

Cohort 08 of 08

Purpose, Proximity and Place: Veterans

A design framework for ex-serving Australian Defence Force members experiencing housing instability, built around purposeful roles, peer proximity, and service-aware intake.

Maggie Hall · Researcher and Founder, Project Humanity · Newcastle NSW

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Veterans · Ex-serving ADF · Moral Injury · Peer Proximity · Service-Aware Intake
· Purposeful Structure

Why This Cohort

Veterans present a distinct combination of service-related trauma, disrupted civilian reintegration and, in many cases, co-occurring physical injury and complex PTSD that does not map cleanly onto any of the other seven cohorts in this series. Training in threat detection and command hierarchy does not switch off on discharge, and the design responses that suit other trauma cohorts can misfire here.

Adding veterans as an eighth cohort also shows that this series is a method rather than a closed list. A fixed list invites the question of who is missing. An extensible method answers it.

*"Housing a veteran well means giving vigilance something
useful to do, not asking it to switch off."*

Cohort Profile

Population	Ex-serving ADF members from all services, and in some cases their families experiencing housing instability alongside them.
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Core drivers	Complex PTSD, moral injury, traumatic brain injury, chronic injury and pain, loss of unit cohesion, and the abrupt loss of a structured identity.
What the data shows	AIHW analysis of homelessness services found that younger ex-serving members, women, and those with shorter ADF service were more likely to seek help, and that clients with mental health issues, problematic alcohol or drug use, or disability needed more support (AIHW, 2019).
Common co-occurring factors	Alcohol or other drugs used as self-medication, relationship breakdown, difficulty with unstructured time, and strong resistance to being treated as a welfare case.

Why Standard Social Housing Design Fails This Cohort

- Isolation-by-default floor plans remove the unit cohesion and peer accountability veterans relied on for years, which can accelerate decline rather than support recovery.
- Repeated tenancy reviews read as one more authority relationship to be managed or resisted, echoing command dynamics in a way other tenants do not experience.
- Passive, low-stimulus common areas designed for calm can leave a hypervigilant nervous system with nothing to monitor, which can raise anxiety rather than lower it.
- General homelessness intake rarely asks about service history, so veteran-specific risk (moral injury, brain injury, discharge-related identity loss) goes unnoticed when it is most actionable.

DESIGN PRINCIPLE 1: PURPOSEFUL STRUCTURE, NOT ENFORCED PASSIVITY

- Legitimate roles and tasks: building maintenance rosters, garden and workshop responsibilities, mentoring newer tenants
- Vigilance channelled into function rather than suppressed
- Roles are offered and chosen, never required as a condition of tenancy

DESIGN PRINCIPLE 2: SIGHTLINES AND DEFENSIBLE SPACE

- Site and unit layout with clear sightlines to entry points and shared spaces
- Lowers baseline anxiety without being named as a security feature, the same quiet principle used in the Women 45+ framework

DESIGN PRINCIPLE 3: PEER PROXIMITY, INDIVIDUAL AUTONOMY

- Clustering within a short walk rather than a single block that reads as a veterans block
- Every tenant has a private, lockable, fully self-contained unit
- Peer support available, never imposed

DESIGN PRINCIPLE 4: SERVICE-AWARE INTAKE

- A short, optional service-history question set at intake
- Surfaces brain injury, discharge-related and moral-injury risk early, without requiring anyone to identify as a veteran housing case
- Links to veteran-specific supports where the tenant wants them

DESIGN PRINCIPLE 5: IDENTITY CONTINUITY

- Programs that carry forward trade, logistics and leadership skills rather than framing housing entry as leaving that identity behind
- Shares its logic with the Men 55–75 framework's emphasis on role and purpose, adapted for a cohort whose earlier identity was more structured and more abruptly severed

Position Within the Infrastructure Argument

The core argument of Social Housing as Infrastructure holds without change: security of tenure as the default, no net reduction in social housing assets, and rapid rehousing as the default response to homelessness apply to veterans exactly as they do to the other seven cohorts. What changes is the design layer: the physical and program details that make a secure tenancy livable for this population. The law and evidence argument stays constant across cohorts. The design argument is what flexes.

Maggie Hall · Researcher and Founder, Project Humanity · Newcastle NSW
Part of Project Humanity's housing work · co-synthesist.com/housing
Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2019), Use of homelessness services by contemporary ex-serving Australian Defence Force members 2011–17.