



# Who gets a home? Unpacking housing inequality within young people

Lilly Anderson  
Vincent Wong  
Reuben Silveira  
Benjamin Greiving  
Austin Haywood  
Shelina Fernando

# Acknowledgements

What YouthThink is an independent, student operated youth think tank focused on Australian public policy. We aim to empower young Australians in public policy and provide a platform where youth issues are centralised, well-researched, and communicated policy makers.

We acknowledge and celebrate the First Nations people on whose traditional lands we meet and work, and whose cultures and knowledge are among the oldest in human history.

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## Executive summary

Young people are feeling the weight of the housing crisis, but some shoulder the burden more than others.

Soaring house prices along with rising rents in the past two decades have pushed youth out of the housing market, while magnifying the cost of living pressures that they face. As housing for young people gets increasingly out of their control, background and structural factors are becoming a greater determinant of access to and quality of housing. This has led to significant housing inequality within young people.

Young people who can access finance or co-reside with family - benefits often unavailable to those from lower income or rural backgrounds - have a head start over those who cannot. This is worsened by a taxation system that allows high wealth households to continue building wealth, perpetuating inequality across generations.

Planning and zoning laws that restrict density within the inner city disadvantage young Australians from less wealthy backgrounds who must choose between a long daily commute or an expensive rental close to where they study or work, some of which are not even in an acceptable condition due to Australia's relatively loose rental regulations.

Women are affected by these issues to an even greater extent. Structurally lower pay makes it difficult for women to save for housing and housing policies have unintended gendered consequences, with stamp duty essentially acting as a 'de facto' tax on divorce as an example.

Young migrants face a separate set of issues. Their immigrant status and limited access to housing support make it difficult to find sustainable housing. The short-term nature of student accommodation further invokes a sense of instability within international students who do not have local families to fall back on.

A common theme is that the gradual policy shift away from social housing towards home ownership has made the housing situation worse for those most disadvantaged. More social housing would mean that vulnerable individuals, like victim-survivors of domestic violence, will be better able to access safe and secure housing. A move away from ownership-oriented policies like first home-buyer grants will reduce price pressures on housing, preventing wealthy households from further appreciating that wealth to pass onto their children.

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# 1: Young people's access to housing is increasingly determined by their background

Australia has some of the least affordable housing in the world.

Between 2001 to 2021, the price for the median Australian home jumped from \$203 567 to \$795 208.<sup>1</sup> This means that five of Australia's capital cities now rank in the bottom 25% for housing affordability amongst the world's major cities<sup>2</sup> while wage growth remains stagnant. As a result, the average home now costs more than 16 times the average household's disposable income as seen in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Ratio of average residential dwelling price to annual household disposable income per capita**



Data accessed from Australian Institute, "Housing Affordability is so Bad That 2020 (!) Now Looks Good", 2024.

Homeowners and investors benefit from rising asset prices, but young people are increasingly struggling to pay rent or purchase their first home.

<sup>1</sup> DPN, "Australian House Price Growth Over 30 Years," DPN, accessed February 28, 2025, <https://www.dpn.com.au/articles/house-price-growth-australia-over-30-years>

<sup>2</sup> Wendell Cox, 2024 Demographia International Housing Affordability (Winnipeg: Frontier Centre for Public Policy, 2024), accessed February 28, 2025, <https://fcpp.org/wp-content/uploads/2024-Demographia-International-Housing-Affordability.pdf>.

Australians aged 25-34 today are 25% less likely to own a home than their counterparts from the 1980s.<sup>3</sup> Further, rent growth has far outpaced wage growth post COVID-19, requiring renters - especially younger people on lower incomes - to spend an increasing proportion of their income on rent, exposing them to rental stress and cost-of-living pressures.<sup>4</sup>

### **1.1 Changes in Australia's cultural environment, combined with homeowner-oriented policies have magnified the equity impacts of the housing crisis.**

Housing services were historically more socialised, with an average 16% of housing completions being for social housing between 1945 and 1970.<sup>5</sup> Coupled with a more progressive taxation system, this effectively facilitated a wealth transfer from the relatively wealthy to the relatively poor via housing.<sup>6</sup>

Today, housing policies like First Home Buyers Grants prioritise home buying, with social housing representing only 3% of housing construction since the 1990s.<sup>7</sup> Homeowner centric policy effectively increases the responsibility of the individual in acquiring housing, by reducing the ability to fall back on government provided housing.

Consequently, more first home buyers are turning to familial wealth to purchase housing, a source of finance not available for all Australians. This results in significant housing inequality among young people.

#### **Box 1 - Individualism vs collectivism**

Individualism emphasises that individuals are responsible for their own success and individualistic policy generally



<sup>3</sup> John Daley, Brendan Coates, and Trent Wiltshire, *Housing Affordability: Re-Imagining the Australian Dream* (Melbourne: Grattan Institute, 2018), accessed February 28, 2025, <https://grattan.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/901-Housing-affordability.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> Nalini Agarwal, Robert Gao, and Megan Garner, "Renters, Rent Inflation and Renter Stress," *RBA Bulletin*, March 2023, accessed January 28, 2025, <https://www.rba.gov.au/publications/bulletin/2023/mar/pdf/renters-rent-inflation-and-renter-stress.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> Hal Pawson, Vivienne Milligan, and Judy Yates, "Housing Policy in Australia: A Case for System Reform," December 2019, accessed January 28, 2025, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/338322291\\_Housing\\_Policy\\_in\\_Australia\\_A\\_Case\\_for\\_System\\_Reform](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/338322291_Housing_Policy_in_Australia_A_Case_for_System_Reform).

<sup>6</sup> Parliamentary Budget Office, "The Roles Played by Different Taxes and How They Have Changed Over Time," PBO, accessed January 28, 2025, [https://www.pbo.gov.au/about-budgets/budget-insights/budget-explainers/tax-mix/brief-history/1950-to-1980?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://www.pbo.gov.au/about-budgets/budget-insights/budget-explainers/tax-mix/brief-history/1950-to-1980?utm_source=chatgpt.com).

<sup>7</sup> Hal Pawson, Vivienne Milligan, and Judy Yates, "Housing Policy in Australia: A Case for System Reform" (December 2019), ResearchGate, accessed January 28, 2025, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/338322291\\_Housing\\_Policy\\_in\\_Australia\\_A\\_Case\\_for\\_System\\_Reform](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/338322291_Housing_Policy_in_Australia_A_Case_for_System_Reform).

prioritises market-based solutions. Collectivism prioritises community and societal needs over individual interests with policy solutions generally based on shared-responsibility.

First home-buyer grants that subsidise households to enter the housing market would be considered individualistic, while providing social housing for those who can't afford a home would be considered collectivist.

## **1.2 Young Australians from different backgrounds face drastically different housing experiences**

Media on housing inequality tends to focus on how soaring housing prices have created a generational divide in home ownership, as home ownership becomes more concentrated among older generations.

Discussions however, often ignore *intra-generational housing inequality* within young people - how access to housing varies among young people specifically. For example, young Australians who receive monetary transfers of over \$10,000 from their parents are almost twice as likely to purchase a home in the following year than those who do not,<sup>8</sup> and disinvestment in social housing disproportionately impacts women who suffer from gender-based violence.<sup>9</sup>

## **1.3 A guide to this report**

This report investigates the nature of intra-generational housing inequality within young Australians to shed light on the diverse experiences that different young people face as a result of Australia's housing crisis.

