



WOMEN'S
COMMON
GROUND
SYDNEY
Feasibility Report



Acknowledgment of Country

The Women's Housing Company acknowledges the Traditional Owners of country throughout NSW and recognises their continuing connection to land, waters and culture. We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging.

Feasibility Report 2024

This report has been prepared with the Women's Housing Company as the lead driver and comprises a high-level feasibility study but should not be read or considered as a detailed business case for the proposals contained herein. The report represents a collaborative feasibility study and does not include any binding costings. In respect of any costings referred to in the report, these costings are based on inputs and analysis from our collaborators and are only preliminary and exploratory in nature. They should not be relied on in any way.

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Thank you

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We would also like to thank the following organisations who participated on the Reference Group, which assisted the feasibility project with their time and expertise:

- Mercy Foundation
- Mission Australia
- NEAMI National
- Women's and Girls' Emergency Centre
- Community Housing Industry Association NSW
- Homelessness NSW

This report was prepared by Dr Rachel Trigg of Polygon Strategy on behalf of the Women's Housing Company.



Executive Summary

An internationally recognised approach

A Common Ground is a Housing First response which provides people experiencing homelessness with immediate access to long term housing and support services. Housing First is recognised across the world as the most successful model to end chronic homelessness for people with complex needs – including women who are unable to be reached through mainstream housing and homelessness services.

Sydney lags behind

In Australia, the first Common Ground was established in Adelaide in 2006. Sydney followed soon after, with Camperdown Common Ground opening in 2011. Since then, there have been no new Common Ground projects in NSW. With only one Common Ground, Sydney has fallen behind other Australian cities in its delivery of this much needed social infrastructure.

Women are particularly poorly served

While most Common Grounds in Australia accept adult residents of all genders, in practice most residents identify as male. Operators report women with complex needs often do not feel safe in mixed gender buildings – particularly where they have experienced domestic and family violence and other forms of trauma. Many women are reported to feel safer choosing homelessness or precarious housing over a home in a mixed gender Common Ground.

Moving from model to reality

The Women's Housing Company understands the game-changing potential of a Common Ground to support women who have experienced chronic homelessness, domestic and family violence and other forms of trauma. We will lead the following next steps, working with a wide array of partners:

- Build a coalition of partners committed to ending homelessness for women with complex needs in Sydney
- Identify a preferred service model and site
- Develop a responsive design informed by best practice and lived experience.



Two models for women

Evaluations show Common Grounds are a cost effective way to reduce chronic homelessness and improve tenant health and wellbeing. There are two potential models for a women’s Common Ground in Sydney, which are well supported by literature and experience. These are summarised below and detailed in Section 3.

	Single women with complex needs	Women and their children
Potential location	Inner city Sydney or Parramatta, close to health care hubs, public transport, shops and services.	Town centre in an affordable location, close to public transport, shops and services.
No. homes	Up to 80	Up to 100
Size of homes	Larger studios and one bedroom apartments	Two to four bedroom apartments
Support focus	Trauma informed support for women with complex needs, which may include mental illness, substance abuse and experience of domestic and family violence.	Trauma informed support for women and their children who have experienced domestic and family violence and have complex and ongoing support needs.
Capital cost	Estimated at \$50.9m total (or \$636,250 per unit). Based on an 80 unit development on the Sydney CBD fringe.	Estimated at \$49.8m total (\$622,500 per unit). Based on an 80 unit development in Liverpool.
Operating cost	Estimated at \$870,000 per year total (or \$10,875 per tenancy), including on-site caseworkers and 24/7 staffing of the concierge by social services staff.	

Part 01:

Introduction

“Many refuges are either unable to provide support to women experiencing multiple disadvantage or have limited capacity to do so. This leaves women experiencing multiple disadvantages who are homeless with very few women-specific safe options.”

(Steel 2020: 4)



Introduction

Why us?

The Women's Housing Company empowers women to improve their lives through the provision of housing that is affordable.

We are the largest specialist community housing provider in Australia, providing homes for almost 1,700 women and children across Greater Sydney, the Hunter and Coffs Harbour. A passionate champion for women left out of the housing market, our organisation provides quality, safe and stable housing and homelessness services for women.

We make a difference to the lives of vulnerable women by:

- Housing women who cannot afford market housing
- Preventing and responding to women's homelessness
- Connecting women to support and communities
- Creating pathways to employment and opportunity
- Providing a safe haven for women at risk of violence
- Advocating for and with women.

Why a Women's Common Ground Sydney?

There is a small but critical proportion of women experiencing homelessness who are unable to be reached through mainstream housing and homelessness services. These women experience a range of complex and co-occurring vulnerabilities, which may include experience of one or more of:

- Domestic and family violence
- Mental ill health and/or brain injury
- Problematic drug or alcohol use
- Contact with the criminal justice system.

