-cd30-45af-9469-74f2b6ee6316/NSW_factsheet.pdf.aspx)

# POLICY CONTEXT



## Rough sleeping and homelessness

Prior to the global pandemic, official census data showed that the level of homelessness, especially rough sleeping, had increased markedly in NSW. NSW had experienced the highest rate of homelessness across the country. In 2017, Sydney's Martin Place had become the site of a homeless 'tent city', which attracted considerable media coverage.<sup>27</sup>

In response to the scale of homelessness, the NSW Government committed \$61 million in funding for its Homelessness Strategy 2018-2023. Launched in 2018, it has a strong focus on prevention and early intervention responses to homelessness.<sup>28</sup> And promotes a Housing First approach to service delivery.<sup>29</sup>

Further, in 2019, as part of the NSW Premier's group of priorities, a key commitment was to reduce street homelessness across the state by 50% by 2025:

*This Premier's Priority means helping almost 1300 people sleeping rough to achieve secure and stable housing, placing them in the best position to improve their health and wellbeing, education, and economic outcomes.<sup>30</sup>*

However, any commitment to reduce homelessness, and especially to end rough sleeping, will be considerably undermined without significant needed investment in social and affordable housing.

## Investment in social and affordable housing

As a social determinant of health, safe, appropriate and affordable housing plays a central role in the health and wellbeing of individuals, families, and communities. Access to social and affordable housing is essential to ending homelessness and preventing the risk of homelessness among low-income households.

The New South Wales Government's policy commitments to housing, and social housing, in particular, are set out in the *Housing 2041: NSW Housing Strategy and Future Directions for Social Housing in NSW*, a 10-year plan to increase the supply of social housing.<sup>31</sup>

However, unlike Victoria, there has been no comparable level of investment by New South Wales to expand the provision of social housing in that state. As a result, social housing in New South Wales is forecast to **fall below 4% of total occupied stock within 10 years** (OECD average is 7%).<sup>32</sup> More recently, between 2019 and 2020, there was a decline of 700 social housing dwellings across NSW.<sup>33</sup>

In their pre-budget submission for the upcoming financial year (2022-23), Homelessness NSW has called for an investment of \$2.6 billion per year over the next 10 years to deliver **5,000 new social housing dwellings per year**.<sup>34</sup>

27 Hartley, C., Barnes E., Writer, T. More than temporary? An evaluation of the accommodation of people sleeping rough in inner city Sydney during the COVID-19 pandemic, (2021), Sydney: Centre for Social Impact, available at: <https://homelessnessnsw.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/More-than-temporary-Homelessness-NSW-Report-June-2021-FINAL.pdf>

28 PRU GOWARD Minister for Family and Community Services Minister for Social Housing Minister for the Prevention of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault, NSW Government, 'NSW Homelessness Strategy 2018-2023' Retrieved from [NSW Homelessness Strategy 2018-2023 | Family & Community Services](#) (4)

29 'Housing First means offering affordable housing to people experiencing homelessness as quickly as possible, removing potential barriers and providing the supports they need to avoid returning to homelessness for as long as supports are needed', NSW Homelessness Strategy 2018-2023'. Available at: [NSW Homelessness Strategy 2018-2023 | Family & Community Services](#), (p.34)

30 <https://premierinternational.com.au/pn-brief/2020/9/1/nsw-premiers-priorities>

31 Pre Budget Submission 2022-23 January 2022, Homelessness NSW, available at: <https://homelessnessnsw.org.au/our-work/submissions/>

32 <https://www.oecd.org/els/family/PH4-2-Social-rental-housing-stock.pdf>

33 Pre Budget Submission 2022-23 January 2022, Homelessness NSW, available at: <https://homelessnessnsw.org.au/our-work/submissions/>

34 Pre Budget Submission 2022-23 January 2022, Homelessness NSW, available at: <https://homelessnessnsw.org.au/our-work/submissions/>

In reality, however, the outcome is expected to fall far short of this figure. Between 2021-22 and 2023-24, only **402 new dwellings** will effectively be added to the overall social housing/affordable rental stock, when accounting for the difference between projected social/affordable dwelling construction and the loss of social/affordable dwellings.<sup>35</sup>

## Responding to homelessness and the COVID-19 pandemic

The urgent need for more social and affordable housing has been demonstrated by the global COVID-19 health crisis. The pandemic led to unprecedented and immediate policy intervention by the NSW Government.

