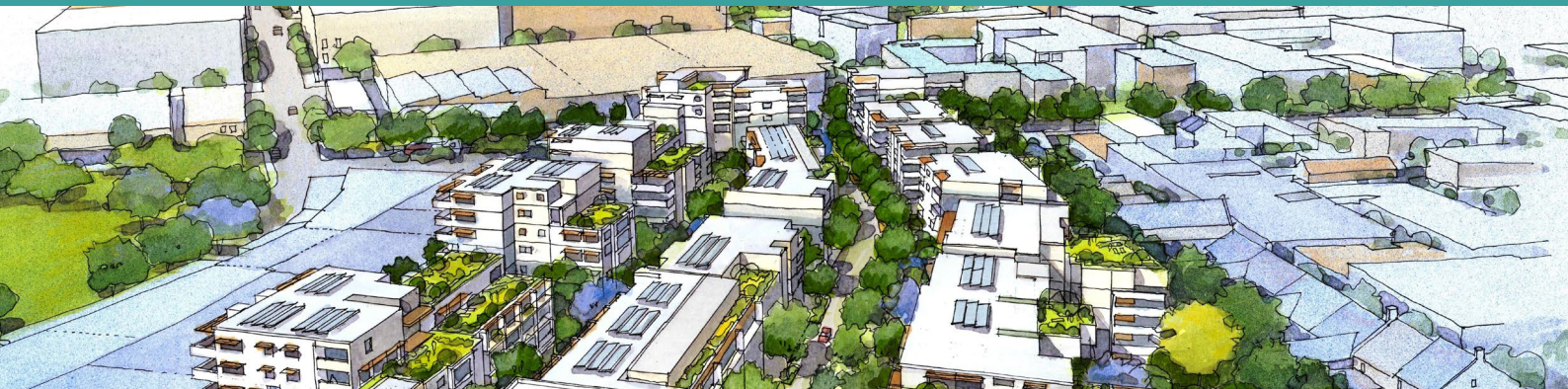


FUTURE DIRECTIONS EVALUATION UPDATE SERIES



Future Directions Evaluation: hitting the ground running

The Department of Communities and Justice welcomes you to the first in a series of newsletters that will update staff and stakeholders on the Future Directions Evaluation.

The evaluation is off to a flying start.

- Expert independent evaluators have been appointed and are working with us to produce early results
- Evaluators and housing program areas have co-designed the evaluation and are confident it will meet housing policy and program area needs
- More than 16,000 public housing clients have responded to a survey about their experiences, wellbeing and outcomes
- Results for individual program evaluations are already emerging and are being used to inform program improvement (see page 4).

Evidence essentials: how the evaluation will help you

The evaluation will improve the quality of social housing services in NSW now and in the future by providing evidence that:

-  helps you to effectively manage your programs and improve performance to better meet the needs of people living in social and affordable housing
-  flows in a way that supports your program needs
-  captures public housing client voices through the new DCJ Housing Client Outcomes and Satisfaction Survey
-  reports against the seven domains of the NSW Government Human Services Outcomes Framework
-  meets NSW government standards for process, outcome and economic evaluation (i.e. NSW Government Program Evaluation Guidelines and NSW Treasury Evidence Bank)
-  draws from data that are embedded into routine service delivery and performance monitoring.

“We value program evaluations, such as Future Directions, because they provide reliable evidence to help us continually improve our service to the community.” DCJ Secretary, Michael Coutts-Trotter

“Housing program areas are anticipating that the evaluation will help them improve outcomes for their clients. The Future Directions evaluation is aiming to be systematic, rigorous and, importantly, firmly embedded in service delivery.” Anne Campbell, Executive Director, Housing and Homelessness

Appointed evaluators know how to work with the communities DCJ serve

Two evaluation groups have been appointed. Both groups have extensive experience working with communities in social housing. The groups are:

- The University of Melbourne, in partnership with the Centre for Evidence and Implementation, Cultural and Indigenous Research Centre Australia, RMIT and Monash University, who will undertake the evaluation of the overarching Future Directions Strategy and larger programs (Communities Plus, Social Housing Management Transfers and the Social and Affordable Housing Fund).
- ARTD, in partnership with Taylor Fry and Social Ventures Australia, who will undertake the evaluation of Service Improvement Initiatives.

The evaluation groups include organisations and staff with expertise in engaging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.



“The Future Directions Evaluation should provide high-quality and robust evidence to support decision-making.” Roland Stanmore, NSW Treasury

Evaluators and programs have co-designed evaluations that focus on key social housing policy issues and client needs

The evaluation is producing evidence to answer two overarching questions:

1. To what extent is the Future Directions Strategy achieving its objectives?
2. Which of the Future Directions programs and initiatives is working well, for whom and under what circumstances?

