

# Transitional Housing

## EVIDENCE BRIEF

Transitional housing is primarily provided as social assistance. There is some evidence that providing transitional housing to offenders exiting prison can reduce reoffending, particularly among serious violent offenders.

### OVERVIEW

- Transitional Housing involves providing short-term housing for people who are homeless, who may have particular needs, and often also transitioning back into the community (e.g. from a prison or mental health facility).
- In the Justice sector the most common example of Transitional Housing is for offenders leaving prison, although it may also be provided to people with community sentences who have accommodation needs.
- The primary focus of Transitional Housing is to help people who need it, rather than to reduce crime. For some ex-prisoners Transitional Housing may also be aimed at managing high needs and reoffending risk.
- There is some evidence that providing accommodation to offenders exiting prison can reduce reoffending, particularly when provided alongside other reintegrative services.
- Transitional Housing reduces crime among serious violent offenders, but the evidence is less clear for less serious offenders.
- Evidence suggests that Transitional Housing may also reduce offending for people with mental illness who are homeless.
- More stable housing is associated with reduced recidivism. Permanent housing interventions will likely have a greater impact on reoffending than transitional housing interventions.

### EVIDENCE BRIEF SUMMARY

Evidence rating:	Fair
Unit cost:	Approximately \$6k to \$8k per individual for each stay, up to three months.
Effect size (number needed to treat):	For every 19 serious offenders receiving transitional housing, one less will reoffend.
Current NZ spend:	\$3.5m (Corrections) \$354 million (MSD)
Unmet demand:	Approximately 650 people exiting prison per year are homeless <sup>i</sup> Full unmet demand is unknown but likely to be in the thousands.

---

## WHAT IS TRANSITIONAL HOUSING?

Transitional Housing is a broad term that has been applied to different programme models. It involves providing short-term housing. “In its common and traditional form, Transitional Housing is time-limited housing... in single units or congregate settings provided with intensive services that are... aimed to help participants transition into permanent housing.”<sup>ii</sup>

People who receive Transitional Housing are usually homeless or facing homelessness. They may be leaving an institution that provided accommodation such as a prison, a mental health facility, military service, or state care.

In the justice sector, internationally and locally, Transitional Housing can be provided to people leaving prison or to people with community sentences who have accommodation needs.

Both Corrections and the Ministry for Social Development (MSD) make a distinction between emergency housing and transitional housing. Both are short-term, although emergency housing lasts for a shorter period than transitional housing. Both have been included in this brief as they are conceptually similar in the research literature.

Programmes that provide Transitional Housing usually also provide a range of other services depending on the programme design. They may support the person to gain employment, manage their finances, overcome drug addiction, and, most frequently, gain more long-term housing.

---

## DOES TRANSITIONAL HOUSING REDUCE CRIME?

Housing is important for successful reintegration when prisoners are released, both in New Zealand and internationally<sup>iii</sup>.

### International evidence

In the US, Miller & Ngugi<sup>iv</sup> conducted two meta-analyses on the impact of housing supports; one with homeless people with mental illness and the other with ex-offenders. For those with mental illness they found 9 programmes investigated across 5 studies, two of which measured the impact of social housing on crime. They found that for the 3,466 people who received social housing crime reduced by 5% for homeless people with mental illness<sup>v</sup>.

Among ex-offenders the authors found that only one robust study examined Transitional Housing specifically<sup>vi</sup>. Miller and Ngugi widened their scope to studies of re-entry programmes that included housing, and conducted a meta-analysis with the resulting 7 randomised control trials. They found that the re-entry programmes with housing supports were not related to recidivism for the general population of ex-offenders, but for serious, violent ex-offenders these programmes reduced reoffending by 15%<sup>vii</sup>.

Only one study examined the impact of exclusively providing housing to offenders. They found that providing substance-free Transitional Housing reduced substance use over time; however they could not find a relationship between housing provision and recidivism<sup>viii</sup>. The small sample size and limited one-year follow-up period may have prevented the authors from finding any effect on recidivism.

Zhang, Roberts, and Callanan<sup>ix</sup> measured 12 month re-incarceration rates for parolees who either received or did not receive one or more of 6 reintegration programmes, one of which was therapeutic transitional housing. The authors found that all programmes reduced recidivism. However parolees who participated in transitional housing had the lowest re-incarceration rate at 15.5%, compared with other programmes with re-incarceration rates between 26.5% and 40.4%<sup>x</sup>.

No statistical analysis was performed to conclusively show that it was the housing aspect of this intervention that made the difference. This is also the case for other studies<sup>xi</sup>.

