



# Youth crisis accommodation

## Yfoundations factsheet

The NSW Government funds Specialist Homelessness Service (SHS) to provide youth crisis accommodation – also known as refuges – to homeless young people across the state. Usually located in a house with individual bedrooms and shared living space, youth refuges are a short-term, emergency response that offers homeless young people shelter and support for up to three months. During this time, staff work with residents to identify longer-term housing solutions, whether that be returning to family, applying for social housing, accessing medium-term or transitional accommodation, or entering private rental accommodation. As well as emergency housing and case management, crisis services often provide outreach to young people in the community, to prevent homelessness before it occurs.

Caring for young people in crisis requires 24/7 SHS staff who are highly trained and can provide support to young people with complex needs. But these vital services are under-funded and over-stretched, frequently supporting more young people than their contracts require. Tragically, this means that crisis accommodation services often have to turn vulnerable young people away. A [2019 ACOSS survey](#) found that 36% of SHS staff reported rarely or never being able to meet demand.

### Who can youth crisis accommodation help?



[See our position paper on homeless 12 to 15-year-olds](#)

Youth refuges are targeted at 16 to 24-year-olds who are experiencing homelessness. Although they are under the age of 18, 16 and 17-year-olds are classified as 'young people' under the NSW Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 and are allowed to live away from home without their parents' consent. While refuges do occasionally accommodate homeless 12 to 15-year-olds, NSW Government policy stipulates that this must only be for a short period while family reunification is attempted. Where that is not possible and a child cannot return home, Child Protection is required to step in.

Youth refuges are designed to offer a broad crisis response for homeless young people. But not all 16 to 24-year-olds have their needs met through this model, given that it is a generalist service that is not staffed by mental health or drug and alcohol specialists. For young people with complex needs, more tailored accommodation is required.



[See our position paper on young people with complex needs](#)

## Transitional Accommodation

On top of crisis accommodation, most youth SHS are funded to deliver transitional accommodation to homeless 16 to 24-year-olds. While they support the same cohort as crisis services, transitional accommodation is a longer-term option that acts as a stepping stone between the refuge and independent living. In this model, young people are housed in shared or solo accommodation and receive support to sustain their tenancies, usually for a period of around a year. The property types used for transitional accommodation vary - some may have individual units in multiple locations, while others offer separate bedrooms in a shared house.



[See our factsheet on medium-term accommodation](#)

Transitional accommodation is a 'semi-independent' service, meaning that there is a lower level of onsite support than in a refuge or medium-term accommodation. Young people also have a higher level of responsibility in this kind of housing, as they must sign a Residential Tenancy Agreement and pay rent, equating to 25% of their income. This builds tenancy management skills and creates a rental history that the young person can use if they move on to the private market. During their stay, residents are offered outreach support from caseworkers, who help them identify their goals and access appropriate services.

Although this model offers a crucial service for homeless young people, its success partially depends on the availability of rental housing for young people to move into at the end of their stay. The dire lack of affordable properties in NSW, particularly in regional areas, means that young people are becoming "stuck" in transitional accommodation – when they are ready to leave, they have nowhere to go. This has [distorted the intended role of the SHS system](#) and created a bottleneck, leaving services struggling to exit young people sustainably.

### Who can transitional accommodation help?

Although transitional accommodation is offered to homeless young people from the age of 16, most under-18's are not ready for this level of independent living. To adequately support homeless 16 and 17-year-olds, Yfoundations advocates for more medium-term services, which have the same longer program duration as transitional accommodation but offer a much higher level of onsite support. Other young people, particularly those with behavioural issues stemming from trauma, severe mental health problems or drug and alcohol issues, also require more specialised residential services than that which transitional accommodation provides.



[See our position paper on young people with complex needs](#)