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The Build SoLiHD Study

Building social licence for housing
developments: consulting community,
planning with care, building homes

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Research Summary

Why was the research done?

Insufficient housing supply is a key factor impacting housing affordability. Increasing affordable housing stock to make it easier for people to find a stable home has become the focus of policy interventions and is subject to often polarising debates. This study aimed to better understand the concerns and wishes regarding affordable housing developments of diverse stakeholders including homeowners, people living in social housing and people with experience of housing instability, including homelessness. Using a methodology called the Comfort Board, we invited the 37 study participants to take the perspective of a protagonist in three fictional scenarios presenting current approaches to expanding affordable housing. We then asked them to rate the perceived benefits and their trust in the proposed solution and if there was anything that would make them more comfortable with it.

What were the key findings?

We found that the perspectives of participants varied significantly, reflecting contemporary tensions in the housing policy landscape. However, across the participant groups we identified a key theme: there is more to increasing affordable housing supply than building more houses. We elaborate five findings under this theme that provide leverage for improving social licence for affordable housing developments. 1) Affordable housing and the variety of housing models currently on offer in Australia are poorly understood due to system complexity and stigma. 2) To fit into the neighbourhoods where housing developments are to be, community engagement and activities need to accompany and extend beyond construction. 3) Housing developments need to be fit for purpose to provide a home for the people who live there, including building design, tenancy mix, and housing governance. 4) There needs to be planning for safety and neighbourly relations built into the housing model. 5) Housing and its governance need ongoing learning for continuous improvement.

What does this mean for policy and practice?

The evidence note concludes with recommendations that can inform processes of community consultation in ways that include the perspectives of all key stakeholders, including those who otherwise might be overlooked.

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We are also grateful to Prof Anna Brown for introducing us to the Comfort Board Methodology, to Prof Cameron Parsell, Dr Rose Stambe and Dr Nancy Sturman for supporting the scenario development.

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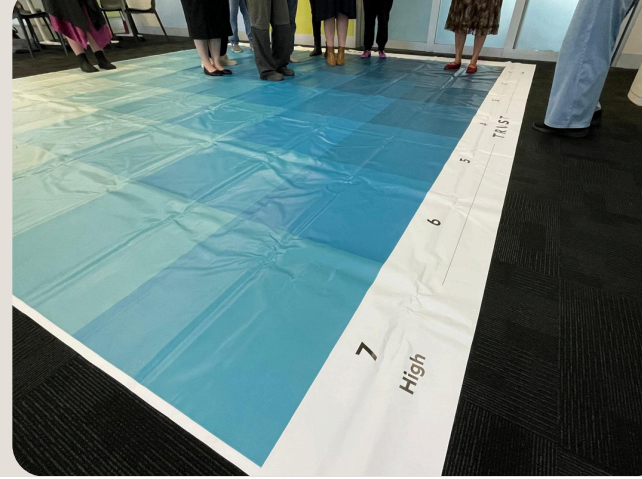
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We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the lands on which we work and live across Australia.
We pay our respects to Elders past and present and recognise their continued connections
to land, sea and community.

The Build SoLiHD Study



Building social licence for housing developments – consulting community, planning with care, building homes

Stefanie Plage, Nikita Sharma, Miriam Dillon, Helen Mols, Robert Perrier, Karen Bittner, Melissa Anderson, Kirsten Baker



This study offers critical evidence for reframing community consultation as a mechanism to produce social licence with input from diverse stakeholders that else might be perceived as acting in opposition to one another. It aims to help policy decision-makers understand the key considerations around trust and benefit and infrastructures of care and support when planning affordable housing projects for people who are otherwise excluded from housing.

The Role of Social Licence in Solving the Housing Crisis

The housing crisis has dominated recent local, state and national political debates and the national government has an unprecedented political mandate to advance solutions to housing instability by reducing the scarcity of affordable housing through public spending. Yet, the consensus to carry the burden of affordable housing developments through different levels of government, all the way to local stakeholders who will be most impacted, requires social licence. Imposing solutions to the housing crisis on communities without a shared understanding of the benefits and mutual trust runs the risk of deepening social division. Social licence, understood as co-constituted in perceived benefits of an intervention and trust that one's interests matter, can provide conceptual clarity to produce meaningful empirical insights.