Because this research often does not separate housing support from other kinds of reintegration support, it is difficult to determine whether housing support alone reduced re-incarceration rates<sup>xii</sup>.

Another limitation of this research is that control groups in transitional housing studies may not be sufficiently similar to treatment groups. That is, participants who do not receive transitional housing may be more resilient and able to house themselves than those who receive transitional housing.

## **New Zealand evidence**

There is no New Zealand evidence on the effectiveness of Transitional Housing specifically. Robust studies based in New Zealand would improve the evidence rating for Transitional Housing.

Corrections have conducted evaluations on two of their reintegrative services: Release to Work and Out of Gate. Overall, the evidence suggests that these reintegrative services have a positive impact on reoffending (see the Reintegration Services evidence brief for more information). However, neither of these programmes includes a Transitional Housing component.

MSD is currently in the process of evaluating their emergency housing funding model.

---

## **WHAT MAKES TRANSITIONAL HOUSING EFFECTIVE?**

The reasons that transitional housing may reduce crime are similar to the reasons that reintegrative services may reduce crime.

Social control theories<sup>xiii</sup> are based on the idea that individuals are less likely to engage in criminal behaviour when their bond to society is strong. These theories hypothesise that transitional housing can reduce reoffending through building a commitment to conventional society.

One commentator suggested that because transitional housing helps ex-prisoners to regain long-term housing, this in turn facilitates social attachment<sup>xiv</sup>.

Furthermore housing may be a pre-requisite for gaining and maintaining employment, which also reduces recidivism by increasing social control<sup>xv</sup>.

Another useful perspective is “relapse prevention”, which proposes that relapse into an undesirable pattern of (formerly habitual) behaviour, such as criminal offending, is more likely to occur when the individual faces high levels of stress, such as homelessness, lack of income, and absence of social support. Housing can reduce stress and enable people to deal with stressors more effectively<sup>xvi</sup>.

---

## WHEN IS TRANSITIONAL HOUSING MOST EFFECTIVE?

Little research has examined when Transitional Housing reduces crime most effectively, although some important elements are known.

### Longer term housing is more effective

One study found that longer lengths of stay in Transitional Housing were associated with reduced substance use<sup>xvii</sup>.

To be most effective, Transitional Housing should be provided in a way that enables offenders to maintain or gain stable, long-term housing<sup>xviii</sup>.

There is international evidence that transience increases recidivism rates<sup>xix</sup>. US studies have found increases in risk of offending between 25% and 70% with each change of address<sup>xx</sup>. Other studies have found that not moving house, or only moving once, reduced the likelihood of return to prison<sup>xxi</sup>.

Long-term housing provision is likely to be a more effective option<sup>xxii</sup>, however where this is not possible transitional housing can ensure people have housing in the mean time.

### Housing serious, violent offenders

One study reported that Transitional Housing receipt reduced crime the most for serious violent offenders<sup>xxiii</sup>.

### Helpful accommodation support

The support provided alongside any housing initiative can impact on the likelihood of return to prison. Housing may be just one aspect of many that need to be addressed for successful prisoner reintegration<sup>xxiv</sup>. In one study accommodation support that the recipients evaluated as being useful reduced the likelihood

of reincarceration<sup>xxv</sup>. Some research has found that transitional housing participants who achieve programme goals are less likely to return to prison<sup>xxvi</sup>.

---

## WHAT OTHER BENEFITS DOES TRANSITIONAL HOUSING HAVE?

### Health and behavioural outcomes

Transitional Housing may reduce substance use and stress among offenders when they are released from prison<sup>xxvii</sup>. One study comparing Transitional Housing with an entry requirement of sobriety to Transitional Housing that did not require sobriety found only a small difference in health outcomes between the two; both social housing programmes improved health outcomes<sup>xxviii</sup>.

### Other outcomes such as employment, earnings and benefit receipt

Transitional Housing is usually accompanied by a raft of other services including support to gain skills and employment. The impact of Transitional Housing on employment has not been evaluated.

---

## CURRENT INVESTMENT IN NEW ZEALAND

### Corrections

Corrections have a number of contracts with community providers that involve Transitional Housing to up to 750 offenders each year.

These include emergency accommodation for high-risk offenders who have no accommodation after leaving prison (or for whom existing accommodation arrangements have broken down) and supported accommodation.

Supported accommodation involves provision of 3-months long housing with casework support to address other reintegrative needs and to locate long-term accommodation options.

### Ministry of Social Development

The Ministry of Social Development (MSD) provides housing support across the housing spectrum; from short term emergency housing to social housing. Emergency and transitional housing is provided on a case-by-case basis.