To understand the drivers of and solutions to intra-generational housing inequality within young Australians, this report breaks the problem down into housing inequality as a result of:

- 1) intergenerational wealth, and
- 2) structural factors.

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<sup>8</sup> Stephen Whelan, Kadir Atalay, Garry Barrett, Melek Cigdem-Bayram, and Rebecca Edwards, *Transitions into Home Ownership: A Quantitative Assessment*, AHURI Final Report No. 404 (Melbourne: Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited, July 2023), accessed January 28, 2025, <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/sites/default/files/documents/2023-07/AHURI-Final-Report-404-Transitions-into-home-ownership-a-quantitative-assessment.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI), "What are the real costs of Australia's housing crisis for women?" (Melbourne: AHURI, March 7, 2024), accessed January 28, 2025, <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/analysis/brief/what-are-real-costs-australias-housing-crisis-women>

## 2: Intra-generational housing inequality originates from past wealth discrepancies

### 2.1 Parent-to-child wealth transfers are a key determinant of access to housing

The inequality of access to housing for young people has roots in the inequalities of older generations. Fundamentally, both the ability to buy a house and the quality of the house one can buy increases with income, and the income levels of young people are affected in several ways by parental wealth. Significant amounts of wealth change hands in Australia every year. In 2018, around \$120 billion of wealth was directly transferred, with inheritances making up approximately \$107 billion, with the remainder being gifts.<sup>10</sup> This amounts to over 6% of national income. ‘The Bank of Mum & Dad’, referring to parents assisting their children with buying a house via gifts, loans, or in-kind transfers (e.g, allowing rent-free living in the family home), is now a top 10 lender in Australia.<sup>11</sup> However, data on wealth transfers in Australia is limited, with most data coming from non-government surveys with relatively small sample sizes.

#### Gift and bequest recipients get a leg up

Direct wealth transfers from parents to children, either during the parent’s life in the case of gifts, or after the parent has passed away in the case of bequests, are a mechanism through which intergenerational wealth discrepancies can markedly affect housing inequality among the youth. AHURI (2023) produced several estimates<sup>12</sup> of the advantage provided to recipients of gifts, loans and bequests at subsequently buying their first house, relative to those who did not receive any transfers.

Those fortunate enough to receive large within-life transfers (i.e. above \$10,000), whether that be through gifts or loans, are around twice as likely to become home-owners, compared

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<sup>10</sup> Productivity Commission, *Wealth Transfers and Their Economic Effects*, Research Paper (Canberra: Productivity Commission, November 2021), accessed February 28, 2025, <https://www.pc.gov.au/research/completed/wealth-transfers/wealth-transfers.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> Martin North, "Bank of Mum and Dad Now A 'Top 10' Lender," *Digital Finance Analytics* (blog), January 17, 2018, <https://digitalfinanceanalytics.com/blog/bank-of-mum-and-dad-now-a-top-10-lender/>.

Note: The terms ‘gifts’ and ‘loans’ are used interchangeably, as both constitute direct parental transfers, with the presence of a repayment obligation not being relevant to our analysis of the inequality of housing access.

<sup>12</sup> Note: It should be emphasised that these are merely correlations, with the data constraints related to the scope of the aforementioned non-government (HILDA) surveys currently precluding researchers from making causal conclusions. Nevertheless, these correlations point to the value that these parent-to-child wealth transfers likely have in facilitating the reproduction of past inequalities.



to those who did not receive large transfers.<sup>13</sup> Bequest recipients are also twice as likely to transition to home ownership than those who do not receive a bequest.

### **It pays to live rent-free**

Parents can also indirectly assist their children with buying a house. A common form of this is allowing their children to 'co-reside' freely with them in the family house, which is a significant in-kind transfer as it allows children to save an average \$383 per week on costs such as rent, groceries, and utility bills.<sup>14</sup> Other parents may allow their children to co-reside if they pay board, a contribution towards the aforementioned costs, although this is likely to still be less than the true cost.

For each additional year spent living rent-free in the family home rather than renting, the chance of transitioning to home ownership increases by 40%.<sup>15</sup> The discrepancy relative to renting in the chance of transitioning to home ownership is surprisingly even higher at 43% for those who pay board, perhaps reflecting a greater incentive to save.<sup>16</sup>

Nevertheless, there are clearly advantages for buying a house through being able to co-reside with one's parents in the family home. The desire to be able to save more may be contributing towards the rising percentage of co-residing young people, with the rate of

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<sup>13</sup> Stephen Whelan et al., *Transitions into Home Ownership: A Quantitative Assessment*, AHURI Final Report No. 404 (Melbourne: Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited, 2023), 15, <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/sites/default/files/documents/2023-07/AHURI-Final-Report-404-Transitions-into-home-ownership-a-quantitative-assessment.pdf>.

Note: A curious caveat to this is that recipients of smaller within-life transfers (below \$10,000) actually have a lower chance of becoming a home-owner than those who do not receive a transfer at all.

<sup>14</sup> Productivity Commission, *Why did young people's incomes decline?* Commission Research Paper (Canberra, 2020), 15, <https://www.pc.gov.au/research/completed/youth-income-decline/youth-income-decline.pdf>.

<sup>15</sup> Stephen Whelan et al., *Transitions into Home Ownership: A Quantitative Assessment*, AHURI Final Report No. 404 (Melbourne: Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited, 2023), 15, <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/sites/default/files/documents/2023-07/AHURI-Final-Report-404-Transitions-into-home-ownership-a-quantitative-assessment.pdf>.

<sup>16</sup> Stephen Whelan et al., *Transitions into Home Ownership: A Quantitative Assessment*, AHURI Final Report No. 404 (Melbourne: Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited, 2023), 15, <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/sites/default/files/documents/2023-07/AHURI-Final-Report-404-Transitions-into-home-ownership-a-quantitative-assessment.pdf>.

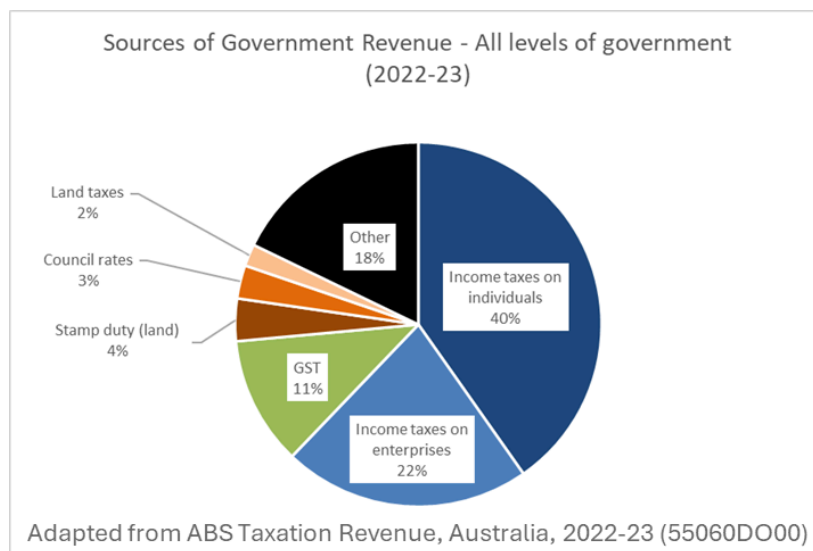
Note: While these results appear to support the intuitive notion of non-renters being able to save more, thereby being better able to buy a house, these are not necessarily causal results due to the potential for reverse causality. There is a possibility that rather than co-residing allowing people to save more of their money, it is those who want to save more in the first place who are more likely to choose to co-reside. Hence, the increased chance at buying a house for those who spend longer co-residing may instead be partially attributed to these people being more financially prudent and having a higher propensity to save.

co-residence among 18-29 year olds rising from 47% to 57% for men, and 37% to 54% for women, between 2002 and 2017.<sup>17</sup>

The ability to co-reside, as well as the quality of the family home where one can co-reside, may also have the effect of reproducing past inequalities. Young people from regional areas are less likely to co-reside,<sup>18</sup> reinforcing the locational disadvantage faced by regional residents. Even within city co-residers, young people fortunate enough to co-reside in inner suburbs are likely to have improved access to jobs and lower commuting costs compared to those who co-reside further out. Once again, the wealth of parents, in this case through influencing the feasibility of their children co-residing, affects the housing opportunities of their children. The following sections point to areas in which current tax and urban planning policies can assist the youth, and in particular those who cannot rely on parental support, in their home-buying aspirations.

