

ONELINK QUARTERLY REPORT ENDING JUNE 2022

What is OneLink?

OneLink is the central intake and assessment service for human services in the ACT. The service conducts assessments of all requests for assistance (accommodation and support services). It then prioritises people according to their needs and makes referrals based on a triaging process. OneLink maintains active holding to ensure engagement with service users continues where an immediate referral is not available. Ongoing support needs are continually reviewed in partnership with service users.

How does it work?

People can access OneLink through 1800 176 468, in person at Nature Conservation House (NCH), at Outreach locations or via the OneLink Website (www.OneLink.org.au/services) through webchat.

When a person calls or visits OneLink, an Assessment and Support Coordinator assesses and prioritises the service user's needs, provides information about options and, where appropriate, follows up with service users to connect them to support.

At the end of the month OneLink reports on the number of people still waiting to be connected to any service, both accommodation and non-accommodation supports. Some people waiting at the end of the month may have had some service needs met while still waiting for connection for others.

Note: not all people waiting for accommodation are sleeping rough; the majority may be staying with relatives or friends or in other temporary accommodation (e.g. caravan parks or low-cost hotels).

The key functions of OneLink include but are not limited to:

- assessment, triage, and referral
- monitoring wait list and active holding to maintain engagement with service users
- provision of brokerage for motel/hotel accommodation and other financial support i.e. transportation to an accommodation option
- provision of outreach and weekend service to increase accessibility
- provision of specialist engagement to support those service users who are not referral ready and requiring additional support before being connected with services
- working closely with service users and services to explore collaborative housing and support solutions to help service users achieve outcomes
- implementing initiatives to respond to COVID-19 i.e. Client Support Fund and Accommodation Brokerage program
- data collection, analysis, and reporting; and
- cross sector collaboration, supporting the Specialist Homelessness Service sector in advocacy and sector development.

Collaboration and participation from all Specialist Homelessness Services, Child, Youth, and Family services, and other sectors including mental health, Alcohol and Other Drugs (AOD),

justice, and education is critical to ensure the effective and efficient operation of the central intake model in the ACT.

What supports does OneLink connect people with?

Accommodation

- Short term emergency accommodation
- Transitional accommodation

Support services

Housing support

- Assertive outreach
- Access to independent housing
- Support to sustain tenancy

Child, youth and family support

- Youth support
- Family and child support

Other support

- Aged care support
- Counselling services
- Disability support services
- Domestic and family violence support services
- Refugee and migration support
- Financial counselling
- Legal services
- Mental health services
- Health/medical services
- Drug/alcohol support
- Domestic assistance

What does this latest report show?

This latest report reflects the impact of the ACT COVID-19 lockdown, and subsequent increased demand on the services of OneLink, and other services in the Specialist Homelessness Service (SHS) sector. This quarter's data shows that whilst the crisis response to the pandemic has ended and OneLink has returned to business as usual, the demand has remained steady and even increased in the last quarter. Data provided in this quarterly report highlighted the increased presentation of service users, as well as the collaboration and responsiveness across the sector.

Hotel Accommodation Program

As demand stabilised following easing of health restrictions, and due to ongoing efforts by OneLink and the SHS sector, OneLink is currently supporting 13 people in hotels, 4 of whom were supported during the 2021 COVID response. OneLink is currently working with the sector and Housing ACT to identify alternative accommodation for these clients.

As vaccination rates and border restrictions continued to ease across the country, OneLink experienced a decrease in demand for urgent hotel brokerage relating to tenancy and accommodation issues as a direct result of COVID restrictions. The noted reduction in demand has begun change trend in the last month of the quarter which is explored later in this report.

During Quarter 4, OneLink supported 37 individuals and families to access hotel accommodation, with 16 of these households having care of children.

This increase in demand was experienced due to several factors, including:

- implementation of a trial tool, developed in consultation with Housing ACT, that supports greater discretion in relation to existing exit points where urgent and/or critical need exists.
- an increase in families presenting without accommodation, often involving young children or pregnancy
- the associated financial impact as families require appropriate hotel rooms which are between 200 – 400% more expensive than single rooms (depending on family composition)
- an increase in those aged 65+ presenting while sleeping rough, exacerbating current health conditions.