Some of transitional housing places MSD provides are dedicated places for perpetrators of family violence with a Police Safety Order in place. This allows police to remove a suspected perpetrator of family violence from the family home for up to five days.

MSD is also implementing Housing First in Auckland. This more long-term housing response that targets chronic homelessness, specifically for people who have been homeless for a year or more. The initiative focuses on moving people into housing first and then provides support to address the issues underpinning their homelessness. MSD has funded a two year trial in Auckland for 472 Housing First places and received funding in Budget 16 to deliver a 500 place expansion of Housing First to high needs regions.

In Budget 2017 MSD received funding for a trial called 'Creating Positive Pathways for People with a Corrections History' to purchase 250 additional social housing places for ex-prisoners with housing needs. The trial will provide them with access to stable accommodation and support services following completion of a Corrections reintegration programme.

### The role of Housing New Zealand

Housing New Zealand Provides tenancy and property management services for social housing tenants. Their March managed stock report indicated that they have 15 transitional houses, provided for 12-24 weeks, and 344 emergency houses, provided for up to 12 weeks<sup>xxix</sup>.

Much of their housing is inappropriate for ex-prisoners, who usually require small units<sup>xxx</sup>.

---

## EVIDENCE RATING AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Each Evidence Brief provides an evidence rating between Harmful and Strong.

Harmful	Robust evidence that intervention increases crime
Poor	Robust evidence that intervention tends to have no effect
Inconclusive	Conflicting evidence that intervention can reduce crime
Fair	Some evidence that intervention can reduce crime
Promising	Robust international <i>or</i> local evidence that intervention tends to reduce crime
Strong	Robust international <i>and</i> local evidence that intervention tends to reduce crime

According to the standard criteria for all Evidence Briefs<sup>xxxi</sup>, the appropriate evidence rating for Transitional Housing is Fair.

As per the standard definitions of evidence strength outlined in our methodology, the interpretation of this evidence rating is that:

- There is some evidence that social housing can reduce crime.
- It is unclear whether social housing will generate return even if implemented well.
- May benefit from trial approaches with a research and development focus.
- Robust evaluation needed to confirm interventions are delivering a positive return and to aid in detailed service design.

Further research, particularly a randomised controlled trial in New Zealand, may improve the evidence rating for social housing.

**First edition completed:** June 2017

**Primary author:** Laura Crawford

---

## FIND OUT MORE

### Go to the website

[www.justice.govt.nz/justice-sector/what-works-to-reduce-crime/](http://www.justice.govt.nz/justice-sector/what-works-to-reduce-crime/)

### Email

[whatworks@justice.govt.nz](mailto:whatworks@justice.govt.nz)

### Recommended reading

Miller, M., & Ngugi, I. (2009). *Impacts of housing supports: Persons with mental illness and ex-offenders*. Olympia: Washington State Institute for Public.

O’Leary, C. (2013). The role of stable accommodation in reducing recidivism: what does the evidence tell us? *Safer Communities*, 12(1), 5-12.

## Citations

- <sup>i</sup> State Services Commission, the Treasury, and the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2014
- <sup>ii</sup> Tsai, Kaspro, Quarles, & Hoff, 2016
- <sup>iii</sup> Johnston, 2016; Baldry, McDonnell, Maplestone, & Peeters, 2006; O’Leary, 2013; LeBel, 2017
- <sup>iv</sup> Miller & Ngugi, 2009
- <sup>v</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>vi</sup> Worcel, Burrus, & Finigan, 2009
- <sup>vii</sup> Miller & Ngugi, 2009
- <sup>viii</sup> Worcel, Burrus, & Finigan, 2009
- <sup>ix</sup> Zhang, Roberts, and Callanan, 2006
- <sup>x</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>xi</sup> Braga, Piehl, & Hureau, 2009
- <sup>xii</sup> O’Leary, 2013
- <sup>xiii</sup> Sampson & Laub, 1993; Hirschi, 1969
- <sup>xiv</sup> Baldry, McDonnell, Maplestone, & Peeters, 2003
- <sup>xv</sup> Rodriguez & Brown, 2003
- <sup>xvi</sup> O’Brien, 2001
- <sup>xvii</sup> Worcel, Burrus, & Finigan, 2009
- <sup>xviii</sup> Johnston, 2016
- <sup>xix</sup> Social Exclusion Unit, 2002; Broner, Lang, & Behler, 2009
- <sup>xx</sup> Makarios, Steiner, & Travis III, 2010; Meredith, 2007
- <sup>xxi</sup> Baldry, McDonnell, Maplestone, & Peeters, 2003
- <sup>xxii</sup> O’Leary, 2013
- <sup>xxiii</sup> Miller & Ngugi, 2009
- <sup>xxiv</sup> LeBel, 2017
- <sup>xxv</sup> Baldry, McDonnell, Maplestone, & Peeters, 2003
- <sup>xxvi</sup> Zhang, Roberts, & Callanan, 2006
- <sup>xxvii</sup> Worcel, Burrus, & Finigan, 2009
- <sup>xxviii</sup> Tsai, Rosenheck, Kaspro, & McGuire, 2012
- <sup>xxix</sup> Housing New Zealand, 2017
- <sup>xxx</sup> State Services Commission, the Treasury, and the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2014
- <sup>xxxi</sup> Available at [www.justice.govt.nz/justice-sector/what-works-to-reduce-crime/](http://www.justice.govt.nz/justice-sector/what-works-to-reduce-crime/)

