



24 January 2023

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Ref: OIA-2022/23-0404

Dear [REDACTED]

Official Information Act request for a briefing on emergency housing

Thank you for your Official Information Act 1982 (OIA) request of 8 December 2022.

You requested of the Prime Minister:

“Under the OIA I seek the following papers received by you please:

*Briefing on Emergency Housing International Comparisons
8/09/2022 [...]”*

This part of your request was transferred to the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. Please find attached a copy of the briefing, *Emergency Housing: international comparisons*.

Some information has been withheld under section 9(2)(a) to protect the privacy of natural persons. Further information is withheld under section 9(2)(f)(iv) to maintain the constitutional conventions for the time being which protect the confidentiality of advice tendered by Ministers of the Crown, and officials.

In making my decision, I have taken the public interest considerations in section 9(1) of the Act into account.

You have the right to ask the Ombudsman to investigate and review my decision under section 28(3) of the Act.

This response may be published on the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet’s website during our regular publication cycle. Typically, information is released monthly, or as otherwise determined. Your personal information including name and contact details will be removed for publication.

Yours sincerely

[REDACTED]

Anneliese Parkin
Deputy Chief Executive, Policy

Briefing

Emergency Housing: international comparisons

To: Rt Hon Jacinda Ardern, Prime Minister			
Date	7/09/2022	Security Level	[IN-CONFIDENCE]

Purpose

1. This briefing continues the Strategy Unit's work to better understand the housing and rental market [DPMC-2021/22-2319 refers]. Attached is a slide pack that compares emergency, temporary and transitional housing settings across a range of international jurisdictions, which focuses on countries with housing market and/or welfare settings that are similar to those in New Zealand.

Recommendations

We recommend you:

1. **note** the attached slide pack providing comparisons of approaches to emergency housing, which officials are available to discuss if you wish
2. **forward** this advice to the Minister of Housing, the Minister for Social Development, the Associate Minister of Housing (Māori Housing) and the Associate Minister of Housing (Homelessness) for their information

YES / NO

Section 9(2)(a)

Paul O'Connell
Director, Strategy Unit

7.9.2022

Section 9(2)(a)

Rt Hon Jacinda Ardern
Prime Minister

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Background

2. The Strategy Unit has an ongoing work programme on the housing and rental market, including prior work on rental regulation, support for the review of the Accommodation Supplement, and analysis of the rental market.
3. This report delivers one of the next steps set out in our previous work [DPMC-2021/22-2319 refers], comparing emergency housing settings across a number of jurisdictions. It focuses on countries with similarities to New Zealand (in terms of housing and/or welfare settings).
4. We have shared the report with key officials at the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the Ministry of Social Development (MSD), and with the Policy Advisory Group (PAG).

Key findings

5. The attached slide pack (Attachment A) compares emergency housing across ten countries (Austria, Australia, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Ireland, Netherlands, Sweden, and the United Kingdom). Systems are generally responding to a broad range of needs, from people experiencing chronic homelessness and rough sleeping, people who have faced a sudden life shock or crisis that has led to homelessness, and people struggling with affordability in tight housing markets.
6. Definitions of what is considered 'emergency housing' vary. Most countries provide a wide range of types of emergency housing and supporting services, with little clear distinction between emergency and temporary housing, and a degree of fragmentation evident. Different models have emerged over time, and the types of offerings range from:
 - Preventive activities that offer low intensity support to find or retain permanent housing.
 - Provision of basic accommodation services (emergency shelters), usually originating from charitable models and focusing on people who are chronically homeless or in crisis.
 - Residential treatment services and supported housing that are focused on intensive service provision (usually mental health and addiction treatment).
 - High intensity support to find and live in permanent housing (e.g. Housing First).
7. While a number of countries have highlighted increasing pressure on emergency housing in recent years (with length of stay generally increasing), use of hotels/motels is less common in other jurisdictions. When they are used, this has to date generally been limited to:
 - Low numbers of people in smaller regions or towns without other shelter or service provision.
 - Responses to COVID-19 focused on rough sleepers.
 - Main centres in countries with strict legal requirements to house individuals at risk of homelessness and tight housing markets.
8. 'Transitional housing' is more clearly attached to the provision of intensive supporting services designed to make people 'housing ready', and is often targeted to specific vulnerable groups (e.g. young people, especially those leaving care, people at risk from family violence, people with mental health or addiction problems, ex-offenders). Overseas models generally provide more services and a longer period of support than New Zealand's model.
9. Estimating and comparing levels of homelessness and housing deprivation is challenging, with significant variance in how countries define and calculate numbers. This can make

