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**Reducing crime in public  
housing areas through  
community development:  
An evaluation of the High  
Density Housing Program  
in the ACT**

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# Acronyms

ACT	Australian Capital Territory
AFP	Australian Federal Police
AIC	Australian Institute of Criminology
BCR	benefit-cost ratio
CAD	computer aided dispatch
CBA	cost-benefit analysis
CPTED	crime prevention through environmental design
HDHP	High Density Housing Program
JACS	Justice and Community Safety Directorate
NE	net effect
NSW	New South Wales
OTGM	on-the-ground manager
PROMIS	Police Real-time Online Management Information System
SCRGSP	Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision
TNE	total net effect
WDQ	weighted displacement quotient

# Executive summary

The High Density Housing Program (HDHP) is a collaborative program involving Reclink Australia, the Australian Capital Territory Justice and Community Safety Directorate (JACS), ACT Housing, ACT Health and ACT Policing. It involves the application of community development approaches to prevent crime and antisocial behaviour at Ainslie Avenue, a large public housing area in the ACT comprising six (previously seven) blocks. An on-the-ground manager (OTGM), employed by Reclink Australia, maintains a continuing presence across the site, coordinating existing services to residents and introducing new events, activities and programs that provide opportunities for resident interaction and relationship building and that address the needs of residents.

The HDHP draws on Australian research evidence that showed social approaches to crime prevention, including community development, can improve neighbourhood cohesion and are associated with reduced crime (Samuels et al. 2004). The HDHP has four primary objectives. It aims to promote community safety and security, prevent and reduce opportunities for crime in public housing sites and surrounding areas, develop pro-social and law abiding community engagement among residents and facilitate and support residents' access to health, mental health, education and employment services.

The evaluation of the HDHP employed a rigorous quasi-experimental design which enabled changes in recorded assaults and property crime, disturbance incidents and ambulance attendances at Ainslie Avenue to be compared with those of another public housing area that shared similar characteristics. This component of the evaluation also examined whether there had been any displacement or diffusion of benefit to surrounding areas. A cost-benefit analysis (CBA) compared the cost of the program with monetised benefits associated with changes in recorded crime rates. This was supported by analysis of data collected by the OTGM on program delivery and in-depth interviews with 15 residents about their experiences of the program and living at Ainslie Avenue.

## **How well has the program been implemented?**

Since the OTGM first had an active presence on site in mid-2009, a wide range of organised activities have been delivered under the auspices of the HDHP, with a strong emphasis on initiatives that target social isolation and marginalisation of residents, encourage residents to interact in public spaces and promote and build social cohesion. They have been spread across the different sites, based on a consideration of need and also the likely success of efforts to

mobilise residents and engage them in activities. In addition to these organised activities, the OTGM also engages with residents on an individual basis to discuss any issues they might be experiencing, provide one-on-one support and facilitate access to important services.

Extended periods of crime and antisocial behaviour have impacted on the delivery of program activities, as have recent changes to housing policy. Program dosage (the amount of activity delivered) and program reach (the number of participants) have varied over time, with noticeable peaks in mid-2014. The OTGM has worked hard to minimise the impact of external factors on program delivery.

Residents interviewed as part of the evaluation reported having been involved in a range of activities, most notably the workshop program and the community gardens, as well as Run Roll Walk. Some described their motivation for being involved as the desire to meet new people and keep busy, while others were motivated by the positive impact on their feelings of self-worth. Most of the residents interviewed for the evaluation have participated in HDHP activities on a regular basis and for an extended period, which is indicative of the program's success in engaging many residents; nevertheless, one of the strengths of the HDHP has been the flexible model that enables participants to engage as much or as little as they want.

The OTGM has a prominent role in the HDHP and is responsible for nearly all aspects of program delivery. All of the residents spoke very highly about their interactions with the OTGM and believed he was responsible for the success of the program. It was evident that he has built rapport and developed strong relationships with local residents, and residents value the support he provided to them. Many recognised the demanding nature of the role and the fact that he was constrained by available resources. While only four of the interview participants had accessed other support services through the OTGM, they were aware that he was working with other service providers to improve access to services and that assistance would be available if they were to seek it.

## What outcomes have been delivered?

The outcome evaluation assessed how well the HDHP was performing against its four overall objectives. To evaluate the performance of the HDHP against the first two objectives—promoting community safety and security and preventing and reducing the opportunities for crime in public housing—the evaluation measured the impact of individual interventions and stages of implementation and the overall impact of the program across several outcome measures.

There was some positive evidence from the assessment of individual interventions and stages of implementation of the HDHP. The introduction of an OTGM and community garden had a small but positive impact on assaults, while the increase in program dosage had a larger effect and was associated with a reduction in assault offences. The increase in participation also had a positive impact on ambulance attendances. In contrast, the introduction of the OTGM led to a short-term reduction in property offending and disturbance incidents in the target area, but in both cases this reduction was offset by the rise in offences and incidents in the buffer zone. This was also true for the impact of the community garden on disturbance incidents.

The evaluation also examined the overall impact of the HDHP on crime and antisocial behaviour, comparing the average monthly number of offences and incidents in the two-year period prior to the implementation of the program with the first four years post implementation (phase 1, 2009–13) and then the subsequent two-year period (phase 2, 2013–15). There was evidence of a positive impact on assault offences in the target area in both phase 1 and phase 2, along with evidence of diffusion of benefit to areas outside the target area, resulting in an estimated 71 assaults being prevented by the program.

In phase 1, the HDHP appeared to have an impact on both property crime and disturbance incidents within the target area, which was the north section of Ainslie Avenue. However, in the first four years of the program there was a significant increase in property offences and disturbance incidents (relative to changes in the comparison area) in the buffer zone, which was the south section of Ainslie Avenue. This more than offset any observed reductions in the target area, suggesting that either displacement was a factor or there were other drivers leading to an increase in criminal activity.

Building on these results, a partial CBA was conducted, finding that the return on the investment in terms of reduced crime was around half the cost of the program. While these savings, largely comprising those associated with the fall in assault, were exceeded by the cost of the program, the aims of the HDHP are broader than just crime prevention. They include promoting community engagement and access to services including health, education and employment services, which were not able to be included in the CBA.

Residents were generally positive about the impact of the HDHP, suggesting that the program has had a positive impact on drug dealing and drug-related crime. However, there were still a number of residents who believed that crime had not declined or that, if crime had declined, it remained concentrated in certain areas. One of the main themes to emerge from the interviews in relation to the prevalence of crime was the persistent problems related to drug use and drug-related crime. The prevalence of drug-related crime had contributed to a climate in which residents in some areas were fearful of engaging with the OTGM, impacted on residents' perceptions of safety and, at different times, posed risks to the safety of the OTGM. This prevented the OTGM from delivering several planned activities and led to him suspend others due to concerns about the safety of participants.

The evaluation also explored whether the HDHP had been successful in developing pro-social and law abiding community engagement among residents. A major focus of the HDHP, underpinned by the community development approach, is on promoting a greater sense of community among residents and encouraging residents to watch out for one another. Residents spoke at length about how the HDHP had helped to build relationships and social ties with their neighbours—participating in the various activities delivered by the OTGM encouraged residents to interact with one another and fostered a sense of familiarity between individuals that was not present before. This had several benefits, including making it easier for residents to resolve conflict and encouraging a sense of belonging, both because of the relationships that had been formed but also because of the sense of joint ownership of communal spaces. This is an important finding, although the impact is likely limited to those residents who, like the interview participants, had actively participated in the program for a period of time.

There was some evidence that the program had encouraged residents to look after one another when they required assistance, including intervening when residents were observed doing the wrong thing. Most notable, however, was that several residents described how they and other residents were more likely to call police, although there are still some concerns about potential reprisals. Nevertheless, the greater willingness to call police and assist neighbours more generally reflected a desire among residents to address some of the persistent problems that impact on them and their community.

Finally, the program was assessed in terms of whether it had been successful in facilitating residents' access to health, mental health, education and employment services. Based on the interviews with residents, it was apparent that the OTGM has created an awareness of other services that are available to residents. His knowledge and understanding of the community sector has given residents access to new information on local services. The overall trend in referrals has been gradually decreasing; however, the OTGM made more than 100 referrals in the 2014–15 financial year.

Some residents reported accessing services with the assistance of the HDHP, while others indicated that they had not followed up on information provided to them. In addition, some residents face barriers in accessing services, including employment services, general health services, and a range of services to support everyday needs. Despite these issues, there were several examples of residents who had gained access to further education, with the support of the OTGM, and some of them had gone on to gain some form of employment.

## What could be improved?

The findings of this evaluation provide promising evidence of the impact of community development approaches to crime prevention in public housing areas. There was evidence of progress towards achieving all four program objectives. Importantly, the results of this evaluation also clearly point to areas where improvements can be made to the program:

- There is a need to implement strategies involving ACT Policing and ACT Housing to reduce property crime and drug dealing, particularly at the south of Ainslie Avenue, including street level drug market enforcement (underpinned by problem-oriented policing methods) and situational crime prevention measures, which are both well supported by rigorous evidence.
- JACS and Reclink Australia should work together to encourage the active and sustained involvement of ACT Government partners represented on the working group, potentially as part as broader reforms to improve responses to volume crime across the ACT.
- In light of the evidence regarding the benefits that came from increased program dosage and reach, the number and the diversity of regular activities and events delivered as part of the HDHP should be increased, strategies to increase participation rates should be implemented and the program should be embedded in the south of Ainslie Avenue, once the immediate crime and safety problems have been subdued.
- Increases in program activity should be supported by adequate resourcing, and the potential of appointing additional community workers to support the OTGM in the delivery of an expanded program should be explored.

- Efforts to raise awareness of the program among new residents and residents who are not yet participating in the program should be continued, and consideration given to how future activities may be delivered to broaden the appeal of the program and ensure maximum engagement of residents.
- A review of services accessible to residents should be conducted to better understand and identify potential solutions to the service needs not being met due to issues outside the control of the HDHP.
- JACS may wish to consider drawing upon the latest research and methods for measuring social functioning to assess levels of social cohesion and collective efficacy prior to further investment in or the expansion of the program, which would provide a baseline to more reliably measure the impact of the program in the future.

The HDHP now faces new challenges associated with the redevelopment of public housing, already underway as part of the ACT Government's Public Housing Renewal Program, along with persistent challenges associated with drug use and drug-related crime and the significant disadvantage and complex needs of local residents who remain at Ainslie Avenue. To continue to be effective in promoting social cohesion and collective efficacy during this period of transition, it requires sustained investment. Looking forward, any changes to the HDHP model must be given adequate time to be established and then deliver positive outcomes for residents and the Ainslie Avenue community.

# Introduction

## Crime prevention in public housing areas

Public housing areas experience disproportionate levels of crime and antisocial behaviour, including property and violent crime (DeKeseredy et al. 2003; Griffiths & Tita 2009; Matka 1997; Samuels et al. 2004; Weatherburn, Lind & Ku 1999). Research from the United States has also shown that public housing communities in close proximity to one another have more intense crime problems (Haberman, Groff & Taylor 2013). However, not all housing areas are equally criminogenic, and many housing areas report much lower levels of crime than surrounding areas (Haberman, Groff & Taylor 2013; Weatherburn, Lind & Ku 1999). Similarly, US research found that, while public housing areas were 'hotbeds' for violent crime, they did not attract offenders from outside the housing area, nor were they generators of crime in surrounding areas (Griffiths & Tita 2009). In attempting to understand crime patterns in locations with high concentrations of public housing, Weatherburn, Lind & Ku (1999) concluded that public housing areas were more likely to experience crime problems because disadvantaged and crime-prone residents were more likely to be allocated public housing.

Safety is also a significant issue affecting residents, with high rates of fear of crime (Bennett et al. 2007; DeLone 2008; Ireland, Thornberry & Loeber 2003). Research commissioned by the City of Sydney, which is home to more than 9,000 public housing dwellings, made a number of observations regarding the safety and wellbeing of tenants (City of Sydney 2015). It found that drug dealing, drug use and discarded syringes had a major impact on residents' feelings of safety, as did assault, intimidation and threats and alcohol-related behaviour. Residents were far more likely to feel unsafe after dark than during the day, and there was a strong relationship between perceived safety and general wellbeing. Many residents indicated that they did not know their neighbourhood or their neighbours at all well, nor did they get on with their neighbours, and those residents who did not get along well with their neighbours were more likely to feel unsafe.

Recognising the importance of underlying social conditions, and the harmful effects of crime and safety problems, various community development programs have been developed and implemented in public housing areas (Kelly & Caputo 2005; Samuels et al. 2004; Wright & Palmer 2007). As a crime prevention measure, community development emphasises the importance of participatory processes in addressing inequality and social exclusion (Lane & Henry 2004).

It is premised on the notion that changing the physical or social organisation of communities may influence the behaviour of individuals who live there, and that crime in a community is the result of the coincidence of a series of structural determinants such as neighbourhood disadvantage, unemployment, intergenerational disadvantage, limited education prospects, poor child health and wellbeing and housing instability (Hayes, Gray & Edwards 2008; Hope 1995; Tonry & Farrington 1995).

These programs have proven notoriously difficult to evaluate (Kelly & Caputo 2005), with relatively few evaluations having been conducted. One of the more widely known projects was delivered at the Northcott public housing estate in Sydney in the mid-2000s. Involving a partnership between the New South Wales (NSW) Department of Housing, New South Wales Police Force crime prevention officers, Big hART and many others, the emphasis was on community development through art exhibitions, music, dance and film and a reinvigorated community centre. In their evaluation, Wright and Palmer (2007) reported a marked decrease in crime, particularly violent crime, and increased feelings of safety among local residents, and the estate was ultimately awarded Safe Community Status by the World Health Organisation.

In arguably the most rigorous assessment of the effectiveness of community development approaches in public housing areas in Australia, Samuels et al. (2004) conducted a multi-site evaluation and found that social interventions, such as community development and community policing, empathetic housing management and the employment of a designated social or community worker, were more effective than physical interventions (such as physical improvement of sites, housing redevelopment, public space upgrades) in reducing crime, building neighbourhood cohesion and improving perceptions of safety. The authors also found that a combination of both interventions was the most effective overall, and that more intensive interventions were more successful (Samuels et al. 2004).

While not specific to public housing areas, there was also evidence that neighbourhood level interventions in deprived areas in the United Kingdom (as part of the New Deal for Communities Programme) to address issues related to economic and social regeneration resulted in reductions in crime and fear and increased satisfaction with the local area, at least in some of the neighbourhoods targeted by the program (Pearson et al. 2008). Further, among those neighbourhoods that did experience reductions in crime, and even among those that did not, there was no evidence of crime shifting to other communities, a phenomenon known as displacement (Whitworth & McLennan 2010).

These findings highlight the challenges of working in public housing areas to reduce crime. They do, however, lend support for the potential benefits that may be derived from efforts to work with the community in disadvantaged public housing areas.

## High Density Housing Program

The High Density Housing Program was developed in response to a recommendation within the *ACT Property Crime Reduction Strategy 2004–2007*. The HDHP is a collaborative program and involves government and non-government agencies working together to address crime and antisocial behaviour in high density public housing areas in Canberra. It is overseen by the High Density Housing Working Group, comprising representatives from Reclink Australia, the ACT Justice and Community Safety Directorate, ACT Housing, ACT Health and ACT Policing.

Following the implementation of the project on one social housing block in Canberra, the delivery of the project was extended to six other sites in the same area, collectively known as 'Ainslie Avenue'. The HDHP involves the application of community development approaches to the reduction of crime and antisocial behaviour in public housing areas. The overall aim of the HDHP is to reduce criminal and antisocial behaviours while maintaining public safety through activities that promote community engagement and social cohesion. More specifically, the objectives of the program are:

- to promote community safety and security;
- to prevent and reduce opportunities for crime in public housing sites and surrounding areas;
- to develop pro-social and law abiding community engagement among residents; and
- to facilitate and support residents' access to health, mental health, education and employment services.

The program aims to achieve these objectives through activities delivered by a full-time on-the-ground manager employed by Reclink Australia, in partnership with other agencies. The manager is required to maintain a continuing, routine and accessible on-the-ground presence in each of the six sites, consult and build rapport with local residents and develop and foster partnerships with and between other government and non-government agencies. The OTGM is also responsible for coordinating the delivery of existing services to residents, as well as introducing new events, activities and programs that provide opportunities for resident interaction and relationship building and that address the needs of residents.

## Purpose of the evaluation

In 2012, Reclink Australia commissioned La Trobe University to conduct research into the impact of Reclink Australia programs, including the HDHP, on the lives of Canberra participants (Nicholson, Hoyer & Gallant 2012). Based on semi-structured interviews with active participants, the study found that residents living in high density public housing experience significant disadvantage and a range of challenges, including social isolation, substance abuse, mental health problems, legal problems, poor living conditions and difficult family and social relationships. Participation in Reclink programs was found to have a number of benefits for these residents, including 'breaking down the barriers to isolation; establishing and maintaining friendships; alleviating boredom; providing a sense of community; encouraging self-esteem and confidence; and acquiring skills' (Nicholson, Hoyer & Gallant 2012: 13).

Recognising the importance of measuring the impact of the HDHP in other domains, in June 2015 the Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC) was commissioned by the ACT JACS to specifically evaluate the HDHP. Using a quasi-experimental research design, this evaluation aimed to determine what crime reduction and community building outcomes had been delivered by the HDHP. More specifically, the evaluation sought to address the following research questions:

- To what extent has the HDHP achieved its stated objectives?
- What outcomes have been delivered for public housing residents and the broader community as a result of having implemented the program?
- What are the costs and potential savings associated with the HDHP and providing services and support to public housing residents?
- What impact has the HDHP had on rates of crime and disorder in and around the housing areas targeted by the program?
- Which program activities contributed to the outcomes that have been observed?
- What external factors have impacted positively or negatively on the effectiveness of the HDHP and the outcomes that were delivered?
- How could the program be improved or modified to deliver better outcomes for residents, and what aspects of the model could and should be replicated in other locations?

The findings from the evaluation are described in this report. The report begins by describing the evaluation methodology, followed by a brief review of program activity. The results from an assessment of the impact of individual initiatives and stages of implementation are then described, followed by an overall assessment of the impact of the program on recorded crime. The results from a qualitative assessment of the impact of the program on social cohesion and collective efficacy and on individual residents are then described, followed by a cost-benefit analysis. The report ends by drawing some overall conclusions and making a number of recommendations.

# Methodology

## Measuring changes in crime and other problems

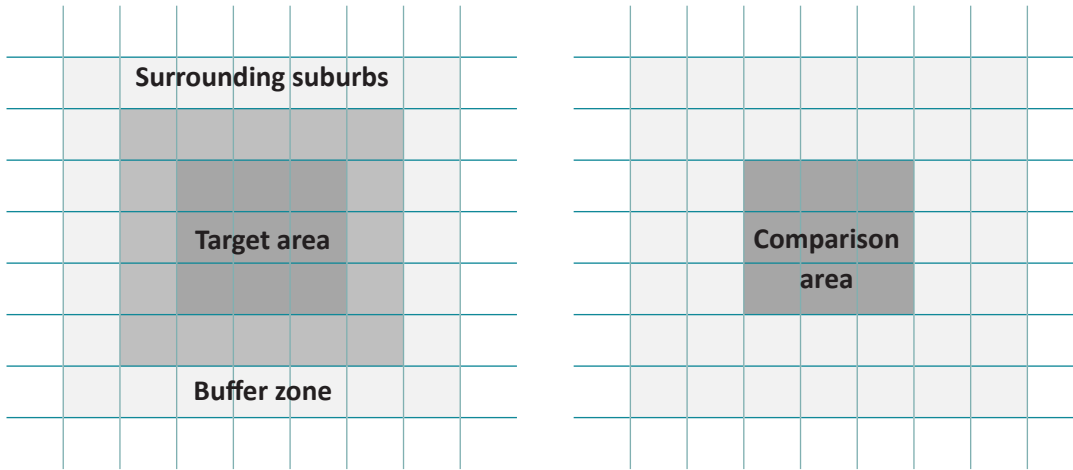
This evaluation employed a quasi-experimental research design—widely regarded the minimum design for drawing valid conclusions about the effectiveness of a strategy (Farrington et al. 2006)—to measure the impact of the HDHP on problems targeted by the program. Using police and ambulance attendance data, the level of crime and other problems present at Ainslie Avenue were measured before and after the commencement of the HDHP to determine whether there had been any change following the implementation of the program. It was also necessary to take into account the counterfactual by comparing any change observed in the target area (Ainslie Avenue) with a comparison area. The comparison area—an area similar to the target area, but without a project like the HDHP having been implemented—was used to estimate how much the measured problems may have changed in the target area had the HDHP not been implemented. Further, recognising the potential for displacement or diffusion of benefit that might have resulted from the HDHP due to it being an area-based intervention, changes in crime levels in the areas immediately surrounding the site were also measured.

