

**Public Private Partnerships for Increasing Social Housing:**

**A Meta-Synthesis of Qualitative Studies to Inform**

**Non-Profit Practice in a Regional Area**

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## **Abstract**

This research aimed to provide service model refinement for a housing service provider (MRRRH) operating in Far North Queensland by conducting a meta-synthesis of empirical studies on public private partnerships for increasing social housing stock. Results included the development of a tool to assess the ability of services' to enter into public private partnership arrangements.

## **Introduction**

In 2007 the National Homelessness Strategy undertaken by the Australian Government's Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, provided funding for the two- year pilot program *Mobile Response to Rural and Remote Homelessness Project* (MRRRH). One of the aims of the MRRRH project was to increase the social housing stock of the Atherton Tablelands and Cooktown regions of Far North Queensland.

The MRRRH project operates in a rural and remote area of Far North Queensland and the project aims to:

1. Trial and evaluate an innovative mobile outreach early intervention service model to support those at risk of homelessness
2. Increase the social housing stock in the region; and
3. Build the capacity of stakeholders to address homelessness in the region (adapted from Pilat 2007, no page no).

While it is recognised that the effectiveness of existing public private partnerships to address ongoing housing affordability and availability issues is debated (New South Wales Council of Social Services, 2005), there is growing evidence that many Australians on low incomes in both the public and private rental markets are experiencing severe financial hardship, that in turn puts them at risk of becoming homeless (Burke & Ralston 2004). Furthermore, according to research conducted by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2008), the public and social housing systems in Australia could be deemed to be in crisis, with thousands of people in each state on waiting lists for many years. Research also shows the effectiveness of current housing support models is limited as these programs do not address the ongoing issue of limited affordable housing stock, nor do they have the ability or the resources to help tenants facing ongoing affordability problems or other personal problems that put their tenancies at risk (Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute 2006).

## Research Aim

This research aimed to refine the MRRRH service model by conducting a literature meta-synthesis of selected studies on social housing initiatives and innovative service delivery models engaging both the public and private sectors, and interrogating the MRRRH model in light of higher order findings. The research addressed the following questions: what are the key elements of the MRRRH project in terms of increasing social housing stock; what do the selected studies say about these elements; what higher order findings come from a meta-synthesis of these studies; and what refinements can be made to the MRRRH model as indicated by these higher order findings (Table 1).

**Table 1. Research Design**

Questions	Data	Sample	Collection	Analysis	Findings
1. What are the key elements of the MRRRH project in relation to increasing social housing stock?	MRRRH service model, EOI, Application for funding, Agency documents, Funding Guideline documents	Population of documents	Review the documents for key terms and concepts	Thematic analysis	Brackets for data collection and conceptual framework
2. What are the selected studies saying about these elements?	Description and analysis of relevant research and literature on public private partnerships in social housing	Selective sampling of population of available literature on topic (See initial data analysis tool)	Reviewing the documents by brackets	Describing the findings against brackets from each study	Aggregative matrix of description against brackets
3. What higher order findings come from a synthesis of the selected studies?	Description in the aggregative matrix	Population of findings from selected studies	Iterative reading and re-reading of descriptions	Interpretive synthesis of key concepts through constant comparison	Interpretive synthesis of higher order findings
4. What refinements can be made to the MRRRH model as indicated by these findings?	Synthesis of higher order findings and MRRRH model	Population of findings and model	Juxta positioning findings and model	Interrogation of model using higher order findings	Refinements of the model

## **Literature Review**

The Australian Bureau of Statistics reports that the 2001 census revealed there were 99,900 homeless Australians and 24,569 homeless people in Queensland alone (Chamberlain & MacKenzie, 2003). Of these homeless Australians, 26,060 were young people aged between 12 and 18 years old (The Salvation Army 2002). Indigenous Australians were also over-represented in homelessness statistics. Indigenous Australians aged over 15 years make up only 1.6% of Australia's population, but comprised 7.53% of the overall homeless population in 2001 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2005).

One of the Federal Government's responses to the homelessness issue has been the provision of the Supported Accommodation Assistance (SAAP) program. The SAAP program does not have the resources to provide emergency accommodation for all homeless people in Australia (Heintjes, 2005). Moreover, those living in SAAP accommodation remain classified as homeless. Emergency accommodation does not provide a long-term housing option and does not constitute a safe and secure environment.

Community based emergency accommodation services also report ongoing issues with dealing with the number of Australians experiencing homelessness. Community based housing assistance programs across Australia who responded to a survey conducted by the Australian Council of Social Services, reported that in the 2004/2005 financial year they provided support for 31,700 homeless Australians. They also reported that they were unable to meet the high demand for services and they turned away 13,979 people (Australian Council of Social Services 2006).