In recent years, increasing housing costs, a lack of social and affordable housing, and the stretching of mental health services have further increased the challenges experienced by this group of women across Australia. These challenges are particularly acute in Sydney, which has long experienced the least affordable housing market in the nation.

This project investigates the establishment of a Common Ground in Sydney to support women with complex needs experiencing homelessness.

What is a Common Ground?

A Common Ground is a well proven model which provides people experiencing homelessness with immediate access to long term housing and support services.

The Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute's (AHURI's) Common Ground Housing Model Practice Manual defines a Common Ground as:

A supportive housing model that accommodates people experiencing chronic homelessness with complex needs in a congregate setting
(Alves et al 2021: iii)

A Common Ground is a Housing First response. Housing First approaches are based on the principle that people have a right to a home – without preconditions. Housing First is now recognised in Australia and across the world as the most successful model to end homelessness for people with complex needs who have experienced long term or recurring homelessness.

The use of a congregate setting, provision of on-site support services and presence of a concierge are core components of a Common Ground. These factors distinguish the approach from other Housing First models in which homes are geographically dispersed and support is provided through outreach services.



Introduction

Common Ground: a globally successful model

The model originated in New York in 1991 when an organisation called 'Common Ground' opened 652 permanent supportive homes in a former hotel in Times Square. This building continues to provide affordable housing and onsite support for low-income and formerly homeless adults, people with serious mental illness and people living with HIV/AIDS.

Today the organisation, now known as 'Breaking Ground', provides permanent and transitional homes in 30 buildings across New York. Breaking Ground calculated the 2011 cost of providing permanent supportive housing as US\$24,190 per person per year, compared to the US\$56,350 cost of service provision for a person experiencing homelessness and mental illness.

Internationally, the Common Ground model is also referred to as permanent supportive housing (PSH). In addition to the US, this approach is successfully used in Canada, the UK and many parts of Europe. A recent UK study found the average cost for a PSH place is £21,000 per year – £9,500 for housing and £11,500 for support. In comparison, the average cost to government of a single person experiencing homelessness was estimated to be £34,500 per year (Blood et al 2023).

What was the scope of this project?

The project aims to develop an initial feasibility study for a Women's Common Ground Sydney, including:

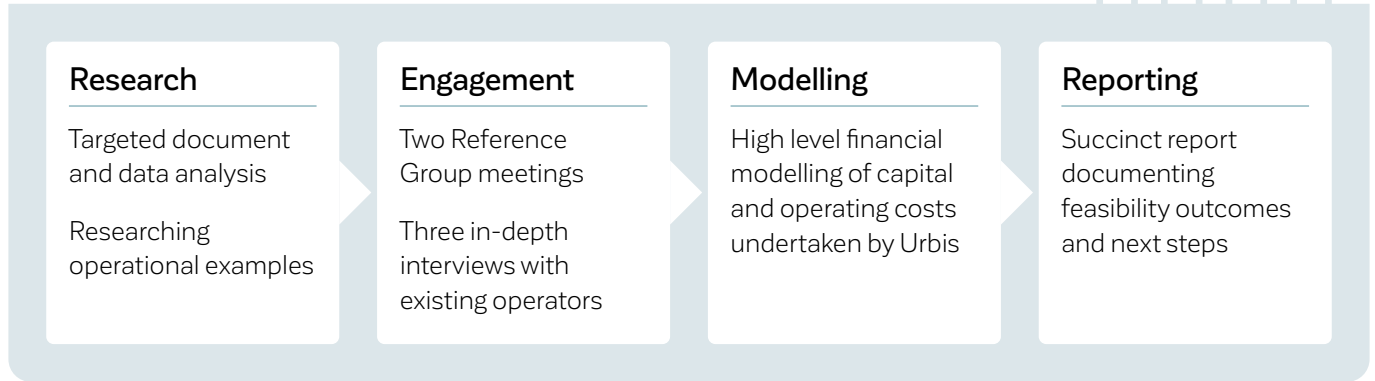
- Appropriate resident cohorts and mix
- Key design parameters, such as location, size and configuration
- Wrap around services needed to support residents
- Success factors from other Common Ground housing models
- Likely capital and operational funding needed.





What was the methodology?

The methodology for this initial feasibility study is shown below.



In addition to representatives from the Women's Housing Company, Reference Group meetings were attended by Dr Rachel Trigg, Polygon Strategy, and representatives from:

- Mercy Foundation
- Mission Australia
- NEAMI National
- Women's and Girls' Emergency Centre
- Community Housing Industry Association NSW
- Homelessness NSW.

Interviews were held with key staff from existing operators of Common Grounds:

- Canberra Housing Company
- Launch Housing
- Mission Australia.

The outcomes of these interviews informed the case studies and key lessons in Part 02 of this report.



Women experience homelessness across Sydney, most frequently in overcrowded homes

According to the 2021 Census, the number of women experiencing homelessness in NSW increased by about 10% between 2016 and 2021.

There were almost 15,000 women in NSW experiencing homelessness, two thirds of whom lived in Sydney.