The assessment of the overall impact of the program examined trends in rates of recorded incidents over an eight-year period, as well as comparing the average monthly number of offences in the two-year period prior to the implementation of any activity with the six years post implementation. However, as evidenced by the review of program activity presented in this report, a feature of the HDHP was that it involved a wide range of initiatives—some short-term and others ongoing—in an attempt to address the complex and wide-ranging causes of crime and safety problems at Ainslie Avenue. Attempts were therefore made to determine the extent to which changes in levels of crime and antisocial behaviour were attributable to the HDHP, rather than other factors, by examining the timing of the introduction of some of the interventions and key project milestones. This was based on the assumption that certain major activities or project milestones would directly result in a reduction in crime or antisocial behaviour, and that this effect would be observed in the short-term.

### *Selecting the target area, buffer zone and comparison areas*

Evaluations of area-based interventions require the selection of three distinct areas—a target area, a buffer zone and a comparison area (Bowers & Johnson 2003; Eck 2003; Guerette 2009). The design used for the current study is represented in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Research design employed for the evaluation of the High Density Housing Program**



The target area refers to the area that was subjected to the intervention. In the current study, the target area was Ainslie Avenue, an area spanning multiple sites (seven in total)—Kanangra, Allawah, Bega, Braddon, Jerilderie, Reid and Currong (now closed)—and housing as many as 800 residents. However, the implementation of the program was staggered over time. The program was introduced in late 2008 and by mid-2009 the OTGM had an active presence on site and there were structured interventions being delivered in the north section of Ainslie Avenue, starting with Kanangra Court. The target area in phase 1, which continued for the first 48 months of the program post-implementation, was the sites in the north of Ainslie Avenue—specifically, Braddon, Reid, Jerilderie and Kanangra (Figure 2, highlighted in blue). In phase 2, the program was extended to include the sites in the south of Ainslie Avenue—Allawah, Bega and Currong (highlighted in red)—which meant that the target area for this phase (which lasted 24 months) included the whole of Ainslie Avenue.

The target area in each phase was identified on the basis of information from ACT Housing and ACT Policing and, for the purpose of analysis, determined on the basis of ACT Housing data and common place name identifiers used by ACT Policing. Recorded offence data and computer aided dispatch (CAD) data includes the common names of places frequently attended by ACT Policing—in this case, the north and south sections of Ainslie Avenue were identified by the specific block names. ACT Ambulance Service data do not include a common place name; therefore the target areas were identified on the basis of a street and suburb name combination, which had some impact on the precision of the areas subjected to analysis. While these selection methods may not be 100 percent accurate in identifying all relevant offences or incidents, they represent the best available solution in the absence of geocoded data.

**Figure 2: Target area for the High Density Housing Program, phase 1 and phase 2**



A buffer zone describes the area immediately surrounding the target area. One form of displacement that can result from area-based interventions like the HDHP is geographic displacement, whereby some offenders continue to offend but target areas that are not subject to the intervention. Given the evidence around the distance travelled by offenders, and the proximity of other suitable targets, much of this displacement is, theoretically at least, expected to affect areas adjacent to the target area. Conversely, there is also the potential for diffusion of benefit, whereby the immediate surrounding area also benefits from the intervention and experiences a decline in crime.

Three criteria need to be considered when selecting a buffer zone to measure displacement or diffusion of benefit: it should be proximal to the target area and logical to expect the area to experience some impact, it should be proportionate in size and it should be free of contamination from other interventions (Guerette 2009). In phase 1, the buffer zone was the south section of Ainslie Avenue. In phase 2, the buffer zone was based on an approximate three block radius (maximum) surrounding the public housing area, determined using a street and suburb name combination. Importantly, Ainslie Avenue is adjacent to one of the ACT's largest shopping precincts. In light of evidence of the crime attracting properties of retail areas, the likelihood that other interventions may have been implemented to reduce crime in the centre (access control, security guards etc) and the desire to focus on similar offence types targeting similar locations (ie residential areas), this precinct was excluded from the buffer zone. Streets were also excluded from the buffer zone if they extended too far from the intervention zone (ie major roads that crossed suburb boundaries).

Given public housing is situated within a larger neighbourhood, and that these neighbourhoods are likely to exert some influence over the crime problems observed in the target area and, perhaps more likely, the buffer zone, this study also analysed data related to the larger area surrounding both the target area and buffer zone. ‘Surrounding areas’ refers to the suburb or suburbs in which the public housing area is located. The total number of offences and ambulance attendances in these surrounding areas was determined by taking the total number of offences for both Braddon and Reid and subtracting the offences designated as having occurred in the target area and buffer zone.

Finally, it was necessary to select a suitable comparison area, to confirm whether any changes that were observed in Ainslie Avenue would have been observed anyway, without any intervention. Several factors needed to be considered in selecting the comparison area: that it was similar to the target area (ie a public housing area), that there was no chance it would have been influenced by the program or some other intervention, and that it was a similar size to or shared similar traits with the target area (Guerette 2009).

**Table 1: Characteristics of public housing areas, 2011–12**

	Target area (Ainslie Ave)	Comparison area (Illawarra Court & Stuart Flats)
<b>Properties and residents</b>		
Total number of properties (ie housing stock)	699	224
Total number of residents (including dependants)	836	239
<b>Resident characteristics</b>		
Percentage of residents aged 16–25 (peak offending age)	17%	9%
Percentage of female residents (who may be less likely to offend)	41%	26%
Ethnic diversity (calculated using index of qualitative variation)—measure of ethnic heterogeneity	45	41
<b>Residential stability and economic stress</b>		
Percentage of households with accounts in arrears—measure of economic stress (disadvantage)	15%	20%
Annual percentage turnover—measure of residential stability	17%	17%
<b>Recorded offences and incidents (2008–09)</b>		
Assault—number of assault offences per 100 residents	5	7
Property—number of property offences per 100 residents	17	45
Disorder—number of disorder incidents per 100 residents	48	90
<b>Ambulance attendances</b>		
Number of ambulance attendances per 100 residents	12	15

Note: Comparison area comprises Illawarra Court, Belconnen and Stuart Flats, Griffith. These were selected from six public housing sites on the basis they were most similar to Ainslie Ave. ACT Housing and ACT Ambulance Service data unavailable prior to 2011–12. With the exception of recorded offences and incidents, these indicators relate to post-implementation period  
Source: ACT Housing, ACT Policing & ACT Ambulance Service [computer files]

Six potential comparison areas were considered for the current study, based on information supplied by ACT Housing. Several criteria were used to identify a suitable match, including the size of the housing area, resident characteristics, residential stability and economic stress, the rate of recorded offences and incidents (pre-implementation) and number of ambulance attendances. With the exception of recorded crime data, information was not available for the period prior to the implementation of the project; however, it was confirmed that there were no significant changes to the target or comparison area at the point where data were available that would have affected the reliability of the match. One of the challenges for the current study is the fact that Ainslie Avenue is the largest single public housing area (with adjacent blocks) in the ACT. The number of properties and residents in other public housing areas is significantly lower.

With this issue in mind, the comparison area used for the current study comprised two public housing areas in two different areas of Canberra—Illawarra Court (Belconnen) and Stuart Flats (Griffith). The characteristics of these two sites combined are compared with Ainslie Avenue in Table 1. While the target area and comparison areas share a number of traits—similar levels of ethnic diversity, residential stability and economic stress, and similar rates of assault and ambulance attendances, there are some notable differences. Besides the comparison area being significantly smaller, there were fewer young residents and a higher percentage of male residents in the target area. The rate of property offending was also significantly higher in the comparison area, which has implications for the analysis of the impact of the program.

Nevertheless, subject to these caveats, this comparison area was selected on the basis that it was the best match for Ainslie Avenue and was similar enough that it was superior to having no comparison area against which to measure the effect of the program.

### *Indicators of criminal and antisocial behaviour*

This component of the evaluation assessed the impact of the program across several key outcome measures. These measures were selected on the basis that they reflected the crime problems targeted by the program, that it was reasonable to assume that the program, if it worked, would have some effect on them, and that it would be possible to detect change were it to occur (ie there was a sufficient number of incidents).

The first outcome measured, assault offences, was selected as a measure of violent crime. This is an aggregate measure comprising common assault, grievous bodily harm and assault of a police officer. Other violent offence types (eg robbery) were not included because of low numbers of offences. The focus on assault is recognition of the body of research that has demonstrated there is a strong relationship between collective efficacy and violent crime (Sampson, Raudenbush & Earls 1997) and that increased social cohesion can lead to reductions in the level of violence experienced by a community (Wickes, Homel & Zahnow 2015).

The evaluation also measured the impact of the program on property offences. This was an aggregate measure that included unlawful entry with intent (burglary), thefts of motor vehicles, illegal use of motor vehicles, theft of motor vehicle contents, theft from a person, other theft and property damage and graffiti offences. This was an important measure because of the strong relationship between property crime and drug use (Bradford & Payne 2012),

the high rate of substance misuse that reportedly occurs at Ainslie Avenue, and the specific mechanisms that underpin the HDHP that may reasonably be expected to influence property crime levels (eg guardianship and natural surveillance).

Disturbance incidents comprise a range of incident types based on police computer aided dispatch data. They include disturbances, public order offences, welfare checks and suspicious activity. In addition to providing a measure of disturbances that do not routinely result in an offence being recorded, including CAD data arguably provides a more reliable measure of calls to police by residents of Ainslie Avenue.

Ambulance attendances included all events. The measurement was not limited to attendances related to injury or drug and alcohol use due to concerns about the reliability of drug and alcohol information recorded by attending officers (without trawling through narratives); however, these comprise a significant proportion of attendances. Ambulance attendance numbers therefore offer a proxy measure of alcohol- and drug-related harm and acute health problems more generally.

### *Net effect, weighted displacement quotient and total net effect*

The impact of the program was assessed by comparing the change in the target area with the change in the comparison area. It was expected that successful implementation would result in reductions in the observed problems that were larger in the target area than in the comparison area. The extent of displacement was also taken into account.

Three measures of impact were calculated—the net effect, the weighted displacement quotient and the total net effect, based on the work of Bowers and Johnson (2003).

The (NE) was used to determine whether the program was responsible for any observed differences in recorded offences, incidents or ambulance attendances. It was based on the differences in the ratios of the target area to comparison area before and after implementation and uses the following formula:

$$NE = \left( \frac{T_b}{C_b} \right) - \left( \frac{T_a}{C_a} \right)$$

where  $T_b$  is the crime count in the target area before the intervention,

$C_b$  is the crime count in the comparison area before the intervention,

$T_a$  is the crime count in the target area after the intervention, and

$C_a$  is the crime count in the comparison area after the intervention.

If the net effect is close to zero, the response was probably ineffective, and if net effect is negative the response may have made things worse. But if net effect is positive, there is reason to believe the response may have caused the improvement.

A *weighted displacement quotient* (WDQ) was calculated if the net effect was positive to determine whether there was any displacement or diffusion of benefits. The WDQ provides ‘a single metric that quantifies the size of changes observed in a nearby catchment area relative to those observed in the associated treatment area (and a suitable control area)’ (Johnson, Guerette & Bowers 2014: 555).

The WDQ uses the following formula:

$$WDQ = \frac{\frac{D_a}{C_a} - \frac{D_b}{C_b}}{\frac{T_a}{C_a} - \frac{T_b}{C_b}}$$

where  $D_a$  is the crime count in the displacement area after the intervention, and  $D_b$  is the crime count in the displacement area before the intervention.

In phase 1, Bower and Johnson’s original formula was used, whereby the comparison area was used in the numerator. However, in phase 2, a variant of Bowers and Johnson’s original formula was applied and neighbouring suburbs were used in the numerator. This was more appropriate from a theoretical perspective as it would be more realistic to expect the displacement areas (private housing areas surrounding public housing) to function in a similar way to the broader suburb in which they are located, rather than another public housing area.

A positive WDQ means there was a diffusion effect and, if it is greater than one, then the diffusion effect was greater than the response effect. A negative WDQ means there was geographic crime displacement (ie crime moved to a nearby location). When the WDQ is between zero and negative one, displacement erodes some, but not all, of the response effects. The WDQ does not account for other forms of displacement, such as temporal displacement or displacement to other crime types.

The *total net effect* (TNE) refers to the total increase or decrease in the number of offences, incidents or ambulance attendances that may be attributable to the HDHP. It was calculated with the following formula:

$$TNE = \left[ T_b \left( \frac{C_a}{C_b} \right) - T_a \right] + \left[ D_b \left( \frac{NS_a}{NS_b} \right) - D_a \right]$$

where  $NS_a$  is the crime count in the neighbouring suburb after the intervention, and  $NS_b$  is the crime count in the neighbouring suburb before the intervention.

A negative TNE indicates a positive result (a reduction in crime or health problems). The larger the number, the greater the increase or decrease. This includes and accounts for any displacement or diffusion effect.

### *Cost-benefit analysis*

Drawing on the analysis of police data, the study also included a partial cost-benefit analysis (CBA). Increasingly being recognised as a vital component of contemporary crime prevention evaluation (Dossetor 2011; Drake, Aos & Miller 2009), the purpose of the CBA was to compare the costs and monetised benefits attributable to the HDHP. A description of the methodology used for the CBA is presented in that section of the report.

### *Limitations*

There were several limitations with this component of the evaluation, including:

- the difficulties identifying a well matched comparison area (described above), particularly given the size of Ainslie Avenue relative to other public housing areas in Canberra;
- the absence of spatial data to determine which offences, incidents or ambulance attendances occurred in the target area, buffer zone and comparison area, meaning alternative methods had to be used;
- the low number of offences and incidents that were recorded in both the target area and comparison area prohibited more sophisticated analyses, and provided limited opportunity for more fine-grained analysis of the impact of the program in individual blocks;
- the limited program data, most notably prior to 2011–12, which prohibited trend analysis for the entire program period or analysis of the impact of activities during the first two to three years of the program (see below);
- the variable nature of the program activity, with multiple, overlapping interventions delivered in combination and at different stages of implementation, which presented challenges in terms of isolating the effects of individual initiatives; and
- the absence of common place name identifiers within ACT Ambulance Service data and the limited reliability of drug and alcohol flags, which meant drug-related incidents could not be easily extracted from the data.

Where applicable these limitations have been considered in the discussion of the evaluation findings and, where possible, efforts have been taken to mitigate their potential impact on the study.

### **Analysis of performance reports**

Information was extracted from the quarterly performance reports produced by the OTGM and provided to JACS for the period 2012–2015. This helped to provide a more detailed understanding of the nature and scope of activities delivered as part of the program, and also to identify various contextual factors that may have influenced the effectiveness of the HDHP.

Information extracted from the reports included:

- the activities delivered on site (number, nature and participation rates);
- the number and nature of referrals made by the OTGM for residents (eg to community services, legal services etc)
- information shared by the HDHP with partner agencies (eg police, housing and health agencies)
- program dosage (number of visits and hours spent at each public housing site); and
- important events, issues and major achievements.

While the reports were a useful source of information about the focus, scope and nature of the program, there were also limitations. Quarterly reports were only available for the period 2012–2015, meaning that understanding of the activities delivered as part of the program prior to 2012, and key events that may have influenced the efficacy of the program, is limited. Finally, some information was not recorded consistently, making any kind of trend analysis difficult.

## Interviews with residents

Between October and December 2015, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 Ainslie Avenue residents who had participated in the HDHP. Residents were selected for inclusion in the research by the OTGM using criteria developed through consultation with the research team, with an emphasis on engaging residents who:

- had been involved with the HDHP for a minimum of 12 months (to be able to measure changes over time);
- were broadly representative of residents participating in the HDHP; and
- could participate in an interview safely (ie they were unlikely to become distressed during the interview).

These interviews sought to develop a better understanding of the residents participating in the HDHP, including their living circumstances and needs, and to obtain the views of residents about the operation of the program (ie what they liked about it, how they heard about it, whether there was anything that they thought could be improved). Resident views were also sought regarding the impact of the program, both for them as individuals as well as the broader Ainslie Avenue community. Another important focus of these interviews was to determine the nature and level of contact interview participants had had with ACT Government and non-government services and the level of support provided to these individuals.

Interviews were conducted face-to-face or over the phone and were audio recorded (when permission was given by the resident). The interviews with residents were then transcribed and analysed using data display and thematic analytical techniques.

Given the project was retrospective in nature, the qualitative interviews required interviewees to recall past events associated with the project. This will naturally be affected by the ability of interviewees to recall events. This is sub-optimal from a methodological perspective, but was the best available method under the circumstances. It also means that greater weight may need to be placed on the quantitative analysis of the impact using the administrative data.

The number of residents interviewed (n=15) also represents a relatively small sample size and therefore the findings have limited external validity. While the criteria for inclusion in the interview were purposefully broad to ensure that residents with a range of views could participate, individuals who had particularly positive experiences engaging in the program were more likely to agree to participate in an interview (and more likely to participate in the program more generally), which raises the prospect of selection bias. Further, residents may also have been reluctant to be critical of the program because of a perception that doing so would negatively impact the future of the program (social desirability bias).

# Review of program activity

The HDHP is delivered by a full-time OTGM who is employed by ReLink and is responsible for day-to-day management and resourcing of the program, recruiting residents to participate in the program, supporting and responding to the immediate needs of residents and designing and delivering activities and initiatives. This section describes some of these activities in more detail and also some of the key findings with respect to the delivery of the program and the role of the OTGM.

## What activities have been delivered?

One of the key roles of the OTGM is to design and implement activities that align with the objectives of the program. The OTGM has delivered a range of structured and unstructured activities during his time with the HDHP, some of which respond to specific short-term issues identified by residents, while others aim to address underlying issues that contribute to crime and safety problems at Ainslie Avenue. Many of these activities are described below. Beyond these organised activities, the OTGM also engages with residents individually during site visits to discuss any issues they might be experiencing, provide one-on-one support and facilitate access to important services.

While they differ in terms of their time frame, focus, location and target group, there are a number of common themes across the different activities. A major focus of all of these initiatives is addressing issues related to social isolation and marginalisation of residents, encouraging residents to interact in public spaces and promoting and building social cohesion. These are ambitious goals, but consistent with the community development approach. The success of the program is contingent on the active involvement of local residents. Indeed, to be effective, the OTGM must engage enough residents in the program for long enough to influence levels of social cohesion.

Importantly, while some of these activities have direct crime prevention benefits, others are more indirect, or address other important goals, such as improved health and wellbeing among residents.

### Community garden beds

The OTGM has been involved in setting up community garden beds at many of the Ainslie Avenue sites. The materials for the garden beds are provided by the HDHP, and additional resources are sourced by the OTGM if needed. The garden beds have a number of benefits both for the residents who help to maintain them and for the wider Ainslie Avenue community.

The garden beds encourage residents to grow their own produce, such as herbs and vegetables, meaning that they can prepare and cook food that they may not have otherwise had access to for financial reasons. The community garden beds also aim to increase community ownership of and responsibility for shared spaces and to promote resident interaction and communication.

### **Workshop program**

The workshop program is a practical skills initiative whereby residents are encouraged to build new items or repair old ones. The workshop is run weekly and residents learn new skills with help from the OTGM. The workshop promotes resident interaction by encouraging people to work together on projects, and learn from one another. It also assists residents to contribute to the wider community and influence perceptions of public housing residents through the donation of their products to local schools and charities. For example, in 2014, residents donated a garden bench to a local primary school raffle, which raised funds for children at the school who required extra support. Some of these children were Ainslie Avenue residents.