## 2.2 How we tax is important

All governments require taxes to fund expenditure, including on social security, infrastructure, and defence. However, the style of taxation chosen by governments has significant implications for the economy, including for intra-generational housing inequality.



<sup>17</sup> Roger Wilkins and Esperanza Vera-Toscano, "Over 50% of Young Australian Adults Still Live with Their Parents – and the Numbers Are Climbing Faster for Women," *The Conversation*, July 29, 2019, <https://theconversation.com/over-50-of-young-australian-adults-still-live-with-their-parents-and-the-numbers-are-climbing-faster-for-women-120587>.

<sup>18</sup> Roger Wilkins and Esperanza Vera-Toscano, "Over 50% of Young Australian Adults Still Live with Their Parents – and the Numbers Are Climbing Faster for Women," *The Conversation*, July 29, 2019, <https://theconversation.com/over-50-of-young-australian-adults-still-live-with-their-parents-and-the-numbers-are-climbing-faster-for-women-120587>.

Australia's taxation system is heavily reliant on income taxes either on individuals or enterprises, comprising over 60% of all revenue raised (across Federal, State, and Local levels of government).<sup>19</sup> The most prominent income tax on individuals is personal income tax. This is the tax you pay on the total of all your taxable income from sources such as wages, salaries, interest, and 'capital gains' from sold assets (e.g. selling an investment property for more than you bought it).

Taxes on properties, including stamp duty, council rates, and land taxes, make up a comparatively small proportion of taxation revenue, but have important implications for the distribution of housing.

### **The current tax landscape does not adequately redistribute wealth**

Taxes, and the subsequent government expenditure of raised funds, have significant redistributive effects which contribute to the disparities in housing for young people. As seen above, personal income tax is the largest individual source of taxation revenue for governments Australia wide. It is also a progressive tax (see Box 2), which in theory ensures a greater share of the tax burden is placed on wealthier individuals who have a greater capacity to pay.

#### **Box 2 - What are progressive taxes?**

Progressive taxes are taxes whose rate increases for higher income earners. The idea is that those with greater means to pay taxes should be relied on more heavily than those who are less able. Personal income tax is progressive, as individuals in higher 'tax brackets' (i.e. who earn higher income) pay a higher average tax rate, thereby effectively redistributing wealth downwards towards lower income earners compared to a tax proportional to income.

The Goods and Services Tax (GST) is not a progressive tax, because it is a fixed 10% of every purchase. If a high and low income earner both buy an identical coffee, for instance, they pay exactly the same level of tax, but as a proportion of their income, the poor person pays a higher rate, thereby effectively redistributing wealth upwards towards higher income earners compared to a proportional tax

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<sup>19</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Taxation Revenue, Australia*, released April 23, 2024, accessed February 28, 2025, <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/economy/government/taxation-revenue-australia/latest-release#data-downloads>.

However, exemptions and discounts to personal income tax place limitations on this progressive potential. Firstly, wealth transfers are not generally directly taxable. As described in section 2.1., large gift and bequest recipients have approximately double the chance of transitioning to home ownership. Approximately a third of intergenerational wealth persistence is due to these inheritances.<sup>20</sup> Hence, by not having gift or inheritance taxes, the government forfeits an opportunity to reduce this reproduction of past inequalities caused by bequest recipients being more likely to transition to home-ownership.

Secondly, *capital income* is in some respects treated differently to *labour income*. Labour income is income that derives directly from one's own work, such as wages, salaries, and bonuses. Capital income is income that derives from the ownership of assets such as houses and shares, including interest, dividends, and capital gains. Most capital income has the same tax treatment as labour income - it is totalled up as personal taxable income, and then taxed progressively. However, provided that the asset sold was held for more than a year, capital gains face different tax treatment.

The capital gains tax discount (CGTD) means that capital gains are generally taxed less than other forms of income. However, assets are more likely to be held by higher income earners, who are also more likely to be older as assets take time to accumulate.<sup>21</sup>

Correspondingly, the CGTD predominantly benefits the highest 10% of taxpayers ranked by taxable income, with approximately three quarters of the discount accruing to this group.<sup>22</sup>

### **Box 3 - What is the capital gains tax discount?**

The capital gains tax discount (CGTD) allows individuals to reduce their taxable income by only paying tax on 50% of a 'capital gain', provided they have held the asset for over a year. A capital gain is simply when you sell an asset (e.g. an investment property) for more than what you bought it for. For example, suppose you sell your investment property for \$100,000 more than what you paid for it. The CGTD means that you would only have to pay tax on half of your capital gain of \$100,000, so only \$50,000 would be taxable.

<sup>20</sup> Productivity Commission, *Wealth Transfers and Their Economic Effects*, Research Paper (Canberra: Productivity Commission, November 2021), accessed February 28, 2025, <https://www.pc.gov.au/research/completed/wealth-transfers/wealth-transfers.pdf>.

<sup>21</sup> Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014).

<sup>22</sup> Brett Freudenberg and John Minas, "Reforming Australia's 50 Per Cent Capital Gains Tax Discount Incrementally," *eJournal of Tax Research* 16, no. 2 (2019): 317–339, <https://www.unsw.edu.au/content/dam/pdfs/business/acct-audit-tax/research-reports/past-issues/bus-2019/2019-volume-16-number-2/BUS-2019-V16-paper4-v16-n2.pdf>.

Hence, the progressivity of the taxation system is attenuated by the CGTD. Holding the total income level constant, a young person who likely earns most of their income from labour income is taxed at a higher rate than someone who makes a substantial share of their income from capital gains, leaving them with less disposable income available for buying houses. Furthermore, the CGTD may even encourage overinvestment in housing,<sup>23</sup> further increasing prices thus reducing housing affordability for young people.

In summary, young people tend to rely on income from their labour to buy a house, yet this income is taxed comparatively higher than income deriving from owning capital. This might be fine for the young people who can benefit from tax-free transfers from asset-rich parents. But for those relying on saving up their own money to buy a house, the tax system's dependence on taxing income, and particularly labour income, makes doing so even more difficult.

### **Stamp duty (and negative gearing) are counterproductive**

Housing is both a need, and a significant source of wealth, so it is no wonder that it is a key focus of government taxation policy. Over \$11 trillion in wealth is held across Australia in housing,<sup>24</sup> which provides a significant opportunity for revenue raising.