monitoring of services difficult, and contributes to a significant lack of available research or empirical evidence about the effectiveness and impact of interventions in this area.

10. Outside of New Zealand, no country investigated provides specific or individual financial assistance payments for people in emergency housing or to fund stays in emergency housing. In general, services or places are funded through a mix of central government, local government, and non-government organisation (NGO) budgets. Instead, people accessing services can generally access existing social assistance and housing benefits if they are eligible for them.
11. Local authorities usually play a significant role in providing, funding, and/or delivering emergency accommodation, reflecting the structure of government in most of the countries considered. This is sometimes a legislated requirement with varying degrees of strictness:
 - Requirements to have housing/homelessness strategies in place (e.g. Canada).
 - General requirements to provide emergency housing and services (e.g. Australia, Ireland, Netherlands, Germany).
 - Strict obligations to house people at risk of homelessness and/or provide pathways to alternative housing (Denmark, France, UK).
12. NGOs also generally play a significant role in delivery of emergency, temporary and supported or transitional accommodation. They are usually responsible for making decisions about service eligibility. This is sometimes based on criteria set by local or central government but at other times it is without limitations.
13. This means NGOs are often responsible for considering whether the person/household has access to suitable alternative accommodation. In New Zealand, MSD case managers are required to make this judgement as part of administering the Emergency Housing Special Needs Grant.
14. New Zealand's approach to emergency housing has several unique features when compared to other countries:
 - Bespoke individualised financial assistance.
 - A high degree of reliance on hotel/motel accommodation.
 - A different model for transitional housing, with fewer services offered over a shorter timeframe.
 - A high degree of central government delivery and administration.

Next steps

15. The Unit is available to discuss this or our other work on the housing and rental market. As part of this work programme:
 - The Unit is looking at research and evidence about the impact of general increases to housing supply on the rental market. You will receive this advice in the coming months.
 - A closed tender procurement process is underway to secure research about rental cost drivers for low-income households (tender closes on 30 September). We will continue to update you as this work progresses.
16. In discussion with HUD, we have identified some avenues for potential further work:

Section 9(2)(f)(iv)

Section 9(2)(f)(iv)

17. If it is useful to you that the Unit do further work in this area, we will scope this in more detail with other agencies.

Attachments	Title	Security classification
Attachment A	Emergency and Transitional Housing: International comparisons	IN CONFIDENCE

Released under the Official Information Act 1982



DEPARTMENT OF THE
PRIME MINISTER AND CABINET
TE TARI O TE PIRIMIA ME TE KOMITI MATUA

Attachment A: Emergency and Transitional Housing

International comparisons

September 2022

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Overview: Purpose and content of this report

Purpose

- The Strategy Unit, as part of its broader work on the rental market in New Zealand, has looked at settings and support for emergency and transitional housing in other jurisdictions.
- It focuses on countries with similarities to New Zealand (considering housing market settings and/or welfare settings).

Content

- This slide pack sets out:
 - An overview of the types of services and financial support provided to people at risk of homelessness/in need of emergency or temporary housing; and the evidence base supporting them
 - A short description of the services and financial support in selected jurisdictions, and of how New Zealand's approach has developed.