### **Neighbourhood 'chats' (Regular social events)**

One of the primary services that the OTGM provides is information sharing. A weekly 'meet-up' is organised where residents can come together, share food and have a chat with the OTGM and other residents. These social events are an opportunity for residents to raise any concerns they have with the OTGM, to get information on services in the area, and also to meet people in a safe and positive environment.

### **Art programs**

The HDHP has run several arts programs since its inception. These art programs have been established to engage vulnerable target cohorts, such as mothers and primary school aged children, in social activities. As well as providing a positive space to gather and engage in activities, participants have the opportunity to contribute their artwork to an art exhibition which showcases art from across the community. For example, the 'Down the Avenue' Creative Arts Exhibition was held in 2010 and showcased a range of artwork by local residents, including women and children, from the Ainslie Avenue community and Ainslie Village.

### **'Hanging Out' laundry program**

The 'Hanging Out' laundry program is based at Bega Court, where there have been significant problems with resident safety (real and perceived) and theft of clothing from the laundry. Because the laundry area is enclosed, and therefore a relatively private space, it was also frequently used to inject drugs, as evidenced by the presence of drug paraphernalia (eg needles) routinely found in the area. As part of the 'Hanging Out' program, the OTGM goes into the laundry room with residents and stays with them while they do their laundry, so as to deter theft from the laundry area and from residents. The OTGM also cleans the area of any needles or other dangerous items to minimise the potential harm to residents and their children. The program aims to improve resident feelings of safety during daylight hours.

## How are these activities supposed to work?

From this brief review of activities delivered under the auspices of the HDHP, it is possible to identify a number of different mechanisms. These mechanisms describe the theory that explains how the interventions are expected to prevent crime (Morgan et al. 2012):

- Information gathering and sharing—gathering information about local problems and consulting with residents to better understanding their needs, in order to be able to forward this information to partner agencies.
- Advocacy—working on behalf of residents to encourage and motivate partner agencies to take action in response to information on local problems.
- Guardianship—acting as a capable guardian, deterring residents from engaging in criminal or antisocial behaviour through the presence of a perceived ‘authority’ and threat of being detected.
- Diversion—diverting residents into more desirable or more productive supervised activities that keep them occupied during periods that might otherwise provide opportunities to engage in criminal and antisocial behaviour.
- Relationship building—building relationships, trust and rapport with residents to enable the OTGM to work more closely with and support people living along Ainslie Avenue.
- Community development—promoting a sense of community whereby residents interact with one another, feel a sense of belonging and feel less socially isolated.
- Skill development—building practical skills that enable residents to contribute to community projects and promote positive feelings of personal self-worth.
- Crisis intervention—supporting residents during periods of crisis, risk and instability and working to ensure their immediate needs are met so that they do not resort to past negative behaviours.
- Referral—facilitating residents’ access to services that can help to address the risk factors for substance use, crime and antisocial behaviour.

These mechanisms will work differently according to the nature, scope and target of each intervention. Some activities will only activate a single mechanism, while others may be underpinned by more than one. For example, community gardens may divert potential offenders away from engaging in less desirable behaviour, increase the level of natural surveillance and therefore guardianship, develop residents’ horticultural skills and promote a sense of community in accordance with the community development model. Guardianship may be more effective in reducing property crime and community development may work better with violent crime, but they might also require an activity to be delivered in a different dosage or targeted at different groups in order to work.

The remainder of this report aims to unpack which of these activities and therefore mechanisms appear to be effective in helping to prevent crime at Ainslie Avenue.

## How has program activity varied over time?

To further understand patterns in program activity and to help inform the outcome evaluation, a program time line was prepared that describes:

- changes in the scope and focus of the program (eg introduction of new activities and cessation of others);
- key achievements;
- changes in housing policy; and
- major criminal events that may have impacted the delivery of the program and the safety and security of Ainslie Avenue residents (Figures 3 and 4).

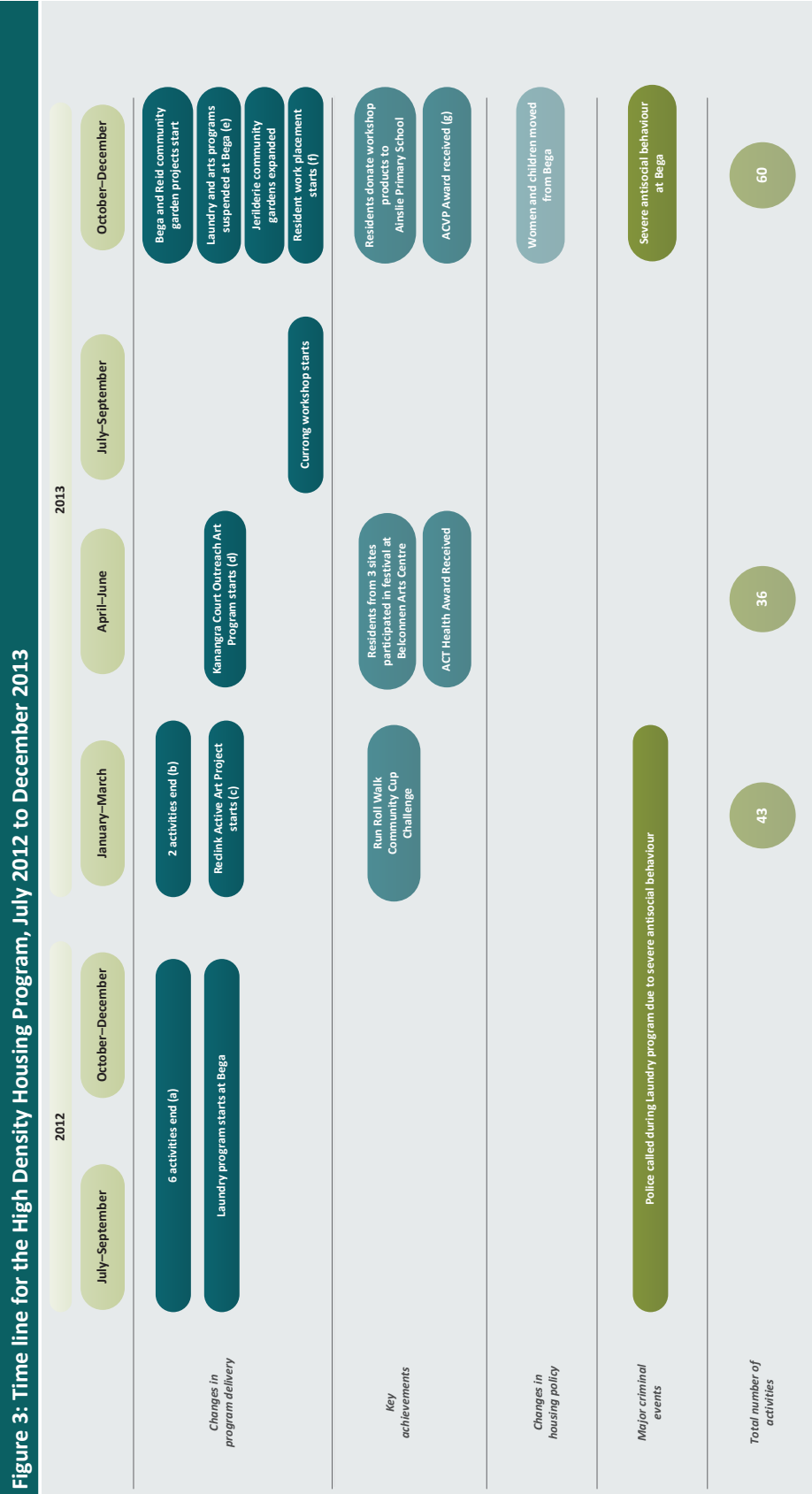
This information was drawn from the quarterly performance reports completed by the OTGM, and therefore relates to the period from July 2012 to June 2015.

While not representative of the entire length of the program, several conclusions can be drawn from this time line. First, it demonstrates the variable nature of program activity—some initiatives are ongoing, while others have been one-off or short-term initiatives. While some initiatives have longer-term goals and aim to build social cohesion, others have attempted to address more immediate safety concerns, such as the introduction of a laundry program to address concerns among residents about their ability to use the facilities safely.

Second, it is also apparent that these activities have been spread across many of the seven (now six) sites at Ainslie Avenue, although the level of activity has varied between blocks. Site selection is based on need and also the likely success of efforts to mobilise residents and engage them in organised activities. Some sites are targeted by multiple, overlapping interventions.

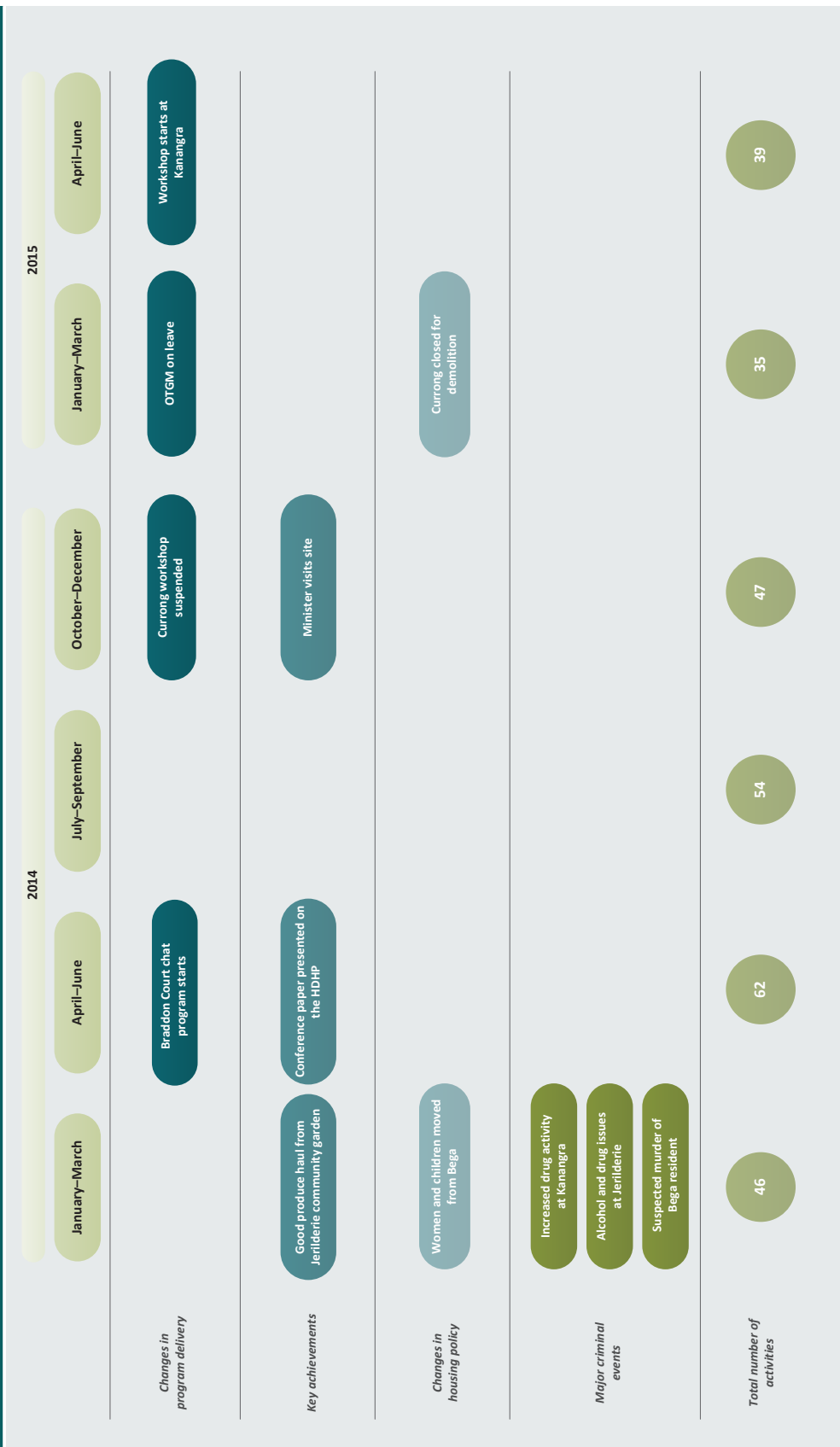
Also evident from this time line is the effect that crime and antisocial behaviour can have on the delivery of program activities. In the second half of 2012, police were repeatedly called to attend the laundry program at the Bega site due to serious antisocial behaviour, which undermined efforts to improve the safety of residents. This program was affected again in late 2013 by serious antisocial behaviour and by a bomb blast and suspected homicide. This had a substantial effect on participation levels, ultimately leading to the suspension of the laundry program and the arts program at Bega, and the site continues to be a challenging environment for project delivery. Indeed, during the first quarter of 2014 three of the seven sites were affected by increases in antisocial and criminal behaviour, particularly drug- and alcohol-related problems.

Changes in housing policy have also had an impact on program delivery. The closure of the Currong apartments resulted in the suspension of the workshop based at the block pending the selection of another site. Issues related to the security of the closed building, which attracted squatters and other antisocial behaviour, posed additional challenges.



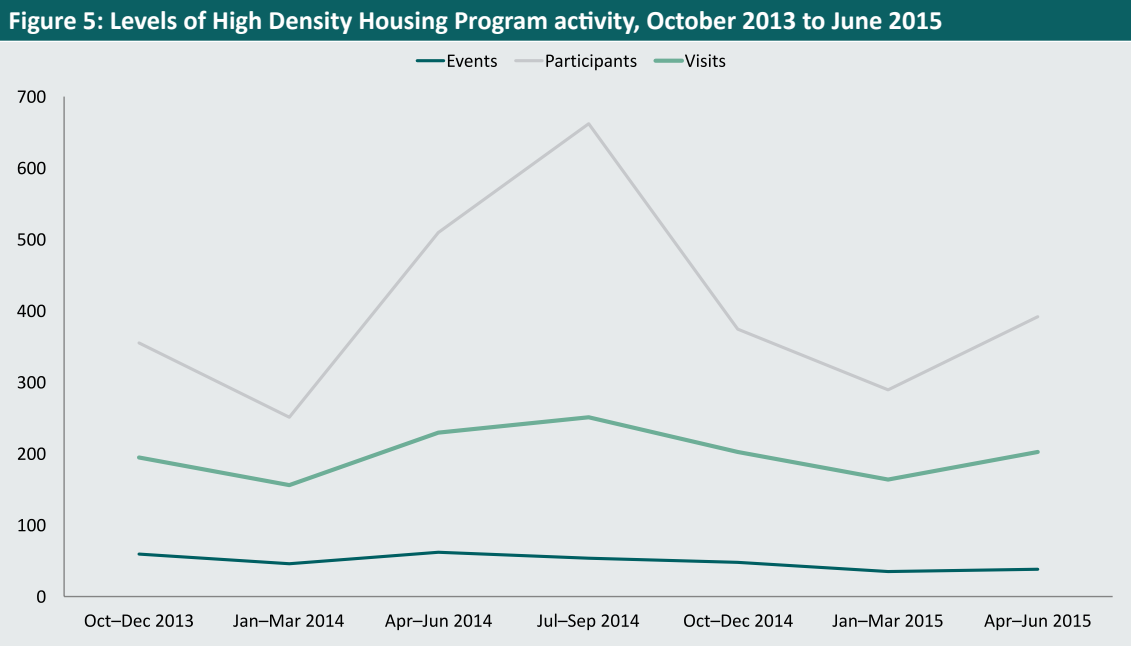
a: Ainslie Village Workshop, Civic Olympic Pool Gym Program, Down the Avenue Creative Arts Exhibition, Ainslie Community Kids Active Art Program, Women’s combined Art Program, Bega Court Friday Chats  
 b: Ainslie Village Food Cents Program, Neighbourhood chats at all sites  
 c: The ReLink Active Art Project is run for 1 quarter  
 d: Kanangra Court Outreach Art Project is run for 2 quarters  
 e: Although the Bega Outreach Art program was suspended at this point, participation was documented into the second quarter of 2014  
 f: A male resident engaged with the HDHP as part of a work placement project  
 g: Australian Crime and Violence Prevention Award received from the Australian Institute of Criminology  
 Note: Number of activities delivered not reported for quarters 3 and 4 of 2012 because only aggregate figures were available, and quarter 4 of 2013 because this was not provided by the OTGM  
 Source: HDHP Evaluation dataset 2015 [Computer file]

Figure 4: Time line for the High Density Housing Program, January 2014 to June 2015



Source: HDHP Evaluation dataset 2015 [Computer file]

Issues related to crime and antisocial behaviour, changes in housing policy, availability of short-term grant funding and seasonal variation can affect both program dosage (the amount of activity delivered) and program reach (the number of participants). As shown in Figure 5, the delivery of major events, participation in key activities and visits to Ainslie Avenue (formal and informal) all peaked between April and September 2014. This period of peak participation also corresponds broadly with the period during which a second community worker was employed, which may indicate that increased resources provided the opportunity for more activities with which to engage local residents.



Note: Aggregate participant numbers for Run Roll or Walk, community garden projects, Bega Laundry Project, Bega Outreach Art, Currong Workshop, Currong Red Shed Workshop and Braddon Court Chat. Participation rates represent total participants and are not based on unique individuals—individuals can participate in multiple events or activities and also the same event multiple times in each quarter. Includes formal and informal visits  
 Source: HDHP Evaluation dataset 2015 [Computer file]

### What involvement have residents had in the program?

The residents interviewed as part of the evaluation reported being involved in a number of these activities—particularly the workshop program and the community gardens, as well as Run Roll Walk. The activities appear well targeted at the interests of residents (at least those residents who were interviewed), some of whom described having previously had an interest in similar areas:

Well for a start the woodwork shed on Monday. I come from half my life in the building trade and the other half of my life was a professional hunter. So I'm used to being outside. I'm used to working with my hands. It's probably one of the best things that I've sort of got back involved with, yeah. We also have between a few of us we've got two separate vegie gardens here...in the program with Coordinator as well. We look after a vegie garden as well. So we try to keep ourselves busy so other things don't interfere to us. (Participant 15)

I used to do woodwork in high school, and so for me to get back into that, it's fulfilling for me I find. I find if I'm doing something with my hands that are good—and it may be for myself, but that's an enjoyment that I get from that. I love it. (Participant 12)

One of the challenges for the OTGM has been developing activities that have broad appeal and can attract both male and female residents and residents of all ages and interests.

Some of the residents described how they were involved in setting up activities, or encouraging other residents to attend, acting as champions for the program:

I'm a chef so what I try and do, because of our barbecue and garden, I try and get people out there. (Participant 11)

When he turned up I was really keen on getting some community garden beds in the complex ...'Well you know, why don't we stick some garden beds there?' Get the community into eating healthy vegie foods and stuff. (Participant 5)

The reasons for participating in the program were varied. A number of residents referred to the benefits of meeting people, keeping busy, or keeping their mind occupied:

...for years now I've been going to the Run Walk Roll thing around the lake. I try to make it every month...I like the barbecue he holds afterwards and it's just a good place to meet people. So I've helped out with his gardening projects there, just because it gets me out of my flat. (Participant 6)

I get so much into it and it occupies my mind. It takes me away from all my other issues...The three hours that I spend with Coordinator doing some woodwork shop I don't have to care about anything else. I just have to worry about what's in front of me. (Participant 3)

For some residents, their motivation for participating came from the pride they felt from producing something of value:

...you have a sense of purpose when you achieve something too which I think is a big thing that a lot of people do miss out on...If you've got a sense of purpose you feel happy about yourself because you've accomplished, you've achieved... (Participant 10)

In terms of participation, several residents described having participated in HDHP activities on a regular basis and for an extended period:

So I did go down and do the art program a few times but then unfortunately that did get shut down due to lack of volunteering...Then after that then I found out about the man shed—the workshop. Now I'm there every Monday. (Participant 7)

I slowly started getting more involved in the garden and yeah now I love it. Now I'm very protective of my garden. (Participant 7)

I've pretty much been helping out with the gardens and playing around with the gardens pretty much since I moved in. (Participant 9)

Eventually I ended up going down to that workshop and it took a couple of months but that was a long time ago. That's probably about two and a half years ago...It's been a consistent thing ever since. (Participant 10)

This suggests the program has had some success in engaging and retaining residents in the program. Other residents described more sporadic involvement in program activities:

I have been involved in the woodwork shed a few times and I have also helped with the run walk ride that he does...But I like the garden because I can just sort of go down whenever. (Participant 8)

While maintaining longer-term involvement in the program is desirable, one of the benefits of the HDHP is the flexible model that enables participants to engage as much or as little as they want.

