

# Homelessness and Housing Instability in Young People Engaged in Tertiary Education in Australia: An urgent call for research

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*Recent housing strategies at both national and state levels have announced the need to improve housing access for young people through providing access to safe, secure and affordable housing. However, there is a paucity of research examining the experience of housing insecurity and homelessness for young people seeking tertiary education at higher education institutions despite the increasingly dire situation. Young people engaged in tertiary education experience vulnerability to homelessness and housing insecurity through structural inequalities such as low income, precarious employment, food insecurity, and an inaccessible, precarious and unaffordable private housing market. Housing insecurity and homelessness is detrimental to students' academic achievement, engagement and wellbeing. The paper concludes by outlining key recommendations for urgent research on higher education students' experiences of homelessness and housing insecurity needed to ensure appropriate interventions and policy responses by Australian universities and government.*

KEY WORDS: Homelessness, housing insecurity, tertiary students, higher education, young people

As the cost-of-living pressures rise, young Australian tertiary students find themselves being placed in a position of growing precarity and vulnerability to homelessness and housing insecurity. While young people are a national priority area for Australian and state and territory governments to reduce the incidence of homelessness, specific attention on tertiary students' homelessness and housing insecurity is significantly lacking. Census data from 2016 indicated that more than 10,000 university students were considered homeless (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS] 2016). Increasing student activism and calls for actions to support students with the rising cost-of-living have emerged from a variety of universities, as demonstrated by the recent submissions to the Senate by the Queensland University of Technology Student Guild (Davidson 2023) and the National Union of Students (Bita 2023). Despite this situation, there is a severe lack of Australian research examining the experience of housing insecurity and homelessness for young people undertaking tertiary education.

This paper argues that young tertiary students are an overlooked cohort of Australia's current housing crisis. A conceptual analysis of extant international and Australian literature will be outlined, with a particular focus on Queensland where the authors are from. It will highlight the unique factors that make these young people particularly vulnerable to housing insecurity and homelessness. The paucity of Australian literature on

this topic raises the urgent need for such research to ensure the needs of this group are captured by policy and service responses by both government and universities.

## Homelessness and housing insecurity in Australia

Although a wealthy country, Australia's crisis of housing insecurity and homelessness has reached a critical point. The Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS] 2018 defines a person as homeless if they do not have suitable accommodation alternatives, and their current living situation: (a) is in a dwelling that is inadequate; (b) has no tenure or the tenure is short and cannot be extended; or (c) does not allow the person to exercise both control of and access to space for social relations (ABS 2023). The most recent Australian Census data classified 122,427 people as experiencing some form of homelessness (ABS 2023). Of this, 25% were aged 12 to 24 years, with those aged 19 to 24 years experiencing the highest rates of homelessness at 91 persons per 10,000 people (ABS 2023). However, these estimates of youth homelessness may greatly underestimate the extent of this issue, as the 2021 census data occurred during the period of COVID-19 when governments were providing temporary accommodation for those sleeping rough (ABS 2023), and recognises that they have not yet established a reliable way to precisely estimate homelessness amongst young people who are likely to experience hidden forms of homelessness. For instance, young people experiencing homelessness most

commonly live in crowded dwellings (68%), followed by supported accommodation (17%), temporary stays at other households (e.g., couch surfing) (11%), boarding houses (11%), and least commonly sleeping rough (3%) (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare [AIHW] 2021).

Young people, like many other groups in Australia, are experiencing unprecedented housing insecurity in response to the increasingly precarious nature of the local housing market, particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic. Housing insecurity is an umbrella term used to reflect the intersecting challenges households may experience in obtaining safe and secure housing (Morris et al. 2021), such as unaffordable rent, overcrowding, frequent or forced house moves, spending the majority of household income on housing (Frederick et al. 2014; Kushel et al. 2006), and reliance on private rental properties (Beer et al. 2016). These challenges can be experienced differently amongst varying population groups, but are particularly felt by the most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups in society (Morris et al. 2021), such as young people living in poverty. Using this broad term allows for different experiences of housing and housing-related stress to be captured.

