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‘Social housing after neo-liberalism: new forms of state-driven welfare intervention toward social renters’ by Cameron Parsell, Lynda Cheshire, Zoe Walter & Andrew Clarke (2022). In *Housing Studies*, 37:7, 1124-1146, DOI: 10.1080/02673037.2018.1563673

There is universal acceptance that in a highly residualised social housing system support services are a crucial component to mitigate the heightened risk of housing breakdown among social housing tenants. Nevertheless, surprisingly few studies formally evaluate the impact of integrated support programs.

In Victoria, where at least three programs are specifically funded to assist ‘at risk’ social housing tenants sustain their housing, evaluatory evidence of their impact is virtually non-existent. The performance in other jurisdictions is not much better.

Given the high financial costs, and the poor housing and non-housing outcomes associated with tenancy breakdowns in social housing, such a large gap in the Australian evidence base is puzzling.

In this context Parsell et als., (2019) evaluation of a pilot program in Brisbane that integrated housing, mental health and psychosocial services stands out as one of the few studies that provide meaningful (and useful) empirical insights into the impact of programs that aim to assist social housing tenants with complex need to sustain their housing.

Drawing on administrative data to measure tenant outcomes and in-depth qualitative interview to understand how the ‘tenants experienced, used and benefited’ from the service, the study found that participants received fewer warnings, arrears, breaches and complaints in the six months after the intervention compared to the six months prior.

The study also reported improved housing stability, improved health and decreased emergency service usage for those involved, as well as improved knowledge among housing providers of the key issues and solutions tenants experienced.

The findings highlight the importance of social housing as a site for delivering non-housing support services.

In terms of designing programs of this sort, there is an inherent danger in treating eviction prevention as the only outcome of interest. To be sure, preventing eviction is important, but focusing solely on preventing evictions ignores the importance of addressing the underlying issues that imperil a tenancy.

Fortunately, this paper goes to some lengths to address this by highlighting preventative work that provided tenants with practical, flexible assistance and resources that ‘enable[d] them to address their own problems’ (p.19) and thus avoid returning to a similarly precarious state.

While the absence of a control group places some limit on the confidence we might have in the findings, the paper is, nonetheless, an essential read for those interested in the role and impact of integrated support programs that seek to reduce tenancy breakdown among vulnerable social housing tenants, but also in thinking more critically about the relationship between neoliberal logics, social housing and questions relating to tenant sustainment.

Reviewed by:
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