Given the Census was undertaken during Covid-19, these numbers are likely to be an under representation of the extent of women's homelessness in NSW.

Number of women in Greater Sydney experiencing homelessness in 2021



9,807
women

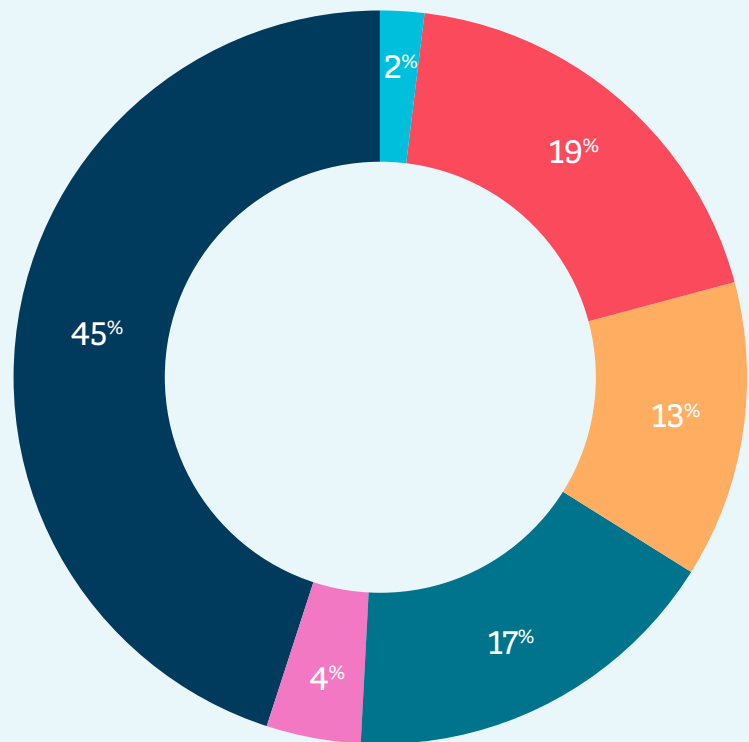
Source: Homelessness NSW, using ABS data

Local government areas in NSW with the largest numbers of women experiencing homelessness in 2021

1. Sydney	1,236
2. Canterbury-Bankstown	1,036
3. Inner West	885
4. Cumberland	836
5. Blacktown	776
6. Fairfield	774
7. Liverpool	508
8. Campbelltown	417
9. Central Coast	387
10. Newcastle	383

Source: Homelessness NSW, using ABS data

Proportion of women in NSW experiencing types of homelessness



- Women living in improvised dwellings, tents or sleeping outside
- Women in supported accommodation for the homeless
- Women staying temporarily with other households
- Women living in boarding houses
- Women in other temporary lodgings
- Women living in 'severely crowded' dwellings

There are many drivers of women's homelessness – including domestic violence and a lack of social housing

Of the 40,405 women who accessed Specialist Homelessness Services in NSW in 2023-24:

43% cited domestic and family violence as the main reason for seeking help

21% had mental health issues


7% had problematic drug or alcohol issues

1% were exiting custodial arrangements

These women have complex needs and face particular challenges in accessing, affording and sustaining housing in the private market. They are also frequent users of a wide range of health and other support services.

Source: AIHW 2023-24 SHS Collection 2023-24

Most crime types are stable or decreasing in NSW. However, reported rates of domestic violence related assault increased steadily in 2018-2022. There are also likely to be many instances of domestic and family violence which remain unreported.

 **3% Per year**

Women and their children in NSW who experienced persistent homelessness due to domestic and family violence in 2021-22.



