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# Sustaining tenancies in public housing: understanding and supporting tenancies-at-risk

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# Introduction

- Increasing interest in ‘sustaining tenancies’ and ‘supportive tenancy management’
  - Have been many initiatives by housing authorities to support and sustain public housing tenancies
  - This has led to an interest in gaining better understanding of the risk factors underlying tenancy failure and the most effective interventions to support tenancies
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# Definitions

- *'Sustaining tenancies'*: 'All possible and reasonable actions by a housing authority to support tenants in order to prevent tenancy failure'
  - *'Supportive tenancy management'*: 'Actions of the housing authority designed to maintain a tenancy and maximise positive housing and non-shelter outcomes'
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# Aims of the paper

- To provide a framework for understanding the risk factors that predispose a tenancy towards failure, and the interventions that can prevent tenancy failure
  - To propose a research study to test a risk identification model to enable housing authorities to more reliably identify tenancies-at-risk early in the tenancy
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# The Queensland sustaining tenancies study

- Paper is based on a study commissioned by Qld Department of Housing and undertaken at The University of Queensland
  - Aim of the study is to understand the factors impinging on public tenancy success and failure
  - Comprises 25 case studies of tenancies 'at risk' of eviction and 10 'failed' tenancies, and interviews with housing managers and workers
  - Study provides the empirical foundation for the model presented in this paper
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# Policy context

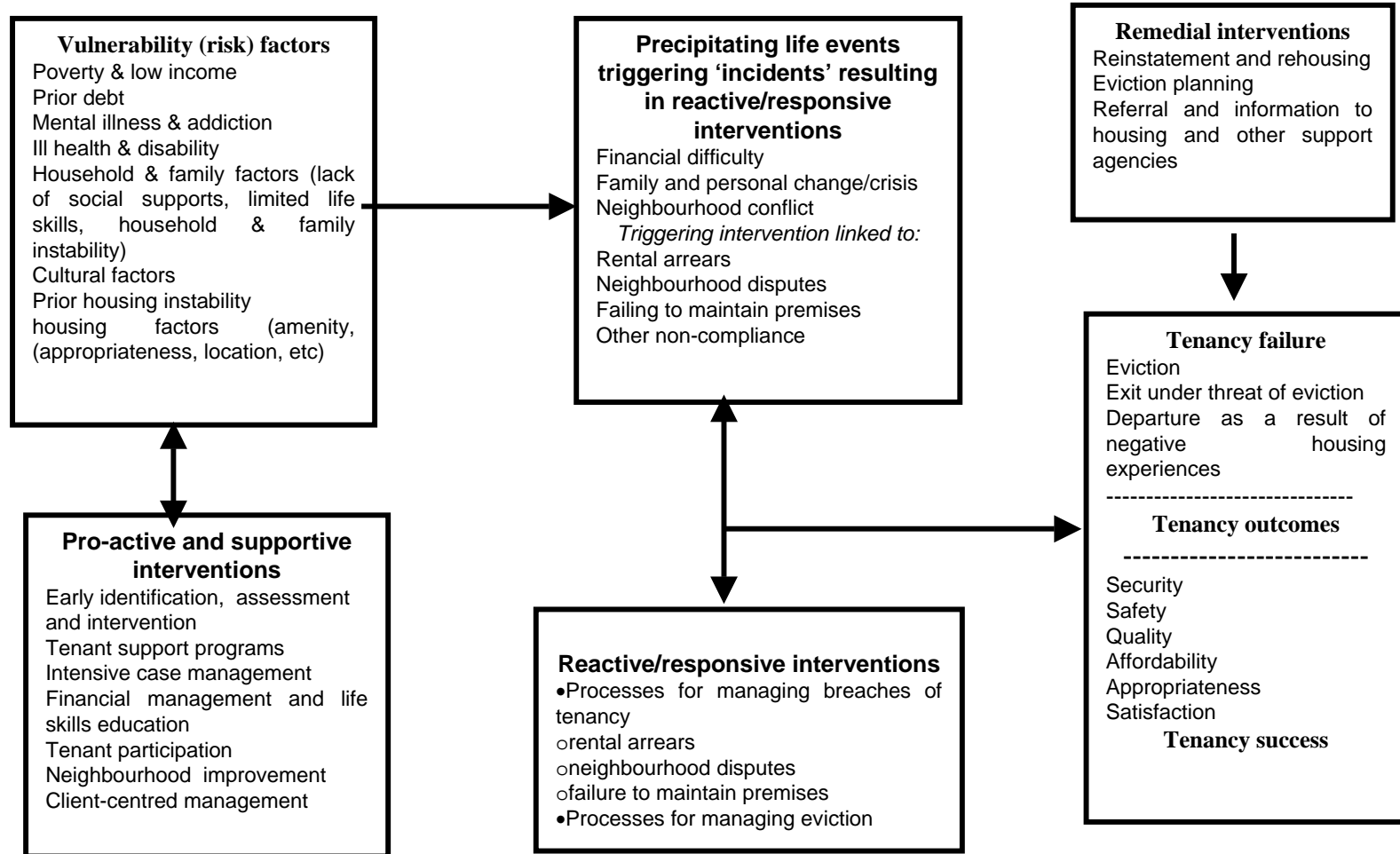
- Current interest in sustaining tenancies:
    - Public housing authorities have responsibilities to support tenancies that go beyond their legal obligations – ‘social landlords’
    - Increasingly targeted nature of public housing
    - Emphasis on the contribution of housing to the overall well-being of individuals, families and communities
    - Countervailing pressures – efficient property and financial management
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# Need for a model of sustaining tenancies

