MEASURING THE IMPACT OF COMMUNITY HOUSING: A PROPOSED THEORY OF CHANGE FOR COMMUNITY HOUSING

for

NSW Government Family and Community Services

June 2015

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The Centre for Social Impact

The Centre for Social Impact (CSI) is a collaboration between the University of New South Wales (UNSW), The University of Western Australia and Swinburne University of Technology. CSI’s mission is to create beneficial social impact in Australia through teaching, research, measurement and the promotion of public debate. We aim to consider and promote best practice and thought leadership in the context of a systems thinking approach to social purpose.

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Suggested citation


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**Introduction**

The Centre for Social Impact (CSI) at the UNSW Australia was commissioned by Family and Community Services (FACS) Housing NSW as part of the NSW Community Housing Industry Development Strategy 2013/14 – 2015/16 to develop a proposed theory of change and program logic model for community housing. It builds on the findings and recommendations of CSI’s 2014 Feasibility Study Assessing the Impact of Community Housing which recommended developing a theory of change for community housing as a first step to determining and approach to measuring community housing’s social impact (see Bennett, Muir et al. (2014).\(^1\)

The project aimed to identify collective outcomes of the community housing sector and the steps (inputs and actions) that were broadly required to achieve these outcomes according to key stakeholders from the community housing sector.

The insights from this project aim to inform a broader discussion around the possible shared objectives and outcomes and the steps required to achieve them and to help inform what might be measured in relation to the impact of community housing.

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A theory of change is “an explicit theory or model of how a program [or policy] causes the intended or observed outcomes”. It presents a visual representation of how a program or initiative should work by linking inputs (the resources that go into a program), activities (what the program does), outputs (the number of people, places, supports, activities the program has produced), outcomes (what changes have occurred) and impact (long-term change).

A theory of change can be used to help determine the social impact a program intends to have, why change may or may not occur and what should be measured. In principle, a theory of change should assist with:

- articulating goals and how they will be achieved;
- developing a better understanding of the policy/program/intervention (including breaking down parts and interactions between these parts and certain outputs and outcomes);
- identifying intended and unintended side-effects and potential risks;
- guiding planning, design and execution of measurement;
- formulating and prioritising meaningful measurement questions and the scope of what should or can be measured.

**Methodology**

The project aims to better understand the objectives of community housing and to understand the relationships between the goals, objectives and activity of organisations in the sector and the outcomes experienced by clients and communities across the state.

To achieve these aims, 37 sector stakeholders and representatives were purposively sampled to participate in a workshop. The sample frame included community housing provider organisations (including single and cross jurisdictional providers and sizes tier 1, 2 and 3); peak bodies, such as the NSW Federation of Housing Associations and the Community Housing Federation of Australia; and other relevant agencies. Of the invited

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Participants, 23 agreed to attend and 11 participated. Participants included a representative from NSW FACS, four Tier 1 community housing providers and six Tier 2 community housing providers.

The workshop covered:
- the key concepts of social impact and outcomes measurement (impact, outcomes, outputs, activities, inputs and indicators; the importance of measuring outcomes and the different levels of outcomes and impact measurement);
- developing theories of change and program logics;
- systems thinking and complexity;
- activities that explored:
  - the overarching objectives of community housing at a sector or system level;
  - the expected or anticipated outcomes of community housing for different stakeholder groups, including tenants, families, communities, the sector and the broader system; and
  - the current and required resources, activities and processes to achieve the expected outcomes and what are the assumptions, influential factors and stakeholder considerations.

The output of workshop activities was used to inform and develop a proposed theory of change using a program logic model to achieve the identified impacts of community housing.

**Limitations**

While our approach captured a range of perspectives, the consultations with stakeholders were limited. Resource constraints meant that only a small number of participants could be targeted, and the total number of participants was limited on the day by adverse weather conditions. As a result, the findings and insights cannot be generalised to the whole community housing sector and should be more widely tested.

**Workshop findings**

**Shared objectives of community housing**

The workshop participants identified and developed three draft impact statements for the community housing sector which encompassed outcomes for tenants, communities, community housing providers and the community housing sector. These included:

1. Community housing providers facilitate access to safe, stable, affordable, appropriate, flexible housing (with or without external support) to people in need.
2. The community housing sector is a trusted, sustainable leader in the community.
3. Community housing providers support and develop healthy resilient inclusive communities.

**Anticipated outcomes of community housing and activities needed to achieve them**

The participants discussed the impact statements and identified expected housing and non-housing outcomes for tenants, communities and the sector. These outcomes covered a range of social, economic and health domains and included concepts such as well-being, resilience and quality of life.

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2 Participant numbers were low because of severe storms and the consequent damage to transport systems and properties on the days before and of the workshop.

