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Citation for published version:

Clarke, A, Watts, B & Parsell, C 2020, 'Conditionality in the context of housing-led homelessness policy: Comparing Australia's Housing First agenda to Scotland's "rights-based" approach', *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, vol. 55, no. 1, pp. 88-100. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ajs4.97>

Digital Object Identifier (DOI):

[10.1002/ajs4.97](https://doi.org/10.1002/ajs4.97)

Link:

[Link to publication record in Heriot-Watt Research Portal](#)

Document Version:

Peer reviewed version

Published In:

Australian Journal of Social Issues

Publisher Rights Statement:

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Conditionality in the context of housing-led homelessness policy: Comparing Australia's Housing First agenda to Scotland's 'rights based' approach

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Accepted for publication in the Australian Journal of Social Issues on 25/11/2019

Abstract

Homelessness services and policy have historically tended to be organised by an explicitly conditional logic, wherein people experiencing homelessness must prove their 'housing readiness' before accessing settled housing. This model has been robustly challenged in recent decades by 'housing-led' approaches that ostensibly eschew conditionality and prioritise the rapid rehousing of people experiencing homelessness. Various countries now include housing-led approaches in the national policy frameworks, including Australia, which overhauled its approach to homelessness in 2008, and Scotland, where a housing-led approach is supported by a legal right to housing for homeless households. Notwithstanding this policy shift, conditionality remains an enduring feature of responses to homelessness in both jurisdictions. This paper sheds light on this phenomena by comparing the Australian experience with that of Scotland. We demonstrate how conditionality remains a feature of both jurisdictions; however, there is greater effort in Scotland to identify and minimise conditionality, whereas in Australia it is able to persist relatively unchallenged. We conclude with some reflections on what Australia can learn from Scotland's relative success, highlighting the importance of a national-level policy framework and an adequate affordable housing supply.

Keywords

Comparative policy; conditionality; homelessness; housing first; housing policy

Introduction

Whilst recent changes to income support payments in Australia have drawn attention to the impact of welfare conditionality on people experiencing (or at risk of) homelessness (see Peterie et al. 2019, Pawson et al. 2018), conditionality is not a new experience for people who are homeless, as it has long been a feature of homelessness service systems. Conditional approaches to homelessness support are often likened to a ‘staircase’ (Sahlin, 2005): people enter the system through drop-in facilities and crisis accommodation services that have low-barriers to access, and then progress ‘up’ through transitional housing to settled housing by adhering to a range of behavioural conditions that ostensibly prove their ‘housing readiness’. These conditions include things like abstaining from drug and alcohol use, engagement with case management or psychiatric services, and demonstrating a capacity for independent living (e.g. budgeting, paying rent, cleaning, cooking, etc.) (Padgett, Henwood, & Tsemberis, 2016).

The assumption underpinning the staircase approach is that homelessness can only be overcome through self-improvement and behaviour change on the part of people experiencing it. However, evidence suggests that those members of the homeless population with complex needs struggle to achieve this whilst they remain exposed to the debilitating conditions of life on the street or in temporary accommodation (Padgett et al., 2016; Mackie et al., 2017; Johnsent & Teixeira, 2012). In light of this, new ‘housing-led’ approaches have emerged that prioritise the provision of settled housing over crisis/transitional models, thus eschewing the conditionality of the staircase approach. The most well known of these is ‘Housing First’, which seeks to permanently end homelessness for people experiencing chronic homelessness through the immediate provision of settled housing coupled with voluntary, client-led support (Tsemberis, 2010). Other approaches foreground the importance of housing in responding to homelessness in different ways, for example by introducing rapid rehousing models (Brown et al., 2017) and/or legally enforceable entitlements to settled housing for those experiencing homelessness (Fitzpatrick and Pawson, 2016).