Stamp duty is used across the country by state governments as one of their main revenue raising tools. However, stamp duty creates undesirable incentives which discourage favourable allocation of housing. Since stamp duty is only payable when one buys property, it can simply be avoided by not moving house. This has perverse consequences which particularly hurt young people.

#### **Box 4 - What is Stamp Duty? What is a land tax?**

Stamp duty is a once-off tax paid by the purchaser of a property, with the revenue going towards state or territory governments. For example, a \$1 million property purchased in Victoria may attract \$55,000 in stamp duty.<sup>25</sup> It is levied progressively in a similar way to

<sup>23</sup> Brett Freudenberg and John Minas, "Reforming Australia's 50 Per Cent Capital Gains Tax Discount Incrementally," *eJournal of Tax Research* 16, no. 2 (2019): 317–339, <https://www.unsw.edu.au/content/dam/pdfs/business/acct-audit-tax/research-reports/past-issues/bus-2019/2019-volume-16-number-2/BUS-2019-V16-paper4-v16-n2.pdf>.

<sup>24</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Total Value of Dwellings, September Quarter 2024*, released December 3, 2024, accessed February 28, 2025, <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/economy/price-indexes-and-inflation/total-value-dwellings/latest-release>.

<sup>25</sup> State Revenue Office Victoria, "Land Transfer (Stamp) Duty Calculator," accessed February 28, 2025, <https://www.sro.vic.gov.au/calculators/land-transfer-calculator>.

income taxes, so more expensive properties will attract not only higher amounts of tax, but also will fall into a higher marginal tax rate bracket. However, specific rates and exemptions vary on a state-by-state basis, with first-home buyers in particular generally facing exemptions or concessions from stamp duty.

Land taxes are ongoing taxes paid by the owner of a property, usually on an annual basis, and usually on the 'unimproved' value of the land they own. Unimproved essentially means the value of the land itself, not including any buildings or other improvements done to it. In other words, two otherwise identical properties, one with a house, and one left empty, would attract the same land tax bill. Again, land taxes vary by state in terms of rates and exemptions. Land taxes currently only tend to apply to investment properties and holiday houses, although the ACT is in the process of phasing them in for the primary place of residence.<sup>26</sup>

Firstly, stamp duty discourages older Australians from downsizing. This limits the supply of appropriate housing for young families, and indeed for share-houses, effectively locking unused bedrooms out of the market. It also drives young families further out into less favourable sprawling outer suburbs, away from services such as childcare and public transport.

Secondly, stamp duty makes it harder for young people to move closer to more favourable job prospects.<sup>27</sup> Suppose a young person owns a house in Melbourne but could move to Sydney for a \$20,000 pay rise after accounting for moving costs. Stamp duty could add an additional \$25,000 cost, making this move no longer worthwhile and adding to the difficulty for young people to attain better work opportunities.

As a result of this disincentive, many people either forgo more favourable job opportunities, or bear excessive travelling costs. Once again, these costs disproportionately fall on less wealthy young people who have less of a capacity to purchase or rent in favourable inner-city areas. The reduced quantity of available housing in these areas means that the prices of what is available get bid up, thereby pricing out many young people.

Of course, removing stamp duty would result in state governments around Australia losing a significant portion of their revenue base. Replacing stamp duty with alternative taxes, such

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<sup>26</sup> State Revenue Office Victoria, "Land Transfer (Stamp) Duty Calculator," accessed February 28, 2025, <https://www.sro.vic.gov.au/calculators/land-transfer-calculator>.

<sup>27</sup> Jos van Ommeren, "Transaction Costs in Housing Markets," Tinbergen Institute Discussion Paper No. 08-099/3 (October 15, 2008), accessed February 28, 2025, <https://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1285971>.

as a land tax inclusive of the primary place of residence, would assist in reducing the distortions inherent to stamp duty. Land taxes are paid on an ongoing basis, rather than only if one moves house, so there would be no associated disincentives to downsizing and/or moving for work related to the tax.

Land tax is one of the few taxes on wealth in Australia. Once an individual holds an asset such as a house, it tends to be that only the income deriving from that asset gets taxed, rather than the asset itself. This means that those who hold large amounts of wealth can largely continue to accumulate more wealth, tax-free, so long as they do not sell assets and attract capital gains tax. Land tax, however, directly taxes the stock of wealth (i.e. the land owned by an individual).

When it comes to housing, those who already own houses are more likely to be able to access credit and subsequently buy more houses because of the security their existing asset offers.<sup>28</sup> This means that young people attempting to buy their first house are at a disadvantage compared to existing, usually older property owners who can more easily borrow. Once again, this disproportionately hurts those who do not have access to ‘The Bank of Mum and Dad’, and rely more heavily on private credit. Shifting from stamp duty to a land tax would give these young people a better chance at winning auctions against wealthier and older investors by reducing the upfront cost barrier caused by stamp duty.

Negative gearing is another important housing-related tax policy, although rather than being a tax like stamp duty, it is a tax deduction which reduced government revenue by almost \$6 billion in 2023-24.<sup>29</sup> It helps to reduce the risk that landlords face with fluctuating property values, thereby encouraging more investment into housing, hence more rentals. However, it also reduces the share of owner-occupied housing.<sup>30</sup>

Removing or reducing the extent of<sup>31</sup> negative gearing would increase the amount of government revenue available. This could be used to fund rent-assistance, to increase the

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<sup>28</sup> Rowan Arundel, "Equity Inequity: Housing Wealth Inequality, Inter and Intra-generational Divergences, and the Rise of Private Landlordism," *Housing, Theory and Society* 34, no. 2 (2017): 176–200, accessed February 28, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14036096.2017.1284154>.

<sup>29</sup> Parliamentary Budget Office, *Cost of Negative Gearing and Capital Gains Tax Discount*, June 17, 2024, accessed February 28, 2025, [https://www.pbo.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-07/Cost%20of%20Negative%20Gearing%20and%20Capital%20Gains%20Tax%20Discount\\_0.pdf](https://www.pbo.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-07/Cost%20of%20Negative%20Gearing%20and%20Capital%20Gains%20Tax%20Discount_0.pdf).

<sup>30</sup> Yunho Cho, Shuyun May Li, and Lawrence Uren, "Investment Housing Tax Concessions and Welfare: Evidence from Australia," CAMA Working Paper No. 2/2021 (January 19, 2022), accessed February 28, 2025, <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3760896>.

<sup>31</sup> Currently, Australia's negative gearing system has full deductibility, meaning you can deduct all losses investment property losses against any of your taxable income. An alternative is partial deductibility, where only a portion of losses can be deducted against your taxable income.



stock of public housing, or for other initiatives assisting young people to access housing services. Removing negative gearing will also make housing more affordable, resulting in a rise in home-ownership particularly for relatively poor young people, but also particularly hurting young landlords who are most reliant on mortgages (thus enjoy the benefits of deducting interest from their taxable income).<sup>32</sup>

### **Box 5 - What is negative gearing?**

Negative gearing is a method for property investors to reduce their taxable income. Owners in investment properties may make a loss in a year, in the sense that the rental income they generate may fall short of costs incurred, such as the interest they need to pay on the mortgage for the property and/or maintenance costs. In which case, owners can deduct the loss from their personal taxable income. The purpose of this is to avoid distorting investment decisions. If negative gearing did not exist, investors may choose to invest instead in a small business where one can fully deduct losses, instead of investing in housing where (without negative gearing) they would have to pay a higher level of income tax.

