

ONELINK QUARTERLY REPORT ENDING MARCH 2022

What is OneLink?

OneLink is the central intake and assessment service for human services in the ACT. The service conducts holistic and conversational 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 lockdown, and subsequent increased demand on the services of OneLink, and other services in the Specialist Homelessness Service (SHS) sector. This report will show 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.

OneLink has experienced significant increase in demand due to its role in providing coordination of COVID-19 related accommodation support. This role has seen OneLink act as the central coordination point for brokered hotel accommodation to support Canberrans who have experienced household breakdown due to the health directives regarding public movement (“Lockdown”). OneLink also provided quarantine accommodation to both the public and SHS services when quarantine hubs were not yet operating.

Temporary Accommodation Program

In the reporting period prior, OneLink was managing the increased demand due to the Covid-19 response, with 193 clients accommodated in hotels across Canberra. Many clients left hotel accommodation during this reporting period. Most of these exits were planned with exit pathways including SHS, Housing ACT and other longer term or transitional services.

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, only 4 of whom were in the initial covid-19 response. OneLink are currently working with the sector and Housing ACT to secure alternative accommodation for these clients to move to.

Impact

During the reporting period, OneLink welcomed the commencement of a new Manager and 3 new assessment and support coordinators.

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 arising from delivery of the 2021 Covid-19 Emergency Accommodation Program, recognised increased costs associated with the expansion of the Client Support Fund. It also provides additional capacity for the ongoing coordination of the Rough Sleepers Working Group (RSWG) and assists in meeting increased service demand through staff resourcing and additional brokerage funds.

OneLink thanks the ACT Government for this additional funding and in particular additional resourcing for the RSWG and the CSF. Given these programs have been operating under considerable strain without dedicated employees, this will be welcome support for the team.

Sector Challenges

The challenges associated with Covid-19 continue to impact service delivery within OneLink and the wider SHS sector. Staff absence due to exposure and/or subsequent illness leads to large numbers of staff being unable to work.

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.

This has resulted in some weeks where in excess of 50% of OneLink staff have been unavailable which has placed greater demand on remaining staff to manage both phone intake and ongoing case support for existing clients.

During this quarter, OneLink was part of discussions with the Domestic and Family Violence (DFV) sector and the Alcohol and Other Drug (AOD) sector regarding concerns that referrals for their clients were not being actioned as often as they needed to be.

Challenges raised by the DFV were focused on the challenges associated with existing brokerage models. Brokerage funding provided through DVCS is aimed at meeting short-term or crisis need for accommodation where a person is currently at risk of violence and requires immediate alternative accommodation. OneLink brokerage is currently available only where an exit point exists for the client. Given the lack of available, affordable and safe housing in the ACT, there is often no exit point for clients meaning that brokerage is unable to be provided under current arrangements.

The AOD sector raised an ongoing issue for people with substance misuse disorders is that refuges will often not accommodate them as the accommodation requires them to be abstinent. Services also report that they do not have the specialist skills and capacity to work with this cohort. Onelink is interrogating the data to determine the regularity of these issues and how the SHS and AOD sectors might be able to facilitate better support for clients with AOD concerns. This will require careful collaboration, shared responsibility and shared risk. Onelink is often in the middle of a lack of services to refer to as well as a lack of appropriate housing options in general which means that a solution can only be found if the SHS sector and AOD sectors work collaboratively to identify issues and proactively advocate to Government where service capacity gaps are identified.

Services advised that whilst normally they would take clients with mental health or AOD concerns, they needed to be mindful of these concerns as it could impact the dynamics in a "locked down house".

As a result of this feedback, OneLink is currently reviewing discretionary guidelines for brokerage in consultation with HACT as the funding body. This is talked about in more detail in the Sector Innovations section of this document.

Additional work with the AOD and SHS sector is required to address concerns raised about skill shortages and future collaborative work practices. OneLink is advocating that this be undertaken in conjunction with Housing ACT as the lead agency to address what appear to be sector gaps in supporting people with substance misuse disorders.

Another challenge for the SHS sector was the demand for outreach. All hotel accommodated clients were linked with support either through SHS outreach, non-SHS outreach or Family Case Management. This created a high demand to which, at first, the sector was able to respond. As time went on, it became more difficult due to program capacity, staff shortages and increased complexity. In some cases, as demand became

unsustainable, OneLink was able to utilise CSF funds to assist outreach support. This in turn increased the sector's capacity to take on clients. This does not address the long-term impacts of lack of exit options and any new capacity is often filled quickly and then new requests for support face the same challenges.