4,171
women and children

Source: BOCSAR and AIHW

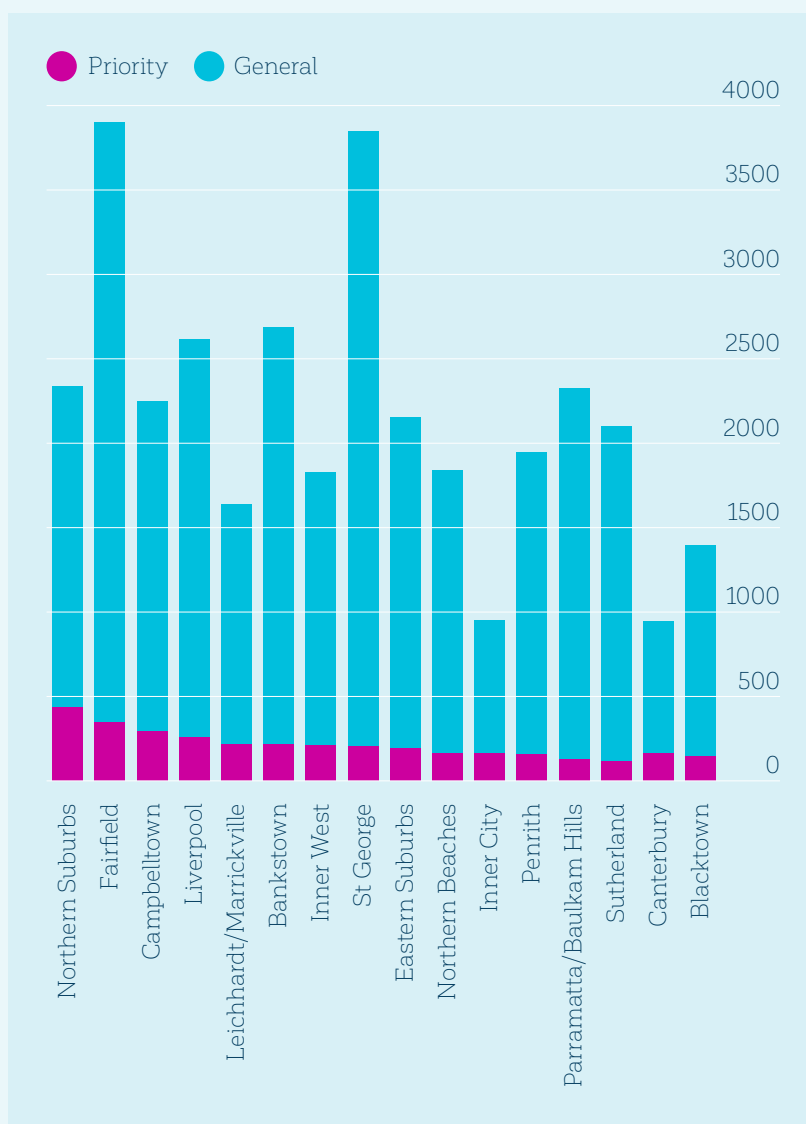
Applicants on waiting list for social housing in NSW. Priority applicants have complex and urgent needs and are not able to rent privately.



52,388 general

10,872 priority

Allocation areas in Sydney with the highest waiting lists, ordered by the number of people on the priority list.



Source: DCJ as at June 2024

Part 02:

Common Ground precedents

“The target cohort of Common Ground projects are people with experience of chronic homelessness and with complex needs, including people with mental ill-health, experience of complex trauma, alcohol and drug misuse, chronic disease, and brain injury. Common Ground projects often also accommodate low-income households. The congregate setting of the building is designed to provide core support services on-site, create socially mixed communities, and strengthen neighbourhoods.”

(Alves et al 2021 : 4)

Common Ground approaches in Australia

This section describes existing Common Ground approaches in Australia. It focuses on case studies of four projects which are particularly relevant to the development of a Common Ground model for women in Sydney.

The section concludes with a summary of lessons from the case studies and associated literature review.

The case studies are of Common Grounds in Sydney, Melbourne, Canberra and Brisbane.

The first Common Ground in Sydney opened in 2011, only five years after the model was first established in Adelaide.

More recently, Sydney has lagged behind other Australian capitals in its delivery of Common Ground projects, particularly given that it is the largest city in the nation.

First project located in Adelaide



Opened **2006**

Size of projects



40-146 homes

Number of Common Grounds in state and territory capitals in 2023



Sydney's first – and only – Common Ground

Common Ground Camperdown

Operator	Mission Australia Housing
Support provider	Mission Australia Community Services
Location	Inner Sydney
Size	104 homes on site of approximately 1,960sqm
Cohort	Largely single people with complex needs
Tenure	Social and affordable housing
Development cost	\$32 million
Opened	2011



Location and design

The building is six stories, with 88 of the homes being studios. There are also 12 one-bedroom apartments and four two-bedroom apartments.

Delivery

The project was jointly funded by the Australian and NSW Governments. Development was project managed by a NSW Government agency. Grocon constructed the project at cost.

The property and tenancies were initially managed under lease to the NSW Government. In 2014, title to the property was transferred to Mission Australia Housing.

Operations

The support provider has nomination rights to 52 of the homes, which are allocated as social housing for people with lived experience of homelessness. Ten additional homes are allocated to social housing tenants from the waiting list. The remaining 42 homes are allocated as affordable housing.

Concierge services are provided 24/7, with the desk staffed by a support worker during weekdays. During weeknights and weekends, concierge is staffed by a security officer under contract to the operator.

Other uses

There are two clinician rooms plus private meeting rooms located on the ground for services to use. The building also includes ground floor space for a low cost food provider, operated by a local community organisation.

Evaluation findings

A detailed evaluation of Common Ground Camperdown found the project has been **'successful in providing secure, permanent housing and support to vulnerable people who had been homeless for many years'** (Bullen et al 2016: 3). The evaluation found that on-site services were helping tenants make positive changes to their lives and tenants had experienced improvements to their quality of life. It also identified early challenges the project was overcoming, such as high arrears and coordination between housing and support services.