The provision of additional funding from the ACT Government has assisted in meeting demand during this quarter. It is noted however that as the Discretionary tool is rolled out to partner organisations across the SHS sector, it is expected this demand will increase significantly. OneLink is unable to sustain this level of support with current available brokerage, and is working closely with Housing ACT to explore future solutions.

OneLink continues to work closely with SHS services, Housing ACT and the broader community sector to assist those accommodated through hotel brokerage into a suitable alternative arrangement.

At the end of Quarter 4, OneLink supported one client in hotel accommodation who was funded as a part of the initial COVID-19 temporary accommodation response. This sees an exit of almost 200 households from hotel accommodation as part of the ACT's COVID response in 2021.

Rough Sleepers working group

The Rough Sleeper Working Group (RSWG) has been operating since December 2021. A total of 54 clients were identified for support and needing accommodation. Five support organisations are a part of the group and have been working to support these clients; YWCA, Street to Home, Catholic Care, Everyman and OneLink.

Of the 54 clients;

- 21 disengaged or refused support from services
- 16 clients are no longer engaged as their housing needs were met
- 17 clients are still engaged with the project.

Partner organisations supported the following number of clients:

- Street to Home: 15 (4 of these clients referred to other agencies during the reporting period)
- Catholic Care: 16
- Everyman: 11
- YWCA: 1
- Onelink: 15

Currently there is:

- 1 client self-funding hotels and occasionally rough sleeping
- 12 in Client Support Fund (CSF) properties
- 2 clients rough sleeping
- 1 client couch surfing
- 1 in a transitional property managed by a partner organisation

The RSWG is currently exploring the option to bring more service users into a second group. So far, approximately 20 service users have been identified and the RSWG will consider both financial resourcing and staffing capacity available to offer supports.

The group has discussed the difficulties faced by attempting to house and work with chronic rough sleepers. The following are issues identified by the group:

- Lack of available and suitable properties. Many properties available for Rough Sleepers under CSF are "hard to lets". Many rough sleepers are wishing to stay away from hard to lets due to wanting to maintain their own sobriety and be away from anti-social behaviour.
- Lack of housing in a timely manner. The group identified that when service users had to wait over a month or more for accommodation, they would cease to engage.

Impact

In February 2022, OneLink received additional funding of \$2.3M under the Expanding Capacity of the Homelessness Sector initiative of the ACT Government. This funding offset expenses from delivery of the 2021 COVID Emergency Accommodation Program, recognised increased costs associated with the expansion of the Client Support Fund; provides additional capacity for the ongoing coordination of the Rough Sleepers Working Group; and assists in meeting increased service demand through staff resourcing and additional brokerage funds.

Subsequently, during this reporting period, OneLink welcomed the commencement of three new Assessment and Support coordinators, and as part of the additional funding, two positions to work in the special projects areas of the CSF and the RSWG. This group has been a most welcomed addition to the team and has already begun to impact the work on the ground with the work load being lessened as they train up.

With assistance from ACT Government ICT specialists, OneLink is pleased to be implementing a new phone system that can better support the volume and frequency of calls to the Central Intake Service. This new system will assist to address some of the client and service providers' technical frustrations accessing OneLink and allow us to innovate in the area of training and quality improvement as well as reporting our telephone data. The implementation commenced in July.

Sector Challenges

There are consistent sector challenges that are continuing to impact service users and exit points from hotels for direct accommodation referral pathways, noting that alternative exit pathways into transitional accommodation or CSF are hindered with demand severely outweighing supply. In particular this is affecting

- single fathers
- couples
- service users with pets
- service users aged 65+
- service users with mobility issues
- service users who are unable to share due to cultural reasons and/or trauma history

Ongoing issues relating to suitable exit points have had a large impact on the time spent in hotels and ultimately affecting OneLink expenditure. In addition to this, the combination of COVID restrictions and impact on the Territory's property market have also affected households' ability to remain in their current tenancy. OneLink is also starting to see evidence of the increased cost of living pressures impacting people's ability to maintain safe, affordable housing. The associated increases in private rental costs and a vacancy rate of 0.8% at June 2022 has contributed to increases of demand for both accommodation and material and financial aid.