Housing-led alternatives to the conditional staircase approach have received widespread support from researchers, campaigners and some policy makers, thanks at least in part to the substantial body of research evidence demonstrating the effectiveness of Housing First in permanently ending homelessness (Stergiopoulos et al., 2015). Following the success internationally, Australia developed a national policy and funding framework to support the roll-out of Housing First programs across the country (Parsell et al. 2013; Haurault & Johnson, 2016). Housing First models have also recently gained ground in the UK and are now being mainstreamed within Scottish homelessness policy (Scottish Government, 2019). Officially, the shifts seen in Australia and Scotland mark a move away from the conditional logic of the staircase approach, toward an approach to homelessness that emphasises the rapid rehousing of homeless households in settled housing regardless of their perceived housing readiness.

However, as recent work in critical policy studies teaches us (Clarke, Bainton, Lendvai, & Stubbs, 2015; McCann & Ward, 2013), policy making is never a straightforward process of rational decision making and implementation, but is instead characterised by contingency, ambiguity, and the persistence of ‘older’ policy logics alongside new ones. Homelessness policy is, of course, no exception to this; hence, there is emerging evidence that conditionality often remains a feature of homelessness service systems that adopt a housing-led approach (Clarke et al. 2019; Stewart, 2018; Watts et al. 2018). In this paper, we examine

the persistence of conditionality in Australia's ostensibly 'housing-led' approach to homelessness, and explore how this contradiction might be addressed. We do so by comparing developments in Australia with those seen in Scotland, where, in our view, efforts to replace the conditional staircase approach with a housing-led alternative have been more effective, albeit far from entirely straightforward. Like Australia, Scotland has recently embedded Housing First in its national approach to homelessness (Scottish Government, 2018). Unlike in Australia, however, in Scotland this has happened in the context of a statutory rights based response to homelessness, which confers on almost all homeless households a legally enforceable entitlement to settled housing, and temporary accommodation in the interim. This approach has been widely praised as a world leading example of a 'housing-led' and 'rights-based' approach to homelessness (Anderson, 2007; Watts, 2014; Stewart, 2018), making Scotland an auspicious case for Australia to learn from.

We compare the Australian and Scottish approaches, demonstrating how conditionality remains a feature of both contexts at both the policy and practice level. However, we also show how in Scotland there is a greater awareness of the contradiction between residual forms of conditionality and the nation's overarching housing-led approach, as well as detrimental impact these contradictions have on homelessness outcomes. There are therefore ongoing efforts in Scotland to identify and minimise conditionality, whereas in Australia the contradiction is able to stand relatively unchallenged. We discuss each case in turn, and then conclude with some reflections on what Australia can learn from Scotland's experience, particularly in regards to the importance of having a coordinated national policy framework endorsing a housing-led approach and an adequate supply of social housing to make that approach practicable.

The Australian case: the coincidence of Housing First and conditionality

Prior to the national embrace of Housing First, responses to homelessness in Australia treated it as a temporary, personal crisis for which people required short-term/transitional support focused on individual behaviour change (Bullen, 2015). This support was provided through the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP), which operated between 1985 and 2011. Officially, SAAP's aim was to enable people experiencing homelessness to transition to independent living in settled housing through the provision of support in the form of temporary accommodation and case management. However, as Fopp (1996) showed, shortages in affordable housing meant there were few exits points for people who were homeless, meaning that the support component of SAAP became something of an end in itself. This both reinforced the idea that people experiencing homelessness were deficient individuals with unique problems, and exposed people to ongoing surveillance and control. Conditionality played a key role in this process, for to accept homeless accommodation in SAAP meant to accept support; people accepted support, not voluntarily, but because denying support—and the surveillance and control that came with it—meant exclusion from accommodation. As Bullen (2015) highlights, this conditionality meant that many people were indeed excluded from access to services under SAAP, as they were unable or unwilling to comply with the conditions services imposed on them.