## **2.3 Restrictive urban planning drive youth to rely on family for housing**

Currently, it is easiest to build housing on the urban fringe away from the inner suburbs where there is best access to infrastructure, amenities and abundant job opportunities. This has created a gulf in living experience between young people with the means to afford housing close to the city, and those who are priced out.

Particularly in Sydney and Melbourne, strict planning and zoning rules have placed restrictions on the construction of new housing. This means that not enough homes can be built in the areas of highest demand, pushing up house prices in the most desired locations and pushing away young people from being able to live in these locations where they grew up in.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Yunho Cho, Shuyun May Li, and Lawrence Uren, "Negative Gearing Tax and Welfare: A Quantitative Study for the Australian Housing Market," paper presented at the Reserve Bank of New Zealand's Housing, Household Debt, and Policy Conference, November 11, 2017, accessed February 28, 2025, [https://www.rbnz.govt.nz/-/media/project/sites/rbnz/files/events/housing-household-debt-and-policy-conference-2017/session-pdfs/session-7\\_paper-2-negative-gearing-tax-and-welfare\\_cho-li-uren.pdf](https://www.rbnz.govt.nz/-/media/project/sites/rbnz/files/events/housing-household-debt-and-policy-conference-2017/session-pdfs/session-7_paper-2-negative-gearing-tax-and-welfare_cho-li-uren.pdf).

<sup>33</sup> KPMG Australia, "Australian Suburbs Shrinking as Millennials Priced Out," KPMG, September 26, 2024, accessed January 28, 2025, <https://kpmg.com/au/en/home/media/press-releases/2024/09/australian-shrinking-suburbs.html>



### **Box 6 - What is a heritage overlay?**

Large parts of inner Melbourne are covered by broad heritage overlays – a planning tool which places controls on the type and scale of development which can occur at a given site. The exact restrictions vary from site to site, but at a minimum requires that a planning permit be given for the development to proceed. While the intent of heritage protections is to protect buildings and places with significant cultural value, critics argue that their application in practice has gone too far, with many properties of dubious value given protection.

### **Zoning effects price regional youth out of urban markets**

RBA researchers in 2018 calculated that the total 'zoning effect' raised detached house prices by 73% above the cost of supply in Sydney, 69% in Melbourne and 42% in Brisbane.<sup>34</sup> Meanwhile, zoning restrictions raised apartment prices by 85% in Sydney, 30% in Melbourne and 26% in Brisbane – an even more stark divide. Young people looking to buy a home in Sydney are massively disadvantaged compared to young people elsewhere in the country, in large part due to zoning restrictions.

High house prices may prevent young people from moving to big cities to pursue higher education or better jobs. Regional Australians who want access to large, well-resourced city universities are often unable to stay in their parents' home due to long commutes, unlike their metropolitan peers. This puts them at an inherent financial disadvantage, compounded by high prices caused by zoning. These high prices are also thought to be a potential cause of declining labour mobility<sup>35</sup> – workers might be discouraged from moving for a higher-paying job because of the cost of housing nearby.

### **A planning system focused on housing favour the rich**

Large, detached homes are permitted to be built on almost every residentially-zoned property in Australia. The same cannot be said of any other housing type. Apartment buildings, for example, can only be built on a fraction of residential land – where they are

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<sup>34</sup> Ross Kendall and Peter Tulip, "The Effect of Zoning on Housing Prices," RDP 2018-03 (Sydney: Reserve Bank of Australia, March 2018), accessed January 28, 2025, <https://www.rba.gov.au/publications/rdp/2018/pdf/rdp2018-03.pdf>.

<sup>35</sup> E61 Institute, "The Lucky Country or the Lucky City" (November 2024), accessed January 28, 2025, <https://e61.in/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/THE-LUCKY-COUNTRY-OR-THE-LUCKY-CITY-8.pdf>.

restricted in size by height limits and maximum floor-space ratios (which dictate the maximum amount of developed floor space relative to the size of the lot).

The aspirational ideal of the detached house might be overrepresented in our existing housing stock. Surveys have found a significant mismatch in the stated preferences of Australians compared to the actual housing stock. Less than half of the people surveyed in Sydney and Melbourne preferred living in a detached house over other types of housing, despite detached homes making up 62% and 72% of the housing stock in those cities.<sup>36</sup> Planning systems which favour detached homes may be a large driver of this mismatch.

A planning system which favours large houses is a planning system which favours those who can afford large houses. Young people on lower incomes who are unable to afford large houses might be better able to enter the housing market if there were a supply of smaller, more affordable homes.

## **2.4 Rental and social housing regulation do not yield the best outcomes for tenants**

### **Stricter rental regulation can reduce rental stress**

Young people who choose or are forced to rent not only face high prices, but are also afforded few protections in their tenure. Rental markets in Australia are largely regulated by the states and territories, which means there is some variation in renters' rights across the country. On the whole, our rental markets are lightly regulated compared to markets in Western Europe, which tend to have higher rates of renting overall.<sup>37</sup>

For example, 'no-grounds evictions' tend to be unlawful across many Western European countries. No-grounds evictions occur when landlords evict a tenant without a legitimate reason (such as to move into the property themselves) at the end of a fixed-term contract. This gives much more security to tenants, who can be confident that they won't have to find a new rental – and potentially have to uproot their lives – each time they come to the end of a fixed-term contract. While most states and territories in Australia have recently adopted some form of ban on no-grounds evictions, exceptions like Western Australia and the Northern Territory remain.

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<sup>36</sup> Jane-Frances Kelly, Peter Breadon, and Julian Reichl, *Getting the Housing We Want* (Melbourne: Grattan Institute, November 2011), accessed January 28, 2025, [https://grattan.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/117\\_report\\_getting\\_the\\_housing\\_we\\_want.pdf](https://grattan.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/117_report_getting_the_housing_we_want.pdf).

<sup>37</sup> Nathalie Wharton and Lucy Craddock, "A Comparison of Security of Tenure in Queensland and in Western Europe," *Monash University Law Review* 37, no. 2 (2011): 17-40, accessed January 28, 2025, <https://www.austlii.edu.au/au/journals/MonashULawRw/2011/18.pdf>

With loose rental regulation, young renters face more housing insecurity than their home-owning peers or those who can co-reside with family. Better rental regulation could reduce renter stress, especially those who have no choice to rent and often have no family in the area to fall back on, for example youth from rural backgrounds who move to big cities to work or study.

### **Public housing rules discourage work**

Rents in public housing are typically set at 25% of tenants' income, assessed on the basis of the whole household. As a result, a 16 year old who co-resides with family in social housing will have a marginal tax rate of 25%, even if they earn less than the tax-free threshold.<sup>38</sup>

This makes it much harder for youth co-residing in public housing to save as the higher marginal tax rate creates a disincentive to work, and even if they did work, it would take them relatively longer to save up income than their peers. At least in this dimension, social housing ironically makes it harder for young people to get out of social housing.