OneLink has received stories of:

- low-income earners and Centrelink recipients being overlooked on rental applications in favour of higher- or dual-income earners.
- increased competition and market prices leading to Notices to Vacate due to planned sales
- tenants competing in a saturated rental market when sourcing another property
- those who have lost employment due to COVID are further affected by not having the capital to rely on and subsequently presenting in crisis
- some families are reporting significant rental increases to the point of the tenancy no longer financially sustainable.

Hotel booking rates have continued to rise into the second quarter, again, due to the demand for holiday and business accommodation. An increase in hotel rates due to COVID restrictions being eased, coupled with demand for travellers, has meant that multiple hotel moves are sometimes unavoidable for those who have been accommodated for several months. This has created increased financial, administrative, and logistical pressure on OneLink and the accommodation program.

The challenges associated with COVID continue to impact service delivery within OneLink and the wider SHS sector. Staff absences due to exposure and/or subsequent illness leads to large numbers of staff being unable to work. During this quarter, OneLink experienced unprecedented numbers of staff absences leading to an inability to continue phone service for one day, and for 1 -2 hours on some additional days. Whilst the ability to work from home mitigates some of this risk, staff who are too unwell to continue working are unable to utilise this opportunity. OneLink's business continuity plan ensures that a clear process is followed if circumstances like these occur again.

The demand for outreach has continued to present itself. After COVID lockdown and subsequent closure of the outreach service in recognition of Government health advice OneLink have maintained contact with services who expressed their desire for this to recommence as soon were able to. In the last weeks of this quarter OneLink have made steps towards recommencing in July. Both OneLink staff and other SHS services are looking forward to this important service recommencing.

Sector innovations

During the past quarter, OneLink has worked to develop clearer brokerage guidelines. The guidelines provide clear parameters around the use of a limited resource and allows OneLink to make clear decisions about when to offer this service. Often, people do not have exit points, and this has been a sticking point for OneLink to be able to provide accommodation support especially for parents with small children, or women escaping domestic and family violence (DFV). Due to the current pressures on housing systems in the ACT, clients, increasingly often, do not have an identified exit point which has previously precluded them from brokered hotel support. Working closely with HACT, OneLink has developed an assessment tool to identify risk and help determine eligibility for hotel brokerage.

Client Support Fund (CSF)

The CSF was established in May 2020 as part of ACT Government's Community Support Package to assist Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) to manage challenges posed by COVID. What was an initial response to COVID became an opportunity to respond to gaps in the sector and provide accommodation for households for up to 12 months. An initial 7 services took part at the commencement of the program and this number has risen to 8. A review into the CSF was completed during this quarter and sent to Housing ACT.

The CSF was funded \$400,000 during the previous quarter. This funding has assisted payment of the increased support periods undertaken through the expansion of the program during the lockdown period in 2021, and funding support for the continued support of service users, some approaching their third year within the CSF. In the past 12 Months, the CSF expanded from 32 properties in June/July 2021 to 98 at its peak with more than 100 funded support packages. This expansion reflects the need for longer term housing solutions and the value of the CSF as a pathway for eligible clients.

Eight new funded support periods were committed to during this quarter. During the month of June 2022, no new supports were enacted while budgeting forecasts were taking place.

Twelve households moved into CSF, including one household moving within the CSF to another property due to anti-social issues, and three into more suitable accommodation, including to meet health needs.

17 tenancies ended (including one from last quarter not captured in previous reporting):

- 1 household moved properties within the CSF to address anti-social behaviour and associated risks
- 3 households moved into more suitable CSF accommodation
- 8 Housing ACT tenancies commenced
- 1 into transitional housing
- 1 into private rental
- 1 client was incarcerated
- 1 due to eviction, and
- 1 into hotel brokerage due to a fire in the household.