---

## References

- Baldry, E., McDonnell, D., Maplestone, P., & Peeters, M. (2003). *Ex-prisoners and accommodation: what bearing do different forms of social housing have on social reintegration?* Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute.
- Baldry, E., McDonnell, D., Maplestone, P., & Peeters, M. (2006). Ex-Prisoners, Homelessness and the State in Australia. *The Australian and New Zealand Journal of Criminology*, 39, 1-14.
- Braga, A. A., Piehl, A. M., & Hureau, D. (2009). Controlling violent offenders released into the community: An evaluation of the Boston reentry initiative. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 46(4), 411-436.
- Broner, N., Lang, M., & Behler, S. A. (2009). The Effect of Homelessness, Housing Type, Functioning, and Community Reintegration Supports on Mental Health Court Completion and Recidivism. *Journal of Dual Diagnosis*, 5(3-4), 323-356. doi:10.1080/15504260903358801
- Fontaine, J., Gilchrist-Scott, D., Roman, J., Taxy, S., & Roman, C. (2012). *Supportive Housing for Returning Prisoners: Outcomes and Impacts of the Returning Home—Ohio Pilot Project*. Ohio: The Urban Institute. Retrieved from <http://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/25716/412632-Supportive-Housing-for-Returning-Prisoners-Outcomes-and-Impacts-of-the-Returning-Home-Ohio-Pilot-Project.PDF>
- Freedman, M., & Owens, E. G. (2011). Low-income housing development and crime. *Journal of Urban Economics*, 70, 115-131.
- Friedman, D. (2010). *Social impact of poor housing*. London: Ecotec.
- Hirschi, T. (1969). *Causes of Delinquency*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Holzman, H. R. (1996). Criminological research on public housing: Toward a better understanding of people, places, and spaces. *Crime and Delinquency*, 2, 107-126.
- Housing New Zealand. (2017, March 31). *Property by number of bedrooms*. Housing New Zealand. Retrieved June 15, 2017, from <http://www.hnzc.co.nz/publications/housing-statistics/>
- Johnston, A. (2016). *Beyond the Prison Gate: Reoffending and Reintegration in Aotearoa New Zealand*. Manukau: The Salvation Army Social Policy and Parliamentary Unit. Retrieved from [www.salvationarmy.org.nz/PrisonGate](http://www.salvationarmy.org.nz/PrisonGate)
- Kling, J. R., Ludwig, J., & Katz, L. F. (2005). Neighbourhood effects on crime for female and male youth: Evidence from a randomized housing voucher experiment. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 120(1), 87-130. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25098732>
- LeBel, T. P. (2017). Housing as the Tip of the Iceberg in Successfully Navigating Prisoner Reentry. *Criminology and Public Policy*, 6(3), 18. doi:10.1111/1745-9133.12313
- Ludwig, J., Duncan, G. J., & Hirschfield, P. (2001, May). Urban poverty and juvenile crime: Evidence from a randomized housing-mobility study. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 116(2), 655-679. doi:https://doi.org/10.1162/00335530151144122
- Lutze, F. E., Rosky, J. W., & Hamilton, Z. K. (2014). A Multisite Outcome Evaluation of Washington State's Reentry Housing Program for High Risk Offenders. *Criminal Justice and Behaviour*, 41(4), 471-491. doi:10.1177/0093854813510164
- Makarios, M., Steiner, B., & Travis III, L. F. (2010). Examining the predictors of recidivism among men and women released from prison in Ohio. *Criminal Justice and Behaviour*, 37(12), 1377-1391. doi:10.1177/0093854810382876
- Matka, E. (1997). *Public Housing and Crime in Sydney*. Sydney: NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research.