Broad approaches to providing services and support to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness

Low intensity support to find or keep permanent housing

- Focus on rehousing and prevention of homelessness
- Examples include case management support to help people find affordable housing, and support to sustain existing tenancies (e.g. loans or grants for rent arrears)

Provision of basic accommodation and services

- Focus on temporary and crisis accommodation, usually originating from charitable and faith-based approaches
- Examples include emergency/night shelters; day or drop-in centres offering services; outreach services to people on the street

High intensity treatment or support that includes accommodation

- Models that originate from mental health and addiction treatment, providing high intensity services aimed at addressing significant barriers to housing
- Examples include residential treatment services and supported housing

High intensity support and services that attempt to find permanent housing

- Models that provide intensive, coordinated and comprehensive case management, targeted to high risk people or groups
- Examples include Housing First, and rapid rehousing or transitional housing programmes that aim to provide support and services to staircase people to permanent housing.

Most countries provide a range of all types of emergency accommodation and services

Country	Shelters	Refuges	Hostels	Housing First	Hotels / motels	Transitional Housing	Delivery	Direct individual financial support	Legislated entitlements
Austria	✓	✗	✗	✓	✗	✓	Local authorities, NGOs	✗	✗
Australia	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	Central govt (\$), Local authorities, NGOs	✗	✓
Canada	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	Central govt (\$), Local authorities, NGOs	✗	✓
Denmark	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	Local authorities, NGOs	✗	✓
France	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	Local authorities, NGOs	✗	✓
Germany	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗	✓	Local authorities, NGOs	✗	✓
Ireland	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Local authorities, NGOs	✗	✓
Netherlands	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	NGOs	✗	✓
New Zealand	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Central govt (\$ and delivery), NGOs	✓	✗
Sweden	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	Local authorities, NGOs	✗	✗
United Kingdom	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Local authorities, NGOs	✗	✓

Shelters: Often set up by charitable or faith-based organisations; offering basic accommodation/food

Refuges: Temporary accommodation and services aimed at women and children at risk of family violence, and/or refugees

Hotels: Use of individual hotel rooms to provide emergency accommodation, usually without services or support attached

Hostels: Providing temporary accommodation, with some shared common areas and varying levels of on-site staffing and support services

Transitional housing: Accommodation with a maximum stay length (up to two years) and intensive services aimed at supporting people into permanent housing

Housing First: Focuses on providing permanent housing to people experiencing homelessness, and then providing intensive support services

This table focuses on the main ways that government supports emergency or temporary housing.

There is limited empirical evidence about the impact of interventions to support homeless people or those at risk of homelessness, and no reliable evidence on cost-effectiveness