Case Study

Nathaniel had experienced significant trauma throughout his childhood and adulthood. He had been intermittently homeless across several states prior to contacting OneLink mid-2021. Nathaniel had been sleeping in a car with his dogs for many months prior. Nathaniel presented with complex trauma which, coupled with some substance use, saw a deterioration of his mental health in the lead up to being allocated a CSF late last year.

The CSF property provided a safe and secure home for Nathaniel to return to after a brief hospitalisation. With his mental health vastly improved, Nathaniel has moved into a Housing ACT property of his home to further his plan to develop his own part-time business. The SHS service Everyman is to be commended for the intensive support provided to Nathaniel, and additional support to ensure Nathaniel is fully supported to further his goals in his permanent home.

Challenges under the CSF

During this reporting period, the CSF encountered many of the same issues it did in the previous reporting period:

- The lack of exit pathways into long term sustainable housing has placed clients and services in sometimes challenging positions.
- Housing ACT Connections team has worked with OneLink and some service providers to facilitate sign-in-place options where appropriate.
- The continued rollover of housing ready clients on priority waitlists has placed financial pressure on the CSF to renew funding support for second or third years. This is an unexpected challenge that OneLink has sought support from Housing ACT to coordinate with providers to address.
- Stock offered to OneLink's CSF program whilst highly appreciated and well utilised, was not suitable for many hotel-accommodated service users. There were limitations regarding client matching for (predominantly) hard to let stock.
- COVID impacts on OneLink generally, and including an almost doubling of CSF stock, had resourcing impacts. Sector partners were also impacted regarding staffing and casework requirements during the lockdown. This coupled with increasing complexity of client presentation has led to a higher resource strain for all services.
- Importantly both OneLink and sector partners responded beyond usual capacity to the unprecedented demands for service
- A significant gap emerged regarding need for headlease organisations which work with male headed households, (who themselves are also identified as a significant sector service gap).
- In response OneLink has expedited discussions with services including Yeddung Mura to provide support services. and plans to approach other services following further discussion about program resourcing more broadly.

General Observations about OneLink and Demand in the SHS

- OneLink provided ongoing support to a higher number of service users per month (606) in this quarter compared to the previous quarter (588). This is an increase from the previous quarter resulting from increased demand for support and accommodation, in particular for families with children.
- There were a similar number of new service users on average 103 new service users per month. This is the same as the previous quarter 103 during Jan-Mar 2022. New service users represented around 17% of all service users each month.
- Lower number of occasions of one-off assistance on average 336 occasions of one-off assistance per month in this quarter compared with 422 in the previous quarter and 396 in the corresponding quarter in 2021. This reflects the decrease in demand for one-off assistance on the OneLink service after COVID in the ACT.
- Service users waited for shorter times for support services 44.6 days in this quarter compared with 45.9 days in previous quarter and waited longer periods for accommodation (56.6 days in this quarter compared with 44.9 days in previous quarter).
- Much lower number of service users placed into accommodation and provided with support in this quarter. 61 service users were placed into accommodation and 115

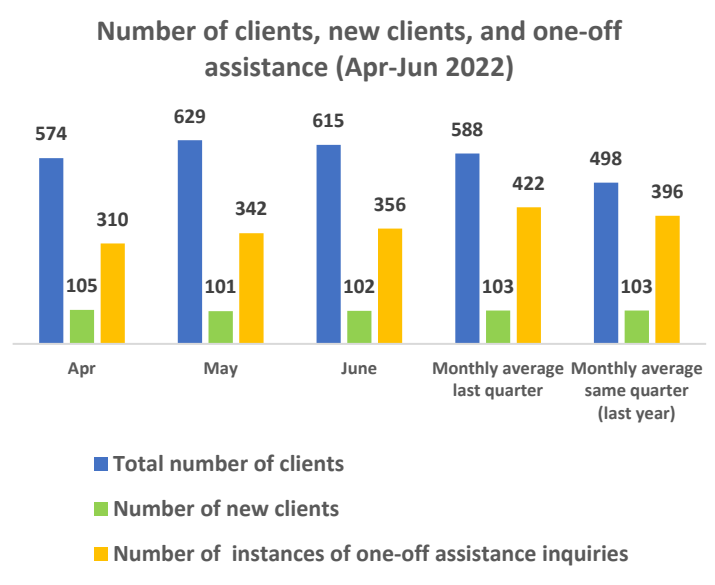
provided with support services in this quarter compared with 90 and 147 respectively in the previous quarter. This reflects the Client Support Fund reaching capacity during this time as well as the flow on impacts of the wider SHS sector having less available vacancies due to the current (and remaining from 2021) demand for accommodation support.

