



Linda Seaborn, September 2024

Australia's housing co-operative sector

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The BCCM is the national peak body for Australian co-operatives and mutuals. BCCM represents a diverse range of member-owned enterprises operating in sectors including community energy, agriculture, banking, insurance, motoring, health services, aged care, disability employment, housing and retail. Co-operatives and mutuals are corporations regulated under the harmonised state and territory Co-operatives National Law or under the Corporations Act.

Introduction

There are varying statistics provided about the amount of co-operative housing in Australia. The BCCM maintains the most comprehensive data on the size and scope of the Australian housing co-operative sector. The following information provides the assumptions and limitations of that data. It is intended to promote consistency in data about housing co-operatives to support effective communication about this important sector.

Co-operative housing in Australia is made up of four types:

1. Common Equity Rental Co-operatives
2. Independent Rental Co-operatives
3. First Nations Rental Co-operatives
4. Equity Co-operatives

Definitions

Common Equity Rental Co-operatives

Common Equity Rental Co-operatives are groups of housing co-operatives whose property is held in common ('common equity') in a jointly owned company. The individual co-op manages typically manages tenancy and minor maintenance. The Common Equity company manages major maintenance, holds the contracts and titles to the properties and is responsible for matters like capital funding, co-operative education and regulatory compliance.

These companies operate as secondary co-operatives with the individual housing co-operatives as members and having a board made up of representatives of the member co-ops, as well as independent directors.

The majority of the Common Equity Rental Co-operatives formed in the 1980s and 1990s when housing co-operatives received significant funding.

An advantage of a common equity model is that the company can register as a Community Housing Provider under the National Regulatory System for Community Housing (NRSCH) that started in 2014, allowing them to apply for growth funding from government housing programs.

Independent Rental Co-operatives

Independent Rental Co-operatives are generally housing co-operatives funded in the 1980s and 1990s under the Local Government and Community Housing Program (LoGCHoP) and the Community Housing Program. Both of these programs had 30 per cent of their funding 'tied' to the development of housing co-operatives.

They are not members of common equity companies, hence the term 'independent'. They range in size from five to 400 houses. Some are registered housing providers under NRSCH and many are not. Those that are not, are ineligible for growth funding.

First Nations Rental Co-operatives

First Nations Rental Co-operatives are often multi-purpose co-operatives providing a range of social services as well as housing. The co-operative model provides a good business structure to support the community-controlled aspect of Aboriginal services and was widely adopted in the 1970s. For the purposes of this data, some organisations which are not registered as co-operatives, but are community-controlled organisations which operate democratically and as such share key features with a registered co-op, are included.

Equity Co-operatives

Equity co-operatives are when the residents of the housing co-operative own equity in the co-op. It may be a share in the cost of the land, or the common facilities, or the whole development and it may be at full market cost or it may be partial. It may be able to be sold at market value or it may have limits on the gain that can be made on sale (limited equity).

Social Housing

In Australia 'social housing' means government funded housing for people who meet low income and assets eligibility criteria – including public housing, community housing and First Nations housing.

Community Housing

Community housing is intended to complement public housing. It is housing operated by not-for-profit housing associations, Indigenous corporations and housing co-operatives. It includes providers who are registered Community Housing Providers under the National Regulatory System for Community Housing (NRSCH) and providers who pre-date this regulation. It includes Common Equity, Independent and First Nations housing co-ops.

Affordable Housing

'Affordable housing' is a definition used differently in different Australian jurisdictions and contexts. There is no consistent definition and as such it is necessary to define what is meant in each context. The international benchmark for determining if housing is affordable is generally no more than 25–30 per cent of income for very low–moderate income households. A second benchmark is 'below market' cost, typically below 80 per cent of market cost which is also a standard set for charitable purpose in Australia. Therefore, when the BCCM refer to 'affordable housing' unless stated otherwise it means housing which is no more than 30 percent of household income, or equivalent to 80 per cent of market rent, whichever is the lower.

Level of confidence in data

Common Equity Rental Co-operatives	BCCM work with the Common Equities to maintain this data and are 100% confident in the data relating to common equity co-operatives.
Independent Rental Co-operatives	Data on this sector comes from extensive research undertaken by BCCM in 2017 and information from state co-op regulators and the ACNC. It is the most comprehensive data existing but may have some errors due to lack of currency.
First Nations Rental Co-operatives	This data comes from co-op regulator lists, internet searches and BCCM membership data. There is only a medium level of confidence in this data. There is likely to be more housing not listed yet.
Equity Co-operatives	This data comes from internet searches and a small amount of direct enquiry surveying by BCCM. There is a low level of confidence in this data. There is likely to be more housing not listed yet.