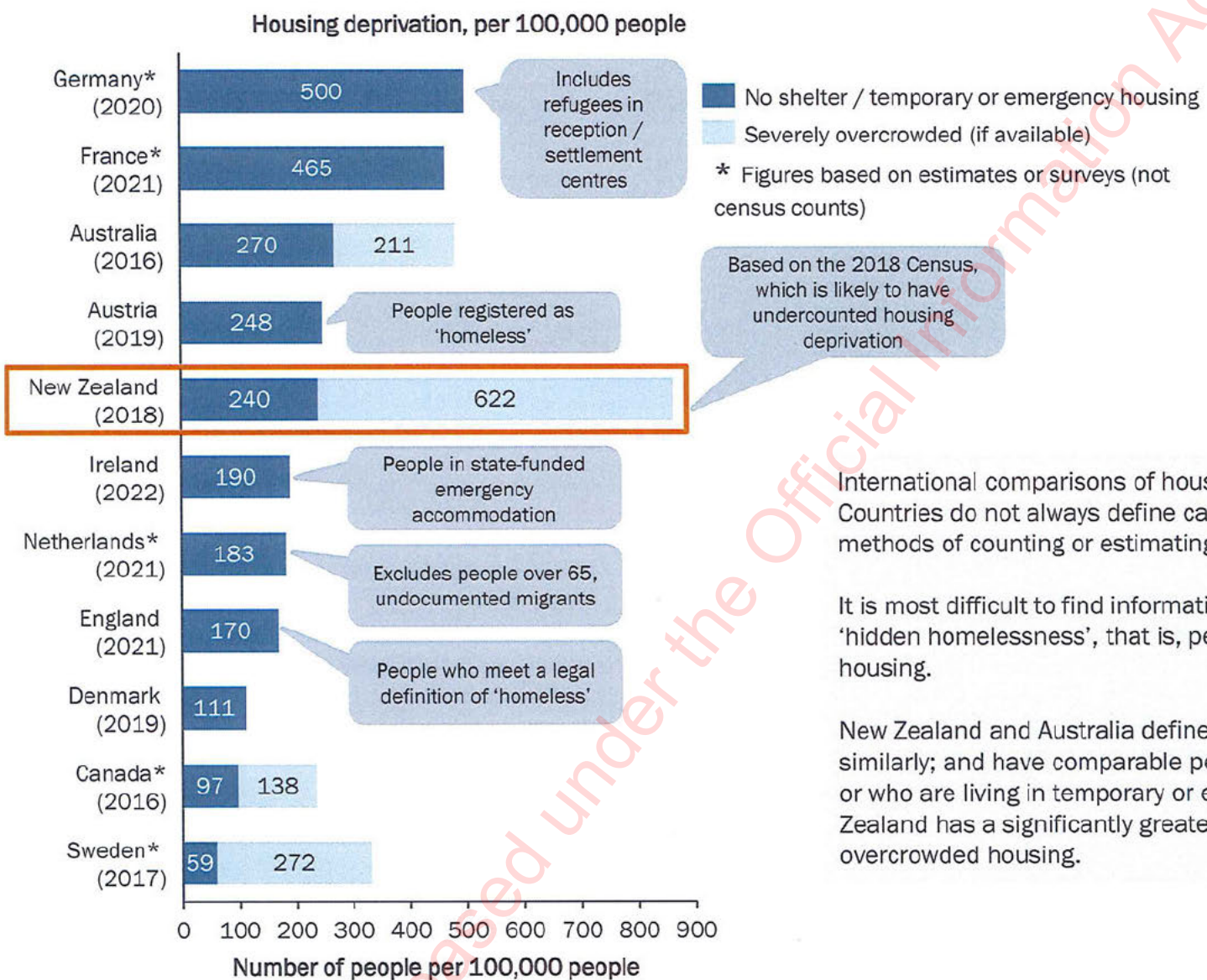
Key

- Considerable evidence / Strong positive impact
- Mixed or insignificant impact
- Some evidence / moderate positive impact
- Limited or no evidence / negligible or negative impact
- Unknown impact

- There are few evaluations that explore the long-term impact of interventions to address homelessness.
- Housing First has the strongest evidential base, with multiple reliable studies finding positive outcomes.
- While some studies provide cost information, none provide enough evidence for cost-effectiveness of these interventions to be reliably determined.

Intervention	Description	Evidence of impact	Strength of evidence
Access to health services	Access to mental health treatment and support	Positive impact on housing stability, employment outcomes, and access to primary care	
Case management for people exiting some types of accommodation	Support as people transition between accommodation types, e.g. after discharge from hospital or prison	Positive impact on housing stability in the US; positive impact on mental health outcomes	
Hostels / temporary accommodation	Temporary accommodation, with varying levels of services and support attached	No reliable evidence on effectiveness or impact	
Housing First	Focuses on providing permanent housing and then providing intensive support services	Strong positive impact on housing stability, wellbeing, justice, and employment	
Shelters	Access to basic accommodation and food for people in crisis	Mixed or insignificant impact on health or housing stability	
Supported Housing	Combines housing with other services (e.g. focused on health or employment)	Mixed or insignificant impact on housing stability and wellbeing	