Clients feedback indicates that people are seeking accommodation as their primary need and finding engagement with support referrals challenging when their primary need is unable to be met due to sector capacity and a lack of social housing or affordable and sustainable private rental options.

Services report that clients are waiting on either priority or high-needs social housing waitlists however due to the shortage of social housing supply, clients remain accommodated in services meaning less vacancies are available to support new or other existing clients.

- Higher number of service users on the wait list for referral in this quarter. An average of 289 service users were waiting at the end of each month in this quarter compared with 255 in the previous quarter and 228 in the corresponding quarter in 2021.
- Accommodation Brokerage Program: During this quarter, the program spent \$270,787, an increase from the previous quarter \$199,755 to provide temporary accommodation at a motel/hotel for 104 individuals and families.

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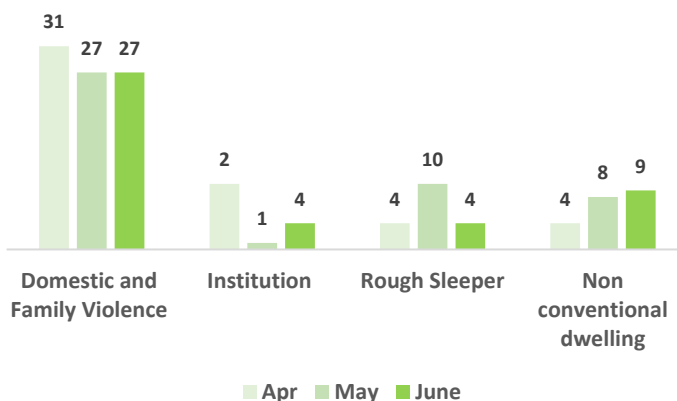
Number of service users	Number of clients, new clients, and one-off assistance (Apr-Jun 2022)																								
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OneLink supported an average 606 service users each month during this quarter (Apr, May, Jun 2022). • OneLink supported a total of 308 new service users during the Apr to June 2022 period, same as the 308 in the same period in 2021. • OneLink provided an average of 336 one-off assistance each month in this quarter, higher than 396 in the same quarter in 2021. 	 <p>The bar chart displays three metrics across five categories: Apr, May, June, Monthly average last quarter, and Monthly average same quarter (last year). The metrics are Total number of clients (blue), Number of new clients (green), and Number of instances of one-off assistance inquiries (yellow). Values are: Apr (574, 105, 310), May (629, 101, 342), June (615, 102, 356), Monthly average last quarter (588, 103, 422), Monthly average same quarter (last year) (498, 103, 396).</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Month</th> <th>Total number of clients</th> <th>Number of new clients</th> <th>Number of instances of one-off assistance inquiries</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Apr</td> <td>574</td> <td>105</td> <td>310</td> </tr> <tr> <td>May</td> <td>629</td> <td>101</td> <td>342</td> </tr> <tr> <td>June</td> <td>615</td> <td>102</td> <td>356</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Monthly average last quarter</td> <td>588</td> <td>103</td> <td>422</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Monthly average same quarter (last year)</td> <td>498</td> <td>103</td> <td>396</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Month	Total number of clients	Number of new clients	Number of instances of one-off assistance inquiries	Apr	574	105	310	May	629	101	342	June	615	102	356	Monthly average last quarter	588	103	422	Monthly average same quarter (last year)	498	103	396
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New service users by priority groups

- Of all **new** service-users the largest single priority group was those experiencing DFV (on average 27.6 % of new service users).

Note this graph is reflective of the top four priority groups and does not capture all new service users.