2024 data

Table 1: Number of housing co-operatives

State	Common equity rental stock	Independent rental stock	First Nations rental stock	Equity stock	Total
VIC	105	8	10	5	128
NSW	32	7	12	14	65
QLD	0	1	22	5	28
SA	11	6	0	3	20
WA	8	4	0	1	13
ACT	0	2	0	1	3
TAS	0	6	0	1	7
NT	0	0	1	0	1
Australia	156	34	45	30	265

Table 2: Number of co-operative houses/households

State	Common equity rental stock	Independent rental stock	First Nations rental stock	Equity stock	Total
VIC	1,980	562	116	145	2,803
NSW	534	475	94	623	1,726
QLD	0	10	458	112	580
SA	210	117	0	39	366
ACT	0	39	0	72	111
TAS	0	81	0	26	107
WA	63	42	0	6	111
NT	0	0	0	0	0
Australia	2,787	1,326	668	1,023	5,804

Table 3: Co-operative households as a percentage of housing types

State	All co-op housing as % of Total Housing ¹	Rental co-op housing as % of all rental housing ²	Rental co-op housing as % of Social housing ³	Rental co-op housing ⁴ as % of Community housing	First Nations co-ops as % of First Nations housing
VIC	0.10%	0.39%	3.24%	15.73%	6.22%
NSW	0.05%	0.12%	0.69%	1.86%	1.71%
QLD	0.03%	0.07%	0.60%	0.09%	8.83%
SA	0.05%	0.14%	1.25%	2.63%	0.00%
ACT	0.06%	0.07%	0.33%	4.07%	0.00%
TAS	0.04%	0.14%	0.56%	0.88%	0.00%
WA	0.01%	0.04%	0.25%	1.36%	0.00%
NT	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Australia	0.05%	0.17%	1.08%	3.65%	3.71%

The highest density of housing co-operatives is generally in Victoria, with the exception of the highest density of First Nations co-operative housing which is in Queensland.

¹ Total housing – from 2021 census data.

² All rental housing from 2021 Census data. ABS Census of Population and Housing – selected dwelling characteristics

³ Social housing, Community housing and First Nations housing – from 2022 data.

⁴ Excludes First Nations co-operative housing

With the introduction of the National Regulatory System for Community Housing, some rental housing co-operatives are registered Community Housing Providers and others are not. The following table displays this information.

Table 4: Number of housing co-operatives as registered Community Housing Providers

State	Common equity rental stock		Independent rental stock		First Nations rental stock		Total
	Registered	Not registered	Registered	Not registered	Registered	Not registered	
VIC	1980	0	509	53	0	116	2,658
NSW	534	0	419	56	10	84	1,103
QLD	0	0	0	10	312	146	468
SA	210	0	117	0	0	0	327
ACT	0	0	34	5	0	0	39
TAS	0	0	0	81	0	0	81
WA	63	0	0	42	0	0	105
NT	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Australia	2,787	0	1,079	247	322	346	4,781

Table 5: Percentage of Housing co-operatives as registered CHPs

State	Common equity rental stock		Independent rental stock		First Nations rental stock	
	Registered	Not registered	Registered	Not registered	Registered	Not registered
Australia	100%	0%	81%	19%	48%	52%

Table 6: Percentage community housing as housing co-operatives

	Community Housing ⁵	Housing in registered co-ops	Percentage of community housing as registered co-ops	Percentage of community housing as ALL rental co-ops
VIC	16,159	2,489	15.40%	16.45%
NSW	54,292	963	1.77%	2.03%
QLD	11,524	322	2.79%	4.06%
SA	12,430	327	2.63%	2.63%
ACT	958	34	3.55%	4.07%
TAS	9,252	-	0.00%	0.88%
WA	7,718	63	0.82%	1.36%
NT	495	-	0.00%	0.00%
Australia	112,828	4,157	3.68%	4.21%

⁵ Data as of 30 June 2022 AIHW Table DWELLINGS.2: Dwellings, by social housing program and states and territories, at 30 June 2010 to 2022

We would be pleased to provide any further information.
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