### How do residents perceive the on-the-ground manager?

Like many crime prevention programs that adopt a community development approach, a central feature of the HDHP has been the prominent role of a community worker, the OTGM, responsible for nearly all aspects of program delivery. Supported by the ACT JACS, the OTGM has primary responsibility for identifying issues that need to be addressed, developing new initiatives that target these issues, running various activities at multiple sites, mobilising the Ainslie Avenue community to get involved and encouraging the active participation of residents. Building rapport and establishing positive relationships between residents and the OTGM is therefore fundamental to the success of the program.

Overall, the residents who participated in the interviews were very positive about their interactions with the OTGM and indicated that, in their view, he was responsible for the success of the program. It was clear from the interviews that the OTGM had been successful in developing strong and positive relationships with many residents who had engaged in the HDHP. Participants said of him:

...he's just a great person to talk to. I connect with him. He just seems to understand where others mightn't and it's just good to get to talk to him... So I actually kind of look forward to seeing him. (Participant 3)

He's been such a positive force you could say in my life. He's like my saviour, my hero because of just the way he's listened to me, just the way he's treated me and the way he's helped me. He's like a father figure even. Wow. Yeah. (Participant 5)

All of the residents described having a good relationship with the OTGM and suggested that he was the main reason that they would continue to participate in the HDHP. Some even suggested that, were he to leave, they too would leave the program, which poses issues in terms of longer-term sustainability.

When asked to identify the attributes that made the OTGM effective, residents described him as non-judgemental, trustworthy and accessible. Some residents also said that they and others appreciated his patience and willingness to help anyone who sought his assistance:

[The OTGM] is the kind of person that builds your confidence and makes you believe that you can actually do it. He's not the kind of guy that's going to stand there and just bark orders at someone. He's the kind of guy that's actually going to build your confidence and help you do it so that you know you're doing it right. I think that that's the right way to teach somebody anything, is to have patience and to actually be willing to explain things. (Participant 9)

...he's such an understanding fellow and he's helped me out...He's a very thoughtful person about others...He doesn't discriminate. I wish all people were like him. It'd be a better world. (Participant 5)

Residents also said that being able to trust the OTGM was an important factor in the success of the program. While this finding is consistent with the broader literature around community involvement (Burton et al. 2004), it is particularly relevant to programs targeting vulnerable

people, such as those living in public housing. Interviewees spoke about how they and many other residents found it difficult to trust other people, often because of past experiences and trauma. However, the OTGM has been able to overcome these barriers and build positive and strong relationships with residents:

I've always been stung by people. Being brought up in the homes and stuff, you learn trust is a big thing. It's a big issue and you've got to earn it...I couldn't do this [participate in an interview] before I met [OTGM], talk to strangers because it's too hard to meet strangers...He taught me how to trust people more and how to read people more. (Participant 5)

A lot of the people have trust issues and that's why we trust [OTGM]. Like we've built the rapport with [OTGM] and if someone came in we're worried that we won't have that rapport. (Participant 7)

The OTGM has remained accessible to residents and actively encourages them to contact him, something that is viewed favourably:

He gives out his mobile number to all of the people who come down to the workshop, that ever need to contact him they can just call him up and he'll be there. (Participant 7)

## Are other residents aware of the program?

In order to encourage the active participation of residents in organised activities, it is first necessary that they are aware of the program. There was some evidence from the quarterly reports that suggests advertising initially involved posting flyers, hanging banners at events and having staff visible and wearing Reclink branded clothing while on site. Despite this, some interviewees suggested that advertising for the program could be improved across the sites to increase awareness of the program—which is particularly important given the relatively high annual turnover among residents. This issue was well supported by the analysis of the interview transcripts, which found that most residents found out about the program through word of mouth or by meeting the OTGM while he was on site for activities.

One of the residents interviewed felt that the program did not have a high profile among the Ainslie Avenue community. They suggested that while residents were probably aware that there was 'a guy gardening, hanging around', there was no advertising for the Reclink program and that someone would have to know the 'right people' to know that there was a service available.

While it was clear from the interviews that many residents were being approached by the OTGM directly, there was also some evidence that other residents had to use their own initiative to get involved. One resident spoke about how he was aware 'that something was going on' but that he did not engage in the program for a period of time because he was unsure of what it involved:

I didn't go in and ask that day. I'd walk one week past it, another week past it, and it was still going. And I worked out the days that it's on, and I asked someone. I said, 'What's going on down there?' (Participant 13)

Another resident said she took it upon herself to get involved with the program after she overheard people in the garden:

I actually was sitting in my house one day. I heard all these people down in the garden. I was like, 'What are they doing?' and I went down and [OTGM] needed some people with supervising. (Participant 7, November 2015)

The same resident noted that while advertising for activities had been better in the past, it had been reduced and that improvements could be made:

There were some notices at one point but I think they've stopped putting them up. I'm not 100 percent sure. I haven't seen them on my block for quite a while. And he [the OTGM] does have a bulletin board but unfortunately the bulletin board is squashed right into the back of a carport and it's behind a giant table so you can't see it. So it's just really bad placement of the bulletin board. If it was moved out where people could more see it, then more people would know about this stuff. (Participant 7, November 2015)

A number of residents noted that they were put into contact with the project through their existing support services or social workers. This indicates that while there may be less awareness of the project among residents, the OTGM has worked to create an awareness of the project among community organisations, especially those who have responsibility for settling new tenants:

They [community service provider] pretty much put me onto [OTGM] the day I moved in. It was just basically because I have anxiety issues and the idea of the wood workshop was coming up. So that's how they introduced me to [OTGM]. (Participant 3)

Another resident noted the immediacy of their introduction to the project:

I got the name [of the project] through a [service] so I knew about Reclink straight away...as soon as I got [to the site] I was introduced to [OTGM] straightaway.

While word of mouth is a successful mechanism for creating awareness of the program, the limited nature of resident interaction in a site like Ainslie Avenue means it is possible that socially isolated residents could be less likely to engage with the program. Target groups are already at risk of social isolation due to existing factors such as unemployment and health issues, including mental health and alcohol and other drug use issues. Additional advertising, as well as the resources to support it, may be beneficial in reaching more residents at Ainslie Avenue.

### Has resourcing been a problem?

Many of the residents interviewed recognised that resourcing for the program was limited. Most residents felt that additional funding would be beneficial. Some indicated that the ability of the OTGM to respond to the immediate needs of residents, implement new activities and maintain and review existing activities was limited, at least in part, by resourcing:

More funding for [OTGM] would be great because you know there are a few things we'd like to get fixed up around the place...Like the garden beds at our place are sort of falling apart a little bit. (Participant 7)

I know he used to have funding to train people at the gym—a personal training thing. That was a while ago. I don't think he does that anymore. (Participant 6)

He does a lot. You probably would've heard by now he does quite a lot... Yeah. He needs help...I know he had an offsider at one stage—a female. I don't know what happened to her. (Participant 6, November 2015)

The fact that residents have been aware of resource constraints suggests it probably has had an impact on the delivery of some organised activities, particularly those that could not be sustained longer term, as well as the individual support that the OTGM has been able to offer residents.

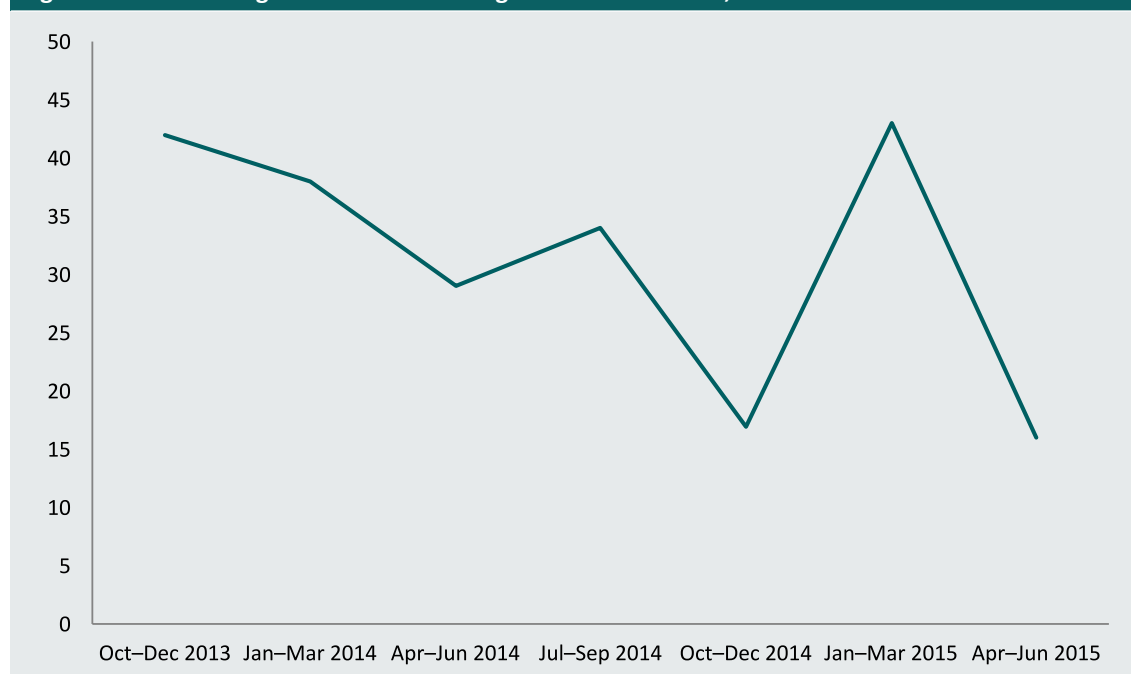
## Are residents able to access services when they need them?

Public housing residents can face a variety of issues including limited access to mental health, education, employment and justice services. Several residents interviewed for the evaluation described their experience of trying to manage serious mental health problems, and how these problems affected their behaviour. Others mentioned suffering from a disability which impacted on their mobility, and a number discussed having experienced significant long-term drug abuse problems and also the effects of prior victimisation.

At the same time residents are sometimes reluctant to ask for help if they are not already linked into a support service. One of the roles of the OTGM has been to help residents to access support services. This is typically an informal process, whereby the OTGM provides information to residents during neighbourhood ‘chats’ and other activities delivered as part of the program.

The analysis of performance reports indicates that, between October 2013 and June 2015 (the period for which data were available), the HDHP regularly referred Ainslie Avenue residents to a range of services (Figure 6). These included legal services, health services, financial services, housing services, education services and general support services. The most common referrals were to general support services (57% of all referrals during this period) and legal services (which includes police; 28%), followed by health services (12%). The overall trend in referrals was a gradual decrease, with the exception of a spike in referrals in the January–March quarter of 2015 (n=43).

**Figure 6: Referrals to government and non-government services, October 2013 to June 2015**



Note: Total number of referrals to legal services (including police), health services, financial services, housing services, education services and general support services

Source: HDHP Evaluation dataset 2015 [Computer file]

As part of the interviews, residents were asked about the accessibility of support services at Ainslie Avenue, and any barriers to accessing services. Residents noted that the proximity of the site to the city meant that it was relatively easy to access services such as health (physical and mental, dental), Centrelink, and non-government organisations and charities where they could get help with food and other practical issues. However, some residents reported that there were very few services on site, meaning that access was an issue for residents who were not comfortable leaving Ainslie Avenue.

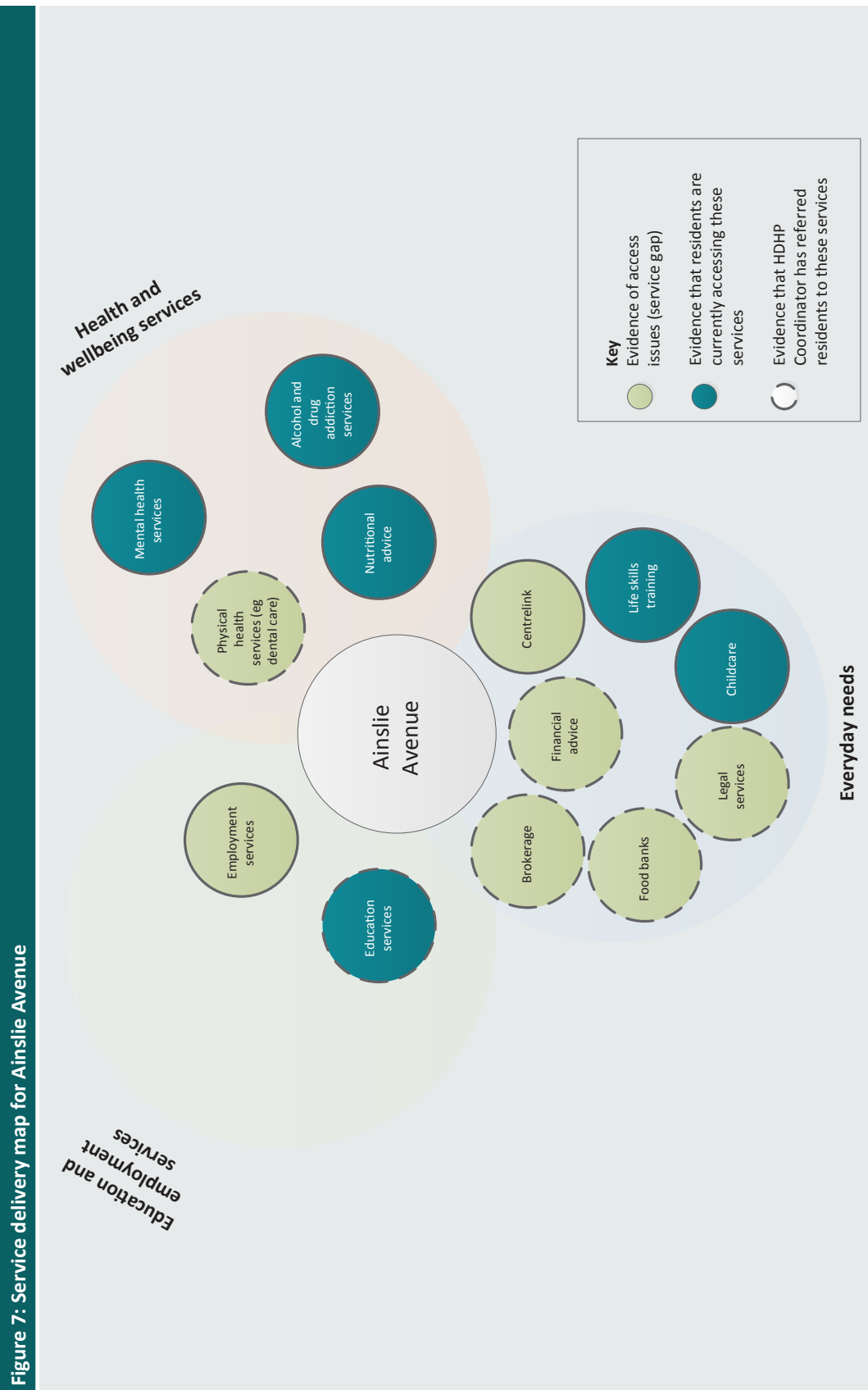
A small number of residents who participated in the interviews reported that they had accessed support services through the HDHP. These services included those of the Salvation Army, Red Cross and ACT Housing, who provided a range of supports, including financial advice, brokerage, education and training and child care:

[OTGM] put me in contact with people like the Salvos because I needed furniture when I first moved in. So he knows a lot of community agencies that I didn't know of. He helped me get a free fridge and washing machine that I didn't know you could get. He put me in touch with Salvation Army to get groceries, their Money Care program. So all this stuff I wouldn't know about, he knows about. And I'm going back to study next year and he knows someone that can help me get a laptop to study. (Participant 6, November 2015)

The residents who said that they had not accessed services through the HDHP reported that this was either because they had not followed up on information provided to them by the OTGM or because, in their view, they did not require the support of other services. However, almost all of the residents said that, if they required assistance, they were comfortable approaching the OTGM and knew that he would be able to give them the information they needed. The OTGM was seen as having a well developed knowledge of the different types of services available to residents in the community.

Inasmuch as other people that I've seen come to [OTGM], I know that he's been able to get on his mobile phone straightaway and then put people in touch with places they need to be or need to go. It's a pretty good and efficient line of communication. (Participant 10, November 2015)

A summary of the services that residents have accessed, services to which the HDHP has referred residents and current support service gaps is presented in Figure 7. Service gaps are support service needs among residents that were reportedly not being met due to issues outside the control of the HDHP. These highlight the importance of improving access to services to support the needs of Ainslie Avenue residents.



Source: Interviews with residents; HDHP Evaluation dataset 2015 [Computer file]

# Impact of project implementation, community gardens and increased participation

The previous sections highlighted the different activities that have been delivered as part of the HDHP, often in conjunction with one another and all underpinned by a community development approach and working towards a common goal (or goals). An important aim of this evaluation was to examine, in finer detail, the impact of individual initiatives that were undertaken as part of the HDHP. In doing so, this evaluation attempted to more closely address the question of attribution—to what extent were the observed changes in crime attributable to the HDHP, rather than due to other interventions in the target area?

Importantly, this approach also aimed to identify the specific activities undertaken under the auspices of the HDHP that appeared to be particularly effective in preventing crime and, conversely, to identify those activities that were less effective. In turn, this information could be used to determine the mix of interventions for future work in the target area, by focusing on those activities where there is evidence of a positive impact on crime.

While the activities of the HDHP were wide-ranging, with a range of underlying mechanisms of change (as outlined in the previous section), there were three specific interventions or stages of implementation that could be examined in more detail to determine effectiveness. These were the introduction of the HDHP and the active presence of the OTGM, the Jerilderie community garden project and the increase in program participation. The impact of each of these is examined in turn.

## Was there an immediate benefit from introducing an on-the-ground manager?

The introduction of the HDHP and, perhaps more importantly, the appointment of a dedicated OTGM to support and work with residents was a significant milestone for Ainslie Avenue. While the program commenced in 2008, the OTGM did not have an active presence on site until May 2009. The HDHP has gradually developed over time and the number of activities has grown since it was first implemented. However, for many residents, the introduction of the program and presence of the OTGM signified a shift in attention to the wellbeing of residents and a focus on building community. While it likely took some time for the community to become involved in organised activities and for some of the benefits associated with social cohesion to be realised, the OTGM was still active on site and engaging with residents; therefore it was still realistic to expect that there would be a short-term effect.

The results from a comparison between 12 months post-implementation and 12 months pre-implementation are presented in Table 2. There was some evidence of a reduction in recorded assault offences following the implementation of the program. The number of assault offences declined by 47 percent, significantly more than the decrease observed in the comparison area (12%)—a NE of 0.40. There was little change in the buffer zone during the same period (WDQ=-0.10). Taken as a whole, the introduction of the program and active presence of the OTGM was estimated to have resulted in five fewer assaults in the first 12 months.

Similar analyses were conducted for property crime and disturbance incidents. There was a reduction in both property offences (a 58% decrease) and disturbance incidents (a 46% decrease), and these reductions were greater than those observed in the comparison areas (a 27% and 15% decrease, respectively). These results suggest that the introduction and active presence of the OTGM had an immediate and short-term impact on property crime and disturbance incidents in the north section of Ainslie Avenue. However, there was evidence of an increase in the number of offences and incidents in the buffer zone, the south section of Ainslie Avenue, suggesting there may have been some level of displacement. In the case of property offences, this more than offset the decrease in offending in the target area (WDQ=-2.34; NE=28 offences), which suggests the increase observed was not entirely the result of displacement. In the case of disturbance incidents, the overall net effect was marginally positive (WDQ=-0.96; NE=-3 offences).