It is difficult to find comparable data on housing deprivation



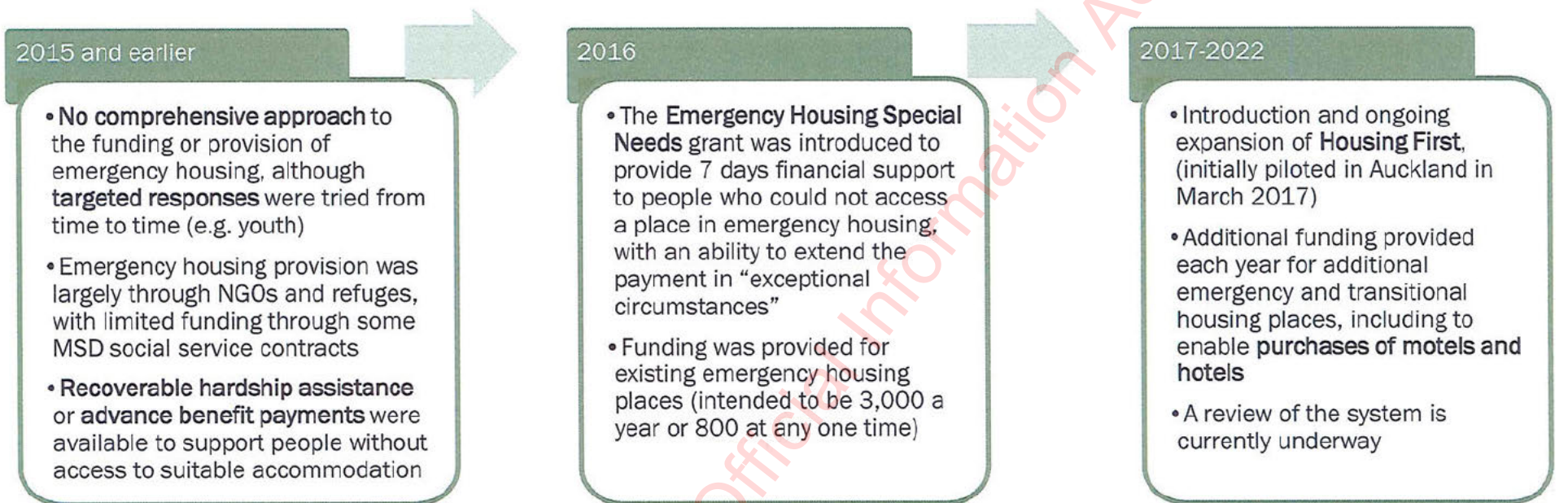
International comparisons of housing deprivation are challenging. Countries do not always define categories in the same way, and methods of counting or estimating numbers vary significantly.

It is most difficult to find information on what is sometimes called 'hidden homelessness', that is, people living in severely crowded or unfit housing.

New Zealand and Australia define and calculate these numbers similarly; and have comparable per capita rates of people with no shelter or who are living in temporary or emergency accommodation. New Zealand has a significantly greater rate of people in severely overcrowded housing.

Sources: Australian Bureau of Statistics; Canadian Observatory on Homelessness; Office of National Statistics UK; FEANTSA *Seventh Overview of Housing Exclusion in Europe*, May 2022; Statistics New Zealand. Does not include people in unfit housing.

New Zealand's current approach to emergency housing was initially developed in 2016



- Cabinet papers establishing a new funding model for Emergency Housing acknowledged that there was poor quality data on which to base the design of the system.*
- Demand was greater than anticipated when the system was designed, and the system has come under ongoing pressure despite increases to the number of places.
- The average length of stay in emergency housing has been increasing, from 5 weeks in 2018 to 18 weeks in 2021, and even longer stays are becoming more common. In May 2021, 7% of people in emergency housing had been there for more than 12 months.
- The largest groups in emergency housing are single people and sole parents, reflecting a similar profile to people on the social housing register.

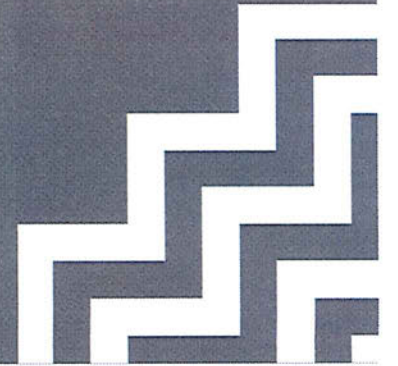
* <https://www.msd.govt.nz/documents/about-msd-and-our-work/work-programmes/housing/initiatives/r-emergency-housing-cabinet-paper.pdf>