Objectives of the Present Study

This project sought to produce nuanced evidence to understand broader community perceptions of benefits of housing developments as well as the level of trust in decision-making surrounding these developments. Broadly, these insights seek to inform interventions that can nurture greater social licence to progress affordable housing developments. Specifically, we aimed:

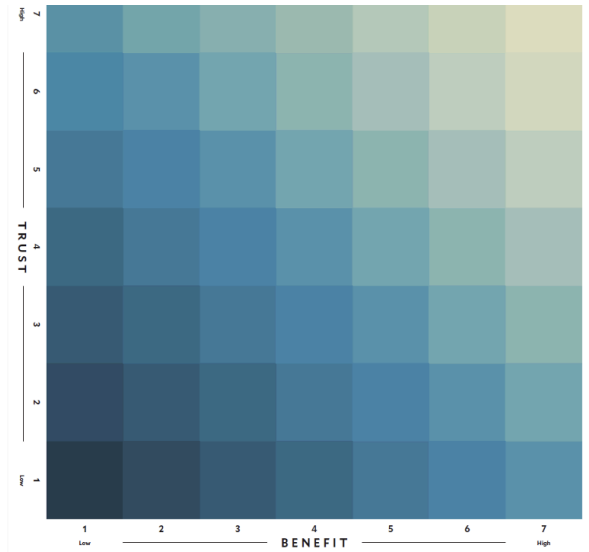
To produce knowledge on social licence in the community for implementing housing solutions for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

To identify and understand the perceived benefits and concerns of community impacted by the planning, design and completion of housing developments.

To inform community engagement and interventions towards building greater social licence for long-term solutions to homelessness and housing instability.

Exploring Social Licence with the Comfort Board

The Comfort Board Methodology is a participatory and scenario-based approach that encourages a group of participants to reflect on a proposed innovation, such as a permanent supportive housing complex in their neighbourhood. Participants were invited to take the point of view of a person in a challenging scenario. We then asked them to rate their trust in, and perceived benefit of a proposed housing solution on a scale of 1-7 (low to high). The participants' position on the resulting matrix indicated their comfort level and elicited discussion of what could be done to improve their comfort.



Of all participants



75.7% are women



72.2% born in Australia



43.2% over 60-year-old

Their housing experience



56.8% experienced housing instability, including homelessness, at some point



35.1% homeowners

Who were the Participants?

Overall 37 people participated in group workshops and individual interviews held between March and April 2026. They were living in either:

- Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) or
- Department of Housing (DOH) units or
- their own homes (HO) either owning outright or paying off a mortgage.

Key Findings: Towards greater comfort



Mis/disinformation and stigma is rampant. Public housing and community housing, including permanent supportive housing needs to be better understood.

“that stigma of it’s a ghetto, it’s not a safe area” Joy (h/ex, PSH)



Increasing or facilitating community engagement activities such as community art projects or gardens and supporting small local business such as social enterprise cafés creates space for community encounters.

“putting community into community housing” Mike (h/ex, PSH)



There is need for new housing to be fit for purpose including the right size, the right location, with a considered mix of tenants, appropriate amenities and management to allow privacy, neighbourly relations and peace.

“People living in the new housing developments, are going to want to feel like they are received into the community as well. ... It is about the scale, the design, the mix of tenancies, engagement of consultation with community ... and that they’re well-managed.” Amy (no h/ex, HO)



Concerns about unmet needs and safety must be heard and addressed responsibly, professionally and transparently.

“[We want] to live safely and (have) peace of mind, without abuse.” Maya (h/ex, PSH)



Everyone needs housing. Issues with specific housing models, individual tenants or some organisations must be considered as opportunities for improvement rather than failure of affordable housing.

“Whether you’re a homeowner or in social housing, there is no perfect system.” Seb (h/ex, DOH)

Conclusion and Recommendations

The following recommendations can inform processes of community consultation in ways that include the perspectives of all key stakeholders, including those who otherwise might be overlooked.



Foster community consultation and engagement by facilitating opportunities for community to participate in housing planning decisions.



Plan for what creates some benefit for most, almost all of the time.



Grow care infrastructures in and around housing, for example by ensuring supports are fit-for-purpose and well managed or co-locating health services near supportive housing developments.



Educate the public about community housing, public housing and permanent supportive housing models.



Design for living well, for example by ensuring new housing is close to public amenities such as reliable transport services and accessible ‘third’ spaces such as libraries, sporting facilities, nature corridors and parks.

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