Australia's first Common Ground for women

Viv's Place

Operator	Launch Housing
Support provider	Uniting Vic.Tas
Location	Outer Melbourne
Size	60 homes
Cohort	Women and their children
Tenure	Social housing
Development cost	\$31 million
Opened	2022



Location and design

Located in Dandenong in outer Melbourne, with the site purchased from the private market. Provides the following mix of homes, with some dual key apartments: 18 x studios, 16 x two bedroom, 12 x three bedroom and four x four bedroom. An additional 10 units are for children aged up to 18 years.

Viv's Place also includes a communal kitchen, living spaces, play spaces and gardens.

Delivery

The Victorian Government provided 40% of development costs, with the remainder funded from 11 named foundations and other philanthropic organisations, as well as many other donors who preferred to remain anonymous.

Launch Housing also contributed \$2.5 million in equity to the project.

Operations

Residents are supported by culturally appropriate support services including education, employment, health and wellbeing, parenting, counselling, and trauma care.

Given the importance of safety for women and their children escaping domestic and family violence, the building has a 24-hour concierge staffed by Launch Housing and controlled access.

Other uses

In addition to homes, the project includes service provider offices and family and children's services.

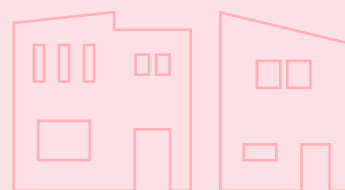
“Women and children who have experienced family violence may find the Common Ground approach particularly suitable to meet their safety needs with concierge supervision at the entrance.”

(Alves et al 2021: 28)

Large Common Ground in an inner city location

Common Ground Brisbane

Operator	Common Ground Queensland (CGQ)
Support provider	Micah Projects
Location	Inner Brisbane
Size	146 homes
Cohort	Primarily single people
Tenure	Social and affordable housing
Development cost	\$47 million, including land cost of \$9.5 million
Opened	2012



Location and design

The 14 storey building includes 135 studios and 11 one bedroom units. It also contains a tenant computer room, art studio, communal lounge and billiards room.

Delivery

The funding for land and construction was primarily provided by the Australian Government under the Nation Building Economic Stimulus Plan. Development was project managed by a Queensland Government agency, which also provided some co-funding. Grocon constructed the project at cost.

Operations

The property and tenancies are managed by CGQ under contract to the Queensland Government, with Micah Projects providing support services.

Concierge services are provided 24/7, with the desk staffed by a support worker and a security officer.

Other uses

The building includes offices for the operator and support provider. There are also two function rooms for public hire.

Commercial or retail space was provided for lease on the ground floor, but space remained vacant for some time due to lack of parking and low levels of foot traffic. As at mid 2023, the ground floor space was occupied by the Inclusive Health and Wellness Hub, operating as a social enterprise by Micah Projects and The Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation. The hub provides health and wellness services for people experiencing disadvantage, including GP and mental health services.

Evaluation findings

A detailed evaluation of this project (Parsell et al 2015) found the Common Ground model can successfully assist people who have experienced chronic homelessness to make an immediate exit into secure housing. Provision of a safe environment was found to be critical to the success of the approach.

The Brisbane project was found to result in a **cost offset of \$13,100 per person per year** for its core cohort: people who had experienced chronic homelessness and a high use of health, criminal justice and homelessness services.

Mixed cohort Common Ground in inner Canberra

Common Ground Dickson

Operator	Community Housing Canberra (CHC)
Support provider	YWCA Canberra
Location	Inner Canberra
Size	40 on site of approximately 5,800sqm
Cohort	Women and families
Tenure	20 social and 20 affordable homes
Development cost	\$23-25 million
Opened	2022



Location and design

The six storey building is located close to shops and community services. It consists of one, two and three bedroom apartments, as well as spaces for meetings, break out and play.

Delivery

The project was developed by the ACT Government, following opening of Canberra's first Common Ground in outer metropolitan Gungahlin in 2015. The development was approved by the ACT Minister for Planning after opposition from some local residents. The Board of Common Ground Canberra, an independent not-for-profit, advocated for the Dickson project. The Board also helped secure donations of goods from the private sector. For example, IKEA Australia donated furniture for homes and common areas.

Operations

The project is managed by CHC under contract to the ACT Government, with YWCA subcontracted to CHC to provide support services. Social housing tenants include older women, single mothers and families with children, with a focus on women escaping domestic and family violence. Affordable housing is allocated to tenants from diverse demographic backgrounds who meet income criteria.

During weekdays, the concierge is staffed by CHC and YMCA. After hours and on weekends, it is staffed by security officers under contract to CHC.

Other uses

The project includes a social enterprise café, operated separately, and an event space intended to be hired out as an additional income source.

“Balancing support needs in the building, and creating a cohesive social milieu are two factors to consider when determining the tenant mix”.

Alves et al (2021: 22)

Key lessons

The case studies and associated literature demonstrate that Common Grounds are successful in providing long term supported housing for people with complex needs. Evaluations have shown the model is a cost effective approach to reducing chronic homelessness and improving tenant health, wellbeing and quality of life.