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<sup>38</sup> Tenants Victoria, "Rents for Public Housing," Tenants Victoria, last updated February 2023, accessed January 28, 2025, <https://tenantsvic.org.au/advice/different-tenancies/public-housing/rents/>

### 3: Structural factors exacerbate housing inequality between particular demographics

#### 3.1 Earning disparity and taxation reinforce gendered housing inequality within a generation

##### Women are earning less and owed more

Intergenerational inequality has priced many young people out of the housing market however, among young people this inequality is more pronounced for young women. The persistent Gender Pay Gap in Australia is making it harder for women in general to access and afford housing, compared to their male counterparts. Accounting for casual, part time, and full time work, Australia presently totes a Total Remuneration Gap of \$28,425 each year in favour of men - a 21.8% shortfall<sup>39</sup>. Within young people, the gender pay gap is smallest before 20 years old and continues to diverge with age<sup>40</sup>. Data shows that in the 5 years post entry into parenthood, women's average earnings are diminished 55%<sup>41</sup>. Given the average maternal age of first time mothers is 29.8 years, this reveals a gendered disparity in the earnings of young people; which extends to a gendered disparity in access to housing.

The gender pay gap also widens if we account for women's disproportionate contribution to household production, which comprises any unpaid care work not sold on the market but rather consumed by family or the community<sup>42</sup>. Women are estimated to contribute at least 7.8<sup>43</sup> more hours of unpaid work per week, compared to men; this stems from cultural stereotypes which disproportionately burden women with caregiving responsibilities compromising their participation in the workforce. This compounds over time resulting in a disparity in their earnings and thus, their ability to afford housing.

This remuneration disparity is significant and gendered. It is effectively a 21.8% reduction in on young women's purchasing power in the housing market; with clear negative implications for women's ability to save for house deposits, meet mortgage requirements, and afford rent

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<sup>39</sup> Workplace Gender Equality Agency. "Gender Pay Gap Data." Accessed February 28, 2025. <https://www.wgea.gov.au/pay-and-gender/gender-pay-gap-data>.

<sup>40</sup> Workplace Gender Equality Agency. *Wages and Ages*. Accessed February 28, 2025. <https://www.wgea.gov.au/publications/wages-and-ages>.

<sup>41</sup> Bahar, Elif, Natasha Bradshaw, Nathan Deutscher, and Maxine Montaigne. *Children and the Gender Earnings Gap: Evidence for Australia*. Treasury Working Paper 2023-02. Canberra: The Treasury, March 2023. <https://treasury.gov.au>.

<sup>42</sup> Workplace Gender Equality Agency. *Unpaid Care Work and the Labour Market*. Sydney: Workplace Gender Equality Agency. Accessed February 28, 2025. <https://www.wgea.gov.au>.

<sup>43</sup> Melbourne Institute. *Taking the Pulse of the Nation: April 2023*. Accessed February 28, 2025. <https://melbourneinstitute.unimelb.edu.au/data/taking-the-pulse-of-the-nation/2023/ttqn-april-2023>.

in comparison to men. This lends itself to further precarity for women who may be placed in a position of reliance on others to gain and maintain access to suitable housing later in life - reinforcing and perpetuating a culture of gendered inequality.

### **Women are being locked out of the housing market as a side effect of stamp duty**

As explained previously, stamp duty presents a significant financial hurdle for aspiring homeowners however, through its interaction with the Gender Pay Gap this hurdle is exacerbated for women.

Stamp duty has been cited as a leading cause behind divorced women remaining out of the housing market for very extended periods of time, if indeed they are ever able to re-enter<sup>44</sup>. In 2023, women between 16 - 34 were involved in 9750 registered divorces<sup>45</sup>. Following a separation, both parties typically aim to secure a new home. However, in the context of home ownership each party is required to pay stamp duty on their new residence, giving rise to stamp duty's reputation as a 'defacto tax on divorce'<sup>46</sup>. For women, the added expense of stamp duty in the context of remuneration disparity creates a disproportionately difficult climate for women when re-entering the housing market.

In this way, stamp duty is acting as an unintentional barrier to women's independence and stability post-separation, which may be confounded within younger generations who disproportionately feel the financial impact of stamp duty.

### **3.2 Cultural individualism does not effectively solve public (housing) problems**

Family and gender based violence affects people of all ages in Australia, and is cited as the leading cause of homelessness in women<sup>47 48</sup>. Victim survivors of family and domestic violence often turn to social housing when escaping a violent home; however, housing policy has increasingly focused on investing in grants which drive private home ownership in young

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<sup>44</sup> Legislative Council Economy and Infrastructure Committee. *Inquiry into Land Transfer Duty Fees*. Melbourne: Parliament of Victoria, 2023. <https://parliament.vic.gov.au/eic-lc>.

<sup>45</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics. "Marriages and Divorces, Australia." Last modified August 16, 2024. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/people-and-communities/marriages-and-divorces-australia/latest-release#divorces>.

<sup>46</sup> Grattan Institute. "Victoria should swap stamp duties for a broad based property tax". Accessed February 28, 2025. <https://grattan.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Grattan-Inquiry-into-Land-Transfer-Duty-Fees-April-2023.pdf>.

<sup>47</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission. "Homelessness." Accessed February 28, 2025. <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/education/homelessness>.

<sup>48</sup> Equity Economics. *Family and Domestic Violence & Homelessness: Updated Research and Analysis*. Sydney: Equity Economics, 2024. <https://www.equityeconomics.com.au/report-archive>.

people at the expense of the adequate supply of social housing - which is failing to meet demand<sup>49</sup>.

The First Home Owner Grant is an example of an individualistic policy as it provides a subsidy to many young people, supporting them to purchase their first home. This places the onus on individuals to find, acquire and afford safe and accessible housing. In contrast, investment in social housing places the onus on the Government to provide suitable and affordable homes to Australians who need it, for example victim-survivors of family and domestic violence.

The current shortage of social housing and focus on private home ownership is problematic. Statistically, 1 in 4 women will experience physical and/or sexual violence at the hands of an intimate partner from the age of 14; this is compared with 1 in 14 men<sup>50</sup>. Within this group, young women aged between 18 and 34 years are more likely to experience cohabitating partner violence than any other age group<sup>51</sup>. We know that many women rely on social housing when fleeing family and domestic violence, this highlights the deleterious effect of a shortage in social housing supply for young women in particular.

Evidence shows that after fleeing a violent home, over 7000 women are forced to return each year, while over 9000 women are forced into homelessness simply because they have nowhere to live<sup>52</sup>. This highlights the fact that whilst subsidies may support private home ownership in young people generally, they fail to address a largely gendered need for access to social housing in the event that a person needs to escape a violent home. This fact calls for housing policy which better balances the desire for private home ownership and the need for increased public housing supply.

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<sup>49</sup> Council to Homeless Persons. "New Data Highlights Desperate Housing Crisis for Women Fleeing Family Violence in Victoria." Last modified September 1, 2022.  
<https://chp.org.au/article/new-data-highlights-desperate-housing-crisis-for-women-fleeing-family-violence-in-victoria/>.

<sup>50</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. "Young Women." Accessed February 28, 2025.  
<https://www.aihw.gov.au/family-domestic-and-sexual-violence/population-groups/young-women>.

<sup>51</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. "Young Women." *Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence*. Last modified December 9, 2024.  
<https://www.aihw.gov.au/family-domestic-and-sexual-violence/population-groups/young-women>.

<sup>52</sup> Equity Economics. "Nowhere to Go". Accessed 28 February 2025.  
[https://static1.squarespace.com/static/61b14c4abbc81a1543f55180/t/62185d457ad63d191d0af100/1645763920507/EE\\_Women+Housing\\_Domestic+Violence\\_WEB\\_SINGLES.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/61b14c4abbc81a1543f55180/t/62185d457ad63d191d0af100/1645763920507/EE_Women+Housing_Domestic+Violence_WEB_SINGLES.pdf)

### **3.3 Short term leases lead to long term stress for women and gender diverse people**

Beyond stress derived from the affordability of housing, women and gender diverse people also face increased difficulty in finding and securing appropriate tenancies due to uniquely gendered safety concerns<sup>53</sup>.