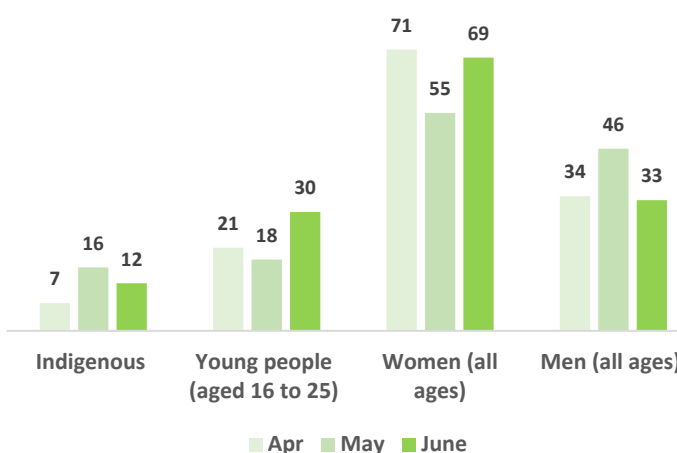
New clients by priority groups (Apr-Jun 2022)



New service users by demography

- There were more new female service users (on average 63.3%) than new male service users (36.7%).
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people accounted for 11.4% of new service users.
- Young people accounted for 22.4% of all new service users.

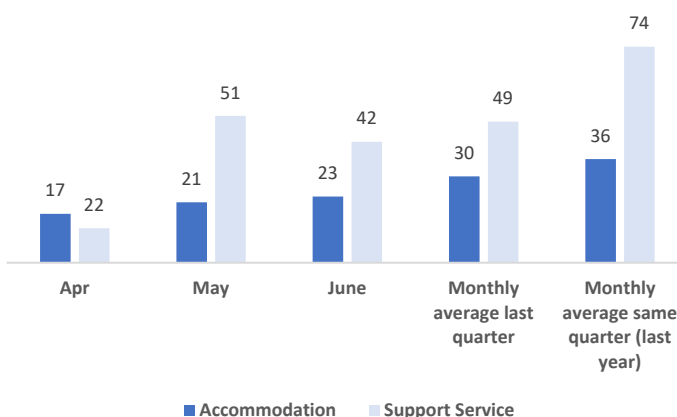
New clients by demography (Apr-Jun 2022)



Number of service users placed into accommodation and support services

- A total of 61 service users were placed into accommodation, with an average of 20 service users placed each month.
- A total of 115 service users were placed into support services, with an average of 38 service users placed each month.

Clients placed into accommodation and support services (Apr-Jun 2022)



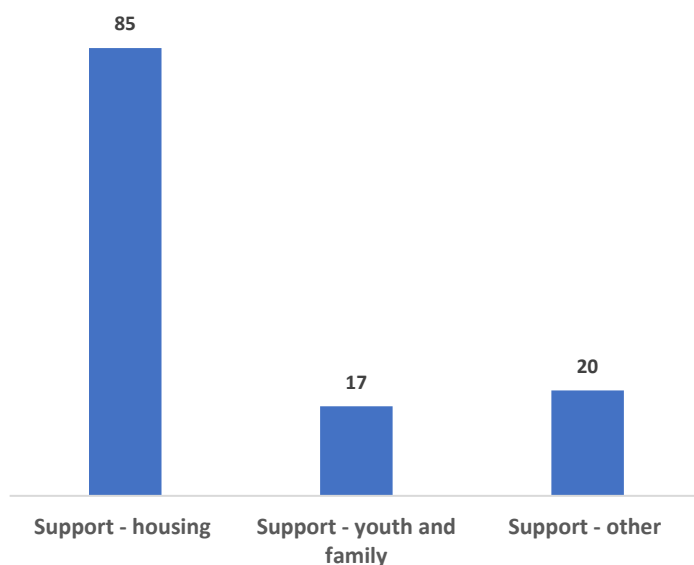
Placement by Support Service

During this quarter, there were a total of 122 placements into support services:

- 69.7% (85) provided by housing support services, which provide tenancy support, assertive outreach, access to independent housing.
- 13.9% (17) provided by youth and family support services.
- 16.4% (20) provided by other support services including legal, mental health, DFV, financial assistance, disability support, counselling services, and drug and alcohol services.