3 It was beyond the scope of the workshop to identify indicators or measures for community housing sector outcomes.
Tenants were recognised as a diverse group with different needs and requirements. Therefore, it was noted that outcomes might differ in type and timing for different groups (e.g. older people, young people, different cultural backgrounds, Indigenous Australians, people who are/were homeless, living in different locations and with different vulnerabilities).

Figure 1 presents the identified anticipated outcomes of community housing for tenants, the community and sector from the group discussion.

**Figure 1: Assumed outcomes of community housing**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tenant outcomes</th>
<th>Community outcomes</th>
<th>Housing sector outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>Reduced homelessness</td>
<td>Low/no evictions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-housing</td>
<td>People can make friends</td>
<td>Access to other tenure where appropriate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Opportunity to engage with education, employment, health and community</td>
<td>- Rental private market</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Connections with community</td>
<td>- Owner occupation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Provide opportunity to young people</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing people in high need</td>
<td>Satisfied clients</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affordable to low income earners</td>
<td>Environmentally safe housing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Break the cycle of homelessness</td>
<td>Reduced housing stress</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduction in housing stress</td>
<td>Increased self-worth</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide security for older people</td>
<td>People engaging with services</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shorter waiting list</td>
<td>People interacting with services/community</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School attendance, healthy activity, employment etc.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social and community inclusion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increased employment opportunities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stable home environment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Use evidence to support interventions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stable long-term tenure</td>
<td>Dignity</td>
<td>Healthy resilient community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People have stable housing so they can build &quot;homes&quot; for themselves and their families</td>
<td>Holistic quality of life</td>
<td>Diverse communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reduction in disadvantage</td>
<td>Affordable housing for all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Employment and increased incomes</td>
<td>Reduction in the poverty level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increased volunteering/giving in the community</td>
<td>Solve poverty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increased independence and self sufficiency</td>
<td>Stabilising and improving neighbourhoods/communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increased resilience (at the individual or family level)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>More connected to community housing as a means to support individuals and community outcomes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Proposed logic models

Using the draft impact statements and outcomes identified and considering the contextual factors, Community housing provider’s role in the system, constraints and assumptions, participants developed draft logic models.

Key terms

**Inputs:** Resources put into or used for a program or organisation; for example, money, time, partnerships, equipment and facilities.

**Activity:** Actions or processes that produce the desired outputs and outcomes.

**Output:** The direct products or services resulting from an activity, usually presented as a numeric value. For example, the number of houses provided or the supports or activities produced.

**Outcome:** The changes in attitudes, values, behaviours or conditions as a result/effect of or expected by the activity. The changes can be short-term (immediate), medium-term or long-term.

**Impact:** The longer-term social, economic and/or environmental outcomes of an activity, program, organisation or policy. This can be positive, negative or neutral and be intended or unintended.

**Indicators:** Measureable markers that show whether progress is being made on a condition, circumstance or outcome.

Muir and Bennett (2014)

Proposed overarching logic model for community housing

Figure 2 illustrates an overarching proposed theory of change for community housing at a sector level, its desired impact and expected outcomes. This proposed logic model was informed by the workshop outputs and the three draft logic models developed by the workshop participants.

The orange arrows indicate the hypothesised links between the inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes and impact. Identified outcomes for different stakeholder groups may provide opportunities for identifying or developing future indicators to measure change.
Figure 2: Proposed logic model for community housing

**Inputs**
- Community housing sector
  - Resources
  - People
  - Partnerships

**Activities, Programs, Processes**
- Housing development and investment
- Redevelopment of existing housing stock
- Investing in services (properties, maintenance, management)
- Investing in people (boards, management, staff)
- Supporting leadership (governance, risk management, innovation)
- Engaging and including stakeholders and developing partnerships
- Supporting advocacy and coordinated public relations
- Investing in measurement and evaluation

**Outputs**
- Increased number of housing options
- New sources of funding and investment
- New community partnerships: government, community, service providers
- Innovative strategies, models and policy

**Outcomes**
- Sector
  - Improved sector relationships
  - Improved sector viability
  - Improved programs, services, policy
- Community
  - Reduced homelessness
  - Participation in the community
  - Reduction in anti-social behaviour
  - Stabilising and improving communities
- Housing
  - Safe, appropriate, flexible housing
  - Stability
  - Safety
  - Tenant satisfaction
- Other
  - Opportunities for education and employment
  - Social and health outcomes

**Impact**
- The sector is a trusted and sustainable leader
- Healthy and resilient communities

Access to resources
New/revised activity/programs
Output indicators
Outcome indicators
Impact indicators
### Theory of Change Program Logic Model