<b>Table 2: Impact of the implementation of the project (May 2009)</b>				
	Target area	Comparison area	Buffer zone	Surrounding suburbs
<b>Assault offences</b>				
12 months pre-implementation (n)	17	17	22	63
12 months post-implementation (n)	9	15	20	64
Difference (%)	-47	-12	-9	2
Net effect	0.40			
Weighted displacement quotient	-0.10			
Total response effect (immediate site only)	-6			
Total net effect (including displacement)	-5			
<b>Property offences</b>				
12 months pre-implementation (n)	65	105	80	789
12 months post-implementation (n)	27	77	107	1066
Difference (%)	-58	-27	34	35
Net effect	0.27			
Weighted displacement quotient	-2.34			
Total response effect (immediate site only)	-21			
Total net effect (including displacement)	28			
<b>Disturbance incidents</b>				
12 months pre-implementation (n)	198	202	203	789
12 months post-implementation (n)	106	172	233	774
Difference (%)	-46	-15	15	-2
Net effect	0.36			
Weighted displacement quotient	-0.96			
Total response effect (immediate site only)	-63			
Total net effect (including displacement)	-3			

Note: The target area included Braddon, Reid, Jerilderie and Kanangra, while the buffer zone included Allawah, Bega and Currong. Comparison area comprises Illawarra Court, Belconnen and Stuart Flats, Griffith. Program implementation refers to commencement of service delivery, not contract start date. WDQ not calculated if net effect was negative. Total net effect includes displacement or diffusion where net effect is positive  
 Source: ACT Policing PROMIS [data file]

## Do community gardens reduce crime?

The Jerilderie community garden project was introduced in September 2011 and involved working with local residents to plant flower and vegetable patches in public garden areas. As well as providing a source of healthy food products, this initiative was designed to help build community relationships by bringing people together to work on the garden. It also provided a degree of guardianship in the area by bringing local residents together in shared spaces, thereby increasing natural surveillance in the area. While it was not the first community garden project, it has been one of the most well attended and maintained, and has generated significant interest.

To assess the impact of this intervention, the number of recorded offences and disturbance incidents for the 12 months prior to the implementation of the community garden project and the 12-month period post-implementation were compared, and the results are presented in Table 3. There were relatively few recorded assaults in the north section of Ainslie Avenue both pre- (n=7) and post-implementation (n=2). The 71 percent decrease in assaults compared with a 27 percent increase in the comparison area; however, the number of assaults also increased in the buffer zone, suggesting that there may have been partial displacement (WDQ=-0.64). Overall, there was a net decrease of two assaults during the observation period. Taking into account the very small number of offences, the garden may have had an impact on assault within the target area, but little or no impact on the number of recorded assaults overall.

<b>Table 3: Impact of the Jerilderie community garden project (September 2011)</b>				
	<b>Target area</b>	<b>Comparison area</b>	<b>Buffer zone</b>	<b>Surrounding suburbs</b>
<b>Assault offences</b>				
12 months pre-implementation (n)	7	11	13	64
12 months post-implementation (n)	2	14	21	48
Difference (%)	-71	27	62	-25
Net effect	0.49			
Weighted displacement quotient	-0.64			
Total response effect (immediate site only)	-7			
Total net effect (including displacement)	-2			
<b>Property offences</b>				
12 months pre-implementation (n)	15	47	61	733
12 months post-implementation (n)	22	52	72	547
Difference (%)	47	11	18	-25
Net effect	-0.10			
Total response effect (immediate site only)	5			
<b>Disturbance incidents</b>				
12 months pre-implementation (n)	83	131	235	797
12 months post-implementation (n)	57	150	315	714
Difference (%)	-31	15	34	-10
Net effect	0.25			
Weighted displacement quotient	-1.21			
Total response effect (immediate site only)	-38			
Total net effect (including displacement)	8			

Note: The target area included Braddon, Reid, Jerilderie and Kanangra, while the buffer zone included Allawah, Bega and Currong. Comparison area comprises Illawarra Court, Belconnen and Stuart Flats, Griffith, WDQ not calculated if net effect was negative. Total net effect includes displacement or diffusion where net effect is positive  
 Source: ACT Policing PROMIS [data file]

There was an increase in property offences following the introduction of the garden project, and this increase (47%) exceeded the increase observed in the comparison area (11%). While the increase in recorded property offences is unlikely to be attributable to the community garden project, it may reflect an increase in reporting within the target area. There was a significant fall in disturbance incidents within the target area (31% decrease), compared with an increase in the comparison area (15%; NE=0.25). There was, however, an increase in the buffer zone that more than offset the positive effect of the project, suggesting there may have been displacement of disturbance incidents to the south section of Ainslie Avenue (WDQ=-1.21).

### Does program dosage make a difference?

Data reported in the quarterly performance reports were used to determine major patterns and milestones in program activity and delivery. These data highlighted a noticeable increase in the number of participants and events between April and September 2014. Given the focus of the program on community involvement, it was expected that this increase in the program dosage (number of activities) and program reach (number of participants) may have been associated with additional benefits in terms of reduced crime.

The 12-month period commencing in April 2014 was compared with the previous 12-month period to determine whether there was any additional benefit resulting from this increase in program dosage and reach (Table 4). There was a small decline (10 percent) in assault offences observed during this period, compared with a significant increase in the comparison area (143%), noting the relatively small number of offences. There was no evidence of displacement (WDQ=0.00). The TNE was a decrease of 32 assault offences.

There also appeared to be a positive impact on ambulance attendances during this period. Indeed, there was a 20 percent reduction in attendances at a time when they may have been expected to rise by a corresponding amount (with reference to the comparison area; NE=0.79). There was also some evidence of a diffusion of benefit to the buffer zone. Increasing participation in the program was estimated to have reduced ambulance attendances by 84 incidents over the course of the year. Once again, there appeared to be no impact on property offences or disturbance incidents, with overall net increases in both problem types. These increases are not directly attributable to the initiative.

**Table 4: Impact of increased program participation (April 2014)**

	Target area	Comparison area	Buffer zone	Surrounding suburbs
<b>Assault offences</b>				
12 months pre-implementation (n)	21	7	11	58
12 months post-implementation (n)	19	17	9	49
Difference (%)	-10	143	-18	-16
Net effect	1.88			
Weighted displacement quotient	0.00			
Total response effect (immediate site only)	-32			
Total net effect (including displacement)	-32			
<b>Property offences</b>				
12 months pre-implementation (n)	80	72	97	475
12 months post-implementation (n)	101	52	144	662
Difference (%)	26	-28	48	39
Net effect	-0.83			
Total response effect (immediate site only)	43			
<b>Disturbance incidents</b>				
12 months pre-implementation (n)	265	137	169	676
12 months post-implementation (n)	343	173	221	755
Difference (%)	29	26	31	12
Net effect	-0.05			
Total response effect (immediate site only)	8			
<b>Ambulance attendances</b>				
12 months pre-implementation (n)	105	47	131	660
12 months post-implementation (n)	84	58	75	571
Difference (%)	-20	23	-43	-13
Net effect	0.79			
Weighted displacement quotient	0.09			
Total response effect (immediate site only)	-46			
Total net effect (including displacement)	-84			

Note: Period of increased participation determined from ReLink administrative data. Coincides with period of additional staffing for program. Target area included Braddon, Reid, Jerilderie, Kanangra, Allawah, Bega and Currong. Buffer zone was surrounding streets. Comparison area comprises Illawarra Court, Belconnen and Stuart Flats, Griffith. WDQ not calculated if net effect was negative. Total net effect includes displacement or diffusion where net effect is positive. Ambulance attendances includes all events, not limited to injury or drug and alcohol use; however, these comprise a significant proportion of attendances. ACT Ambulance Service data available from 2011. These data do not include a common place name. Areas selected on basis of a street and suburb name combination

Source: ACT Policing PROMIS; ACT Ambulance Services [data file]

## Which parts of the program worked best?

The purpose of this component of the evaluation was to try and understand whether certain program activities or stages were more effective than others. In practice, this was difficult to achieve, largely because the HDHP involves multiple overlapping interventions, and because of the relatively small number of recorded offences and incidents during the periods of analysis. It was therefore not possible to examine all the activities delivered as part of the program in depth.

Nevertheless, there were mixed results, with signs that some elements worked better than others. The introduction of an OTGM and community garden had a small but positive impact on assaults, while the increase in program dosage had a larger effect—primarily due to the spike in assaults that occurred in the comparison area in the same period. Combined, these three interventions were estimated to have prevented 39 assaults at Ainslie Avenue and the immediate surrounding areas—most of which occurred during the period of increased program dosage, in which there was also a positive impact on ambulance attendances.

In contrast, the introduction of the OTGM led to a short-term reduction in property offending and disturbance incidents in the target area, but in both cases this reduction was offset by the rise in offences and incidents in the buffer zone. This was also true for the impact of the community garden on disturbance incidents. The increase in program dosage was associated with a small increase in both property offences and disturbance incidents within the target area.

In short, the introduction of the OTGM appeared to lead to reductions in assault, property damage and disturbances, with some evidence of displacement. The community garden appeared to reduce assaults and disturbance incidents, also with evidence of displacement, but not property crime. This might indicate that these activities deterred crime in the target area through improved natural surveillance. The impact of increased program participation on assaults and ambulance attendances, but not other crime, lends support for the community development mechanism (ie increased social cohesion). These mechanisms were explored further as part of the qualitative interviews.

# Impact on recorded crime and reporting rates

The analysis of overall impact examined the change in recorded offences and incidents pre and post implementation of the HDHP. This was taken to be May 2009, coinciding with the active presence of the OTGM on site (at Kanangra). The assessment of the overall impact of the program examined trends in rates of recorded incidents over an eight-year period, taking into account changes in residential population. This involved comparing the average monthly number of offences and incidents in the two-year period prior to the implementation of the program with the first four years post implementation (phase 1, 2009–13) and then the subsequent two years post implementation (phase 2, 2013–15).

## Has violent crime decreased?

The trend in the rate of assault offences per 100 residents at both Ainslie Avenue and the comparison area is presented in Figure 8. Prior to the introduction of the HDHP, both areas followed similar trends in the rate of assault offences. These began to diverge on commencement of the project, with assaults at Ainslie Avenue declining to a low in mid-2013, after which there was an increase to levels observed at the start of the project. In contrast, the comparison area experienced wide fluctuations over the entire period, with the overall trend being stable.

The results from a comparison of the average monthly number of assault offences pre- and post-implementation in both phase 1 and phase 2 are presented in Table 5. In phase 1, the average number of assault offences per month declined by 50 percent in the target area—the north section of Ainslie Avenue—compared with an eight percent increase in the comparison area, equivalent to a reduction of 26 assault offences ( $NE=0.47$ ). Further, the  $WDQ$  was 0.51, meaning that the program was also associated with a diffusion of benefit to the south section of Ainslie Avenue. Based on this analysis, it was estimated that the HDHP was responsible for 39 fewer assaults being committed between May 2009 and April 2013.

In phase 2, the average number of assault offences per month declined by 33 percent at Ainslie Avenue, compared with a four percent decrease in the comparison area, meaning the reduction in assault offences was larger than expected (NE=0.73; equivalent to 18 offences). Further, the WDQ was 0.19, meaning that the program was also associated with a diffusion of benefit to the streets immediately surrounding Ainslie Avenue. It was estimated that the HDHP was responsible for 32 fewer assaults occurring between May 2013 and April 2015.

Together, these results suggest that the HDHP contributed to a reduction of 71 assault offences across both phase 1 and phase 2.

**Figure 8: Assault offences, rate per 100 residents (adjusted resident population)**



Note: Resident population adjusted to reflect changes in total number of residents  
 Source: ACT Housing and ACT Policing PROMIS [computer files]

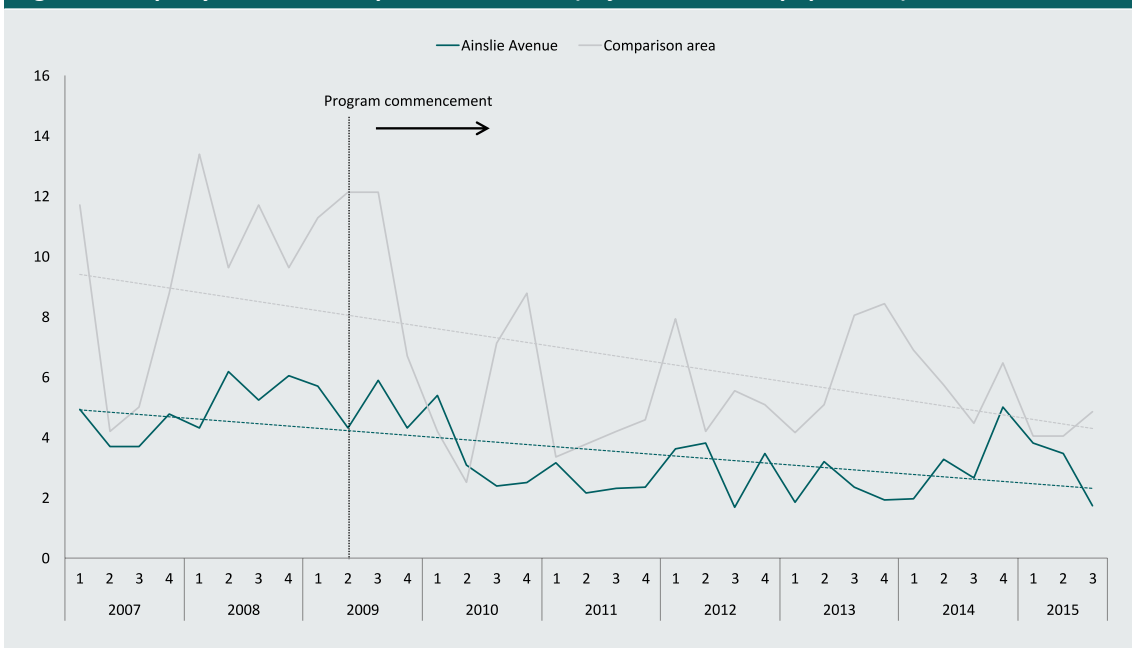
<b>Table 5: Impact of the High Density Housing Program on assault offences</b>				
	<b>Target area</b>	<b>Comparison area</b>	<b>Buffer zone</b>	<b>Surrounding suburbs</b>
<b>Phase 1</b>				
Average monthly pre-implementation (n)	0.92	1.04	1.58	4.63
Average monthly post-implementation (n)	0.46	1.13	1.44	4.58
Difference (%)	-50	8	-9	-1
Net effect	0.47			
Weighted displacement quotient	0.51			
Total response effect (immediate site only)	-26			
Total net effect (including displacement)	-39			
<b>Phase 2</b>				
Average monthly pre-implementation (n)	2.50	1.04	1.50	4.63
Average monthly post-implementation (n)	1.67	1.00	0.83	4.46
Difference (%)	-33	-4	-44	-4
Net effect	0.73			
Weighted displacement quotient	0.19			
Total response effect (immediate site only)	-18			
Total net effect (including displacement)	-32			

Note: In phase 1, target area included Braddon, Reid, Jerilderie and Kanangra, while the buffer zone included Allawah, Bega and Currong. In phase 2, target area included Braddon, Reid, Jerilderie, Kanangra, Allawah, Bega and Currong. Buffer zone was surrounding streets. Comparison area comprises Illawarra Court, Belconnen and Stuart Flats, Griffith. Average monthly number of offences and incidents based on 24 months pre-implementation, 48 months post-implementation (phase 1) and 24 months post-implementation (phase 2). WDQ not calculated if total response effect was negative. Total net effect includes displacement or diffusion where response effect is positive  
Source: ACT Policing PROMIS [data file]

## Has the program reduced property crime?

The trend in the rate of property offences per 100 residents for both Ainslie Avenue and the comparison area is presented in Figure 9. At Ainslie Avenue, property crime declined slowly but steadily, peaking in the period prior to the implementation of the program and appearing to increase slightly towards the end of the observation period. The comparison area exhibited a more noticeable decline in the offence rate; however, this was largely due to there being a high rate of offending prior to May 2009 (similar to Ainslie Avenue), after which there was sharp decline until mid-2010, before rising slowly over the remainder of the post-implementation period.

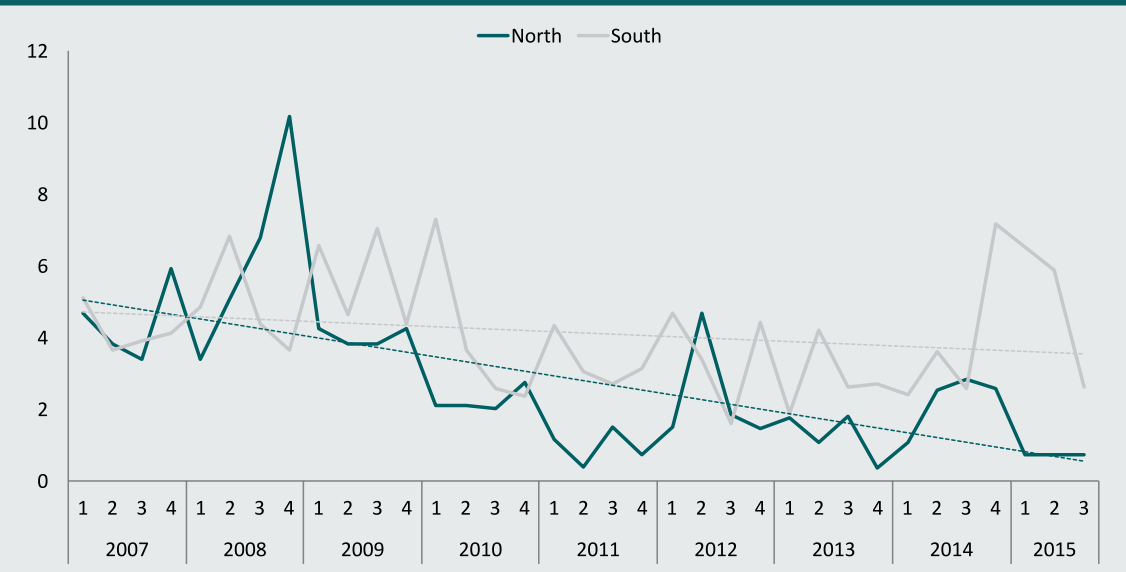
**Figure 9: Property offences, rate per 100 residents (adjusted resident population)**



Note: Resident population adjusted to reflect changes in total number of residents  
 Source: ACT Housing and ACT Policing PROMIS [computer files]

This trend in property crime disguises the fact that the activity associated with the HDHP was not evenly distributed across the seven (now six) sites. It was apparent from the review of program activity and interviews with residents that far more activity was undertaken in the north of Ainslie Avenue than in the south, particularly during phase 1. This was largely due to the conditions being more conducive to community development work. For example, there was reported to be a particular problem with drug markets operating in the south section of Ainslie Avenue, which helped to create a climate in which residents in that area were fearful of engaging with the OTGM. It is not surprising then that the decline in property crime following the implementation of the project was significantly greater in the north than in the south (Figure 10).

**Figure 10: Property offences, rate per 100 residents (adjusted resident population), by section**



Source: ACT Housing and ACT Policing PROMIS [computer files]

Overall, the number of property offences in the target area during phase 1 declined by 60 percent, compared with a 38 percent decline in the comparison area (NE=0.20), equivalent to a reduction of 45 property offences. However, the number of recorded offences in the buffer zone—the south section of Ainslie Avenue—only declined by four percent (WDQ=-2.31). This was less than what would have been expected based on the comparison area, suggesting either that property crime was displaced to the south section of Ainslie Avenue or that there were other factors driving a relative increase in offending. This more than offset any apparent declines in the areas where the OTGM had focused his efforts.