The individual focus and conditionality of SAAP was formally rejected in Australia's new paradigm of homelessness policy initiated in 2008 through the Commonwealth Government's White Paper on homelessness, *The Road Home* (Australian Government, 2008). Important for

the present discussion was the White Paper's emphasis on the supply of affordable housing as a key driver of homelessness, and on the State's role in addressing this. The White Paper also adopted a discourse of fairness and social inclusion: it explicitly referred to homelessness as unacceptable in Australian society, and set headline targets to achieve measurable reductions in homelessness (50% by 2020) and to ensure all rough sleepers had access to supported accommodation (Australian Government, 2008). These targets were to be achieved through early intervention and prevention; improving, expanding and integrating support services; and rapidly rehousing and providing ongoing support to people who become homeless (Australian Government, 2008, p. ix).

Parsell and Jones (2014) observed that the optimistic agenda initiated by the White Paper constituted a stark rejection of SAAP's narrow focus on supporting individuals through temporary accommodation and case management. Rather than shaping the behaviours of homeless subjects through conditional modes of support, the White Paper identified the necessity of changing the systems within which homelessness is embedded. Reflecting this, increased funding for support services and new initiatives was made available in 2008 through the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH) established between the Commonwealth and all state and territory governments. The White Paper had emphasised the need for innovative and evidence-based approaches to ending homelessness, and given the mounting international evidence pointing to the effectiveness of the Housing First approach, the funding allocated for new initiatives was directed towards the national roll-out of the Street to Home and Common Ground initiatives, both which are underpinned by Housing First principles (Herault & Johnson, 2016).

Alongside these national-level policy changes, endorsement of the Housing First approach has also become a key feature of the homelessness policy discourse of state and territory governments. The *New South Wales 2018-2023 Homelessness Strategy* (NSW Government, 2018) emphasises Housing First and the need to provide housing and unconditional support as an evidence based means to end chronic homelessness. Similarly, the 2018 *Victorian Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Plan* (Victoria State Government, 2018) endorses Housing First as part of their broader reform to ensure that people who are chronically homeless access and sustain housing. And the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) government's recent *ACT Housing Strategy 2018* makes an explicit commitment to 'investigate and implement a model of support that draws upon the principles of Housing First, particularly for those experiencing long-term homelessness' (p. 26).

Yet, despite both national and state/territory policies stressing a move away from conditionality, there is growing evidence that the conditionality that characterised SAAP continues to be a feature of the homelessness support systems that traverse the country today, particularly when it comes to people deemed to have complex needs and those experiencing 'chronic' homelessness. Indeed, state/territory policy often espouses a commitment to Housing First – which is the antithesis to conditionality – whilst simultaneously putting forward transitional approaches informed by the conditional logic of the staircase model.

For example, notwithstanding its express commitments to Housing First (see above), the Victorian Government's revised approach to reducing homelessness involves establishing an intensive support program that includes temporary and transitional housing for people who are deemed to have "been unable to successfully transition to housing" (2018: 22). The

transitional approach is predicated on the conditional logic of the staircase model described above, with the assumption that the existing housing and support systems are unproblematic and it is the people that fail to transition that require changing. The validity of such assumptions are belied by recent studies that demonstrate the unaffordability of private rental housing in Victoria for people on low incomes (Anglicare, 2018) and the drastic undersupply of social housing in the State (Lawson et al. 2018).

Conditionality also remains a feature of the Australian Capital Territory's (ACT) response to homelessness. Like Victoria, there is an extreme lack of affordable housing in ACT for people relying on government income support (Anglicare, 2018), meaning that homelessness services rely on the social housing sector to access settled housing for their clients. However, the wait times to access social housing in the ACT are extensive, with only those applicants placed on the priority list waiting less than a year on average. Priority status is reserved for people with the most complex needs. Yet, to make it onto the priority list, applicants also have to demonstrate that they are housing ready, with those unable to prove this being referred to temporary accommodation (i.e. the bottom of the staircase), as the below excerpt from the ACT's social housing allocation instrument illustrates:

Inclusion will be confined to applicants who are currently capable of independent living and with the capacity to undertake a housing tenancy to address their longer term housing needs. A clear distinction will be made between applicants who meet these requirements and those for whom crisis or short-term housing is more appropriate to their needs. (ACT, 2011: 2)

Thus, despite the ACT Government's express commitment to pursue a Housing First response for long-term homeless people, access to affordable, settled housing for this group continues to be organised according to the logic of the staircase approach.