An economic evaluation will measure the costs and benefits of programs and initiatives to guide decisions about investment in the future. Evaluation questions have been co-designed to address areas relevant to each program and initiative, with examples shown in the table below.

| Program/initiative name | Description | Example evaluation question |
|--|--|--|
| Social Housing Management Transfer | This program is transferring the management of around 14,000 properties to community housing providers. | How have support services embedded in social housing improved client and community outcomes? |
| Social and Affordable Housing Fund (SAHF) | SAHF provides access to more dwellings, managed by community housing providers, who link tenants to tailored coordination services. | Is this new model a sustainable and effective way to deliver social housing, and does it improve outcomes for tenants? |
| Service Improvement Initiatives | These initiatives, such as Rent Choice and Place Plans, aim to provide better access for social housing clients to education, training and employment opportunities. | How effective are these services in meeting the needs of social housing clients, and what helps or hinders success? |

About the Future Directions Evaluation

The evaluation, which will run from 2019 to 2022, will provide robust evidence on the effectiveness and efficiency of the Future Directions strategy and individual programs and initiatives. It will inform DCJ-wide policy development and service reform and improve client outcomes, while delivering the objectives of the reform.

For information about the evaluation, contact: FutureDirectionsEvaluation@facs.nsw.gov.au

Sound evaluation planning leads to early wins

Evaluations succeed or fail on the basis of careful planning, asking the right questions and having access to high-quality data. Planning is 90% of the work, and it is nearly complete for the Future Directions Evaluation.

This is what we have achieved so far.



1. NSW public housing client voices have been captured

- For the first time across DCJ, 16,000 public housing clients have provided data through the Housing Outcomes and Satisfaction Survey
- The survey captures clients' outcomes across the domains of the NSW Human Services Outcomes Framework and their experience of services
- The annual survey will be integral to the evaluation.



2. Using big data to drive understanding and performance of Future Directions has begun

- Data sharing agreements have been established with NSW Health and the Department of Education to start data linkage across relevant NSW government departments
- Data custodians have approved the release of data for a report within the next 12 months
- DCJ data are being analysed for baseline reports.



3. Evaluators and program areas have developed the evaluation framework and 10 evaluation plans

- The evaluation teams have established positive working relationships with the program areas and sought detailed feedback on the evaluation plans
- The plans meet the highest standards of evaluation design to produce reliable evidence about what works, and whether what works is cost beneficial
- More than 25 groups in DCJ and external stakeholders (peak bodies, Community Housing Providers, NSW Government and AHO) have identified their evaluation priorities
- Evaluation plans are approved and available.



4. Robust governance and communication structures have been established

- The evaluation governance and management is linked to the governance of Future Directions to ensure the information meets policy and program needs.

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Case study: Evaluation provides insights into benefits of the Place Plans program

The lead partner of one of the Future Directions Evaluation consortia, ARTD, responded rapidly to the need for evaluation evidence to support a review of the Place Plans program.

Place Plans is an evidence-based, place-based program, designed to work in partnership with communities to develop and implement place-building activities.

The Place Plans program has five objectives that include: building stronger and safer communities; improving access to education, training and employment; and improving access to effective and coordinated services.

There are 16 Place Plans teams operating across 31 social housing estates in NSW.

The evaluation focused on understanding whether and how Place Plans are improving the experience of social housing for residents.

A key finding of the evaluation is that the Place Plans program has successfully worked with local communities. In addition, early findings show crime rates are trending down in estates where the program has been implemented, compared to similar estates where the program has not been implemented, but these trends will need to be further investigated.

The evaluation also found that:

- Local residents and service providers agree that the Place Plans program has improved conditions and most have experienced positive change
- Strong partnerships and coordination between service providers and the community, and improvements in physical spaces helped to achieve change
- Sites that achieved the most success attribute it to the community's participation in co-designing their Place Plan.

“It was great to be able to conduct an outcomes evaluation so early in the Future Directions evaluation – we benefited greatly from a broad range of information including FACSIA’s previous work and data provided by the Place Plans team. We were pleased the evaluation was able to support decision-making about Place Plans.”

Andrew Hawkins, Partner, ARTD

“ARTD helped us to co-design an evaluation that highlighted how the Place Plans program is making a difference in the community, and is helping build the evidence base for ‘place-based’ approaches.”

Joe Parsons, A/Director, Design and Stewardship

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