#### Proposed Theory of Change for Community Housing

**Figure 3: Draft logic model: Safe, equitable housing**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WHAT</th>
<th>Community housing providers provide safe equitable housing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WHO</td>
<td>Clients, Communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WHAT AND HOW</td>
<td>Funding, Matching housing to need, Housing, More housing options, Community housing providers, Legislation, policy, Measurement and evaluation, Partnerships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WHAT</td>
<td>Understanding client needs, Developing appropriate rent models, Long-term institutional investment, Changes to the Residential Tenancies Act - e.g. longer lease terms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HOW</td>
<td>More appropriate staff with required skills and attributes, Maintenance services, New housing products, Professional development, Tenancy support, Government guarantee</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### WHAT OTHER ASSUMPTIONS ARE IMPORTANT

Changes to the Residential Tenancies Act occur to support client/tenant needs, Policy, legislative and regulatory changes

### [OUTCOMES]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OUTCOMES</th>
<th>For</th>
<th>Clients</th>
<th>CHPs</th>
<th>System</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SHORT-TERM</td>
<td></td>
<td>Reduced tenancy turnover</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lower arrears</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEDIUM-TERM</td>
<td></td>
<td>Increased stability</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Appropriate housing options that meet the needs of the tenant at different times and situations</td>
<td>Decreased cost of land and housing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ability to maintain property</td>
<td>Financially viable</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LONGER-TERM</td>
<td></td>
<td>Reduced stress</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Increased safety</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Theory of Change Program Logic Model
Proposed Theory of Change for Community Housing

Figure 4: Draft logic model – Trusted and sustainable leader

[WHAT]
The community housing sector

[WHO]
Is a trusted and sustainable leader

[WHAT AND HOW]
by accessing and supporting

- Boards
  - Capacity building
  - Quality training
  - Mentoring
- Staff
  - Community Housing Industry Association (CHIA)
  - NSW Federation of Housing Associations
  - Churches Housing
  - PowerHousing Australia
  - Sound governance framework
- Peak bodies
  - Source of funding
- Collaboration and partnerships
  - Community stakeholders are engaged, informed and included
- Advocacy and public relations
  - Planning debates
  - Research
  - Outcomes measurement
- Infrastructure
  - IT and case management

[WHAT OTHER ASSUMPTIONS ARE IMPORTANT]
- Ability to leverage new construction
- Government hands over the stock and/or management of public housing stock to CHPs where capacity and skills are available
- A consistent regulatory framework
- Ability to provide good training not just "sink or swim"

[OUTPUTS]
High quality and professional services
Industry development
Grass roots local participation
New sources of funding
Marketing and communication activity
Bequests
Donations
Philanthropic support

[OUTCOMES]
Government "go to" the sector for affordable housing and advice
Long term viability of the sector
The sector "gets title"
The sector can trade the "stack"
Partnerships with local government
An informed community
Community education about community housing
**Theory of Change Program Logic Model**

**Proposed Theory of Change for Community Housing**

Figure 5 Draft logic model: Healthy and resilient communities

### [WHAT]

**The community housing sector** supports their clients and communities

#### [WHO]

- Clients
- Communities

#### [WHAT AND HOW]

By accessing, developing and supporting

- Measurement and evaluation
- Resources
- Planning, coaching and capacity building
- Specialist skills/support
- Advocacy
- Tailoring support based on client needs

- Data
- Grant money
- Tenants
- Social work expertise
- Trauma support specialists
- Development managers

- Research
- Seed funding
- Staff
- Community engagement
- Approach based
- Location/geography

#### [WHAT OTHER ASSUMPTIONS ARE IMPORTANT]

- That client pathways out of community housing exist
- Resources are available

### [OUTPUTS]

- Tenant participation in the community
- New funding
- Community partnerships (Number and type)
- Number of targeted services/programs
- Strategies to promote and reward tenant engagement in education and employment

### [OUTCOMES]

leading to improvements in

- Number of dwellings near transport/employment hubs
- Reduction in bad debts
- Attitude change in tenants (e.g. decrease in stigma)
- Attitude change that community housing is a societal objective
- Building innovative housing diverse secure that includes on-site support
- Access to new funding instruments

- Tenant participation in education or training
- Shifting the conversation about trauma
- Sustainable or increased employment (by partner organisations)
- Access to new funding instruments

### [LONG-TERM]

which results in healthy resilient communities
What next?

The participants consistently identified a range of housing and non-housing outcomes for different client and stakeholder groups. We recommend that the community housing sector undertakes a broader consultation process of the proposed theory of change.

While there was primarily consensus across the participant group, it will be important to test and refine the proposed theory of change for stakeholders across the sector and other associated sectors (such as homelessness, domestic violence or public housing). The outcomes could then be matched to indicators to measure where and whether change has occurred.