In addition to these policy-driven forms of conditionality, there is also evidence that many homelessness service providers remain committed to the conditional logic of the staircase approach. In assessing the fate of the reforms engendered by the White Paper, Hurland and Johnson (2016: 138) argue that many service providers have resisted the shift to a Housing First approach, leading to the perpetuation of crisis and transitional responses to homelessness, and thus the conditionality that these responses entail.

The innovative and often evidence-based ideas that underpinned reform in the area of chronic homelessness have not taken hold in the way that was hoped. In part, this is because supporters of Housing First and PSH [permanent supportive housing] failed to bring along existing service providers. Indeed, by critiquing the existing system without recognising the historical, material and structural constraints that faced existing service providers, those services were alienated from the broader process of change. However, it is equally true that existing providers were overly defensive at times and many sought to preserve the status quo. Despite the promise of change, Australia's primary response to homelessness remains much the same – the majority of funding is still directed towards transitional support linked to short- and medium-term emergency accommodation.

Clarke et al. (2019) also document resistance to the unconditional logic of Housing First among some service providers in their study of homelessness support in an unnamed

Australian jurisdiction. They describe how people working in crisis-oriented homelessness services criticised the voluntary nature of support services provided by a local Housing First program, claiming that it meant service users lacked an incentive to improve themselves and transition to other forms of housing. However, Clarke et al. (2019) also show that even service providers who endorse Housing First rely on transitional and crisis models to support their clients due to a dearth of affordable housing and the continued promotion of conditionality in government policy in their study jurisdiction (as we saw with Victoria and the ACT above).

Clarke et al.'s (2019) findings regarding how barriers to Housing First perpetuate conditionality resonate with previous studies that show how Australia's Housing First initiatives have been plagued by problems accessing affordable housing and the under-resourcing of the voluntary supports they provide (Parsell et al. 2013). Unlike the original Pathways to Housing model of Housing First developed in the United States, which accessed settled housing through the private rental sector with government subsidies, Australian Housing First programs have relied almost exclusively on social housing to rehouse their homeless clients (Pawson et al. 2018). The dwindling stock of social housing in Australia (< 5% of all housing), coupled with growing demand, mean that waitlists have ballooned. The extended wait times for social housing represent significant barriers for Housing First services to make good on their promise of rapid rehousing. Moreover, inadequate funding levels have meant that the voluntary support component of Australian Housing First programs has tended to be time limited, undermining long-term tenancy sustainment outcomes (Parsell et al. 2013).

Finally, the tensions and contradictions that exist in the delivery of unconditionally espoused through Housing First are complicated by competing interpretations of what constitutes Housing First. Is Housing First a philosophy or a program (Johnson et al. 2012)? When seen through the prism of the former, an unconditional approach is emphasised through the commitment to overarching principles of choice and housing as a human right, and the eschewal of notions like 'housing readiness' (Padgett et al. 2016). However, if Housing First is understood as the model developed via the Pathways to Housing program in New York City, a more complicated discussion emerges about conditionality. Even though the Pathways to Housing First program identifies closely with an unconditional approach as a means to differentiate from the staircase model, closer analysis demonstrates the presence of some forms of conditionality. For example, participants of Pathways to Housing are required to meet weekly with support workers as a condition of program participation (Tsemberis, 2010), and moreover, some Housing First programs require clients to handover control of elements of their social security income, including housing choice vouchers, to ensure rent is paid. Some Housing First programs thus adopt minimal conditionality as compared to the staircase model. Significantly, however, Housing First does not adopt conditionality in terms of drug and alcohol abstinence/sobriety or medical treatment and intervention.