Overall, swift action by the NSW Government in the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic to provide temporary housing for people sleeping rough was described as *'a significant achievement and one that was an important and effective measure to prevent the spread of COVID-19 amongst a highly vulnerable cohort'*.<sup>36</sup> However, limitations of the response have also been noted, specifically that the temporary accommodation response should have been implemented as soon as the first case of COVID-19 was confirmed in NSW in January 2020. Further, it was noted that

the provision of health, food, and other supports for people in temporary accommodation was late and fragmented. And for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in temporary accommodation, the shortcomings were even more pronounced.<sup>37</sup>

In March 2020 the NSW Government provided \$34 million in funding to prevent people from experiencing homelessness, and \$14 million for emergency temporary accommodation for people who were sleeping rough. Across NSW, hotel/motel rooms were bulk booked and assertive outreach expanded.<sup>38</sup> Overall, between 1 April 2020 - 31 January 2021, more than 4,300 people who were sleeping rough were provided with temporary accommodation.<sup>39</sup>

In early June 2020, the NSW Government developed *Together Home* in, a \$122 million program designed to ensure that people in temporary hotel accommodation did not end up back on the streets.<sup>40</sup> In total, 1,050 *Together Home* packages were made available to transition people from short-term hotels/motels and into long-term stable housing along with wrap-around support.<sup>41</sup>

But by the end of June 2020, temporary accommodation in the City of Sydney was back to 'business-as-usual' arrangements for new clients accessing specialist homelessness services, and by February 2021, the number of people sleeping rough resembled around 80% of pre-pandemic levels.<sup>42</sup>

35 Pawson, H., Martin, C., Thompson, S., Aminpour, F. (2021) 'COVID-19: Rental housing and homelessness policy impacts' ACOSS/UNSW Poverty and Inequality Partnership Report No. 12, Sydney (p.105).

36 Hartley, C., Barnes E., Writer, T. More than temporary? An evaluation of the accommodation of people sleeping rough in inner city Sydney during the COVID-19 pandemic, (2021), Sydney: Centre for Social Impact, available at: <https://homelessnessnsw.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/More-than-temporary-Homelessness-NSW-Report-June-2021-FINAL.pdf> (p.v).

37 Hartley, C., Barnes E., Writer, T. More than temporary? An evaluation of the accommodation of people sleeping rough in inner city Sydney during the COVID-19 pandemic, (2021), Sydney: Centre for Social Impact, available at: <https://homelessnessnsw.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/More-than-temporary-Homelessness-NSW-Report-June-2021-FINAL.pdf>

38 Retrieved from [NSW Homelessness Strategy 2018-2023 | Family & Community Services](#) (p.5)

39 Pawson, H., Martin, C., Thompson, S., Aminpour, F. (2021) 'COVID-19: Rental housing and homelessness policy impacts' ACOSS/UNSW Poverty and Inequality Partnership Report No. 12, Sydney (p.85).

40 Pawson, H., Martin, C., Thompson, S., Aminpour, F. (2021) 'COVID-19: Rental housing and homelessness policy impacts' ACOSS/UNSW Poverty and Inequality Partnership Report No. 12, Sydney (p.88).

41 Pawson, H., Martin, C., Thompson, S., Aminpour, F. (2021) 'COVID-19: Rental housing and homelessness policy impacts' ACOSS/UNSW Poverty and Inequality Partnership Report No. 12, Sydney (p.85).

42 Pawson, H., Martin, C., Thompson, S., Aminpour, F. (2021) 'COVID-19 Rental housing and homelessness policy impacts in Australia', ACOSS/UNSW Poverty and Inequality Partnership Report No.12, Sydney (95)