With only one Common Ground, Sydney has fallen behind other Australian cities in its delivery of this much needed social infrastructure.

Gender

While most Common Grounds in Australia accept adult residents of all genders, in practice most residents identify as male. Operators report women with complex needs often do not feel safe in mixed gender buildings. This reflects the high co-occurrence of women who have experienced homelessness, domestic and family violence and other forms of trauma.

Many women with complex needs are reported to feel safer choosing homelessness or precarious housing over a home in a mixed gender Common Ground.

Location

Most Common Grounds in Australia are located in inner city locations, enabling proximity to shops, services and public transport.

More recent projects are in a wider array of areas, including the Viv's Place project in Dandenong and a Common Ground in Port Augusta. A project is also being planned in Mandurah and an organisation has been formed to advocate for a Common Ground on the Gold Coast.

It is clear that a Common Ground needs to be centrally located near transport, services and community support networks. The location needs to be determined based on need, opportunity, cost and support from all levels of government.

Design

There is detailed guidance on project design in AHURI's Common Ground Housing Model Practice Manual. Key design considerations for women include:

- Safety and security, such as access and circulation arrangements, CCTV and remote access
- Common areas, such as communal kitchens, living spaces and gardens
- Privacy and confidentiality, such as sound proofing, inclusion of private meeting rooms and sight lines to balconies
- Sense of homeliness, particularly in common areas, created through choice of colours, fittings and furnishings
- Maintenance, typically durable construction materials and landscaping
- Accessibility, to support aging in place and women living with disability.

It is important the operator is part of the design process, rather than being appointed after design and/or construction are complete. This enables the design to support a detailed service model. It is also preferable for the design to be informed by the lived experiences of people from a similar cohort.





Size

Financially, the optimal size of a Common Ground is reported to be 80-100 units. Smaller models can be operationally successful and their viability depends on the tenant mix and the level of support needs but are likely to have higher operational costs per tenancy. Buildings with 40 tenants are reported as requiring the same staffing as those with 80 or more. However, projects of over 100 homes are reported as more challenging to manage, particularly where many tenants have complex support needs.

Tenure mix

In most Common Grounds in Australia, affordable housing is co-located with social housing in a roughly 50:50 split.

This arrangement enables affordable housing to assist in cross-subsidising the costs of the concierge and/or support services. It can also enable flexibility where a tenant exceeds social housing income eligibility levels, as well as promoting social mix.

Operation

Close collaboration between housing and support staff, with clear roles and funding arrangements, is critical. Success factors include co-location of office space for housing and support staff and use of shared procedures for the operation of the building. Frequent and structured meetings attended by housing and support staff are also considered critical.

All operators considered in this project have a strong focus on allocations, including assessment of tenant needs, support resources, risk management and creation of cohesive communities.

In some locations, allocation of affordable housing within Common Ground buildings is challenging, due to a narrow window of income eligibility and/or location of the building away from service centres.



Key lessons (continued)

Concierge

The role of the concierge in Common Ground models varies depending on resident needs and funding arrangements. In all models, the concierge acts as a welcoming presence, creates a sense of safety and helps de-escalate challenges. Concierge staff also assist to identify when tenants may benefit from the offer of additional support.

The classic common ground model includes 24/7 staffing of the concierge by trained and experienced support staff. This continues to be the preferred model for most Common Ground operators. In practice, there are a range of staffing models, particularly due to difficulties in securing ongoing funding for 24/7 staffing by the support service provider.

All case studies use contracted security providers as part of the concierge. In some cases, security officers are located at the concierge 24/7, along with support staff during weekdays. In others, security officers staff the concierge on the weekends and at night during the week.

It is seen as important that security staff are contracted by the housing operator, and preferably have the same officers regularly located within the building. This helps build positive relationships between security staff and tenants.

Support services

Common Grounds operate within a Housing First, supportive housing model. It recognises that for a cohort of homeless people, they require on-site support that is flexible in duration and intensity depending on changing needs.

The inclusion of on-site supports is a core component of the Common Ground model. In all buildings with mixed tenure, support services are available to all residents. In some cases, affordable housing tenants are reported to access supports almost as frequently as social housing tenants

In some Common Ground buildings, hot desk office space is available for drop-in service providers and/or other staff employed by the housing or support provider.



“Security can mean support and support can mean security. That walking in every day past the concierge desk, being greeted, knowing that there are people around who could take control of situations if they need to be managed, then that’s support.”

(Housing Manager cited in Parsell 2015: 63)

Other uses

Several case study projects include uses other than housing and offices for the operator and support provider. There are potential benefits to including additional uses within a Common Ground project, including:

- Providing an additional income source
- Enabling relevant services to be easily accessible to residents
- Activating the street frontage.