**Table 6: Impact of the High Density Housing Program on property offences**

	Target area	Comparison area	Buffer zone	Surrounding suburbs
<b>Phase 1</b>				
Average monthly pre-implementation (n)	4.42	7.58	6.33	82.42
Average monthly post-implementation (n)	1.77	4.67	6.08	63.10
Difference (%)	-60	-38	-4	-23
Net effect	0.20			
Weighted displacement quotient	-2.31			
Total response effect (immediate site only)	-45			
Total net effect (including displacement)	59			
<b>Phase 2</b>				
Average monthly pre-implementation (n)	10.75	7.58	12.92	82.42
Average monthly post-implementation (n)	7.75	5.13	9.92	47.58
Difference (%)	-28	-32	-23	-42
Net effect	-0.10			
Total response effect (immediate site only)	12			

Note: In phase 1, target area included Braddon, Reid, Jerilderie and Kanangra, while the buffer zone included Allawah, Bega and Currong. In phase 2, target area included Braddon, Reid, Jerilderie, Kanangra, Allawah, Bega and Currong. Buffer zone was surrounding streets. Comparison area comprises Illawarra Court, Belconnen and Stuart Flats, Griffith. Average monthly number of offences and incidents based on 24 months pre-implementation, 48 months post-implementation (phase 1) and 24 months post-implementation (phase 2). WDQ not calculated if total response effect was negative. Total net effect includes displacement or diffusion where response effect is positive

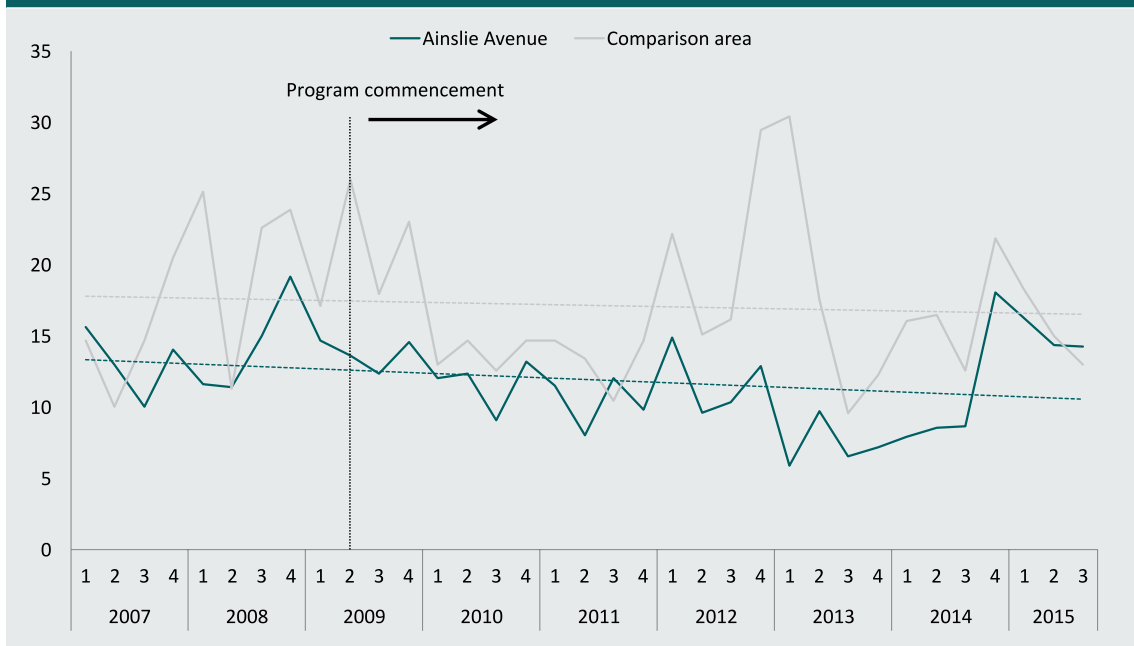
Source: ACT Policing PROMIS [data file]

In phase 2, there was little or no difference in the change in the average monthly number of offences pre- and post-implementation between the target area (28% decrease) and the comparison area (32% decrease;  $NE=-0.10$ ). In other words, the HDHP was less effective in reducing property crime in the target area when the program was expanded to include the south section of Ainslie Avenue.

### Are there fewer disturbances, or are residents more likely to call police?

The final indicator relates to the number of disturbance incidents, which reflect low level disorder that results in police attendance. It was contested in an earlier section of this report that the number of disturbance incidents may be the best measure of reporting to police, given that a large proportion of these incidents are based on incidents reported by the public and that police call-for-attendance data is not subject to the same attrition effects as recorded offence data. The overall trend in the rate of disturbance incidents is presented in Figure 11. There was a very slight downward trend in the rate of disturbance incidents at Ainslie Avenue, and an almost identical trend observed in the comparison area.

**Figure 11: Disturbance incidents, rate per 100 residents (adjusted resident population)**



Note: Resident population adjusted to reflect changes in total number of residents  
 Source: ACT Housing and ACT Policing PROMIS [computer files]

The results from a comparison of the average monthly number of disturbance incidents pre- and post-implementation in both phase 1 and phase 2 are presented in Table 7. In phase 1, the average number of disturbance incidents per month declined by 49 percent in the target area, compared with an 11 percent decrease in the comparison area, equivalent to a reduction of 244 incidents ( $NE=0.37$ ). However, the  $WDQ$  was  $-1.34$ , meaning that there was an increase in the number of incidents in the buffer zone (the south section of Ainslie Avenue), relative to the

comparison area. This more than offset the decrease in the number of incidents in the target area, resulting in an overall increase in the number of disturbance incidents between May 2009 and April 2013. As with property offences, the fact that the increase in the average number of incidents per month in the buffer zone exceeded the reduction in incidents in the target area suggests that this was not only due to displacement.

In phase 2, the average number of disturbance incidents per month declined by 13 percent in the target area, compared with an 18 percent decrease in the comparison area. This is equivalent to an overall net result of 31 more disturbance incidents observed during the 24-month follow-up period.

Together with the results from phase 1, this suggests a net increase in the number of disturbance incidents in the south section of Ainslie Avenue over the six-year follow-up period. There are several possible explanations for this result. There may have been a decline in the actual number of incidents, offset by an increase in reporting to police. It may reflect an actual rise in low level disorder, due to some of the same drivers believed responsible for the slow rate of decline in property offending on the south side of Ainslie Avenue—specifically, issues related to drug use (which is prevalent among disturbance incidents) and the destabilising effects of the closure of Currong. Finally, given a sizeable proportion of these incidents may have been detected by (rather than reported to) police, and the involvement of ACT Policing as a partner on the HDHP working group, it may also represent an increase in policing activity in the south section of Ainslie Avenue.

**Table 7: Impact of the High Density Housing Program on disturbance incidents**

	Target area	Comparison area	Buffer zone	Surrounding suburbs
<b>Phase 1</b>				
Average monthly pre-implementation (n)	13.38	15.42	15.96	58.00
Average monthly post-implementation (n)	6.79	13.69	20.98	63.15
Difference (%)	-49	-11	31	9
Net effect	0.37			
Weighted displacement quotient	-1.34			
Total response effect (immediate site only)	-244			
Total net effect (including displacement)	83			
<b>Phase 2</b>				
Average monthly pre-implementation (n)	29.33	15.42	16.83	58.00
Average monthly post-implementation (n)	25.38	12.67	16.79	60.54
Difference (%)	-13	-18	0	4
Net effect	-0.10			
Total response effect (immediate site only)	31			

Note: In phase 1, target area included Braddon, Reid, Jerilderie and Kanangra, while the buffer zone included Allawah, Bega and Currong. In phase 2, target area included Braddon, Reid, Jerilderie, Kanangra, Allawah, Bega and Currong. Buffer zone was surrounding streets. Comparison area comprises Illawarra Court, Belconnen and Stuart Flats, Griffith. Average monthly number of offences and incidents based on 24 months pre-implementation, 48 months post-implementation (phase 1) and 24 months post-implementation (phase 2). WDQ not calculated if total response effect was negative. Total net effect includes displacement or diffusion where response effect is positive.

Source: ACT Policing PROMIS [data file]

## What do the residents think?

Residents were asked during the interviews to comment on the outcomes that had been delivered by the HDPH and, not surprisingly, many of those residents discussed whether there had been an impact on crime in and around Ainslie Avenue.

All of the residents acknowledged that crime and antisocial behaviour were common at Ainslie Avenue, including drug use and dealing and drug-related offending (theft, burglary, selling stolen property and prostitution). Many also believed that the HDHP had a positive impact and had led to a reduction in crime. While acknowledging that drug use remained common, several residents believed there had been an impact on drug dealing:

This drug activity in front of your eyes...Before [OTGM] turned up with his garden project and all the garden beds were put in...it was just a constant, daily effort to turn a blind eye to it. It makes it hard when you're trying to get off the [drugs] to turn a blind eye to it when it's right there in your face. Everywhere you look in our complex there was drug deals going on because the [redacted] were dealing. The heroin dealer was dealing. The ice dealer was dealing. It was just everywhere and we just slowly got rid of them. That's another beauty thing that he's done, got rid of them in our complex. (Participant 5)

Residents also said they believed there had been a reduction in crime in general:

Years ago there used to be a lot but not so much these days. (Participant 4)

[Crime has gone down] Within the complex, yeah. Now we're not getting our cars burnt. We're not getting our cars broken into. (Participant 5)

Probably three or four years ago, there was still a bit of crime. But not really. Like we used to have people dumping cars and burning out cars and used to have the cops called every couple of days. (Participant 7)

One resident described how they were now less likely to hear about or witness the more extreme incidents that they described as previously having been quiet common:

There used to be people walking around with samurai swords, off their head, walking around with no shirt on, swinging their samurai swords around at people. You just don't see that anymore. There used to be a very bad dog in the area and when the owner would get mad, he would just release his dog onto people and they would get attacked and mauled and there'd be blood everywhere and you just don't see that anymore. That's what I mean. Like it used to be really crazy and there used to be really horrible things that'd happen and people getting attacked with knives and stabbed with needles and stuff but that just doesn't happen anymore. (Participant 7)

Some residents believed that the perceived reduction in criminal activity was due to greater use of communal spaces by residents participating in the HDHP (eg community gardens), which in turn increased the likelihood that offenders would be detected:

If you're out in the garden in a group and you'll get someone who comes through who is going to score heroin, they usually keep on driving. They'll go somewhere else to get it because there's just too much people. (Participant 11)

The program helps with that [drug use and activity] too, because there's people around, and drug dealing you don't want lots of people hanging around. You know, there's a crowd that's around, and that's good. Crowds are good. (Participant 14)

Other residents believed that the presence of the OTGM on site had a deterrent effect, because he was widely known and respected and, in effect, acted as a capable guardian for the area:

Well they do behave themselves when [the OTGM is] there I think...He just knows everyone and everyone respects him, whatever sort of person they are, you know. (Participant 4)

There is one person who I'm aware that does that thing [dealing drugs] and he's very strict on the fact that he won't do it [deal drugs]. He won't do it when [the OTGM is] on site. He won't do it. He'll have 10 people sitting out the front of his house and he'll be like, 'I don't care—it can wait.' (Participant 7)

Importantly, some residents also suggested that crime had fallen because residents were looking out for one another and were now more likely to report crime to the police—a finding which is explored in more detail in the next section.

Some residents said that they and their neighbours felt safer interacting with other residents, moving through the site and living there, because of the relationships they had formed with their neighbours:

Because they know more people here. They've got friends here now. They're not here alone. They know that if they yell out someone will come. And I mean some people look pretty scary here and they're as nice as. They just haven't had a shower for a while, that's all. (Participant 14)

Even the old people have been saying to me that they can actually go out now and feel a bit safer taking their rubbish to the bin. (Participant 5)

However, not all residents believed crime had declined and, because of this, they still felt unsafe:

You know, the crime rate around here is just ridiculous anyway. It mainly happens at night when no one is around anyway. (Participant 9)

There's just a lot of arguments, a lot of parties, late night boozes. Like I got a couple of smashed windows. (Participant 12)

My flat has been attempted to be broken into. The flat upstairs from me got broken into. The flat next door to me got broken into. The flat upstairs from that got broken into. My car got broken into. My neighbour's car got stolen twice. This is all since I've lived here [14 months]. (Participant 9)

Others believed that, if crime had fallen in some locations, it remained concentrated in certain areas or blocks:

There's a lot of drug dealing, a lot of prostitution, a lot of bad stuff goes on in that whole area. So just some of the people at the moment—it's not a really safe area...I think there seems like a lot of alcohol problems, that police are called more there now, the ambulance is called more there now than five years ago and just the general not being safe. (Participant 6)

One of the main themes to emerge from the interviews in relation to the prevalence of crime was the persistent problems related to drug use and drug-related crime, which had undermined the effectiveness of the HDHP in some areas. Two participants suggested that the two most significant problems affecting Ainslie Avenue were drug dealing and stolen property (Participants 4 and 11), while another participant suggested that drug-related theft was a major problem for residents (Participant 12).

Other residents were concerned about the relationship between drugs and violent crime and, in particular, the emergence of the drug ice and its effect on residents:

It comes down to less drugs. It comes down to if there's more drugs in this area there's going to be more violence. (Participant 1)

I can definitely see the introduction of ice—the increasing people affected on ice around the area and some of the violence that comes with that. (Participant 6)

Yeah, ice addicts. There's heaps of them. The police are here all the time. I live at Kanangra Court and we have the police here every day, sometimes four times a day. Several people are missing from our complex as well who've been missing for weeks and weeks. It's quite a bad neighbourhood with people trying to stab you with syringes and shit like that all the time. (Participant 15)

For some residents, the problems associated with drugs were a constant presence in their neighbourhood—while there was some degree of acceptance of the problem, there was also frustration that drug use and dealing had not declined:

We're still getting people down in the garbage bin area shooting up, just leaving their needles around when they don't have to leave their needles around. We've got little needle canister things now for them on the brick wall. There's three of them in our complex. (Participant 5)

I get offered drugs at least once a week in the car park or on the way to my car. (Participant 6)

There's more syringes around. There's more just junk and just mess in the car park. It has gone downhill. (Participant 6)

Yeah, but I mean there's syringes on the ground all the bloody time and broken glass. (Participant 15)

Overall, there is a perception among most of the residents interviewed as part of the evaluation that crime declined at Ainslie Avenue following the introduction of the HDHP. However, there is still a concern among residents that drug-related crime remains a problem and that these problems are concentrated in certain blocks.

# Impact on social cohesion and collective efficacy

A major focus of the HDHP, underpinned by the community development approach, is promoting a greater sense of community among residents. By engaging the community in a variety of pro-social activities, the program aims to foster improved relationships between residents (social ties). This is an important goal, because the way in which members of a community interact, share common goals, trust and help one another helps to determine how much crime they will experience (Mazerolle, Wickes & McBroom 2010; Sampson, Raudenbush & Earls 1997; Uchida et al. 2014).

In determining the impact of the HDHP, the current research draws upon the recent work of Uchida et al. (2014), who distinguish between two major areas of social functioning (building on a well-established body of research). The first is social cohesion, which refers to the extent to which people trust each other, experience a sense of belonging and get along with each other—the sense of community that exists (Sampson, Raudenbush & Earls 1997). The second area is collective efficacy, which refers to the degree to which residents watch out for one another and intervene if something problematic happens (Uchida et al. 2014).

The interviews with residents were subjected to qualitative analysis to assess whether either of these two properties were more or less prevalent or, more correctly, *perceived* as being more or less prevalent as a result of the HDHP.

## Has the program been successful in promoting a sense of community?

Interview participants spoke at length about how the HDHP had helped to build relationships with their neighbours. As one interview participant described it, the program brought everyone together on the same terms:

They're [the residents] all there on the same level, they're all borrowing [OTGM's] tools or Reclink's tools, and people help each other out. And it allows room for those relationships to build. That's what [HDHP] does. It just provides the space for it to happen. (Participant 14)

Others described how residents were now more likely to interact with one another when moving about the neighbourhood:

So there's been quite a few people that I used to pass coming up and down from the city and they'd look at you a bit funny or they'd give you a smiley look or they'd say something to you. But now it's just like a bit of a smile or a hand up and a bit of a wave, you know. Even some of them just saying 'How are you going?' Yeah, so these things have made a big difference to Ainslie Avenue. (Participant 15)

You go down to Civic and you see someone you know at the shops...coming to the city it used to freak me out. You're just walking around going, 'All these people and I don't know any of them.' But at least now I can say, 'Oh, I know you.' (Participant 4)

Some residents, particularly those who said they were typically very shy or uncomfortable meeting new people, suggested that the HDHP had helped them to overcome these barriers and develop relationships with neighbours:

I've found that I've lived in places with more private rental around, so like body corporates and stuff and you don't see or talk to your neighbours nearly as much as I do living here and having these sort of programs and stuff in place to give us the opportunity to meet properly. (Participant 8)

I've met so many neighbours in our complex through that barbecue program. I nearly know everyone by name in our complex, nearly. Just the new ones that have recently moved in are probably the only ones I don't know. (Participant 5)

This included relationships with residents in other buildings or blocks, which was otherwise relatively rare:

Because we don't do a lot together as a community in that area. People stick to themselves and that and that sort of brings the top end as I refer to it, the top end and the bottom end together because we don't associate with each other unless it's in that room. (Participant 3)

Building these social ties between residents has had a number of benefits. For example, one resident reported that it had improved his ability to resolve conflict with his neighbours:

What makes it easy is when you're having problems with the bloke next door, it's a lot easier to sort out if you already know the bloke next door.  
(Participant 14)

Residents also reported that activities like the community garden beds had made them feel more involved and had given them a sense of belonging in the Ainslie Avenue community. This was because of the relationships that they had formed with other residents, but also because of the joint ownership of communal spaces:

The more people get involved, the more the garden gets worked on, the more harvest we get. I think it brings our little community together.  
(Participant 11)

I'm not a gardener, I'm a brown thumb, I kill things before I do anything else. But I don't mind having a yack and talk and helping out...we've got a lot of community spirit in regards to we come out and have a yack, you have a cup of coffee with each other and just basically talk rubbish. Then we drag a few others in with it so we've got that going. We've got more community spirit happening. (Participant 1)

I like that it gives me an opportunity to spend some time with my neighbours and people that live in the area and sort of get to know people that I might see around the complex, like get to know them a bit better. Then I feel more comfortable about living there. (Participant 8)

One resident commented on the benefit of having created a more attractive public space for social interaction:

Everybody [wants to hang out at the garden], it also then increases the harmony of the area. You're improving the social interaction and these people's social skills. Instead of yelling and screaming, and basically want to punch each other's lights out, they are actually looking out at something else that can take their mind off doing that to something else. It's changing their mentality. (Participant 1)

The benefits of participating in the community gardens and workshop program, including donating projects from the workshop to a raffle for Ainslie Primary School, have also helped residents to feel more engaged in the wider community, bringing with it a feeling of self-worth:

I made a chess board for the little [Ainslie] Primary School. I helped [the OTGM] with a seat that he made for the primary school. I heard they got \$2,000 at auction for that and that goes towards helping the kids, the needy kids...I like the fact that the money they make out of it goes to helping needy kids...Say there's a kid that doesn't have money to go on an excursion, boom, now they do. (Participant 5)

### Are residents more likely to help their neighbours?

The other area of social functioning that was explored was whether residents were more likely to intervene to assist their neighbours, or to believe that others would do so on their behalf. This intervention could take a variety of forms, such as monitoring people hanging out in the neighbourhood, asking questions of strangers or people behaving strangely, or calling the police (Uchida et al. 2014).