The Scottish case: persistent conditionality and the right to housing

Following the devolution of wide ranging legislative powers from Westminster to the newly formed Scottish Parliament in 1999, a government appointed cross-sector Homelessness Task Force made a series of recommendations seeking to improve homelessness responses in the country. Subsequent reforms pursued by the Scottish Executive established Scotland as

world-leader in homelessness policy (Fitzpatrick et al. 2012). At the centre of these reforms was the abolition of the Priority Need test, which – in line with prior UK-wide homelessness law – had acted as the main rationing device restricting legally enforceable entitlements to settled housing to only a subgroup of those experiencing homelessness, namely families with children (Fitzpatrick and Pawson, 2016). This change meant that, from the end of 2012, virtually all homeless households in Scotland were entitled to settled housing – usually in the form of a secure social housing tenancy – and to temporary accommodation while that settled housing is secured. This approach has been described as ‘rights based’ – in that it in effect created legal rights to settled housing for homeless households (Watts 2014) – and ‘housing-led’ – in that it unambiguously recognises the centrality of housing in responding to homelessness, albeit alongside relevant supports (Anderson, 2007). However, as we saw with the Australian case, elements of conditionality remain an enduring – albeit not central – feature of Scottish homelessness policy despite this entitlement-based and housing-led approach.

Two factors are especially relevant here. First, entitlements to settled housing under Scottish homelessness law remain conditional on whether a homeless person or family is deemed by their local authority to have become homeless intentionally i.e. deliberately done (or not done) something that caused them to lose their accommodation, like running up rent arrears or anti-social behaviour. Legislative reform following the Homelessness Task Force’s recommendations signalled a softening of these intentionality provisions, meaning local authorities would no longer have a duty to investigate intentionality, but only discretion to if they wished. These reforms have never been brought into force, however, and in 2017/18, just over 1,500 households – 5% of those assessed as homelessness – were deemed to have become so intentionally and thus did not qualify for the ‘full rehousing duty’. In 2018, a cross-sector Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group convened to make recommendations on how to end homelessness in Scotland, and proposed the softening of these provisions once again. As a result, from late 2019, local authorities will no longer have a duty to assess whether people become homeless intentionally, though will retain a power to do so (Scottish Government, 2019). Consequently, some filtering on the basis of ‘deservingness’ is likely to continue in the future, albeit that the numbers impacted now are very small and are set to decrease even further under reforms soon coming into force.

Second, those entitled to settled housing under Scottish homelessness legislation are, it appears, often required to be ‘housing ready’ by relevant professionals before they are able to move out of temporary or supported accommodation and into mainstream housing. This rationale for delaying access to settled housing finds its roots in a combination of homelessness legislation itself, local authority practice, and the ethos of some voluntary sector homeless accommodation providers. Under Scottish homelessness law, homeless households owed the main rehousing duty are entitled to temporary accommodation while settled accommodation is being secured. However, relevant regulations specify that local authorities are permitted to provide an applicant with non-permanent accommodation and delay their access to settled housing (usually in a hostel) where they are deemed to have support needs meaning that permanent accommodation would be inappropriateⁱ. This assessment of their ‘housing readiness’ must be reviewed every six months.

Research and investigations into homelessness and rehousing practices have consistently revealed the deployment of ideas of ‘tenancy readiness’ or ‘housing readiness’ in some

Scottish local authorities. Based on research with formerly homeless young people in ten areas, Stewart (2018) argued that ‘the rights-based legislative framework [is] instilled with a Housing Ready ethos’ (p.17), with the result that young people experience ‘conditional pathways’ out of homelessness which appear to be in tension with the narrative of a housing-led and entitlement-based approach. A recent study of temporary accommodation in Scotland identified a ubiquitous logic of ‘tenancy readiness’ in several local authorities (Watts et al. 2018). In Glasgow, this meant some households spent several years ‘in limbo’ in temporary accommodation unable to ‘make the place their own’ and facing work disincentive effects due to the very high rental costs of such accommodation (see also Scottish Housing Regulator, 2018). Dundee City Council’s response to single homelessness was found to very closely mirror the staircase logic described in the introduction, and involves a highly structured three tier system of hostels: an assessment centre, ‘direct access’ hostels, and ‘resettlement’ hostels, with the level of structured support increasing as progress is made ‘up’ this hierarchy and residents deemed increasingly capable of independent living and closer to ‘tenancy readiness’.