These safety concerns pertain to risks and challenges that women and gender diverse people face due to structural factors, power dynamics, and social and cultural norms. The feeling of safety at home and in one's neighbourhood is paramount in finding appropriate housing. For people who experience these gendered safety concerns, losing tenancy of a house which satisfies this need for safety can be particularly distressing due to the ongoing lack of gender appropriate housing.

The Australian norm of short-term leases - compared to those overseas which tend to be closer to 5 years - places women and gender diverse people in a persistent state of housing precarity.

This has been linked to long term consequences for mental health, wellbeing, and future planning<sup>54</sup>; influencing decisions over factors such as further education, employment, and parenthood. Due to the legacy impact of mental health, education, and ability to maintain stable employment, on a person's ability to engage in the housing market beyond youth we see intragenerational housing inequality extend across the lifespan.

### **3.5 Immigration and education policies structurally disadvantage migrants in housing markets**

A person's citizenship (or lack thereof) can have significant impacts on their ability to find and sustainably afford suitable housing. Most notably, Australia's immigration and education policy landscape creates conditions where those with and without Australian citizenship face markedly different housing constraints.

#### **Immigrant students and workers face significant barriers to entry into Australia**

For foreigners seeking to visit, study, or work in Australia, there are a range of visa options available,<sup>55</sup> often coming with significant financial and non-financial costs. Some, such as the

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<sup>53</sup> Stone, Wendy, Sal Clark, Zoë Goodall, and Catherine Hartung. *"We've Been Robbed": Young Women and Gender Diverse People's Housing Experiences and Solutions*. Hawthorn, VIC: Swinburne University of Technology, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.25916/sut.27108301>.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Australian Government Department of Home Affairs, *Visa List*, last modified January 24, 2025, <https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/visas/getting-a-visa/visa-listing>.



Student Visa (Subclass 500) are priced starting at \$1,600, and standard processing timeframes can extend up to four months.<sup>56</sup> Many visa types can take years to be processed, in particular permanent visas.<sup>57</sup> These costs can create significant material barriers for those seeking to enter and/or stay in Australia, as they reduce the amount of wealth or existing savings available for an immigrant to spend on housing costs, especially rental bonds.

### **Subsidies for domestic education create different cost constraints for Australian and international students**

The direct costs of education in Australia are also different for those with and without Australian citizenship. Australians are able to access Commonwealth Supported Places (CSPs) and Higher Education Loan Program (HELP) loans, while most international students are not.

#### **Commonwealth Supported Places (CSPs) & HELP loans**

A Commonwealth Supported Place (CSP) is a place at an approved Australian higher education provider where the Australian Government pays for a proportion of the student's fees. This is a subsidy, not a loan, and does not need to be repaid. The vast majority of CSPs are for undergraduate study.<sup>58</sup>

Those able to access CSPs include Australia & New Zealand citizens, Australian permanent residents, and holders of a small number of special visas.<sup>59</sup>

A Higher Education Loan Program (HELP) loan is a loan from the Australian government that assists a student in paying for their upfront fees. There are two types of HELP loans that are for tuition fees: HECS-HELP and FEE-HELP. HECS-HELP loans are for students with a CSP, and FEE-HELP loans are for those students without a CSP.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Australian Government Department of Home Affairs, *Subclass 500 Student Visa*, last modified February 26, 2025, <https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/visas/getting-a-visa/visa-listing/student-500>.

<sup>57</sup> Australian Government Department of Home Affairs, *Visa Processing Times*, last modified February 27, 2025, <https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/visas/getting-a-visa/visa-processing-times/global-visa-processing-time>.

<sup>58</sup> Australian Government Study Assist, *Commonwealth Supported Places (CSPs)*, last modified July 30, 2024, <https://www.studyassist.gov.au/financial-and-study-support/commonwealth-supported-places-csps>.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Australian Government Study Assist, *How Student Loans Work*, last modified July 22, 2024, <https://www.studyassist.gov.au/financial-and-study-support/how-student-loans-work>.



Those able to access HECS-HELP loans include Australian citizens and holders of a small number of special visas.<sup>61</sup>

As such, combined with the aforementioned visa costs (in particular, the financial costs of student visas), the costs of education in Australia are vastly different for domestic and international students. Domestic students are often able to live at home, receive a CSP and a HELP loan, and work during their study. In contrast, international students must pay visa fees, travel costs, *upfront* tuition fees, and are limited in their ability to work by visa restrictions. Hence, the amount of income remaining for international students to pay for their housing costs is often much less than a comparative domestic student.

### **Cost constraints exacerbate existing inequalities between migrants and Australians and across migrant groups**

Socially, the aforementioned structural forces can result in tiered housing markets. The highest-quality inner-city purpose-built student housing is occupied by wealthy domestic & international students, with strong access to public transport and other amenities.<sup>62</sup> Most domestic students live at home or rent privately.<sup>63</sup> The remaining poorer international students then segregate into more affordable outer-city suburbs, often with lower-quality housing, public transport and amenities and higher crime rates.<sup>64</sup> Internationally, the selection bias caused by the high cost barriers to immigration mean that socioeconomic divides are more pronounced among foreign-born residents than those with citizenship.<sup>65</sup> A case for this can be seen in Australia: while poor domestic students are still generally able to live at home and commute to university, poorer international students are forced into

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<sup>61</sup> Australian Government Study Assist, *HECS-HELP*, last modified January 10, 2025, <https://www.studyassist.gov.au/financial-and-study-support/hecs-help>.

<sup>62</sup> Property Council of Australia, *Myth Busting International Students' Role in the Housing Crisis*, April 2024, <https://www.propertycouncil.com.au/submissions/myth-busting-international-students-role-in-the-rental-crisis>.

<sup>63</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Australia's Youth: Demographics*, last updated June 25, 2021, <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/children-youth/australias-youth/contents/demographics>.

<sup>64</sup> Val Colic-Peisker and Andy Peisker, "Migrant Residential Concentrations and Socio-Economic Disadvantage in Two Australian Gateway Cities," *Journal of Sociology* 59, no. 2 (September 29, 2021): 365–84, <https://doi.org/10.1177/14407833211044206>.

<sup>65</sup> Dustmann, Christian, Yannis Kassis, and Ian Preston. "Inequality and Immigration." *Oxford Open Economics* 3, suppl. 1 (July 17, 2024): i453–i473. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ooec/odad052>.

substandard housing by cost pressures reinforced by structural factors – their income/wealth is shifted down by visa costs, upfront tuition fees, and a limited capacity to work.

These policies exist for a reason. Cost barriers, including visa fees, work restrictions, and the inability to access education subsidies, exist for international students so that domestic students are more easily able to access education in Australia. The existence of CSPs and HELP loans enable disadvantaged Australians to much more readily access higher education than under alternative policies. If higher education were not subsidised in Australia, then only the wealthiest Australian families would be able to access it, entrenching socioeconomic divisions that exist for other structural reasons (historical disadvantage / government policies).

Similarly, the existence of Commonwealth funding for the education of domestic students means that domestic students do not have to compete with international students for tertiary education. The Australian Government sets a certain amount of funding for a higher education institution to spend on CSPs, and this set number of places available to domestic students is then competed for directly by Australian citizens.<sup>66</sup> International students then simply have to satisfy (separate) entry requirements to the course to be admitted.