A prominent aspect of housing insecurity experienced by young tenants in the housing market is the issue of housing affordability. Australia is currently experiencing a housing crisis in the form of a rapid decline in the accessibility of affordable housing such as social and community housing as well as low-cost private rentals (Pawson et al. 2023). This situation is caused by a complex interplay of structural factors including reduced investment in public housing alternatives, high mortgage rates, negative gearing, low wage growth and low income, reduced rates of home ownership, increased use of housing as an 'investment', and a highly competitive and expensive rental market (Beer et al. 2016; Gurran et al. 2021; Hulse et al. 2019; Morris et al. 2020; Pawson et al. 2023; SGS Economics and Planning 2022). In consideration of these factors, the affordability of private rentals has drastically reduced. Furthermore, rental affordability has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic due to the reduced economic and financial stability of private renters (Ong et al. 2022) with limited affordable private rental properties available for people on low incomes (Anglicare 2023a). Recent data from the national Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey also indicates that the amount of affordable housing has reduced and is a more common cause of housing precariousness than forced moves or overcrowding (Ong et al. 2022). The scarcity of affordable housing in the private rental market creates a precarious and turbulent housing situation for both private renters and young people.

A significant marker of housing insecurity is the number of low-income households experiencing rental stress. Rental stress is experienced when households in the bottom 40% of Australia's income distribution spend over 30% of their income on housing costs (Morris et al. 2021; SGS Economic and Planning 2022). Households experiencing rental stress can become particularly vulnerable, as they need to continuously forfeit other essential items to continue to pay their rent (Morris et al. 2021). In 2020, HILDA data discovered that over 12% of the Australian population experienced financial stress after their housing costs were deducted, with over 6% of people indicating they were unable to pay their housing costs on time, an increase from previous years (Wilkins et al. 2022). This is backed up by ABS data which indicates that approximately 55% of low-income households with young people aged 15 to 24 years contribute over 30% of their income to housing costs (ABS 2022).

It has been long recognised that young people transitioning to adulthood experience greater vulnerability towards housing instability and homelessness than older adults (Ong et al. 2022). Young people's vulnerability to these social issues are found to be associated with a number of structural and cultural factors contributing to housing insecurity in young people. This cohort experiences additional challenges to accessing affordable housing as they are often employed casually and receive lower incomes, making it more difficult to secure private rental properties or enter the housing market without support from family and others (Susilawati and Wong 2014). These factors make young people twice as likely to experience a housing crisis compared to any other housing group (Susilawati and Wong 2014), with young people more likely to live in overcrowded households and experience rental stress (Bentley et al. 2019). These intersecting factors of precarious employment, low income, and inaccessible housing markets, contribute to young people being particularly vulnerable to housing insecurity. Additionally, Pearl et al. (2022) assert that it is this exposure to multiple social and economic factors, such as unemployment, low job security, high housing costs, and inadequate welfare support, that create the conditions that lead to young people's risk of homelessness.

In recognition of the current housing crisis illustrated above, state, territory and federal governments throughout Australia have developed targeted housing strategies. One such strategy is the Queensland Youth Strategy which was developed to address issues pertaining to young people in Queensland (Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services 2017). An element of this strategy is a targeted aim to improve housing for young people, in recognition

that 23.4% of all people experiencing homelessness are young people. Other key areas of this strategy include supporting vulnerable groups of young people, providing access to safe, secure and affordable housing, initiating health and wellbeing programs, and supporting educational pathways for improved employment outcomes (Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services 2017). Although vague in detailing specifically how these goals will be achieved, the housing strategy succeeds in acknowledging the presence and challenges of homelessness and housing insecurity in young people. However, while the strategy recognises young people as a vulnerable group and places an emphasis on education as a pathway out of homelessness, it fails to acknowledge and address the unique housing challenges and experiences of those engaged in tertiary education.