Whilst the above examples illustrate that an emphasis on ‘housing readiness’ and the staircase approach is certainly present in Scotland, evidence suggests that it is partial, contested and changing, both locally and nationally. In Glasgow, for instance, while a ‘tenancy readiness’ ethos has dominated the general homelessness response, the city was also the first in the UK to provide a Housing First response for single homeless people with complex needs from 2010 (Johnsen, 2013), a service that explicitly eschews ideas of ‘housing readiness’. Moreover, in some local authorities, no signs of such tenancy-readiness conditionality are currently evident (Watts et al. 2018). In Edinburgh, for example, hostel providers noted that the commissioning local authority strongly emphasise the fast flow of individuals through temporary accommodation, with little emphasis placed on their readiness for settled housing. This kind of approach was sometimes criticised by voluntary sector – and particularly faith-based – hostel providers who saw an explicit transitional role for such accommodation, which they believed functions as a place for personal reflection and transformation (albeit in contrast to much of the evidence base, see Mackie et al., 2017). This echoes wider evidence from across Europe that identified NGOs – particularly those of a traditional and/or faith orientation – as resistant to shifts towards housing-led approaches (Fitzpatrick et al. 2012).

It is also important to note that the ‘housing readiness’ approaches present in areas like Dundee and Glasgow are now subject to challenge and change, not least given their incompatibility with the ‘rapid rehousing by default’ approach proposed by the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group in 2018 (Indigo House, 2018) and now being implemented by Scottish Government (Scottish Government, 2018). All local authorities have recently been required to produce Rapid Rehousing Transition Plans covering the next five years, and those for Dundee and Glasgow convey a commitment to move away from the approaches described here (Glasgow City Integration Joint Board, 2019; Dundee City Council, 2018). This policy change is expected to lead to a reduction in the numbers of households in temporary accommodation, and their length of stay in it, as well as the mainstreaming of Housing First provision for those with complex needs (Fitzpatrick et al. 2019a).

This analysis of the Scottish case demonstrates the persistence – albeit geographically uneven and fast evolving – of forms of conditionality in Scottish homelessness law, policy and

practice. While behavioural conditionality might be seen as anathema to rights-based approaches to housing, this position rests on a failure to distinguish human or moral rights based approaches, and legal rights based approaches such as those seen in Scotland (Fitzpatrick et al. 2014; Watts & Fitzpatrick 2018). While the former sees access to certain things – in this case housing – as a universal moral entitlement (something certainly in tension with behavioural conditionality), legal rights focus instead on delineating in law the specific groups entitled to particular goods and services and rendering those entitlements enforceable via the law courts (an enforceability that human rights articulated in international instruments often lack). Such ‘black letter’ legal rights are entirely consistent with conditionality targeting welfare goods and services, such as housing, at particular groups based on need, behaviour or other characteristics, as we see in the deployment of the intentionality test in Scottish homelessness law. However, the persistence of such conditionality – while now under considerable pressure – does not eclipse the impact and achievements of this rights-based approach on homelessness, which sees tens of thousands of homeless households rehoused every year, and has been argued to empower those experiencing homelessness as well as ‘crowd out’ to a significant extent considerations (e.g. housing readiness) other than housing need in responding to homelessness (Watts 2014).

What our analysis does make clear, however, is that the shift to a ‘housing-led’ response to homelessness in Scotland has been gradual and contested, and characterised by what Anderson and Serpa (2013, p14) describe in a related context as ‘policy blurring’. The expansion of legal entitlements to rehousing for all homeless households saw a dramatic escalation in reliance on temporary accommodation (Watt et al. 2018), and in some areas a strong emphasis on delaying access to settled housing *not* (or not only) on the basis of housing demand pressures or challenges accessing mainstream housing, but on the basis that households were not ready for normal housing, not capable of managing their tenancy, or reflecting an ethos of provision that saw time in congregate hostels as positively transformative. The 2018 review of homelessness law, policy and practice in Scotland undertaken by the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group – and leading to a government commitment to ‘rapid rehousing by default’ – might be interpreted as providing the most recent ‘push’ taking Scotland further towards a housing-led response to homelessness that more fully eschews the ‘housing ready’ ethos.