It was apparent from the interviews that the program was having some success in promoting a sense of responsibility, generally by creating spaces that were the owned by residents:

I like getting out and I go and knock on a few of my mates, tell them to come down for a while. Yes, because I reckon if they stop this thing, the whole garden will just deteriorate. (Participant 11)

This same resident described how the HDHP had encouraged residents to look after one another when they need assistance:

Now everybody is a lot calmer and there's hardly any fights. I think everybody just looks after everybody, you know? If you see someone in trouble and stuff like that, somebody's car won't start, you go out with a pair of jumper leads. (Participant 11)

Another resident suggested that this would extend to situations in which residents were seen doing the wrong thing:

So the majority of residents are doing the right thing. Instead of just keeping quiet about it I think because we do have this little community thing that you will like ask people to stop or move on or whatever. (Participant 8)

However, most of the discussion relevant to collective efficacy related to whether residents were more likely to call police. While it was difficult to determine whether any changes in recorded crime levels were due to changes in reporting practices, several residents spoke of an increased likelihood that other residents would call police (either directly or via Crime Stoppers)—either because they were more willing to make the call themselves or because they knew others who would:

There was a few of us that have had to make reports to Crime Stoppers in the past and I think that's helped as well because from how it was when I first moved in three years ago, it was pretty rough and tumble. (Participant 10)

There's at least 10 people that I know that will ring up the police if there are problems down there. We're all on top of it. (Participant 10)

We had an altercation here the other night down near his place. When I called the police they told me they had already received three calls for the same thing. (Participant 11)

One resident suggested that this was in part the result of an increased police presence in the area:

...now that there is a police presence here, they come through every couple of hours, people feel safer and they know if there's trouble, there's going to be a couple of phone calls go through because everybody just wants to live nice and quiet and peaceful. (Participant 11)

While most residents spoke about calling police, two residents spoke about having a more active role:

I told the police. I said, 'Listen, if youse parked here in an unmarked or rented one of these units you'd see so much drug dealing going on in front of your eyes, it's not funny.'...Then they turned around and tried to get me to get number plates, like the number plate and the type of car. I did that for a little bit and gave them to [redacted]. Then I did a bit of, you could say infiltration work. I infiltrated them and got their phone numbers and then gave them to [redacted]. (Participant 5)

At least one resident spoke of ongoing reservations among residents about calling the police, for fear of reprisals:

Well they'll ring a copper, but when the copper comes around they won't talk to them...people will ring the coppers, and that's probably why they're slow to respond, because they know it's not going to go anywhere either. So people will lash out and say 'Right, I'm going to ring the cops.' They ring them, and then they think, 'Shit, I can't talk to the coppers. That's the worst thing I can do.' (Participant 14)

Nevertheless, the overall finding appears to be that, at least among the residents interviewed for the evaluation, there is a greater willingness to call police and assist neighbours more generally—reflecting a desire to address some of the persistent problems that impact on residents.

# Impact on residents

While there is little doubt that the HDHP has been mostly focused towards building a more cohesive community, the OTGM still directs considerable time and effort to supporting individual residents.

## How has the program impacted the circumstances of individual residents?

Residents said that participating in the program had made them happier and given them a more positive outlook. For some, this improvement was due to the relationships that they had been able to form with other residents, or simply due to having something positive to participate in:

You meet new friends. Some come and go, some stay. You feel happier in yourself. You're outside in the sun. More physically fit. (Participant 11)

I feel valued there. Put that down. That's a good way to put it. (Participant 13)

Yeah and it's good for social skills and stuff like that. Meet different people... Deal with the community. It's good to have high spirits. (Participant 13)

Some residents who reported that they had participated in the workshop program said that being able to contribute to the community in a positive way (through donating completed work) had made them feel good about themselves, more confident and happier more generally.

There was not much evidence that the program had had an impact on personal drug or alcohol use. Some residents suggested that drug use among other residents may have decreased because the program gave them something to do and alleviated their boredom, which they would have usually overcome by using drugs.

[The HDHP] just kind of gets you motivated. It gets you motivated working and doing something. So you're not sitting at home and watching TV all day. It's either that or you turn to drugs and it's often drugs. (Participant 12)

Not surprisingly, given the findings already reported elsewhere, the majority of residents believed that the program had little or no impact on drug use at Ainslie Avenue. One interviewee argued that it was unrealistic to expect that it would have an impact, given the range of factors influencing drug use at the site and the fact that drug addiction is a significant problem in the area.

You can put in a rollercoaster [at Ainslie Avenue], you could put in, just think a funfair, you could have a fair go through there, it's still going to have the same [mess]. Until you get rid of the drug problem, until you fix that problem, no matter what you put there it's still going to be there. That's the problem... having nothing there [services] is going to ten-fold it [the drug problem], but having something there it's going to improve it but it's not going to improve it to the extent that it's never going to happen. (Participant 1)

Nevertheless, for some residents, participation in the HDHP has had a significant impact on their engagement in education and, in some cases, employment. Some residents spoke about how engagement with the HDHP and the OTGM had been the catalyst for getting into education and training which had, in turn, helped to improve their employment outcomes:

When I first met [OTGM] I was doing really patchy part-time work and I didn't have my [driving] licence and I didn't know what I wanted to do. Then I started helping in the garden which led me to start my horticulture certificate at CIT. So I ended up starting up my own gardening business. (Participant 8)

Another resident, who had been living at Ainslie Avenue area for a little over a year, spoke about how getting involved with the community gardens gave him and other residents focus:

Yes, well I've now actually got direction and drive. Twelve months ago I had no idea where I was going, what I was going to do, how I was going to get out of government housing. How I was going to get off Centrelink. I had no idea. Whereas now, February I start a Cert III in Horticulture and Landscape Construction. (Participant 9)

Like I said, I'm going to use an example of a girl up there who went from all the turmoil she went through, she actually went to school, learnt horticulture, went from that. Learnt how to drive. Got her driving licence and then opened a business up. He's an influence [the OTGM]. (Participant 1)

The OTGM has also helped residents by giving them information about training opportunities and linking them with employment services:

[OTGM] put me in touch with a little company called Train for Life. I did a short course through those guys to become a qualified mental health peer worker...Having done the short course, I've thought, 'Right, I'm going to do the full course at CIT.' (Participant 10)

[OTGM] helped me with finding Volunteering ACT and he's helped me with getting in contact with them and doing all of that. (Participant 7)

While not all residents will have the opportunities or be motivated to pursue further education, it is nevertheless significant that the HDHP has been able to have a positive impact on some residents' engagement in education, particularly as residents of public housing areas frequently experience high rates of social and economic disadvantage, which contributes to increased risk of becoming involved in crime, as either a victim or offender.

# Cost-benefit analysis

Drawing on the analysis of the impact of the HDHP on recorded crime, the evaluation has also involved a CBA. This sought to determine the return on investment by the ACT Government in the HDHP. In light of the findings from the assessment of program impact, and the need to be able to monetise benefits, this CBA focuses on the impact of the program on assaults, property offences and disturbance incidents. Ideally, the full range of benefits delivered by the HDHP would be included. However, benefits beyond recorded crime, such as the impact on social cohesion and the individual circumstances of residents and the criminal justice savings associated with reduced crime (beyond policing costs), could not be easily measured or monetised. It is therefore more accurate to regard this as a partial CBA.

## What has the program cost?

JACS is the primary source of funding for the HDHP, having funded the HDHP since 2008. In total, JACS has invested an estimated \$770,019 in the program. In addition, the HDHP has received several one-off grants from ACT Health worth \$218,708 for various activities delivered as part of the HDHP. This excludes those grants awarded to ReLink for projects focused on outcomes outside the scope of the HDHP or that targeted public housing residents outside of Ainslie Avenue. The total program budget for the period from August 2009 to June 2015 was therefore \$988,727, equivalent to an average annual adjusted program budget of \$164,788 (Table 8). Importantly, this excludes any in-kind contributions by ReLink, JACS and other members of the HDHP working group.

**Table 8: Estimated program budget, August 2009 to June 2015**

JACS funding	\$770,019
Grants awarded	\$218,708
Total program budget	\$988,727
Annual program budget (adjusted)	\$164,788

Note: Estimates based on figures supplied to the AIC. Does not include any in-kind contributions by ReLink, JACS or other stakeholders. Annual adjusted budget accounts for the fact that the total actual budget did not align with full years. Discount rates have not been applied. Estimates are reported in real dollars.

Source: ACT Justice and Community Safety Directorate; ReLink

## What are the savings?

Estimated savings were calculated for the impact of the program on assaults, property offences and disturbance incidents.

### *Assault offences*

To estimate the savings associated with the observed reduction in assault offences it was necessary to develop an estimate associated with the cost of assault, including both tangible and intangible costs. Smith et al. (2014) produced an estimated cost of assault of \$2,619 per incident in 2011 (2011 dollars), comprising \$320 in medical costs, \$1,200 in lost output and \$1,100 in intangible costs. Per incident costs comprise weighted estimates for different levels of offence seriousness. For example, the average cost for assault is based on the cost of assault offences that result in injury requiring hospitalisation, assault offences that result in injury treated outside of hospital, assault offences that result in injury that does not require treatment and assault offences that do not result in any injury, adjusted according to their respective prevalence rates.

Several adjustments were then made to this original estimate for the current study. First, all costs were adjusted to 2014–15 dollars using the General Government Final Consumption Expenditure chain price deflator, which is the same method used in the *Report on Government Services* (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision 2016).

The next adjustment accounted for the fact that the per incident cost produced by Smith et al. (2014) included unrecorded crime, based on multipliers, whereas the estimate required for the current study needed to be limited to offences recorded by police. Multipliers are important because they adjust for levels of under-reporting to provide more accurate estimates of the actual frequency of crime (Mayhew 2003). The likelihood of an assault being reported to police is lower for those incidents that do not result in injury than it is for those that do. The multipliers for each level of seriousness originally reported by Mayhew (2003) were therefore used to recalculate the average cost per assault. This had the effect of increasing the per incident cost (Table 9).

Then, several additional cost items not included in the original estimate were added. The number of assault offences resulting in an emergency department presentation was estimated using NSW research by Poynton et al. (2005), who found that 60 percent of emergency department presentations resulted in hospitalisation. According to the adjusted estimate, five percent of offences resulted in hospitalisation, meaning nine percent required an emergency department presentation. The cost of each presentation was estimated using the average cost for emergency department presentations reported by the Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision (SCRGSP 2016). Multiplying this by the prevalence rate resulted in an average cost for each assault offence of \$77, which was included in the medical costs.

The estimated cost of ambulance attendances was based on the average labour costs for an ambulance service response in the ACT. The average cost per ambulance response was calculated by dividing the total labour costs (salaries and related payments) in 2014–15 by the

total number of ambulance responses in the same period. Both figures were reported by the SCRGSP (2016). The prevalence of ambulance attendances was based on a study of ambulance attendances for alcohol-related assault in the ACT, which found that up to 36 percent of recorded assaults required an ambulance attendance (Miller et al. 2016). The average cost for each assault offence was therefore estimated to be \$225.

**Table 9: Estimated assault costs, per incident (2014–15 dollars)**

	All assaults	Excluding unrecorded assault
Medical costs	\$334	\$811
Lost output	\$1,254	\$2,705
Intangible	\$1,149	\$1,776
Ambulance	\$225	\$225
Police response	\$184	\$184
Counselling costs	\$77	\$77
Property damage	\$10	\$10
Calls to police	\$33	\$33
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$3,267</b>	<b>\$5,821</b>

Source: Australian Federal Police 2012; Donnelly et al. 2007; Laslett et al. 2010; Smith et al. 2014; SCRGSP 2016

The cost of police time spent responding to assault offences was determined by multiplying the mean number of police hours spent responding to assault offences (2.4 hours) reported by Donnelly et al. (2007) by the average hourly salary costs for ACT Policing (\$76). The latter was based on the average number of hours worked per annum (Australian Federal Police 2012) and salary information included in the Australian Federal Police (AFP) Enterprise Agreement, and includes salaries and salary-related expenditure.

Finally, the opportunity costs associated with counselling for assault victims (affecting 4% of assault victims at a cost of \$204 per victim), property damage costs including damaged clothing (6% of victims at a cost of \$173 per victim) and opportunity costs associated with calling police (\$33 per incident) were all included on the basis of findings from Laslett et al. (2010).

The estimated assault costs, per incident, are presented in Table 9. This shows that the average cost per recorded assault offence was \$5,821, higher than the \$3,267 for all assaults, including those that are not reported to police. The adjusted estimate has been used in the CBA that follows.

### Property offences

Estimated savings were also calculated for property offences. While there was some evidence of possible displacement, particularly during phase 1, these savings are based on reductions in property offences in the target area (response effect), assuming no displacement. This is a best case scenario, and assumes that other factors were driving the increase in offences and incidents in the south section of Ainslie Avenue. The final cost-benefit analysis includes both scenarios—with and without displacement.

Like with assault offences, the cost of property offences was based on figures reported by Smith et al. (2014), adjusted using the General Government Final Consumption Expenditure

chain price deflator. Because the number of property offences was an aggregate measure based on different types of property crime, it was necessary to develop an aggregate cost that was adjusted for the frequency of different crime types at Ainslie Avenue (Table 10). The cost of each property offence, including lost output, intangible costs and property damage, was estimated to be \$2,119 per offence.

**Table 10: Adjusted property crime costs, Ainslie Avenue**

	n	%	\$ Per incident
Unlawful entry with intent	123	14	\$2,405
Theft of a motor vehicle	36	4	\$6,701
Illegal use of a motor vehicle	28	3	\$6,701
Theft of motor vehicle contents	128	14	\$1,865
Theft from a person	14	2	\$784
Theft (except motor vehicle)	152	17	\$784
Property damage and graffiti	408	46	\$1,936
Total	889	100	\$2,119

Note: A single average cost per property offence was calculated based on the relative proportion of each offence type among offences recorded at Ainslie Avenue during observation period. Property crime costs include lost output, intangible costs and property damage. All figures in 2014–15 dollars  
Source: ACT Policing PROMIS [computer file]; Smith et al. 2014

Also added to the Smith et al. (2014) estimate for property crime was the cost of reporting to police (\$33) and the cost of police time responding to recorded property offences (\$145). The latter estimate was based on the mean number of police hours spent responding to property damage offences (1.9) reported by Donnelly et al. (2007) and the average hourly salary costs for ACT Policing (\$76). This resulted in a total cost per offence of \$2,297.

### *Disturbance incidents*

The cost associated with disturbance incidents was based on a similar methodology used as part of recent research into the cost of alcohol-related crime in the ACT (Miller et al. 2016). Police attendance data from the Police Real-time Online Management Information System (PROMIS) were used to measure the time spent responding to common disturbance incidents in the city centre. Information is recorded in PROMIS on all incidents attended by police, including the start and end time of the event and whether the incident was alcohol-related. Using these start and end times, the average duration of each police attendance was calculated, and the mean police hours for each incident type was determined. A small proportion of incidents lasting longer than four hours were excluded, as this would have included follow-up inquiries, indicated that there had been delays in closing the event or that the information was incorrectly recorded. As with property offences, the frequency of different types of disturbance incidents was used to develop a weighted estimate for all incidents. The mean time spent by police was estimated to be 1.2 hours for each disturbance incident, equivalent to \$92 per incident.

### Total savings

To determine the total savings attributable to the HDHP, the average cost per recorded offence was multiplied by the TNE (or NE in the case of property offences and disturbance incidents). This resulted in a total estimated saving from a reduction in assault offences of \$412,695, \$75,801 for property offences and \$19,556 for disturbance incidents (Table 11). The TNE for property offences and disturbance incidents is based on the target area only and does not take into account any displacement effects.

	Assault offences	Property offences	Disturbance incidents
Cost per offence	\$5,821	\$2,297	\$92
Total net effect	-71	-33	-213
Total savings	\$412,695	\$75,801	\$19,556

Source: AFP 2012; ACT Policing PROMIS [computer file]; Donnelly et al. 2007; Laslett et al. 2010; SCRGSP 2016; Smith et al. 2014

### What other savings are not included?

The estimated savings associated with the reduction in crime is based on the best available data on the unit cost of individual offences. This included adjustments for reported crime, and a number of other costs not included in the standard estimate. However, it relates to the immediate, direct costs of the offence. While it accounts for the time police spend responding to an offence or incident, it does not account for the time they might have spent on paperwork or preparing for court, which is not insignificant (Donnelly et al. 2007). It also excludes the costs associated with court hearings or the sentences that might be imposed on offenders, which are potentially very high. For example, the median prison sentence imposed on individuals with a principal offence of acts intended to cause injury (which comprises assault), was 2.9 years in the ACT in 2014–15 (ABS 2016). Given the costs associated with imprisonment exceed \$400 per prisoner per day, and the wider costs to government, offenders and the community even higher, the potential savings that might have resulted from a reduction in assaults and therefore offenders sentenced to a term of imprisonment are significant. However, the proportion of offences recorded by police that proceeded to court and then resulted in imprisonment is unknown and reliable estimates were not available.

While it was possible to measure the impact of the HDHP on ambulance attendances during the period of increased program activity, it was not possible to develop an overall estimate of the net effect of the project on ambulance attendances. The average cost per ambulance attendance—\$624—is calculated by dividing the total labour costs (salaries and related payments) in 2014–15 by the total number of ambulance responses in the same period (SCRGSP 2016). Using this figure, the reduction in ambulance attendances that resulted from the increased program dosage, a TNE of 84 attendances, is associated with a saving of \$52,416. It is not possible, however, to extrapolate this to the whole of the observation period.

There are other less tangible outcomes delivered by the program that cannot be so easily monetised. For example, the impact of the program on social cohesion, the impact on the willingness of residents to intervene to assist their neighbours and the effects on individuals who have participated in education or paid employment as a result of the program are not easily expressed in dollar terms (the latter because it affects a relatively small number of residents, but that effect is significant). The OTGM also reported that two lives had been saved as a direct result of the project, that several residents with serious mental health issues were more likely to take their prescribed medication and were therefore less likely to present at hospital, that there was a reduced risk of homelessness among residents and that there had been other health benefits associated with the program.

The fact that criminal justice system savings and the savings associated with other outcomes are excluded from the CBA means that the estimated savings most likely underestimate the actual savings resulting from the program.

## What is the benefit-cost ratio?

The next and final stage of the CBA was to calculate the benefit-cost ratio (BCR) for the HDHP based on this partial CBA and undertake some further sensitivity analysis. For this component, discount rates were applied to future costs and benefits associated with the program, in accordance with the guidelines recommended by Harrison (2010) and best practice in CBA for criminal justice programs (Henrichson & Rinaldi 2014). This recognises the time value of money, and adjusts future costs and benefits incurred after the first year downward by the same amount. In accordance with Harrison (2010), the current study uses a discount rate of eight percent, with testing over a range of three percent to 10 percent.

<b>Table 12: Estimated costs and benefits, by discount rate (2014–15 dollars)</b>			
	<b>3 percent</b>	<b>8 percent</b>	<b>10 percent</b>
<b>Program costs</b>			
Total (PV)	\$919,468	\$863,748	\$789,463
<b>Estimated benefits—assuming no displacement</b>			
Total benefits (PV)	\$472,463	\$422,759	\$405,661
Benefit-cost ratio	0.51	0.51	0.51
<b>Estimated benefits—assuming displacement</b>			
Total benefits (PV)	\$383,787	\$343,411	\$329,523
Benefit-cost ratio	0.42	0.42	0.42

Note: PV = present value

Source: AFP 2012; ACT Policing PROMIS [computer file]; Donnelly et al. 2007; Laslett et al. 2010; SCRGSP 2016; Smith et al. 2014

Two estimates are provided for the total benefits from the program. The first assumes that there was no displacement of property offending or disturbances during phase 1 of the program. This is a best case scenario, and assumes that the increase in recorded offences and incidents observed in the south section of Ainslie Avenue was due to other causes, such as increased drug use, rather than problems shifting from the target area. The second estimate assumes that there was displacement, but that any increase in either the target area or buffer zone was not caused by the program. There is no reason that the program would be expected to lead to an increase in crime, besides the potential increase in reporting.

The BCR directly compares benefits and costs and divides the total discounted benefits by total discounted costs. Because both the costs and savings were incurred over the same period, the BCR remains constant irrespective of the discount rate applied. The BCR for the HDHP ranged between 0.42 and 0.51, depending on whether there was assumed to be any displacement, meaning the program delivers a benefit of *at least* \$0.42 to \$0.51 for every \$1 invested.

Overall, and limitations aside, it can be concluded that the program has delivered significant financial savings associated with a reduction in recorded assault offences, since the HDHP was implemented in 2009. There are additional savings associated with a fall in property offences and disturbance incidents during phase 1 of the program, assuming no displacement. However, there are other important outcomes that could not be easily monetised for the purpose of the CBA. These include the benefits of improved community cohesion and also the benefits for individuals. While they cannot be easily measured in monetary terms, they should still be taken into account when reviewing the results from this partial CBA.