### **Homelessness, housing insecurity and tertiary education**

While the conditions that contribute to young people's vulnerability to housing insecurity and homelessness have been heavily researched, there has been a scarcity of Australian research in the context of tertiary students and housing precarity. Recent Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) data found that in 2019-2020, 2.2% young people (aged 15-24 years) accessing SHS services were university students (AIHW 2021). Grace et al. (2012) conducted a qualitative interview of 11 young people who were attending university while engaged with a youth-foyer housing program and aimed to document their experiences and challenges. The study identified that homelessness in university students was mostly experienced through hidden forms of homelessness such as couch surfing, staying in overcrowded accommodation, living in cars, or living in homeless accommodation services (Grace et al. 2012). Although this research is outdated, it provides vital information in establishing how homelessness can be experienced amongst young people studying at university. However, larger and more recent studies would be required to further examine the prevalence and experiences of homelessness and housing instability in young people engaged in tertiary education, particularly those not connected to a youth-foyer service where engagement in education or work is required.

Whilst there is a scarcity of research in Australia, housing insecurity and homelessness in tertiary students has been extensively researched in America and the United Kingdom (UK). Tsui et al. (2011) found 41.7% (approximately 100,000) of students studying at the City University of New York experienced housing insecurity. Similarly, Crutchfield and Maguire's (2018) online survey of 24,324 students at California State University found

that 10.9% of students reported being homeless one or more times within the past 12 months. In a smaller survey of 390 participants, Silva et al. (2017) identified that 4% of students had faced extremely unstable housing, and 5.4% had experienced homelessness since starting tertiary study. Additionally, two different studies by Haskett and colleagues on nearly 2000 university students' experiences of food insecurity and homelessness found that over 9% of students had experienced homelessness, with 4.6% of these students staying temporarily with friends or family, 2.6% sleeping outdoors, and 5% staying in temporary accommodation, closed areas or treatment centres (Haskett et al. 2020; Haskett et al. 2021). Evidently, homelessness and housing instability in tertiary students has been widely documented in American research, indicating that this is a well-identified social issue amongst tertiary students.

In addition, further American research has identified how being a student can contribute to homelessness and housing insecurity. These conditions reflect the intersection of university student lifestyle and housing challenges, such as losing their college residence during university holiday breaks; falling behind on rent which leads to the risk of eviction; threats to maintaining share housing if roommates are not able to cover their rent; and the need to prioritise the cost of schooling supplies over food or other essentials costs (Hallet and Crutchfield 2018). In consideration of the turbulent periods of the university student lifecycle, Crutchfield and Meyer-Adams (2019) suggest that students' experiences of housing insecurity are better understood as fitting along a housing security continuum, where they can fluctuate between high stability and high instability throughout the schooling period. Hence, in the context of the higher education environment, various points throughout the student lifecycle can increase risk of housing insecurity, alongside other external economic and social factors.

While these findings are key in establishing that housing insecurity and homelessness is an issue affecting university students, there is a gap in the research on this cohort in the Australian context. These American studies provide a wealth of knowledge in understanding homelessness and housing insecurity for university students that can be used as a preliminary foundation for researching this concept in Australia. However, these findings cannot necessarily be generalised to the Australian context as there are important differences between the two countries, including the nature and accessibility of the welfare systems, cost of higher education, and affordability and accessibility of housing. Furthermore, these American studies may not be representative of homelessness and housing insecurity in young students (ranging from 18-24 years), as participants of all age ranges were included.

Considering this gap in knowledge, the overlapping vulnerability factors to insecure housing that were previously identified in Australian young people, such as precarious employment, low income and insecure living arrangements, will be examined in tertiary students.

### **The vulnerability of university students**

A dominant cultural narrative of the 'starving student' depicts studying at university as a period marked by financial insecurity, inadequate access to nutritional and affordable food, and inconsistent living arrangements (Crutchfield et al. 2020a; Maynard et al. 2018). This rhetoric reinforces the assumption that living in poverty is a rite of passage for university students, rather than a situation requiring action from policy makers (Hallett and Crutchfield 2018). Failure to address housing precarity for university students on a social policy level not only silences the experiences of this group, reinforcing and perpetuating oppression and disadvantage, but also can have significant impacts on students' educational attainment and wellbeing. Previous research has identified that tertiary students are exposed to several factors that influence their vulnerability to experiencing insecure housing and homelessness, such as precarious employment and low incomes (Hallett and Crutchfield 2018), and food insecurity (Haskett et al. 2021). Hence, to consider housing insecurity and homelessness in young Australian university students, these vulnerabilities and their impacts on students will be analysed below.