Discussion and conclusion

Policy making and implementation are always messy and contingent processes, as ‘older’ policy logics are never simply replaced by newer ones but rather persist alongside them in complex and contradictory ways (Clarke et al., 2015; McCann & Ward, 2013). The foregoing discussion demonstrates some the specific complexities and contradictions of homelessness policy in an era in which housing-led approaches appear to be gaining ascendancy. Namely, we have highlighted the persistence of conditionality in the face of national efforts to establish unconditional, housing-led responses to homelessness. This persistence is present in both the Australian and Scottish case studies, despite their very different approaches to establishing a housing-led response. However, as Scotland moves to implement a ‘rapid rehousing by default’ approach, there are strong indications that the scope for conditionality in Scotland’s response to homelessness is diminishing, whereas conditionality appears much more obstinate in the Australian case. By way of conclusion, we discuss some potential

reasons for this difference, and what these tell us about how to address the persistent conditionality in Australia's response to homelessness.

First, whilst conditionality continues to be sanctioned in formal policy in both jurisdictions, Scotland has been more willing to review its policy and legislative frameworks, and is thus more cognizant of the problems and contradictions caused by ongoing conditionality in the sector. As we showed above, the review carried out by the Scottish Government-convened Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group (Indigo House, 2018) has led to further efforts to replace residual conditionality (in the form of the 'intentionality clause' and staircase-like practices of some local authorities and accommodation providers) with a truly housing-led approach. By contrast, in Australia homelessness policy has slipped further and further off the national policy agenda since the reforms of the Rudd era (Coleman & Fopp, 2014), despite homelessness increasing at a rate greater than population growth during this period (Pawson et al. 2018). Although state and territory governments have been active in developing their own strategies, these have entailed a contradictory blend of Housing First endorsements and transitional programs targeting people deemed not 'housing ready'. These uncoordinated initiatives across Australia have meant that some projects and pilots do indeed achieve unconditional housing provision as a means to end homelessness, but the successes of these ground-up programs have not been institutionalised into Australia's systems to disrupt the housing and support failures (Parkinson & Parsell, 2018).

For us, this signals the need for Australia to develop a coordinated national approach to homelessness that mandates a truly housing-led response across the states and territories. In doing this, serious consideration should be given to adopting something like Scotland's legal rights-based response to homelessness. While this approach might be argued by some to fall short of a human rights-based response to homelessness (Chomczuk, 2019), it has proved a far more effective framework for pursuing a housing-led response to homelessness than Australia's more ambiguous assemblage of policy and funding mechanisms.

Second, whilst there is an ongoing commitment to conditionality and the staircase approach amongst some service providers in both jurisdictions, this looks set to be largely overridden in Scotland by the focus on 'rapid rehousing by default' and the mainstreaming of Housing First (Fitzpatrick et al. 2019b). In Australia, by contrast, there is evidence that even service providers overtly committed to rapid rehousing and Housing First continue to rely the practices and logics of the staircase approach out of necessity (Authors 1 & 3, 2019a). We contend that, along with the different policy environments discussed above, a key reason for this difference is the relative lack of secure and affordable housing in Australia to make a genuinely rapid rehousing approach possible. Unlike Scotland, where nationally around 24% of all housing stock is social housing, in Australia only 4.2% of housing is social housing. This means that people experiencing homelessness, and the services supporting them, must often wait for extended periods to access social housing; a situation that leads to increased reliance on temporary and transitional accommodation, and the conditionality that these entail (Authors 1 & 3, 2019b). While in Scotland supply and access challenges certainly exist, especially in high pressure areas like Edinburgh, they are arguably less acute than in Australia; and this may explain the relative success of the former at tackling residual conditionality in the dispositions and practices of its frontline services providers.

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ⁱ See http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ssi/2010/2/pdfs/ssi_20100002_en.pdf