- 
- Meredith, T. (2007). Developing and implementing automated risk assessments in parole. *Justice and Policy Research*, 9, 1-24.
- Miller, M., & Ngugi, I. (2009). *Impacts of housing supports: Persons with mental illness and ex-offenders*. Olympia: Washington State Institute for Public.
- Ministry of Justice. (2013). *Transforming Rehabilitation: A summary of evidence on reducing reoffending*. London: Ministry of Justice. Retrieved from <http://www.justice.gov.uk/publications/research-and-analysis/moj>
- O'Brien, P. (2001). "Just like baking a cake": Women describe the necessary ingredients for successful reentry after incarceration. *Families in Society: Journal of Contemporary Human Services*, 82, 287-295.
- O'Leary, C. (2013). The role of stable accommodation in reducing recidivism: what does the evidence tell us? *Safer Communities*, 12 (1), 5-12.
- Popkin, S. J., Rich, M. J., Hendey, L., Hayes, C., Parilla, J., & Galster, G. (2012). Public Housing Transformation and Crime: Making the Case for Responsible Relocation. *Cityscape*, 14(3), 137-160. Retrieved from [http://digitalcommons.wayne.edu/urbstud\\_frp/8](http://digitalcommons.wayne.edu/urbstud_frp/8)
- Rodriguez, N., & Brown, B. (2003). *Preventing Homelessness Among People Leaving Prison*. New York: Vera Institute of Justice. Retrieved from [storage.googleapis.com/veraweb-assets/downloads/Publications/preventing-homelessness-among-people-leavingprison/legacy\\_downloads/IIB\\_Homelessness.pdf](http://storage.googleapis.com/veraweb-assets/downloads/Publications/preventing-homelessness-among-people-leavingprison/legacy_downloads/IIB_Homelessness.pdf)
- Sampson, R. J., & Laub, J. H. (1993). *Crime in the Making: Pathways and Turning Points through Life*. Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Social Exclusion Unit. (2002). *Reducing re-offending by ex-prisoners*. London: Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.
- Social Investment Unit. (2017). *Social housing technical report: Measuring the fiscal impact of social housing services*. Wellington: Social Investment Unit.
- State Services Commission, the Treasury, and the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. (2014). *Performance Improvement Framework Follow-up Review: Department of Corrections*. Wellington: Author. Retrieved from [www.corrections.govt.nz](http://www.corrections.govt.nz)
- Tsai, J., Kaspro, W. J., Quarles, J. L., & Hoff, R. A. (2016). A 20-Site Comparison of Transition-in-Place Versus Traditional Transitional Housing Programs. *Administration and Policy in Mental Health*. doi:10.1007/s10488-016-0756-z
- Tsai, J., Rosenheck, R. A., Kaspro, W. J., & McGuire, J. F. (2012). Sobriety as an admission criterion for transitional housing: A multi-site comparison of programs with a sobriety requirement to programs with no sobriety requirement. *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*, 125, 223-229. doi:10.1016/j.drugalcdep.2012.02.016
- Weatherburn, D., Lind, B., & Ku, S. (1999). 'Hotbeds of crime?' Crime and public housing in urban Sydney. *Crime & Delinquency*, 45(2), 256-271.
- Worcel, S. D., Burrus, S. W., & Finigan, M. W. (2009). *A study of substance-free transitional housing and community corrections in Washington County, Oregon*. Portland, OR: NPC Research.
- Zhang, S. X., Roberts, R. E., & Callanan, V. J. (2006). Preventing parolees from returning to prison through community-based reintegration. *Crime & Delinquency*, 52(4), 551-571. doi:10.1177/0011128705282594

## SUMMARY OF EFFECT SIZES FROM META-ANALYSES

Meta-analysis	Treatment type/population	Outcome measure	Reported average effect size (d)	Number of estimates meta-analysis based on	Percentage point reduction in offending (assuming 50% untreated recidivism)	Number needed to treat (assuming 50% untreated recidivism)
Miller & Ngugi (2009)	Persons with mental illness	Crime	-0.038	2	0.02	58
	Serious violent ex-offenders	Crime	-0.115	4	0.05	19

\* Statistically significant at a 95% threshold

OR=Odds ratio

d=Cohen's d or variant (standardised mean difference)

Φ=phi coefficient (variant of correlation coefficient)

NA=Not applicable (no positive impact from treatment or non-offending measure)

NNT=Number needed to treat

NS: Not significant

NR: Significance not reported

RR: Risk Ratio