### **Low income and income insecurity**

Income insecurity and low incomes have both been identified as factors that can increase vulnerability to homelessness and housing insecurity in Australian young people, and university students overseas (Chamberlain and Johnson and 2013; Miller 2011). In Australian tertiary students, financial hardship has been identified as a common issue. To monitor the financial challenges for university students, Universities Australia conducts a regular study on the cost-of-living for students. In 2017, Universities Australia surveyed 18,500 students of all ages about their income, employment, and living and study costs. They found that the median yearly income for domestic undergraduate students was \$20,900, with paid work (79.1%) and Youth Allowance (33.2%) being the main sources of income (Universities Australia 2018). This demonstrates that the majority of tertiary students are considered as either low-income earners or living in poverty, with the poverty line sitting at approximately \$23,000 per year for a single adult (Australian Council of Social Service 2020). Queensland Council of Social Service (2022) identified that the average weekly budget of a single university student (under 25) was below the poverty line by \$43.59 per week and in an average expenditure deficit of \$7.32 per week, leaving little

room to afford necessities. This was calculated based on a young student receiving both Youth Allowance and casual employment, with no dependents, which is the situation of the majority of young tertiary students. These findings provide evidence that young tertiary students in Australia have significantly low incomes, which may increase their risk of experiencing housing insecurity and homelessness in the face of high housing and living costs.

### **Precarious employment**

Tertiary students tend to be employed in casual jobs and face increasing precarity of employment. Precarious employment is work that involves irregular hours, that does not guarantee ongoing employment, and is associated with lower incomes and increased financial and housing stress (Chesters and Cuervo 2019; Victoria State Government 2021). Tertiary students are more likely to experience precarious employment than those who are not studying (Chesters and Cuervo 2019), with over half of all young workers under 25 employed in casual jobs (Creed et al. 2022). This places tertiary students in a precarious position where not only are they low-income earners, but their hours of employment can vary each week and are not guaranteed, which can result in their pay fluctuating with each pay period. An inconsistent wage and work schedule can have implications on a worker's financial security, which can also impact their ability to consistently afford housing.

Tertiary students, especially international students, are also vulnerable to exploitation through precarious employment. Clibborn's (2021) mixed methods study of 1433 international students in Sydney discovered that most participants were engaged in precarious work, with 60% of respondents being paid less than the National Minimum Wage, and 35% of this group being paid \$12 or less per hour. International students identified their lack of work experience, limited English language skills, temporary visa status, work and study requirements, and replaceability in this competitive underground job market, as barriers to obtaining employment with legal minimum wages (Clibborn 2021). If students are engaging in insecure and exploitative employment with wages below minimum wage, this can contribute to increasing vulnerability to securely afford their accommodation. Employment insecurity has been linked to housing insecurity as precarious employment reduces the capacity for households to access accommodation, consistently pay their rent or mortgage costs, and access income support (Beer et al. 2016; Bentley et al. 2019).

Precarious employment cannot only have an impact on student's abilities to gain secure housing, but can also come at the detriment to their higher education

studies and wellbeing. In a survey of 24 Australian working tertiary students, Creed et al. (2022) identified a negative relationship between precarious employment and wellbeing, with wellbeing being negatively impacted through student's experiencing poorer sleep quality, student burnout, high financial and job strain, and affected academic performance and functioning. These findings are consistent with previous research in an international study by Barber and Levitan (2015), which found that amongst the 78 Canadian university students surveyed, students who needed to engage in work to meet their basic necessities and tuition costs were disadvantaged in higher education systems. Due to financial insecurity, these students needed to prioritise employment rather than their education, resulting in work commitments and work-related fatigue reducing student's available time to study and complete assessment, and thus reduced their academic performance (Barber and Levitan 2015).