- Are currently many initiatives (policies, programs, practices) concerned with sustaining tenancies
  - However, no systematic approach showing how these are linked to the goal of sustaining tenancies
  - In particular, no clear conceptualisation of the two key concepts: 'risk' and 'intervention' and how these are inter-related
  - The model presented in this paper provides a systematic approach that can underpin a comprehensive strategy of supportive tenancy management
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# A model of risk, intervention and public tenancy outcomes



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# Conceptualising 'risk'

- 'Risk' – a threat or danger of an adverse event
  - Reducing 'housing risk' as a goal of public housing and social policy
  - 'risk management' as a technology and its positive application to public housing
  - Limitations and dangers of a risk management approach
  - Risk as a dynamic process involving 'vulnerability factors' and 'precipitating' life events
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# Vulnerability (risk) factors

## **Vulnerability (risk) factors**

- Poverty & low income
  - Prior debt
  - Mental illness & addiction
  - Ill health & disability
  - Household & family factors (lack of social supports, limited life skills, household & family instability)
  - Cultural factors
  - Prior housing instability
  - housing factors (amenity, (appropriateness, location, etc)
- Contingency, latent factors
  - General characteristics of public housing tenancies that make them prone to tenancy failure/eviction
  - Hypothesised factors based on prior studies and the Queensland sustaining tenancies study listed in the diagram opposite

# Precipitating factors

## **Precipitating life events triggering 'incidents' resulting in reactive /responsive interventions**

- Financial difficulty
- Family and personal change/crisis
- Neighbourhood conflict
- *Triggering intervention:*
- Rental arrears
- Neighbourhood disputes
- Failing to maintain premises

- 'Crystallisation' of the risk i.e. making the risk of eviction an immediate or proximate possibility
- Involves precipitating life events triggering intervention by housing authority
- Hypothesised factors based on Queensland study listed in the diagram opposite

# Conceptualising intervention

- Interventions are any policies, programs and practices of the housing authority and other agencies designed to prevent tenancy failure
- Can be divided into three broad categories:
  - Pro-active & supportive interventions
  - Reactive/responsive interventions
  - Remedial interventions

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# Pro-active interventions

## **Pro-active and supportive interventions**

- Early identification, assessment and intervention
- Tenant support programs
- Intensive case management
- Financial management and life skills education
- Tenant participation
- Neighbourhood improvement
- Client-centred management

- Policies, programs and practices designed to support vulnerable tenancies
  - Can be early intervention programs and/or after difficulties have arisen
  - Are many examples of the types of programs listed in diagram
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# Reactive/responsive interventions