In the last reporting period, one of the largest gaps that OneLink has seen within the sector is the ongoing lack of accommodation options for single fathers and people with pets.

There has been a continued demand from single fathers calling OneLink and seeking accommodation for them and their children. Unfortunately for many, there have been a lack of accommodation options and only support with SHS services can be provided. Onelink is now accommodating these people in hotels with the only exit identified as the CSF.

Sector innovations

During the last 2 reporting periods, Onelink developed brokerage guidelines to place parameters around our use of this funding and help us to make clear decisions about when to offer this service. These were informed by the requirement of Housing ACT that all hotel brokerage is dependent on an existing exit point for the client. The reality however is that, often, people do not have exit points, and this has been a sticking point for us to be able to provide safety, especially for parents with small children, or women escaping domestic and family violence (DFV) who do not have an identified exit point to go to once the hotel stay is complete.

Working closely with HACT, OneLink has commenced a review of discretionary guidelines to assist in assessment of risk to all stakeholders when considering brokered hotel accommodation. OneLink would like to thank the services that are contributing to this process. Once these clearly defined new parameters are in place, Onelink will be able to offer brokerage for people experiencing exceptional need. This will require sector collaboration and would ideally involve services and HACT working together to identify longer term housing pathways.

Client Support Fund (CSF)

The client support fund was established in May of 2020 as part of ACT Governments Community Support package to assist SHS to manage challenges posed by Covid 19. What was an initial response to Covid 19 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 in the infancy of the program and this number has risen to 8. A review into the Client Support Fund was completed during this quarter and sent to Housing ACT. OneLink would like to thank all organisations and clients who took part in this review. Housing ACT have provided input into the report and it is currently in final stages of approval.

The report identified many highlights and successes as well as recommendations to ensure the continued success of the program. OneLink is currently working with Housing ACT to finalise the report including confirming a strategy to review the program guidelines in recognition of the challenges highlighted by CSF partner organisations.

OneLink will release a full copy of the report to CSF partner organisations once it is finalised. This will be an important step in working with all partners to increase the effectiveness and accountability of the CSF program for all stakeholders.

The CSF has continued to grow throughout this quarter despite a brief pause in the lead up to the CSF Review completion.

- 7 new funded support periods were committed to during this quarter. 10 households moved into CSF,
- 3 moving properties within the CSF as a way of addressing anti-social behaviour.
- 3 further moves were identified across the CSF program during this quarter but will be undertaken the following quarter.
- 9 tenancies ended,
- 3 moved to CSF,
- 2 were not tenanted by service users,
- 1 signed into place
- 2 Housing ACT tenancies commenced.

OneLink has communicated with HAAP and Allocations teams the urgent need for additional properties on a case-by-case basis during this quarter and look forward to developing a future-focussed clearly articulated policy position determined through the CSF Review.

CASE STUDY

Robert was referred to OneLink by the Office of Disability during lockdown last year. Robert has an intellectual disability and had become homeless due to family violence across many years including repeated assaults and his income taken. Robert was housed in the Client Support Fund and a specialist housing service worked with a disability provider to ensure that Robert was supported to develop independent living skills needed for an independent tenancy, including managing his income. The property provided by Housing ACT was very suitable and safe for Robert who is a vulnerable person and easily taken advantage of due to his generous and kind nature. Robert has now moved to a suitable Housing ACT property with supports in place to ensure he transitions to full independence regarding his tenancy.

Challenges under the CSF

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

- 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 trauma informed practice and client matching to often hard to let stock. OneLink have highly appreciated the additional properties provided to the CSF and they are well utilised.
- The time and associated impacts of the pandemic on OneLink generally, and including an almost doubling of CSF stock, had resourcing impacts. Sector partners were also impacted regarding staffing and case work requirements during the lockdown. This coupled with the at times chaotic and complex presentations of many service users impacted.
- Timeliness in response to the draft Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) held with Housing ACT, particularly rough sleepers whose engagement is more likely hampered through lack of working phones, poor mental health, and trust issues particularly where there is a history of statutory engagement.
- Importantly both OneLink and sector partners responded far beyond usual capacity to the unprecedented demands for service. OneLink thanks the services who partner in the CSF and we look forward to further consolidating the hard work undertake together.
- A significant gap emerged regarding the lack of head-lease organisations which work with male headed households, who are also identified as a significant sector service gap. In response OneLink has expedited discussions with Yeddung Mura to achieve funded support services and plans to approach the Salvation Army's Doorways program. Both services are already strong support services within the CSF program, often picking up unmet needs of service users where there was a gap in SHS service availability. Additionally, Vinnies has come on board with expertise in working with this cohort.