### ***Food Insecurity***

Tertiary students with low incomes have been identified as vulnerable to experiencing food insecurity, which is strongly associated to financial and housing insecurity, and has detrimental effects on student's wellbeing and education. Food insecurity may occur when access to healthy foods is compromised (Gallegos et al. 2014), food intake is disrupted or reduced, or meals are missed due to limited finances (Crutchfield et al. 2020b). To measure food insecurity in Australian university students, Gallegos et al. (2014) surveyed 810 tertiary students and found that one in four (25.5%) students experienced food insecurity. These findings have been supported by recent research by Brownfield et al. (2023) whose study found that in 664 Australian tertiary students aged under 25, 25.5% of students were food insecure. Corroborating reports from these studies demonstrate the widespread prevalence of food insecurity throughout tertiary students in Australia, as demonstrated consistently even after almost a decade. Additionally, food insecurity is associated with greater psychological distress and poorer academic performance (Brownfield et al. 2023; Dana et al. 2023). Considering the widespread and long documented experiences of food insecurity in young university students on low incomes, food insecurity may be indicative of more extensive insecurity of students' basic needs.

Alongside negative wellbeing and academic outcomes, food insecurity in university students has been connected to experiences of housing insecurity and homelessness. Students who are privately renting, working part-time or reduced hours, and/or receiving government income support are more likely to experience food insecurity (Gallegos et al. 2014). An American study by Goldrick-Rab et al. (2018) found that out of 43,000 students,

36% reported experiencing food insecurity, and 22% had experienced both food insecurity and housing instability. Additionally, of this initial 22%, a further 8% of students reported experiencing housing insecurity, food insecurity and homelessness (Goldrick-Rab et al. 2018). These results identify a correlation between experiences of food insecurity, precarious housing and homelessness in American tertiary students. Notably, these results do not establish a causal relationship between food insecurity, homelessness and housing insecurity. However, they identify an association between these different factors of basic needs insecurity within the tertiary student population. As food insecurity has already been well-documented in Australian students, these findings indicate the strong possibility of a more extensive situation of tertiary student housing instability and homelessness than currently recognised.

### ***Housing for university students***

The situation of low wages and precarious employment makes it difficult for tertiary students to access private rentals in what is currently an unprecedentedly expensive and competitive rental market. Recently, Australian media and news reports have become increasingly focused on Australian tertiary students, reporting this cohort to be particularly affected by the current housing crisis and rising cost-of-living. As various ABC news articles report, students are priced out of rental markets (Nothling 2023), increasingly exposed to housing scams (Mayes 2023), sleeping in cars amid accommodation shortages (Olumee and Rheinberger 2022) and resorting to actively skipping meals to afford necessary life expenses (O'Flaherty and Hamilton-Smith 2023). Whilst these reports demonstrate the growing disparity and exclusion of tertiary students from housing, there is a significant lack of empirical research in this area to identify the extent and impact of the housing crisis for young tertiary students.

Despite the limited research, the unaffordability of the rental market for tertiary students was identified in a recent report. Anglicare (2023a) conducted a review of the affordability of rental property for low-income earners receiving different income streams, including Youth Allowance. Youth Allowance is a government income support payment for young people under 24, with a maximum payment of \$562.80 per fortnight for a single person over the age of 18, living out of home (Services Australia 2023), and is received by many tertiary students. In analysing 45,895 rental listings on realestate.com.au nationally across March of this year, Anglicare (2023a) found that there were zero affordable homes available for a single person over 18 receiving Youth Allowance. In Queensland, of the 2859 available rental properties available in Brisbane, the median rent of

a single rental and a room in a share house for a single person aged over 18 receiving Youth Allowance, equated to 113% and 88% of this payment, respectively (Anglicare 2023b). Furthermore, this year's report found the lowest number of available rentals for people on low incomes in the history of the Anglicare snapshot (Anglicare 2023a). This data suggests young students receiving Youth Allowance are significantly impacted by rising private rental costs and may find it virtually impossible to obtain affordable private rental accommodation, unless they share with others. While this study is only conducted at one point in time, over a single weekend in March, it provides important insight into the affordability of the private rental market for young tertiary students.