This result extends to housing – the Australian Government subsidises housing for domestic students by offering higher rates of Youth Allowance and other social security payments for those students, satisfying family income requirements,<sup>67</sup> that live away from their parents' home. The Australian Government (and, by extension, the Australian taxpayer) subsidises the housing of Australian students because education benefits all Australians. Only approximately one third of international students progress to permanent residency after completing their education in Australia,<sup>68</sup> and as such the societal value of the education of an international student is worth significantly less to the average Australian, relative to a comparative domestic student. As such, intragenerational inequality among young people is reinforced by immigration policies, in particular through housing quality and affordability.

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<sup>66</sup> Universities Australia, *How Universities Are Funded*, accessed February 28, 2025, <https://universitiesaustralia.edu.au/policy-submissions/teaching-learning-funding/how-universities-are-funded/>.

<sup>67</sup> Australian Government, Services Australia, *Youth Allowance for Students and Australian Apprentices, How Much You Can Get*, last modified February 10, 2025, <https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/how-much-youth-allowance-for-students-and-apprentices-you-can-get>.

<sup>68</sup> Brendan Coates, Trent Wiltshire, and Tyler Reysenbach, *Graduates in Limbo: International Student Visa Pathways After Graduation* (Grattan Institute, October 2023), <https://grattan.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Graduates-in-limbo-Grattan-Institute-Report.pdf>.

### **3.6 Young migrants in Australia experience systemic challenges that limit their access to stable and affordable housing**

#### **Limited housing options pushes young migrants into overcrowded and costly housing**

Spatial displacement refers to the process where young migrants are pushed into less desirable, overcrowded, or high-cost housing due to factors like affordability, discrimination and limited access to local support networks. It is a significant factor contributing to housing inequality between young domestics and young migrants in Australia. Young migrants, particularly international students and recent arrivals, often face systemic barriers that force them into overcrowded, substandard, or distant housing arrangements, limiting their access to essential services, employment, and community integration. Unlike their domestic counterparts, who may have familial support networks, young migrants encounter unique challenges that exacerbate their housing insecurity.

A key driver of spatial displacement young migrants face is their exclusion from competitive rental markets due to their temporary visa status. This forces young migrants to seek alternative housing options, typically in shared houses or informal rental arrangements, which are often overcrowded and poorly maintained.

The issue of spatial displacement is further intensified by economic pressures. Because of high rental prices in inner-city areas where universities, employment opportunities and key services are concentrated - young migrants whose priority is managing funds over ease of access, end up having to move to suburban regions. On the contrary, migrants who choose convenience over affordability would choose to reside in expensive city areas. Both these groups are still at a disadvantage as opposed to domestic students who have the flexibility to reside with family if nothing works out.

Additionally, limited access to purpose-built student accommodations (PBSA) exacerbates the spatial displacement of young migrants. Data from the Property Council of Australia indicated that there are fewer than 130,000 student accommodation beds available nationwide, leaving the majority of international students to compete in the private rental market. This means that the only viable option for migrants is to rely on landlords who charge inflated rents<sup>69</sup>, leading to further financial strain.

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<sup>69</sup> Bo Li, "The realization of class-monopoly rents: Landlords' class power and its impact on tenants' housing experiences," *Journal of Urban Management* 12, no. 4 (2022): 360–74, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S222658562300064X?via%3Dihub>.

## **Young migrants face a higher degree of uncertainty as they opt for short-term accommodation**

For many Australians, family serves as a crucial support system when housing arrangements fall through- whether due to financial struggles, rental shortages, or unexpected life events. However, international students, who move to Australia without immediate family, lack this fundamental safety net. Unlike domestic students who may have relatives to turn to in times of crisis, international students must navigate an already competitive housing market with no fallback option if their rental applications are rejected or they face sudden displacement.

The broader research on disadvantage highlights how family breakdowns can serve as catalysts for long-term hardship, triggering poverty, homelessness, and psychological distress. The Australian Social Inclusion Board (2011)<sup>70</sup> found that many individuals experiencing social and financial disadvantage cited family breakdowns as the key event that set off a cycle of instability. Similarly, lone parents, particularly single mothers, face significantly higher risks of poverty and long-term economic struggle, largely because they must bear financial burdens alone without the support of a partner.

While these findings emphasise the role of family as a protective factor against disadvantage, international students lack this layer of security entirely. If they are unable to secure housing, there is no relative to temporarily accommodate them or provide financial assistance. This leaves them disproportionately vulnerable to housing insecurity and, in extreme cases, homelessness. The literature also underscores that stability in living arrangements plays a crucial role in mitigating disadvantage (Smith & Middleton, 2007)<sup>71</sup>. Without this stability, international students may struggle to maintain their academic performance, mental well-being, and overall livelihood in Australia.

Unlike Australian students, who may have the option of seeking temporary refuge with family or relying on government assistance, international students often have no formal recourse. University support services exist but may not always be sufficient to address urgent housing crises. This gap in support underscores the need for stronger institutional frameworks to

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<sup>70</sup> COMMUNITIES AND FAMILIES CLEARINGHOUSE AUSTRALIA, "Social exclusion and social inclusion: Resources for child and family services," *Australian Institute of Family Studies* (Australian Institute of Family Services, May 2011), <https://aifs.gov.au/resources/policy-and-practice-papers/social-exclusion-and-social-inclusion-resources-child-and>.

<sup>71</sup> Loughborough University, "A Review of Poverty Dynamics Research in the UK," Figshare, n.d., [https://repository.lboro.ac.uk/articles/online\\_resource/A\\_review\\_of\\_poverty\\_dynamics\\_research\\_in\\_the\\_UK/9598583](https://repository.lboro.ac.uk/articles/online_resource/A_review_of_poverty_dynamics_research_in_the_UK/9598583).

provide emergency accommodation and financial assistance tailored specifically for international students facing housing instability.

Landlords in Australia often favour domestic tenants over international renters due to perceptions of stability and creditworthiness, creating a significant barrier for young internationals seeking housing<sup>72</sup>. Unlike local tenants, who typically have established credit histories and long-term residency, international students and temporary visa holders are viewed as high-risk due to their limited financial track records and visa restrictions. Many landlords and real estate agents require extensive proof of income, rental history, and long-term job prospects - criteria that young international often struggle to meet, especially if their visas restrict working hours or their income is sourced from overseas. This bias is particularly evident in high-demand rental markets, where competition is fierce. As a result, many internationals are either forced into overpriced, low-quality rentals, accepting short-term leases with frequent disruptions, or rely on informal housing arrangements that lack tenant protections.

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<sup>72</sup> Sophia Maalsen et al., "Understanding Discrimination Effects in Private Rental Housing," *AHURI Final Report* (Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.18408/ahuri7324501>.

## 4. Future directions

Everyone deserves access to quality housing.

This report highlights some areas which distinguish different young people's ability to access housing; however, it relies strongly on existing literature. Further research directly surveying intragenerational housing inequality in Australia would be beneficial in shaping targeted, and effective policy solutions. Studies should also investigate the experiences of young First Nations people, and young people with disabilities, to consider the intersectionality in intra-generational housing inequality.

Future research could also provide a temporal analysis of issues which shape intra-generational housing inequality. A projection of how these issues are evolving over time and how growing issues such as climate change will influence intergenerational housing inequality. This would assist in informing proactive housing policy that ensures Australians from all backgrounds will have equal access to housing.

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