Key findings

- Most countries provide a wide range of emergency housing and supporting services, with little clear distinction between emergency, and temporary housing. Fragmentation and regional differences in service provision are common.
- Transitional housing is more clearly attached to the provision of intensive supporting services designed to make people 'housing ready', and is often targeted to specific vulnerable groups (e.g. young people, especially those leaving care, people at risk from family violence, people with mental health or addiction problems, ex-offenders). Overseas models generally provide more services and a longer period of support than New Zealand's model.
- Outside of New Zealand, no country investigated provides direct financial assistance to individuals in emergency housing or to fund stays in emergency housing. In general, services or places are funded, that is, providers are funded to deliver a certain number of bed nights and/or services. People can generally access existing social assistance and housing benefits for which they are eligible.
- Local authorities usually play a central role in providing, funding, and/or delivering emergency accommodation, generally reflecting their system of government more broadly. In some jurisdictions this is a legislated requirement with varying degrees of strictness:
 - Requirements to have housing/homelessness strategies in place (e.g. Canada).
 - General requirements to provide emergency housing and services (e.g. Australia, Ireland, Netherlands, Germany).
 - Strict obligations to house people at risk of homelessness and/or provide pathways to alternative housing (Denmark, France, UK).
- NGOs are generally heavily involved in delivery of emergency, temporary and supported or transitional accommodation. They are usually responsible for making decisions about service eligibility, including consideration of whether the person has access to suitable alternative accommodation. This is in contrast to New Zealand, which requires MSD case managers to make this judgement when administering the Emergency Housing Special Needs Grant.
- Use of motels/hotels is less common outside New Zealand, and has generally been limited to:
 - Smaller regions or towns without other shelter provision.
 - COVID responses.
 - Main centres in countries with strict legal requirements to house individuals at risk of homelessness and tight housing markets.
- New Zealand's approach to emergency housing has several unique features:
 - Bespoke financial assistance to individuals.
 - A high degree of reliance on hotel/motel accommodation.
 - A different model for transitional housing, with fewer services offered over a shorter timeframe.
 - A high degree of central government delivery and administration.

Country summaries

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Country summaries (1)



Austria



Emergency housing services offered

- Emergency shelters for people living rough, concentrated in larger cities, with minimal support services attached. Transitional housing is offered for up to 2 years.



Responsibility

- States are responsible for services and provision varies between local jurisdictions. Housing First and other outreach services are largely only available in Vienna. NGOs largely responsible for delivery.



Financial support

- No specific financial assistance for people in emergency housing. A housing benefit is available for people on means-tested income support/pensions, dependent on income and housing costs.



Australia



Emergency housing services offered

- Focus on crisis accommodation, with targeted service responses for particular groups (e.g. youth, domestic violence victims, indigenous people). Transitional housing is usually provided for 12-18 months.



Responsibility

- States and territories provide services (with some central government funding); provision varies between local jurisdictions. NGOs often contracted to deliver services and make eligibility decisions, e.g. whether the person has access to suitable alternative accommodation.



Financial support

- No specific financial assistance for people in emergency housing. Rent assistance is available to people receiving social security payments, dependent on income and rent; limited advance payments of benefit are also available.

Country summaries (2)



Canada



Emergency housing services offered

- A range of emergency shelters focusing on crisis accommodation. Occupancy rates and median stays have been increasing.
- Transitional housing is usually offered for up to 12 months; some services focused on young people are up to 18 months.



Responsibility

- Provincial and territorial governments provide services and provision varies between local jurisdictions. Shelter services may be delivered by NGOs, which often set their own eligibility criteria to deliver services.



Financial support

- No specific financial assistance for people in emergency housing. Housing costs are generally built into social assistance benefits. In 2020, a Canada Housing Benefit was introduced to provide short-term financial relief to low income households facing high housing costs.



Denmark



Emergency housing services offered

- About 70 emergency shelters across Denmark that provide high intensity support services. Some larger cities and towns also offer more basic shelters with lower entry thresholds.



Responsibility

- Local authorities required by law to provide shelter for people with assessed support needs (e.g. mental health problems or addiction) who have nowhere to live. Mix of local authority and NGO delivery and funding; shelters set their own admission systems.