Due to issues of affordability, tertiary students may find themselves living in insecure, overcrowded shared housing. Students with low incomes commonly rely upon shared housing for economic affordability, to reduce housing and other living expenses (Hilder et al. 2018; Nasreen and Ruming 2021). However, to reduce their housing costs to a more affordable amount, students may end up living in overcrowded conditions through shared-room housing or overcrowded shared housing. Shared-room housing refers to group housing where two or more unrelated tenants share a sleeping space (bedrooms or portioned living rooms) and share the rental costs (Nasreen and Ruming 2021). Often these arrangements may be informal, which can appeal to low-income tenants and those without a rental history, as they are commonly excluded from the traditional, formal rental market (Maalsen et al. 2022; Nasreen and Ruming 2021). Hence, exploitative and insecure living arrangements may be more accessible than the traditional rental market, limiting student's housing options and contributing to their disadvantage and vulnerability to housing insecurity and homelessness.

Whilst informal or overcrowded housing arrangements are not experienced by all tertiary students living in share homes, initial research has identified numerous tertiary students living in these conditions. In a study of 135 people living in shared housing arrangements in Sydney, Nasreen and Ruming (2021) found that 18% of participants lived in living rooms that were converted to bedrooms, and 27% of participants shared a bedroom with more than one person. While university students were not the intended core demographic of Nasreen and Ruming's (2021) study, 29% participants were tertiary students. This provides valuable preliminary evidence to demonstrate that some tertiary students live in insecure, shared housing situations. Under these conditions, these tertiary students may be living in dwellings that the ABS (2016) would define as severely overcrowded (if at least four additional bedrooms are required to adequately

accommodate each household member) and classify these students as homeless. Hence, while preliminary, this research indicates that the lack of available, accessible and affordable housing may contribute to tertiary students living in insecure, overcrowded, shared living arrangements. As these findings are only from a small sample size, taken in one location in Australia and participants were from all age groups, further research is necessary to establish the prevalence of young tertiary students living in overcrowded share homes, and thus experiencing homelessness and/or housing insecurity.

### ***Impacts of housing insecurity and homelessness on tertiary students***

To fully grasp the implications of homelessness and housing insecurity for tertiary students, it is necessary to understand how it impacts student's education and wellbeing. Basic need insecurities, encapsulating food insecurity, financial insecurity, housing insecurity and homelessness, have been found to have significant negative impacts on student's wellbeing such as anxiety, depression, physical health, and reduced academic success (Coakley et al. 2022; Kornbluh et al. 2022; Leung et al. 2021). In a UK qualitative study of 16 tertiary students, it was reported that student's studying capabilities were negatively affected by the challenges they faced while experiencing homelessness and living in substandard, overcrowded temporary housing (Mulrenan et al. 2018). Students reported that their housing situations lacked privacy and designated learning spaces for effective study, lacked internet to access learning materials, and frequent transitions between different accommodations often resulted in losing study materials and encountering difficulties in commuting to university (Mulrenan et al. 2018). Grace et al.'s (2012) Australian study found that while students were committed to completing their studies, they still faced a number of barriers that impacted their studies, such as a lack of social networks, and health-related issues. In addition, these students tend to experience more delays across their course and to take longer to complete their studies due to the interruption of housing concerns (Grace et al. 2012). As these findings suggest, inadequate access to appropriate and secure housing significantly places students at a disadvantage, negatively impacting their studies and their wellbeing.

### **Discussion**

Upon examining the available Australian and international literature, it is evident that young tertiary students in Australia are a vastly under-researched cohort in the context of homelessness and housing insecurity. While the extent of young students experiencing homelessness and/or housing insecurity is undetermined in Australia, it is evident that students experience a range of structural

inequalities that contribute to their vulnerability to homelessness and housing insecurity, such as low incomes, precarious employment and unaffordable housing.

It is imperative that quantitative and qualitative research is performed throughout various regions of Australia to identify the prevalence, experiences, challenges and required resources for young people experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity whilst engaged in tertiary education. Such research needs to include a diverse range of students, with varying income levels, ethnic backgrounds, and family socio-economic status to determine the factors shaping tertiary students' risk and experiences of housing inequality and homelessness. As student homelessness tends to be more hidden, it is also important that future research explores the various types of homelessness that tertiary students experience, such as couch surfing, temporary housing, and severe overcrowding (Brownfield et al. 2023). In addition, the educational and wellbeing outcomes of homeless and housing insecure students need to be compared with students who have secure housing. Without adequate data, these students remain marginalised, silenced and overlooked by social policy and university support services.