Note: number of service users and number of placements are different; some service users are provided with more than one placement to meet their different needs.

Number of placement by type of support service (Apr - Jun 2022)

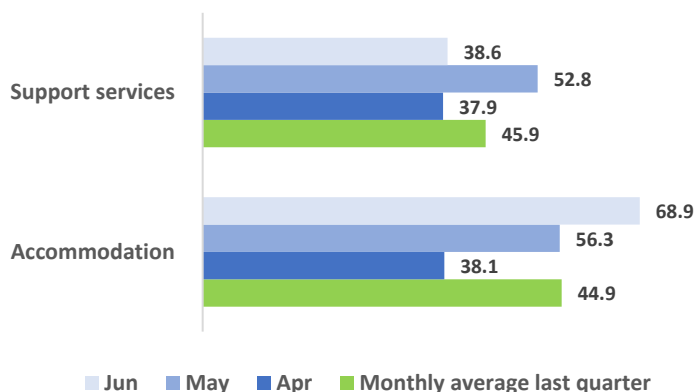


Waiting time for accommodation and support services

During this quarter, service users waited on average 44.6 days for support services (45.9 days in the last quarter), and 56.6 days for placement into accommodation (44.9 days in the last quarter).

Note that 'waiting for accommodation' does not necessarily equate to rough sleeping. Many people are staying with friends or relatives or in other temporary accommodation.

Waiting time (days) for accommodation and support services (Apr-Jun 2022)

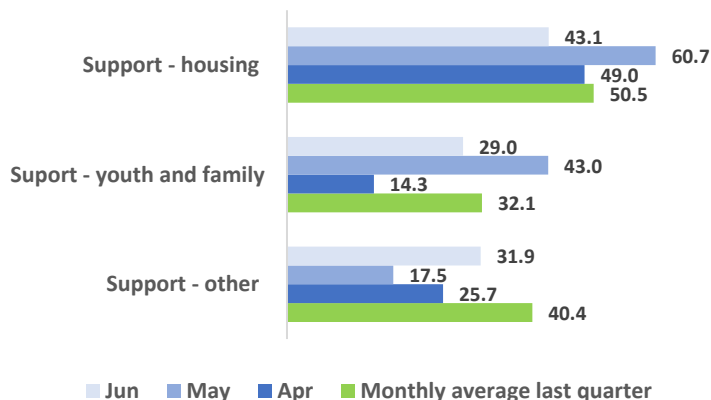


Waiting time by type of support service

During this quarter, service users waited on average:

- 52.7 days for placement into housing support (50.5 days in the last quarter).
- 27.1 days for youth and family support (32.1 days in the last quarter).
- 25.2 days for other support (40.4 days in the last quarter).

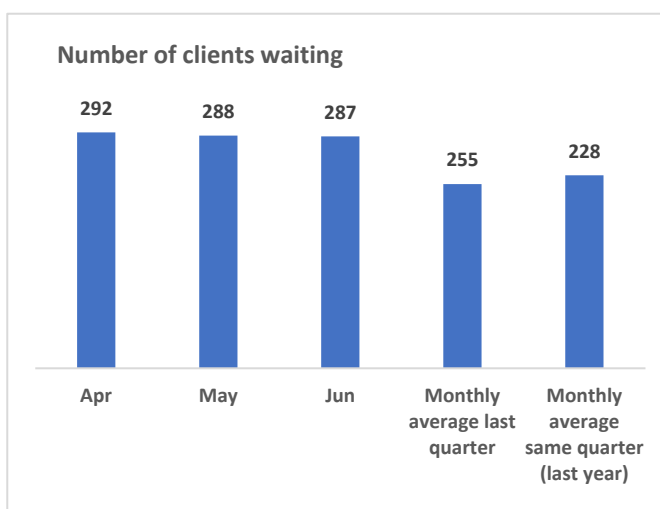
Waiting time (days) by type of support services (Apr - Jun 2022)



Waiting list – Active Hold

- At the end of June 2022, 287 service users were waiting for accommodation and/or support services.
- This is higher than the average of over the 3-month period.

Note: service users at end of month may be connected to some services but are waiting connection to others.



