

# The ache for home: rental affordability in Brisbane



Over the past eight years, Anglicare Australia has conducted the annual *Rental Affordability Snapshot*, to highlight the lived experience of people and families on low incomes trying to find a home in the private rental market.<sup>1</sup> Sadly, what is distinctive about the *Snapshot* is the sheer consistency of the results, right across the country, over that period.

In short — year after year, the private rental market has been shown to be out of reach of the vast majority of people in receipt of benefits, or on minimum wage.<sup>2</sup>

In 2017, Anglicare Southern Queensland evaluated more than 8,000 properties in the Brisbane metro area. Only 99 (1%) could be considered affordable and appropriate for households on income support, with the situation particularly dire for families on Parenting Payment or Newstart. Renting a two bedroom property in Brisbane can absorb from 64% to 76% of the household income for a single parent on benefits with one child.

A single person earning the minimum wage would have to spend 59% of their weekly income to rent a one bedroom property at \$350 per week; and that same rent would cost a single person on the aged or disability pension 70% of their household income. Similarly, a room in a shared rental would cost a student 70% of the Youth Allowance.<sup>3</sup>



It's little wonder that "room sharing has become the new flat sharing", as Christian Tietz suggests in a recent article.<sup>4</sup> While Tietz's research refers particularly to Sydney, it only needs a cursory search on Gumtree to see that the trend exists in Brisbane as well, with advertisements for inner city apartment room-sharing including a corner of a living room in a unit 'shared with only three girls' (\$120/week) and '3 people in one room, 2 in the other room' (\$175).

This can't be attributed just to a willingness to sacrifice personal space for an inner-city 'lifestyle'. The Anglicare Brisbane *Snapshot* revealed that the median advertised rent for a room in a share rental was \$165 per week in 2017. A Brisbane 'rent map' based on listings on a 'flatmates' accommodation site shows that shared rentals near public transport (specifically train stations) are almost all higher than that figure, certainly within about a 20 kilometre radius of the city.<sup>5</sup> It doesn't take sophisticated calculations to work out that a single person on a minimum wage or less, renting a room in a shared house and potentially factoring in transport costs, is facing as precarious an existence as the room-sharer living on the edge of homelessness — lacking a sense of security, stability, privacy, safety and the ability to control their living space.<sup>6</sup> This is the proverbial choice between the devil and the deep.

It also raises the issue of 'appropriate' accommodation. The Brisbane families in the 'best' position of all those surveyed in the Anglicare *Snapshot* were families of four with at least two minimum wages, with just over 1,000 properties (12% of the total) both affordable and 'appropriate' for this household type. That of course assumes that the families in question don't also face other challenges in finding an appropriate dwelling – that proximity to work, or availability and cost of transport aren't issues; and that no one in the family has a disability. Even owning a cat or dog reduces the number of properties that are available.

These aren't fussy demands. They are things that everyday families and individuals think about and negotiate when they're looking for a home.

The difference is that people on low incomes have far fewer options to consider, and the *Snapshot* shows that some have almost no options at all. This is even without taking into account the further vulnerability of those identified in community consultation carried out by the Queensland Government. Finding and sustaining safe, secure accommodation — a home — is likely to be even harder for a long list of Queenslanders, including seniors, young people transitioning from care, people who identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, people



with a disability, people experiencing a mental health issue, families escaping domestic and family violence, people impacted by drug and alcohol use, those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, people exiting custody, returned services people and, yes – even people with a pet.<sup>7</sup>

Even the Australian Bureau of Statistics now recognises that *homelessness* is not the same as *rooflessness*.<sup>8</sup> Home is where we spend time with those we love, make memories, enjoy our privacy. It's a space we can make our own, helping us find the peace and stability to take on all the other parts of our lives.

Poet and activist Maya Angelou wrote: "The ache for home lives in all of us. The safe place where we can go as we are and not be questioned."<sup>9</sup> It's a right that an increasing number of individuals and families are being denied.

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<sup>1</sup> Anglicare Australia, 2017, *Anglicare Australia Rental Affordability Snapshot*, Canberra, [anglicaresq.org.au/news/rental-affordability-snapshot/](http://anglicaresq.org.au/news/rental-affordability-snapshot/)

<sup>2</sup> See also, for example, Copp J, 2010, "Benefit Recipients Reliant on Shared Accommodation" *Parity* vol.23, no.6, pp. 53-54.

<sup>3</sup> Anglicare Australia, 2017, *Anglicare Australia Rental Affordability Snapshot*, Canberra, p. 39, [anglicaresq.org.au/news/rental-affordability-snapshot/](http://anglicaresq.org.au/news/rental-affordability-snapshot/)

<sup>4</sup> Tietz C, 2017, "Room sharing is the new flat sharing", *The Conversation*, 6 Oct., [theconversation.com/room-sharing-is-the-new-flat-sharing-84359](http://theconversation.com/room-sharing-is-the-new-flat-sharing-84359)

<sup>5</sup> 2017, Brisbane Rent Map: What it costs to rent near a station in Brisbane, [flatmates.com.au/widgets/train-maps/brisbane](http://flatmates.com.au/widgets/train-maps/brisbane)

<sup>6</sup> Tietz C, 2017, "Room sharing is the new flat sharing", *The Conversation*, 6 Oct., [theconversation.com/room-sharing-is-the-new-flat-sharing-84359](http://theconversation.com/room-sharing-is-the-new-flat-sharing-84359); Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012, *4922.0 - Information Paper - A Statistical Definition of Homelessness, 2012*, [www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/4922.0Main%20Features22012?opendocument&tabn](http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/4922.0Main%20Features22012?opendocument&tabn)

<sup>7</sup> Queensland Government Housing Strategy Consultation Summary 2016, p.13, [www.hpw.qld.gov.au/SiteCollectionDocuments/HousingStrategyConsultationReport.pdf](http://www.hpw.qld.gov.au/SiteCollectionDocuments/HousingStrategyConsultationReport.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012, *4922.0 - Information Paper - A Statistical Definition of Homelessness, 2012*, [www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/4922.0Main%20Features22012?opendocument&tabn](http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/4922.0Main%20Features22012?opendocument&tabn)

<sup>9</sup> Angelou Maya, 1986, *All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes*, Penguin Random House.