There is a need for target responses and support from university for students at risk of and/ or experiencing housing insecurity and homelessness. Mulrenan et al. (2018) argues that tertiary institutions should identify a student's housing status in the same manner that they do a student's socio-economic background and ethnicity, to ensure appropriate support is provided by the university. Furthermore, as the diversity of students attending university increases, tertiary institutions need to consider how to implement a range of flexible, appropriate and inclusive programs to support students from diverse backgrounds (Costa et al. 2020). As proposed by Bland (2018), these programs could include specific bursaries/scholarships to support students to find affordable accommodation, programs where universities provide students with the opportunity to obtain deposit-free and guarantor-free accommodation, and for universities to advocate for rental control to the private student accommodation companies they endorse. Students may also be impacted by shame and stigma surrounding accessing university resources, so tertiary institutions may need to implement discrete, supporting and commonly available, known and easily accessible support services (Mulrenan et al. 2018).

Whilst universities play a crucial role in the provision of these support services, it is imperative that safe and affordable housing for young tertiary students be

addressed through the provision of appropriate social policy. The Australian government must incorporate the specific needs, experiences and challenges of housing for young tertiary students into their social policies, strategies and reforms to address the structural disadvantage of this cohort. The Queensland Family & Child Commission (2018) states that young peoples' experience of homelessness is diverse and as such the policy solutions needed to address this issue need to reflect this diversity and the issues they face. Research evidence that identifies the extent, experiences and challenges of homelessness and housing insecurity of this population is needed to ensure policy and service responses adequately target the range of issues at play for this cohort, such as low incomes, the need for time to study and attend classes, and the lack of affordable low-cost housing. It is necessary for research to be conducted to inform social policy through identifying the extent, experiences and challenges of homelessness and housing insecurity for young people studying at university. This is imperative to providing a clear pathway forward to address affordable housing for this cohort, to ensure their experiences and needs are reflected and addressed throughout Australian housing social policy.

## Conclusion

The paper has highlighted the various factors that contribute to the vulnerability of young tertiary students to housing insecurity and homelessness. Previous research overseas has identified tertiary students as significantly experiencing prominent rates of housing insecurity and homelessness. However, there is a paucity of research in Australia to determine if this is the case in young Australian tertiary students. Both tertiary students and young people experience numerous structural inequalities associated with housing vulnerability such as low income, precarious employment, insecure living arrangements and basic needs insecurity. Thus, it is vital for researchers to begin to explore this area to identify the extent, experiences and challenges of young tertiary students experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity in Australia. Failure to bring attention to this cohort in research and social policy initiatives will continue to perpetuate the cycle of disadvantage experienced by this cohort, leading to them being silenced and slipping through the gaps throughout our education system and housing initiatives. In contemporary Australia, it is incredulous that a student should be positioned as having to choose between obtaining an education and having a secure place to call home. It is time to bring this cohort to the forefront of the housing conversation.

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## OBSERVATION TANKS

Axolotls blink their gills. They water-breathe  
and climb across each other at multiple elevations.

Every shiver of shark pups behaves in a circle.  
These, the epaulette sharks, hardly breathe at all.

PhDs patrol the gridwalk mesh over beds rolling  
with glass eels, elvers and fingerling squids.

All shark relatives possess eyelids, but no desire  
to blink. In its aquarium the axolotl's behaviour,

gold with goldenrod eyes, is tied to the thyroid  
in a complicated, almost Greco-Roman coil.

Mutatis mutandis the slippery salamanders  
in their semi-aquatic terraces on Vivarium Lane.

They stare with blank abandon at their carers'  
blue synthetic overcoats, carrying in their stems

the cell memory of an unassailable craft  
dropping anchor. The swoop of specimen nets.

Dark memory-foam impressions of creatures  
jettisoned from the Ark. These fish know

they are hungry. Those fish know they are fed.  
A ghost knife nods its electrosensitive head.

## Guardian seven three twenty-three

A fish inside a birdcage  
teaching's last gasp recorded  
and rebroadcast to silent screens.

A simulacra of educational exchange  
reducing educators to talking taxidermy  
and quality oversight.

No teaching happens here.

DEANNA GRANT-SMITH

MITCHELL WELCH