General Observations about OneLink and Demand in the SHS

- OneLink supported a lower number of service users per month (588) in this quarter compared to the previous quarter (607). This amount as seen in the previous quarter shows that OneLink are still experiencing a high demand of service users contacting for support and accommodation, but it has decreased slightly.
- A similar number of new service users on average 103 new service users per month. This is similar to the previous quarter of 108 during October – December 2021. New service users represented around 17% of all service users each month.
- Lower number of occasions of one-off assistance on average 422 occasions of one-off assistance per month in this quarter compared with 804 in the previous quarter and 379 in the corresponding quarter in 2021. This reflects a decrease in demand on the OneLink

service as a result of Covid 19 in the ACT which was characterised by many instances of one-off support. These figures are significantly lower this quarter.

- Service users waited for longer times for support services 45.9 days in this quarter compared with 25.4 days in previous quarter and waited longer periods for accommodation (44.9 days in this quarter compared with 35.9 days in previous quarter). This may be a result of delay in suitable vacancies across the SHS sector due to the flow-on effects of increased demand. This variance may also be as a result of an increase in the complexity that clients are presenting with , meaning more time on the phone with each caller.
- Much lower number of service users placed into accommodation but higher number of service users provided with support in this quarter. 90 service users were placed into accommodation and 147 provided with support services in this quarter and 135 respectively in the previous quarter. The increase in the number of people provided with support indicates that the sector may have started to recover from demands associated with Covid-19 and lockdown health restrictions.
- Higher number of service users on the wait list for referral in this quarter. An average of 255 service users were waiting at the end of each month in this quarter compared with 250 in the previous quarter which is not a significant change.
- Accommodation Brokerage Program: During this quarter, OneLink provided temporary accommodation at a motel/hotel for 78 individuals and families at a cost of \$199,755.89, a decrease from the previous quarter's expenditure of \$548,602.77. This decrease indicates that we have moved out of the Covid19 emergency phase of the brokerage program however that requests and expenditure is still increased compared to previous years.

Jan-22	Feb-22	Mar-22
\$73,088.38	\$60,304.67	\$66,362.84

Phone call trends

The table below represents the number of calls received over the last 3 quarters. During the July period of 2021 the impact of covid on Onelink was evident by the large spike in calls. This began to dissipate in October which would indicate the Covid 19 crisis had begun to resolve However, the numbers began to rise again during this reporting period with March numbers at 1295, indicating that we are not yet on the other side of the pandemic, and we are still receiving large numbers of phone calls daily. Given that the immediate crisis for the pandemic is now behind us, the high level of calls could be a result of people now coming out of lockdowns and being more visible and in need of support. This is an important trend to discuss as it reflects the need in the community as still being greater than it was before the Covid19 emergency phase of the pandemic.

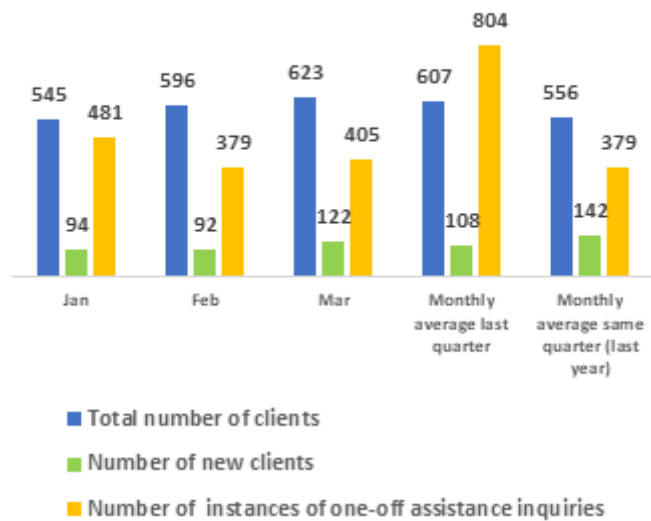
Jul-21	Aug-21	Sep-21	Oct-21	Nov-21	Dec-21	Jan-22	Feb-22	Mar-22
1,693	1,743	0	719	990	1222	839	1123	1295

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Number of service users

- OneLink supported an average 588 service users each month during this quarter (Jan, Feb, Mar 2022).
- OneLink supported a total of 308 new service users during the Jan to March 2022 period, lower than 427 in the same period in 2021.
- OneLink provided an average of 422 one-off assistance each month in this quarter, higher than 379 in the same quarter in 2021.