It is important that additional uses are compatible with the primary objective of providing secure homes for people with complex needs who have experienced homelessness. There should also be careful consideration of the viability of additional uses, as it can be difficult and costly to reconfigure the building if additional spaces are unable to be leased.

Funding

All projects considered in the case studies were developed with funding from State, Territory and/or Australia Governments.

The proportion of development costs funded by government ranged from 40% to 100%. Sources of the remaining delivery costs included contributions by philanthropic organisations and the operator and at-cost construction by the private sector.



Part 03:

Progressing the Women's Common Ground Sydney

“Housing First prioritises choice and control – women who have been routinely disempowered and abused by partners, services and the wider system are given the autonomy and agency to make decisions for themselves. Housing First support is intensive, flexible and open ended; it gives women the necessary time and space to consider their options, with the support of strong and trusting relationships with specialist workers who coordinate a multi-agency response around each woman.”

(Steel 2020: 3)

Progressing the model

This section sets out a proposed approach to a Common Ground for women in Sydney. It includes principles to guide the delivery and operation of the Common Ground, based on relevant principles from the literature discussed in Part 01

It also describes two potential models for a Common Ground for women, based on the key learnings from the literature review and interviews:

Model 01: For single women with complex needs

Model 02: For women and their children.

The section concludes by setting out the next steps to progress the realisation of a Common Ground for women in Sydney, driven by the Women's Housing Company in partnership with a wide range of public, private, not-for-profit and philanthropic organisations.

“Many victims of DV recover relatively quickly from the experience, particularly if the abuse is shorter in duration and less severe, and they have access to resources and support... Others, particularly those who experience more frequent or severe abuse, may develop symptoms that make daily functioning more difficult, including depression, substance abuse, anxiety, and PTSD.”

(Sullivan and Olsen 2016: 185)



Principles for a Women's Common Ground Sydney

1	A place that feels like home <p>The Women's Common Ground will provide quality, long term homes. While support services will be located on site, the building will be neither an institution nor a social service centre. This will be reflected in its welcoming design, with comfortable private homes and inviting public spaces. It will also be reflected in the engaging approach to staffing and management of the building.</p>
2	A safe and secure environment <p>Safety and security will be critical elements in the design and operation of the Women's Common Ground. Safety will be enabled in multiple ways, such as building design, concierge staffing and electronic measures such as CCTV and electronic entry.</p>
3	A close collaboration between housing and support services <p>The separation of housing management and support services will enable tenant self determination and engagement without coercion. While functionally separate, there will be close collaboration between housing and support services to enable residents to build their recovery, maintain their tenancy and create community connections. Support will be available to all tenants regardless of tenure type.</p>
4	An approach grounded in lived experience and response to Country and Culture <p>The design and operation of the Women's Common Ground will be grounded in engagement with women who have experienced homelessness and precarious housing. It will incorporate connections to Country and Culture and to family and community and respond to the needs and experiences of women from diverse cultural backgrounds and gender identities.</p>
5	A place embedded within the community <p>The Women's Common Ground will be a good neighbour and foster social inclusion within the area in which it is located. This may include locating spaces available to the community on site, such as a café, social enterprise or event space for hire. On-site services will work closely with other local support providers, including providing hot desks and meeting spaces for drop-in and outreach supports.</p>
6	A place delivered through meaningful partnerships <p>Realisation of the Women's Common Ground will require funding and support from all three levels of government, the private sector and a wide range of not-for-profit and philanthropic organisations. It will bring together land, capital funding and pro bono supports and aggregate operational funding sources such as rent, Commonwealth Rental Assistance and homelessness funding. Most importantly, it will require a meaningful partnership between organisations with the vision and commitment to work together to end homelessness for women with complex needs in Sydney.</p>

Model 01: for single women with complex needs

Potential location	<p>Inner city Sydney or other central hub, close to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Major physical and psychological health care hubs, such as RPAH or Westmead Hospital • Public transport, preferably within 800m of a train station to enable independence • Shops and services, including affordable food and bulk billing GPs
No. of homes	Up to 80 in Common Ground. May also be co-located with other homelessness services and/or permanent social housing.
Size of homes	Larger studios and one bedroom apartments, 35-50sqm in size
Tenure	Social and affordable housing
Support focus	Trauma informed support for women with multiple and complex needs, which may include co-occurring mental illness, substance abuse and experience of domestic and family violence. May also include support for women exiting custodial arrangements.
Concierge	Ideally 24/7 concierge staffed by experienced support workers, potentially partnered with security officers at night.
Key supports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental and physical health services • Drug and alcohol services • Specialist domestic and family violence services • Sexual health services
Other uses	May be compatible with other uses on-site, particularly on the ground floor
Estimated capital cost	<p>Based on an 80 unit development on the fringe of the Sydney CBD which is 50% studios and 50% one bedroom units, the estimated total capital cost for this model is \$50.9m (or \$636,250 per unit). This includes site acquisition costs of \$24.5m, construction costs of \$23.8m and development costs of \$2.6m. These figures include appropriate contingencies and car parking allocations.</p> <p>The costing also factors in savings of \$2.9m due to the Women's Housing Company being a not-for-profit which is not subject to stamp duty and the City of Sydney not charging development contributions for social housing.</p>
Estimated operating cost	Based on an 80 unit building, the estimated total operating cost is \$870,000 per year (or \$10,875 per tenancy). This includes all staffing, maintenance and utilities costs. Staffing includes on-site caseworkers and 24/7 staffing of the concierge by social services staff.