# What worked, what did not and what could be improved?

This report provides further evidence of the challenging issues present in public housing areas and the complex needs of the residents who live there. The HDHP aims to provide a long-term solution to these issues at Ainslie Avenue. It draws on Australian research evidence that shows social approaches to crime prevention, including community development, can improve neighbourhood cohesion and are associated with reduced crime (Samuels & Judd 2005). Consistent with this evidence base, the HDHP aims to promote interagency collaboration and is supported by a working group comprising representatives from ACT JACS, ACT Policing, ACT Housing and ACT Health, alongside Reclink Australia.

The evaluation of the HDHP adopted a rigorous quasi-experimental design, which enabled changes in crime levels at Ainslie Avenue to be compared with those of another public housing area that shared similar characteristics. This was supported by analysis of data collected by the OTGM and in-depth interviews with 15 residents.

The results from the evaluation suggest the HDHP has made significant progress towards achieving its overall objectives—there is evidence of reductions in some crime types, while the program has increased levels of community engagement and access to services. This section discusses each of these objectives in turn, reflecting on findings from each component of the evaluation to understand how program implementation and the mechanisms that underpin the program help to explain what has been accomplished and where improvements can be made.

## How well has the program been implemented?

Since the OTGM first had an active presence on site in mid-2009, a wide range of organised activities have been delivered under the auspices of the HDHP, with a strong emphasis on initiatives that target the social isolation and marginalisation of residents, encourage residents to interact in public spaces and promote and build social cohesion. While some of these initiatives have longer-term goals, others were developed to address more immediate safety concerns. They have been spread across the different sites (six, previously seven blocks), based on a consideration of need and also the likely success of efforts to mobilise residents and engage them in organised activities.

In addition to these organised activities, the OTGM also engages with residents on an individual basis to discuss any issues they might be experiencing, provide one-on-one support and facilitate access to important services.

Periods of crime and antisocial behaviour have had a significant impact on the delivery of program activities, as have changes to housing policy (see below). Program dosage (the amount of activity delivered) and program reach (the number of participants) have varied over time, with noticeable peaks in mid-2014. The OTGM has worked hard to minimise the impact of external factors on program delivery.

Residents interviewed as part of the evaluation reported having been involved in a range of activities, most notably the workshop and the community gardens. Some described their motivation for being involved as the desire to meet new people and keep busy, while others were motivated by the positive impact on their feelings of self-worth. Most of the residents interviewed for the evaluation participated in HDHP activities on a regular basis and for an extended period, which is indicative of the program's success in engaging residents; nevertheless, one of the strengths of the HDHP has been the flexible model that enables participants to engage as much or as little as they want.

The OTGM has a prominent role in the HDHP and is responsible for nearly all aspects of program delivery. All of the residents spoke very highly about their interactions with the OTGM and believed he was responsible for the success of the program. It was evident that he has built rapport and developed strong relationships with local residents, and residents valued the support he provided to them. Many recognised the demanding nature of the role and the fact that he was constrained by available resources. While relatively few had accessed other support services through the OTGM, they were aware that he was working with other service providers to improve access to services and that assistance would be available if they were to seek it.

## Has the program achieved its objectives?

The HDHP has four primary objectives. It aims to promote community safety and security, prevent and reduce opportunities for crime in public housing sites and surrounding areas, develop pro-social and law abiding community engagement among residents and facilitate and support residents' access to health, mental health, education and employment services.

### *Reducing crime and reducing the opportunities for crime*

The first two objectives are discussed together, because they share a focus on reducing crime and improving safety. The quantitative and qualitative evidence from the evaluation suggests that the program has made progress towards achieving these two objectives, with reductions in some crime types.

There was some positive evidence from the assessment of individual interventions and stages of implementation of the HDHP. The introduction of an OTGM and community garden had a small but positive impact on assaults, while the increase in program dosage had a larger effect and was associated with a greater reduction in assault offences. Combined, these three interventions were estimated to have prevented 39 assaults at Ainslie Avenue and the immediate surrounding areas. The increase in participation also had a positive impact on ambulance attendances.

In contrast, the introduction of the OTGM led to a short-term reduction in property offending and disturbance incidents in the target area, but in both cases this reduction was offset by the rise in offences and incidents in the buffer zone. This was also true for the impact of the community garden on disturbance incidents. The increase in program dosage was associated with a small increase in both property offences and disturbance incidents within the target area, which at that time included both the north and south sections of Ainslie Avenue.

The evaluation also examined the overall impact of the HDHP on crime and antisocial behaviour, comparing the average monthly number of offences and incidents in the two-year period prior to the implementation of the program with the first four years post implementation (phase 1, 2009–13) and then the subsequent two years post implementation (phase 2, 2013–15). There was evidence of a positive impact on assault offences in the target area in both phase 1 and phase 2, along with evidence of diffusion of benefit to areas outside the target area, resulting in a total of 71 assaults being prevented by the program.

In phase 1, the HDHP appeared to have an impact on both property crime and disturbance incidents within the target area, which was the north section of Ainslie Avenue. However, in the first four years of the program there was a significant increase in property offences and disturbance incidents (relative to changes in the comparison area) in the buffer zone, which was the south section of Ainslie Avenue. This more than offset any observed reductions in the target area, suggesting that either displacement was a factor or that there were other drivers leading to an increase in criminal activity.

The CBA concluded that there were significant financial savings associated with a reduction in recorded assault offences, as well as potential savings associated with changes in property offending and disturbance incidents in the target area. The HDHP has produced savings of up to around half of the total program investment in reduced crime alone, while there are other potential benefits that are significant but which have not yet been costed.

Residents were generally positive about the impact of the HDHP, suggesting that the program has had a positive impact on drug dealing and drug-related crime. They attributed this to the increased use of communal spaces, which provided more opportunities for natural surveillance and deterred potential offenders (and illicit drug users). Other residents attributed this to the OTGM's role as a capable guardian, given how highly he was respected in the community, while some indicated it was because residents were more likely to look out for one another and call police.

However, there were still a number of residents who did not believe that crime had declined or that, if crime had declined, it remained concentrated in certain areas. One of the main themes to emerge from the interviews in relation to the prevalence of crime was the persistent problems related to drug use and drug-related crime, which had undermined the effectiveness of the HDHP in some areas. This issue had been identified by the OTGM and was regularly reported to ACT Policing. The resilience of this drug market, despite the best efforts of the HDHP, is not unique to Ainslie Avenue, with previous research having found that drug markets in social housing operate according to a social economy that was sustained through changes in drug availability and despite efforts from police and housing authorities (Dalton & Rowe 2004).

### *Promoting a sense of community and willingness to assist other residents*

The third objective of the program was to develop pro-social and law abiding community engagement among residents. A major focus of the HDHP, underpinned by the community development approach, is promoting a greater sense of community among residents and encouraging residents to watch out for one another. To determine whether the program was successful in this regard, the evaluation drew on contemporary research into social cohesion and collective efficacy, to assess whether there had been any changes in social functioning (actual or perceived).

Residents spoke at length about how the HDHP had helped to build relationships and social ties with their neighbours. Participating in the various activities delivered by the OTGM encouraged residents to interact with one another and fostered a sense of familiarity between individuals that was not present before. This had several benefits, including making it easier for residents to resolve conflict and encouraging a sense of belonging, both because of the relationships that had been formed but also because of the sense of joint ownership of communal spaces.

There was some evidence that the program had encouraged residents to look after one another when they required assistance, including intervening when residents were observed doing the wrong thing. Most notably, however, was that several residents described how they and other residents were more likely to call police, although there are still some concerns about potential reprisals. Nevertheless, the greater willingness to call police and assist neighbours more generally reflected a desire among residents to address some of the persistent problems that impact on them and their community.

### *Improving access to services*

The final objective of the HDHP was to facilitate and support residents' access to health, mental health, education and employment services. Based on the interviews with residents, it was apparent that the OTGM has created an awareness of other services that are available to residents. His knowledge and understanding of the community sector has given residents access to new information on local services. The overall trend in referrals has been gradually decreasing, the reasons for which are unclear; however, there were more than 100 referrals made by the OTGM in the 2014–15 financial year.

The evidence around whether residents have accessed these services was less clear. Some residents reported accessing services with the assistance of the HDHP, while others indicated that they had not followed up on information provided to them (often because they did not feel they needed the support). In addition, there are some barriers reducing residents' ability to access services, including employment services, general health services, and a range of services to support everyday needs (legal, financial, Centrelink etc). Despite these issues, there were several examples of residents who had gained access to further education, with the support of the OTGM, and some of them had gone on to gain some form of employment.

## Why did assault rates decline?

Arguably the most important finding from this evaluation is that the HDHP appears to have had a positive impact on recorded assault rates at Ainslie Avenue, which has delivered significant financial savings. Several caveats are warranted here, including acknowledgement of the relatively small number of recorded offences (in both the target area and comparison area), the challenge of measuring changes in reporting behaviour, and the difficulties untangling the effects of different interventions and controlling for differences between the target and comparison areas.

The precise mechanism that led to this result is difficult to determine, but the most likely explanation is that the program has fostered a sense of community and social ties that have helped to reduce conflict between residents. Much of the activity associated with the HDHP could best be described as being based on the community development approach to crime prevention (Morgan et al. 2012). There was evidence, primarily from the qualitative interviews, that the program had increased levels of social cohesion and collective efficacy, and that this was attributable to the structured community-oriented activities delivered by the OTGM. In other words, the community development mechanism, which builds social ties and strengthens community relationships, appears to have been 'activated' by the different activities that make up the HDHP.

This is consistent with the growing body of evidence that has shown social cohesion and collective efficacy can have a significant impact on the level of crime in a community. Sampson, Raudenbush and Earls (1997: 918) found that 'associations of concentrated disadvantage and residential instability with violence are largely mediated by collective efficacy'. Mazerolle, Wickes & McBroom (2010) concluded that as much as 30 percent of the variation in violent crime could be explained by the level of collective efficacy within a community. Recent research from Queensland found that changes in violent crime in Brisbane suburbs could be explained by two main factors—decreases in the level of social disadvantage and increases in the level of social cohesion and trust that exist within that community (Wickes, Homel & Zahnow 2015). Importantly, research has also shown how the characteristics of places related to social cohesion and informal social control varies from place to place, including at the street level (Weisburd, Davis & Gill 2015), which lends support to the targeted approach taken by the OTGM and the importance of implementing tailored responses in those blocks that have received less attention to date.

## Why didn't the program reduce property crime across the whole of Ainslie Avenue?

The results were mixed in terms of property crime. There was some evidence that property crime had declined in some areas of Ainslie Avenue—specifically, in areas where the conditions were far more conducive to community development work and where more activity had been delivered. There was a decline in the number of property offences at the north section of Ainslie Avenue in phase 1, but an increase in the south section during the same time frame. There was also a decrease in the number of property offences in the target area during phase 2; however, this decrease was less than that observed in the comparison area.

Stakeholders and residents reported a growing problem with illicit drugs and an active drugs market operating in the southern section of Ainslie Avenue. This had created a climate in which residents in that area were fearful of engaging with the OTGM, impacted on residents' perceptions of safety and, at different times, posed risks to the safety of the OTGM. This prevented the OTGM from delivering several planned activities and led him to suspend others due to concerns about the safety of participants. Further, there is a strong relationship between drug use and property crime, particularly acquisitive crime (Bradford & Payne 2012), which may also explain why property crime has not fallen in these areas.

While the activities delivered in some areas of Ainslie Avenue appear to have contributed to overall reductions in assault, the same is not true for property crime. One explanation for this may be that the mechanisms required to reduce property crime—natural surveillance and capable guardianship—may be limited only to the specific areas within which the interventions were delivered, rather than extending to other blocks.

Similarly, some of the relative increase in property crime in the south section during phase 1 may have been due to the displacement of crime from the north. However, research has tended to show that, where displacement does occur, it rarely offsets any reductions in crime in the target area in its entirety, and that diffusion of benefit is just as likely (Johnson, Guerette & Bowers 2014). It is likely, therefore, that other drivers are responsible.

Two other explanations are plausible. The first is that the south section of Ainslie Avenue includes Currong Flats, which were recently closed down and demolished. The potential destabilising effects of the closure of Currong and movement of residents to Bega and Allawah—particularly some of the more problematic residents—coupled with the potential crime attracting properties of the vacant building, may also have contributed to the displacement effects observed in phase 1 and the relative increase in property crime during phase 2. This may continue to have implications for crime at Ainslie Avenue, given plans to close at least two more properties and, as a result, reallocate public housing residents to other communities (within and outside of Ainslie Avenue). This forms part of the ACT Government's Public Housing Renewal Program, which aims to reduce concentrations of disadvantage and address problems relating to ageing housing stock.

Finally, it may be that part of the increase is due to increased reporting by residents, who have taken greater ownership and responsibility for the area as a whole. While residents indicated that they were more likely to report crime to police, there was no evidence of this from the quantitative analysis of CAD incident data.

## What could be changed or improved?

This report ends by offering several recommendations for potential changes or refinements to the HDHP, based on the outcomes of the evaluation.

### *Implement complementary strategies to reduce property crime and drug dealing*

Given the level of drug-related crime and disorder that appears to persist in some sections of Ainslie Avenue, most notably in the southern section, it may be necessary to employ alternative strategies to help reduce crime to a level that would be more conducive to intervention through community development. An active police presence, including targeted patrols, may help to reduce some of these issues. Street-level drug market enforcement by police has been shown to be very effective as a crime reduction measure, particularly where it is based on the principles of problem-oriented policing and working in partnership with third parties (Mazerolle, Soole & Rombouts 2006). While this evaluation has not directly assessed the partnerships between agencies represented on the working group, or the activities undertaken by those other agencies, there was evidence of variable levels of involvement and engagement from ACT Policing, primarily related to staff turnover.

Further, there is good evidence to show that situational measures, including access control, improved lighting and crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED), can reduce property crime in public housing areas (Morgan et al. 2012), with no guarantee that this crime will simply move elsewhere (Johnson, Guerette & Bowers 2014). ACT Policing have previously been engaged to conduct CPTED safety audits for both Kanangra Court and areas covered by Allawah, Bega and Currong. However, relatively few changes, if any, were made by ACT Housing in response to these audit findings. Further, there have been and will continue to be significant changes to the physical environment at Ainslie Avenue—as well as the way people move in and around the area—due to ACT Housing’s process of relocating tenants from the south section of the area, demolishing existing buildings and redeveloping the land.

To implement effective place-based situational crime prevention measures, Eck et al. (2010) argue the importance of engaging place managers—those responsible for the physical and social environment. At Ainslie Avenue, ACT Housing will perform a vital function in ensuring that the design and maintenance of public housing infrastructure, including occupied and unoccupied dwellings, do not provide opportunities for crime. While encouraging residents to secure their properties (ie lock doors, windows etc) and to store attractive items is important, encouraging residents to install improved security by way of financial assistance has been shown to be more effective (Morgan et al. 2012). Further analysis of police data specific to Ainslie Avenue on the characteristics of property offences, including spatial and temporal characteristics, common access points and the nature of items stolen, may also be helpful in better understanding the current crime problems that exist at Ainslie Avenue and opportunities for prevention.

### *Reinvigorate the partnership approach*

Related to the suggestion above is the need to focus on the active engagement of other partner agencies in implementing a whole-of-government response to the problems affecting Ainslie Avenue. This is critical to the ongoing success of the program (Samuels et al. 2004). There have been variable levels of engagement from some of the major partners represented on the working group, and there are persistent gaps or barriers preventing access to services for residents to address their immediate needs. Working with Reclink Australia, JACS is well placed to lead efforts to re-engage with other ACT Government partners, potentially as part of broader reforms to improve responses to volume crime across the ACT. The outcomes of this evaluation may provide a useful mechanism for encouraging more active engagement by these agencies. Given the significant redevelopment of the site that is already underway, and the persistent drug problems, it is particularly important that the relationship between JACS, ACT Policing and ACT Housing, and the level of involvement in the HDHP by the latter two, be enhanced.

### *Increase program dosage and reach*

Evidence from the analysis of the impact of increased participation rates on assault rates highlights the potential benefit that might come from increasing the dosage and reach of the intervention. In other words, increasing the number of people who are actively engaged in the program, and the amount of activity delivered to participants, may contribute to further reductions in violent crime. This means increasing the number and, potentially, the diversity of regular activities and events and increasing participation rates—maintaining the status quo is unlikely to lead to a reduction in crime. This finding is consistent with the earlier research by Samuels et al. (2004), which found that more intensive social interventions comprising multiple activities directed at improving neighbourhood cohesion were the most effective. Further, extending and sustaining the model into the south of Ainslie Avenue, once the immediate crime and safety problems have been subdued, may deliver additional benefits, both in terms of violent crime and property crime.

### *Ensure there is adequate resourcing for a revised program model*

Clearly, any increase in activity will need to be supported by additional resourcing. At present, the bulk of responsibility for program delivery rests with a single OTGM, who has been supported by another part-time community worker for brief periods. Expanding program delivery will require additional staff to support the OTGM and, given the apparent benefits that have resulted from the OTGM building personal networks with residents, additional community workers will need to be appointed for extended periods (rather than short-term appointments).

### *Raise awareness and encourage other residents to become involved*

In addition to ensuring there is adequate resourcing, it will also be necessary to encourage greater awareness of the HDHP among residents not already involved in the program, particularly in those areas where less activity has been delivered (for the reasons described above). While awareness of the program and engagement levels were high among those residents interviewed for the evaluation, there are many residents who are unlikely to be aware of the program or who have had limited engagement. Some residents reported having noticed a decline in promotional activity, and many residents had become involved through word of mouth. Additional advertising, as well as the resources to support it, may be beneficial in reaching more residents at Ainslie Avenue. Further, one of the challenges for the OTGM has been developing activities that have broad appeal and can attract both male and female residents and residents of all ages and interests. This should be considered when expanding the program and developing new activities to ensure maximum engagement from residents.

### *Review, identify and respond to service gaps*

This research highlighted some of the barriers encountered by residents in attempting to access important support services. This was based on interviews with residents, and did not examine individual services or the service needs of individuals residing at Ainslie Avenue (both of which were outside the scope of the evaluation). A review of the service needs of residents and the accessibility of services that meet these needs would help to identify potential solutions to the gaps identified in this report.

### *Find better ways of measuring social functioning*

One of the major limitations of the current study relates to how the impact of the program on social cohesion and collective efficacy has been assessed. While thematic analysis of the interview transcripts detected several references to the various properties that underpin these two concepts, the retrospective nature of these interviews impacts on the validity of the results. Given the significant emphasis placed on these outcomes, and the evidence from this and other studies of their relationship with violent crime, there is scope to conduct research to better assess the impact of the HDHP over the longer-term. While this may involve a combination of qualitative and quantitative research, recent interest in the importance of social cohesion and collective efficacy has led to the development of validated instruments (Uchida et al. 2014). It is recommended that JACS draw upon this research and administer a survey of residents prior to further expansion of the program. This survey could then be repeated after a period of time (not less than 12 months) to assess whether there has been any change.

## What can be concluded from this evaluation?

The findings of this evaluation provide promising evidence of the impact of community development approaches to crime prevention in public housing areas. Limitations aside, the program appears to have led to a reduction in assault offences, as well as several important outcomes in terms of increased social cohesion and collective efficacy. Importantly, the results of this evaluation also clearly point to areas where improvements can be made to the program.

One of the remarkable features of the HDHP is how long it has been sustained, particularly given the challenges related to sustainability often encountered by community development programs. The program now faces new challenges associated with the redevelopment of public housing, already underway as part of the ACT Government's Public Housing Renewal Program, along with persistent challenges associated with drug use and drug-related crime and the significant disadvantage and complex needs of local residents who remain at Ainslie Avenue. To continue to be effective in promoting social cohesion and collective efficacy during this period of transition, the HDHP will require sustained investment. Looking forward, any changes to the HDHP model must be given adequate time to deliver positive outcomes for residents and the Ainslie Avenue community.

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