Number of clients, new clients, and one-off assistance (Jan-Mar 2022)

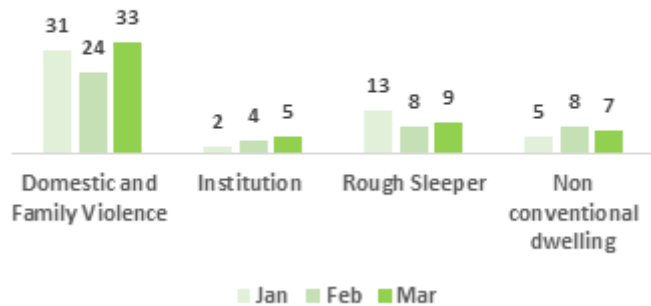


New service users by priority groups

- Of all **new** service-users the largest single priority group was those experiencing DFV (on average 28.6 % of new service users).

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

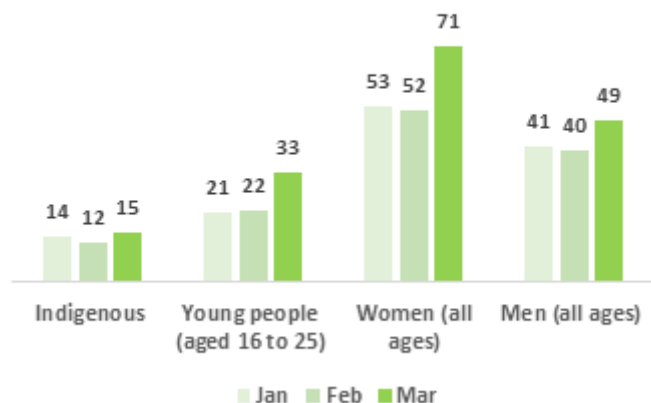
New clients by priority groups (Jan-Mar 2022)



New service users by demography

- There were more new female service users (on average 57.1%) than new male service users (42.2%).
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people accounted for 13.3% of new service users.
- Young people accounted for 24.7% of all new service users.

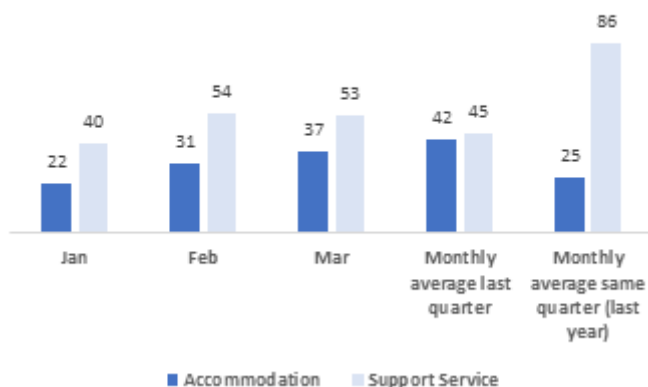
New clients by demography (Jan-Mar 2022)



Number of service users placed into accommodation and support services

- A total of 90 service users were placed into accommodation, with an average of 30 service users placed each month.
- A total of 147 service users were placed into support services, with an average of 49 service users placed each month.

Clients placed into accommodation and support services (Jan-Mar 2022)



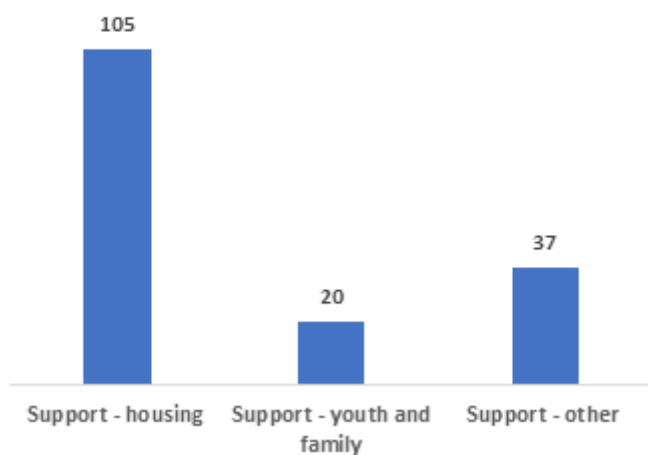
Placement by Support Service

During this quarter, there were a total of 162 placements into support services:

- 64.8% (105) provided by housing support services, which provide tenancy support, assertive outreach, access to independent housing.
- 12.3% (20) provided by youth and family support services.
- 22.8% (37) 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 (Jan-Mar 2022)

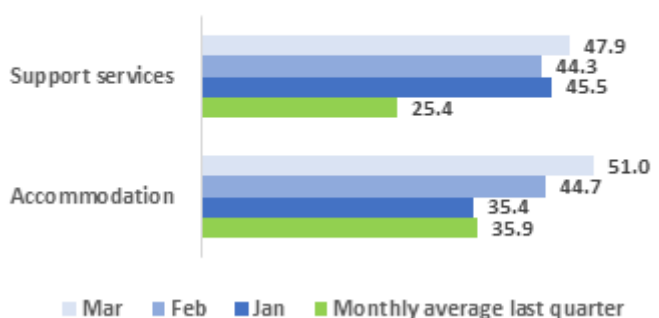


Waiting time for accommodation and support services

During this quarter, service users waited on average 45.9 days for support services (25.4 days in the last quarter), and 44.9 days for placement into accommodation (35.9 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.

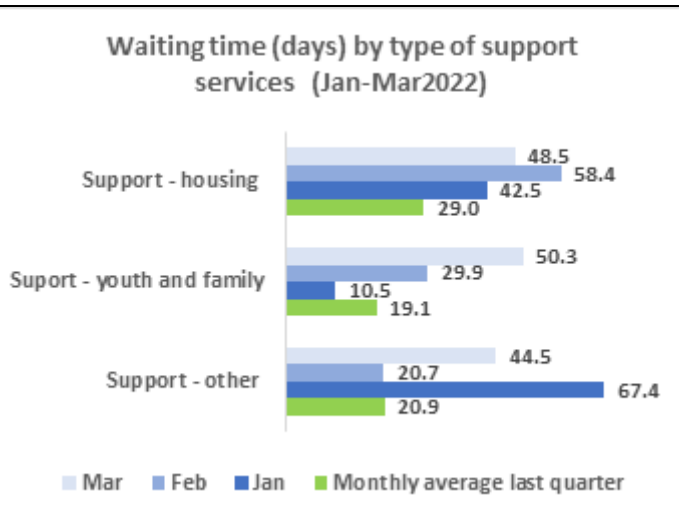
Waiting time (days) for accommodation and support services (Jan-Mar 2022)



Waiting time by type of support service

During this quarter, service users waited on average:

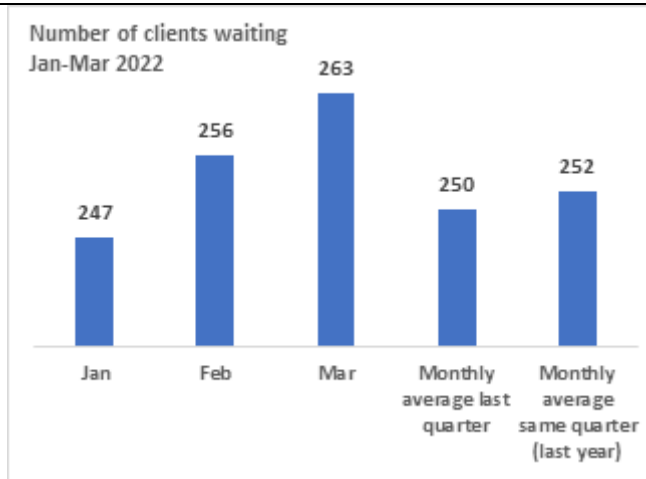
- 50.5 days for placement into housing support (29.0 days in the last quarter).
- 32.1 days for youth and family support (19.1 days in the last quarter).
- 40.04 days for other support (20.9 days in the last quarter).



Waiting list

- At the end of March 2022, 263 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.



Key terms explained

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	Provision of support to service users to obtain an independent tenancy, including private, community and public housing. Services include: <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).