## **Reactive/responsive interventions**

- processes for managing breaches of tenancy
  - rental arrears
  - neighbourhood disputes
  - failure to maintain premises
- processes for managing eviction

- Despite pro-active interventions, there will continue to be precipitating life events and behaviours that result in tenancy breaches and eviction proceedings
- The management of these processes in a 'supportive' manner is central to a sustaining tenancies strategy
- The diagram shows the main processes involved

# Remedial interventions

## **Remedial interventions**

- Reinstatement and rehousing
  - Eviction planning
  - Referral and information to housing and other support agencies
- The consequences of eviction may be profound and there is the problem of the 'revolving door'
  - Hence, housing authorities may be concerned with mitigating the adverse consequences of eviction
  - The diagram shows the main processes that may be involved

# Public tenancy outcomes

## **Tenancy failure**

- Eviction
- Exit under threat of eviction
- Departure as a result of negative housing experiences

## **Tenancy success**

- Security
- Safety
- Quality
- Affordability
- Appropriateness
- Satisfaction

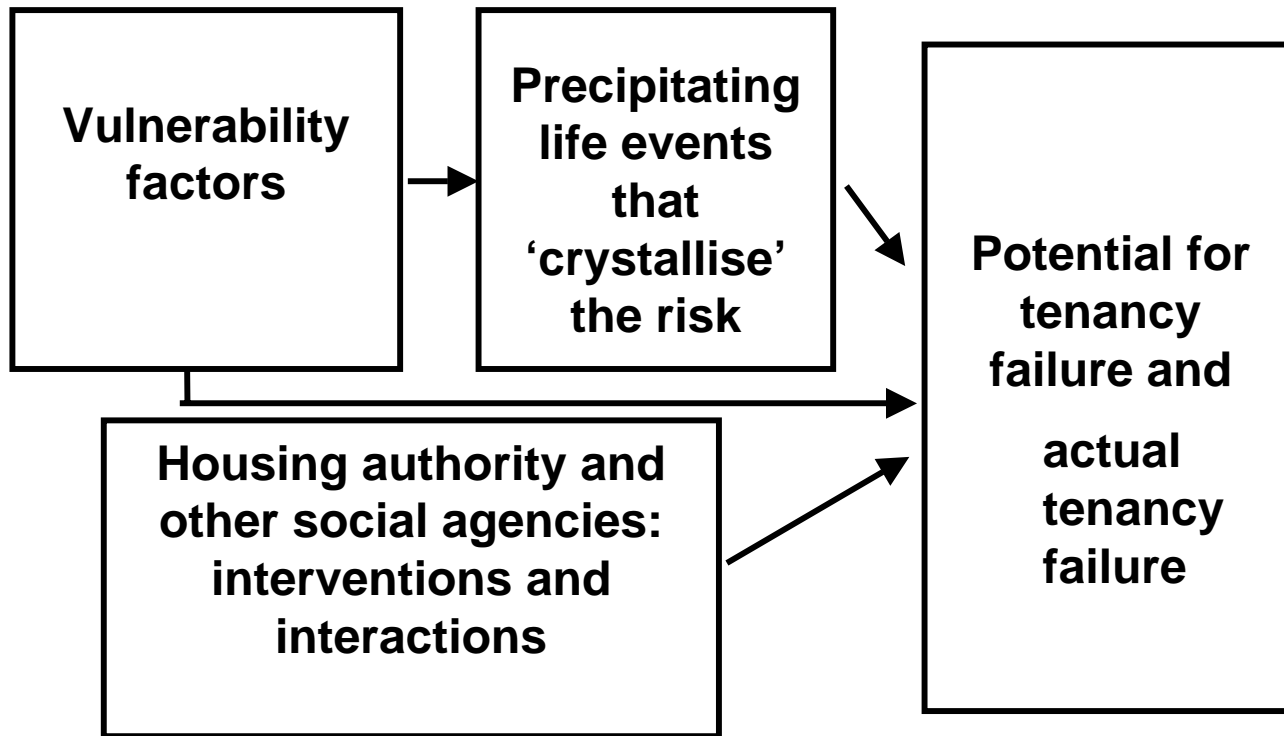
- The final 'box' in the model describes public tenancy outcomes
- Viewed as a consequence of risk processes and interventions and their inter-relations
- 'Failure' is more than eviction, 'success' more than simply maintaining the tenancy