Model 02: for women and their children

Potential location	<p>In a town centre which experiences high levels of domestic violence and homelessness, in a more affordable location and close to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public transport, within walking distance of a train station or frequently serviced bus stop • Shops and services, including affordable food, bulk billing GPs, public schools and affordable child care. <p>Potential locations in Sydney include Bankstown, Blacktown and Liverpool, which experience a combination of high levels of women experiencing homelessness, higher levels of domestic assault and/or a larger number of applications on social housing wait lists.</p>
No. of homes	Up to 100
Size of homes	Varying – two to four bedroom
Tenure	Social and affordable housing
Support focus	<p>Trauma informed support for women and children who have experienced domestic and family violence and have complex and ongoing support needs.</p> <p>Will require cultural competencies and experience working with women from diverse cultural backgrounds.</p>
Concierge	Concierge staffed by support workers during the weekday and by security officers on weeknights and weekends for at least the first 6-12 months. May be able to reduce security officer presence after first year of operations.
Key supports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specialist domestic and family violence services • Financial counselling • Mental and physical health services • Legal services
Other uses	Less likely to be compatible with other uses on-site, due to actual and perceived safety concerns
Estimated capital cost	<p>Based on an 80 unit development in Liverpool with 60% two bedroom units, 25% three bedroom units and 15% four bedroom units, the estimated total capital cost for this model is \$49.8m (or \$622,500 per unit). This includes site acquisition costs of \$6.9m, construction costs of \$38.4m and development costs of \$4.5m. These figures include appropriate contingencies and car parking allocations, as well as development contributions.</p> <p>The costing factors in savings of \$0.4m due to the Women’s Housing Company being a not-for-profit which is not subject to stamp duty.</p>
Estimated operating cost	Based on an 80 unit building, the estimated total operating cost is \$870,000 per year (or \$10,875 per tenancy). This includes all staffing, maintenance and utilities costs. Staffing includes on-site caseworkers and 24/7 staffing of the concierge by social services staff.

Next steps

The Women's Housing Company understands the game-changing potential of a Common Ground to support women who have experienced chronic homelessness, domestic and family violence and other forms of trauma – and who are being failed by the current system. We will lead the following next steps, working with wide array of partners.

1. Build a coalition of partners committed to ending homelessness for women with complex needs in Sydney

As shown in the case studies, a Common Ground is a collaborative service model, which requires dedicated partnerships to fund, deliver and operate.

Women's Housing Company has received strong interest from a wide range of potential government, philanthropic and private sector partners which share its commitment to preventing and responding to women's homelessness.

Now is the time to strengthen and formalise these partnerships to create a coalition willing and able to deliver a Common Ground for women with complex needs in Sydney.

2. Identify a preferred service model and site

While they share many core features, the two potential models for the Women's Common Ground are best suited to different locations. The choice of service model will impact the preferred location – and vice versa.

The site location will also have implications for the capital cost of the project, while the selected service model will influence the operational costs, particularly for the concierge and on-site support services.

The Women's Housing Company will work with government and other partners to identify a cost-effective service model and appropriate site for the Women's Common Ground Sydney.

It will also progress the development of a business case with more detailed capital and operational costings.

3. Develop a responsive design informed by best practice and lived experience

The design of a Common Ground is critical to its success and needs to be carefully considered in alignment with the proposed service model. Direction on the design of Common Grounds in Australia, including principles and a checklist, is provided in AHURI's Common Ground Housing Model Practice Manual.

Homes Victoria (2022) has also developed a supported housing model for adults with mental illness informed by lived experience. The report provides guidance relevant for the design of the Women's Common Ground Sydney, as well as a contemporary co-design model for long term housing and support services.

The Women's Housing Company will work with women who have experienced homelessness, domestic and family violence, mental ill health and other complex challenges to develop, test and refine the design of the Women's Common Ground Sydney.

This will include working with Aboriginal women and women from diverse cultural backgrounds to understand their particular experiences and needs.



“Research has shown that as well as domestic abuse, homeless women affected by multiple disadvantage experience a continuum of gendered violence and abuse. Women are more likely than men to experience abuse from childhood and then repeatedly throughout their life. Trauma therefore accumulates as risk increases. Research has shown that women typically access services at a later stage than men and, by the time they do, their needs are high and they are often struggling with complex trauma. Indeed, some studies have suggested that women experiencing long term and recurrent homelessness may have higher needs than men.”

(Steel 2020: 3)



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