Definitions

Service user	A service user refers to any person who directly receives a service. For example, if a mother and three children require accommodation, and OneLink only has contact with the mother, then the mother will be the only service user for OneLink, with other family members not directly assisted. If referred to a service that then accommodates the family, then that service provides direct service for the mother and the children and that service will count each member of the family as service users.
One-off assistance <i>*people receiving one-off assistance are not counted as service user</i>	Provision of immediate support, including providing information and clarification, where there is no need for continued assistance at the time of the enquiry.
Active holding	OneLink maintains contact with service users while service users are waiting for OneLink to connect them with appropriate accommodation and/or support services. Active holding is to ensure OneLink's assessment of the service user's needs and situation is up to date.
Rough sleeper	A person who is living on the streets, sleeping in parks.
Non-conventional dwelling	A person who is a squatter or who is living in an improvised dwelling (tent, car etc.)

Assistance to access independent housing	<p>Provision of support to service users to obtain an independent tenancy, including private, community and public housing.</p> <p>Services include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supportive Tenancy Service – housing options • ASSIST (Catholic Care) • Youth Housing Support Service (Catholic Care) • St Vincent de Paul’s (SVDP) Family Service and Young Parents Program • Everyman Australia • YWCA Canberra • Karinya • Northside Community Service • Ted Noffs Take Hold
Tenancy support	Provision of support to service users to maintain an existing tenancy (e.g. Supportive Tenancy Service – tenancy support).
Short term or emergency accommodation	Short term accommodation with support to help address any issues leading to homelessness and seek an independent tenancy. Services are targeted to particular population groups or needs, including single men (e.g. Samaritan House, CatholicCare Minosa), young people (Youth Emergency Accommodation Network (YEAN)), women and families (Toora) and women leaving domestic violence (e.g. Beryl, Doris).
Transitional accommodation	Medium-term accommodation with limited support focussed on finding long-term accommodation, for people who have the capacity to maintain a tenancy. Funded transitional accommodation includes SDVP’s Family Service, YWCA Canberra’s Housing Support Unit, Barnardos Our Place and Friendly Landlord programs, Everyman, Northside Community Service and Karinya.
Assertive outreach for rough sleepers	Outreach services to assist people who are sleeping rough or in non-conventional dwellings, to assist in connection to services as needed (e.g. SVDP’s Street to Home program).
Financial assistance/material aid	Emergency relief, such as food, clothing or assistance with expenses (e.g. SVDP, Salvation Army and Uniting Care Kippax).
Domestic/family violence support	Support specifically around responding to the experience of DFV e.g. Domestic Violence Crisis Services; note other services (including Beryl, Doris, YWCA Canberra and Toora Women) provide DFV violence support as part of emergency accommodation.
Youth Support	Support for young people, up to 25 years of age e.g. Youth Engagement Teams and YouthCARE Canberra.
Family/child support	Support for families and/or children, including family case management services.
Disability support (including NDIS)	Support for people living with a physical or intellectual disability, including services under NDIS or CASP other than domestic assistance – excludes psychosocial disability.

Domestic assistance/CASP	Support for domestic assistance or through CASP, which provides assistance to people who do not qualify for or have not yet obtained NDIS support (domestic assistance is often provided through CASP).
Aged care support	Support for older people (generally 65 years or older), including through My Aged Care.
Health/ medical services	Medical support e.g. through General Practitioners, Winnunga.
Mental health services	Support for people living with a psychosocial disability, including through NDIS, as well as other specific mental health services.
Counselling services	Professional assistance to promote mental health and wellbeing, enhance self-understanding, and resolve identified concerns (e.g. Relationships Australia).
Drug/alcohol support	Support for people dealing with addiction to alcohol or other drugs (e.g. Directions ACT, Karralika).
Legal issues/court support	Legal advice or assistance through legal processes (e.g. Canberra Community Law, Tenants Union, Street Law, Legal Aid).
Financial counselling	Information, support and advocacy to assist people in financial difficulty (e.g. Care Financial).
Other	Support not covered in other categories, including general support for specific population groups (e.g. MARSS).