Financial support

- No specific financial assistance for people in emergency housing. Income-tested housing benefits are available to low income households with high housing costs.

Country summaries (3)



France

Emergency housing services offered



- Emergency shelters with a focus on pathways; people in emergency shelters are legally entitled to stay until they have a pathway out of homelessness (e.g. residential care, supported accommodation, or other long-term housing). There is an increasing reliance on hotels for accommodation, especially in and around Paris.
- Transitional housing focuses on those struggling with economic integration, including at risk from domestic violence, vulnerable young people, and ex-offenders. Stays range from one month to two years.



Responsibility

- Local authorities are legally required to provide emergency accommodation and housing-centred support to people living rough (some central government funding is provided). NGOs often responsible for delivery.



Financial support

- No specific financial assistance for people in emergency housing. A housing benefit is available for people on means-tested income support/pensions, dependent on income and housing costs.



Germany

Emergency housing services offered



- Emergency shelters; in small towns without purpose-built shelters, this may be provided through low cost hotel rooms or hostels.
- Private housing is used to provide transitional support to people in need, with an expectation that they will move to independent housing after a period.



Responsibility

- Local authorities are legally required to provide basic emergency accommodation to people at risk of rough sleeping. Delivery is generally through NGOs.



Financial support

- No specific financial assistance for people in emergency housing. A housing benefit is available for people on means-tested income support/pensions, dependent on income and housing costs. Municipal loans/grants are available to support tenants in rent arrears.

Country summaries (4)



Ireland

Emergency housing services offered



- The main form of emergency accommodation is through homeless shelters with on-site support staff; these can be both short and long-term. There has been a substantial increase in demand, and pressure on services has led to an increase in the use of hotels for emergency accommodation (about 800 households had been in EH for 2 years or more in June 2022).
- Supported/transitional housing targets particular groups (sole parents, vulnerable young people, ex-offenders, people with addiction). Some are time limited for 6 months.



Responsibility

- Local authorities are legally required to provide housing services for people who cannot afford to house themselves (distinct from a direct requirement to house people).



Financial support

- No specific financial assistance for people in emergency housing. Income-tested Housing Assistance Payment available to those in social housing.



Netherlands

Emergency housing services offered



- Emergency shelters; widespread use of housing focused support services. One of the more established jurisdictions for Housing First. Mobile support services (outreach to people sleeping rough) are largely confined to urban areas.
- Transitional housing focuses on younger people (18-27 years). Stays can be for over 12 months.



Responsibility

- Local authorities legally required to provide emergency accommodation and support services. Delivery of services is largely organised through NGOs. Provision is variable between jurisdictions.



Financial support

- No specific financial assistance for people in emergency housing. An income-tested housing subsidy is available, dependent on housing costs and household composition.

Country summaries (5)



Sweden

Emergency housing services offered



- Has generally focused on basic accommodation rather than treatment or support services, but this is shifting in more recent years. Some temporary winter shelters are provided to any rough sleepers; and some local areas have reported use of hotels, hostels, and caravan parks, because of pressure on supply.
- Transitional housing using a 'staircase' model is widespread; recently a lack of affordable options for people to transition into has led to increases in average stays in transitional .



Responsibility

- Emergency accommodation is run by both local authorities and NGOs (together and separately). Most are operated on a referral basis and are not open to non-Swedes or those without residence permits.



Financial support

- No specific financial assistance for people in emergency housing. Income-tested housing benefits are available.



United Kingdom

Emergency housing services offered



- Larger towns and cities have moved away from basic emergency shelters towards greater use of supported housing. Pressure on affordable housing has put pressure on temporary housing, as people cannot find adequate alternatives that enable them to leave. Particularly during the response to COVID-19, the UK has also used hotel accommodation due to pressure on other options.
- Transitional/supported housing services focus on targeted groups (vulnerable young people, people with mental health or addiction problems).



Responsibility

- Following a law change in 2017, local authorities are legally required to support homeless people or those at risk of homelessness in their area, including a focus on prevention.



Financial support

- No specific financial assistance for people in emergency housing. Universal Credit includes income-tested support for housing costs, depending on age and circumstances.

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