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# The next step: predicting the factors that impact on tenancy failure

- The Queensland sustaining tenancies study has used qualitative research to construct the model of risk, intervention and outcomes
  - In order to develop targeted supportive tenancy management practices, need research to systematically and reliably identify risk factors
  - A research study has been submitted to AHURI to test an empirically-grounded risk identification model
  - A prospective, quantitative, longitudinal study of a sample of new public housing tenants
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# A predictive model of tenancy failure



# Risk (vulnerability) factors

## **Risk (vulnerability) factors**

- Poverty & low income
- Prior debt
- Mental illness & addiction
- Ill health & disability
- Lack of social supports
- Limited life skills
- Household & family instability
- Cultural factors
- Prior housing instability
- Housing factors (amenity, (appropriateness, location, etc.)

- Model hypothesises that the vulnerability factors identified in the Qld sustaining tenancies study are predictors of potential or actual tenancy failure
- These factors will be measured at the commencement of tenancy

# Precipitating life events that 'crystallise' the risk

## **Precipitating life events that 'crystallise' the risk**

- Unemployment
- Illness
- Unanticipated expenditure
- Loss of income
- Financial difficulty
- Relationship breakdown
- Domestic violence
- Family conflict or crisis
- Neighbourhood conflict
- 'Pile-up' of stressful life events

- Model also hypothesises that life events during the tenancy can crystallise the risk and that these events are predictors of tenancy failure
- These factors will be measured at 9 & 18 months into tenancy

# Housing authority and other social agencies: interventions and interactions

## **Housing authority and other social agencies: interventions and interactions**

- Early identification, assessment and intervention
  - Tenant support programs
  - Intensive case management
  - Coordinated social care arrangements
  - Financial management and life skills education
  - Tenant participation
  - Neighbourhood improvement
  - Client-centred management
  - Processes for managing breaches of tenancy
  - Processes for managing eviction
- Model hypothesises that the actions of housing authorities also impact on tenancy success and failure, as shown in diagram
  - These factors will be measured at 9 & 18 months into tenancy

# Measuring tenancy failure

## **Potential for tenancy failure**

- Difficulties in meeting legal requirements of the tenancy & the expectations of the housing authority
- Rental arrears
- Unresolved problematic interactions with neighbours
- Difficulties in maintaining the property
- Conflict with housing officials
- Significant levels of uncertainty concerning capacity to sustain the tenancy
- Receipt of warnings or notices from the housing authority
- Commencement of eviction proceedings

## **Actual tenancy failure**

- Eviction
- Exit under threat of eviction

- The model will measure tenancy failure in terms of a range of indicators of potential and actual tenancy failure
- These factors will be measured at 9 & 18 months into tenancy, and subsequently if possible

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# Conclusions

- Sustaining tenancies and supportive tenancy management are central concerns of housing authorities and sector generally
  - Need to have an integrated, systematic approach that incorporates specific policies, programs, practices
  - The model provided by the Queensland sustaining tenancies study provides such an approach linking risk and intervention
  - What is now needed is further research to yield statistically reliable and robust findings of the key predictors of tenancy failure to provide a basis for targeted and effective early intervention
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# Effectively linking research and policy

- The Queensland sustaining tenancies research project is indicative of the close relations between University of Queensland & the Queensland Department of Housing
- Finding ways of effectively linking research and policy in this way is a central goal of the Queensland AHURI Research Centre



**The Honourable Robert Swarten MP - Minister for Public Works and Minister for Housing and Member for Rockhampton**

Robert Swarten has been Queensland's Minister for Public Works and Housing since 29 June 1998.

Minister Swarten was elected as the Labor Member for Rockhampton in July 1995.