According to research conducted by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, the public and community housing systems in Australia is deemed to be in crisis. In Queensland in 2006, 4791 households were living in public housing, but there were 10,774 on the public housing waiting list. 90% of all public housing tenants are low-income earners, and 44% of those spent greater than 25% of their overall household income on rent (News.com.au 2007). Furthermore, "Commonwealth and State funds under the Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement have declined in real terms by approximately 25 per cent (\$419 million) since 1992-93" (National Council of Churches in Australia 1997, no page no).

## **Methodology**

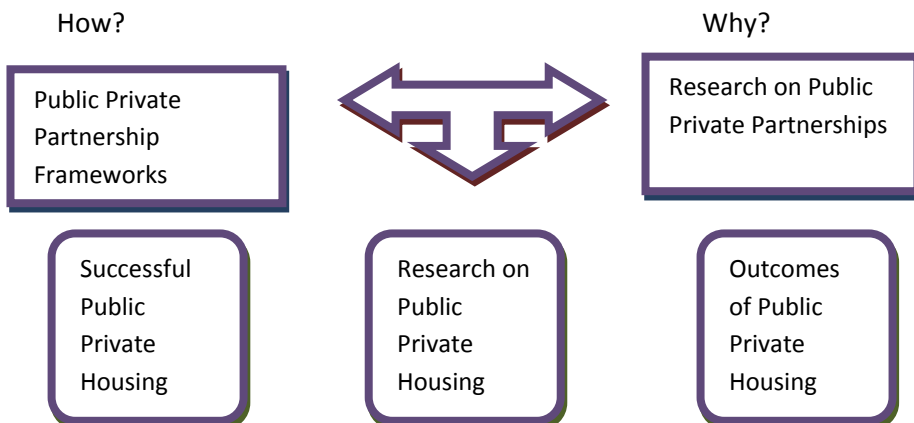
Meta-synthesis involves the pooling and systematic review of data across a range of studies with the aim of synthesising findings. While this research had a particular focus on public private partnerships in social housing, the initial literature sample was collected from wider literature on the areas of homelessness, Indigenous homelessness, youth homelessness, public private partnership, housing partnerships, housing affordability, and public and social housing (Figure 1). Three levels of data analysis occurred in this research. The first level was an analysis of the usefulness of the available literature. The second was an analysis of the quality of studies for use in the synthesis, by viewing them against the criteria described in the analysis tool developed by Walsh and Downe (2006). The third level of the data analysis describes, categorizes, and connects the key concepts that arose from the meta-synthesis process. These findings were juxta-positioned with the MRRRH model.

**Figure 1. Conceptual Framework**



The initial collection of the sample occurred by conducting key word searches of various databases including Ingenta Connect, Sage, Blackwell Publishing, Synergy, Informit, Info Trac, and X Search as these databases have a strong focus on social sciences and many of the articles have been peer reviewed. Literature on the key areas of homelessness, Indigenous homelessness, youth homelessness, housing support programs, public private partnerships, public private housing partnerships, issues leading to homelessness, housing affordability, public and social housing and crisis accommodation was reviewed (Figure 1). While in theory, a key word search is the best way to access articles on electronic databases, and this search returned many useful articles, very few were empirically based. At this time, the sampling frame changed, and new searches were conducted using terms focused more specifically on public private partnerships (Figure 2).

**Figure 2. Changed Sampling Design**



Each search term entered into individual databases returned a very large number of articles. For example, the term public private partnership entered into the X search database search engine on the 11/12/07 found 5678 articles. The number of articles was systematically reduced throughout this process due to them providing insufficient breadth or depth or no new insight into the topic. Once initial analysis was completed, 1680 articles and book chapters were reviewed, and 57 articles and 4 books had been earmarked for further analysis. These were then further analysed, in particular against quality criteria established by Walsh and Downe (2006), which led to the selection of the five articles used in the meta-synthesis.

The next stage of data analysis began by reading and re-reading the studies selected in order to ascertain the brackets that appeared within the studies, then recording the brackets (or second order findings) in a table, as per Question 2 in the research design. 'Methodology', 'focus of study' and the 'years the study was undertaken' were recorded also in order to provide context to the studies. The construction of an aggregative matrix drew out the common themes of the selected studies to create the findings.

**Table2. Aggregative Matrix**

<i>Author</i>	<i>Nature of the issue and approach</i>
Lownes, V. and Skelcher, C. (1998)	Provide solutions to problems that cross organisational boundaries.
Teisman, G.R. and Klijn, E.H. (2002)	Meet the needs of a network society. Manage interdependencies between societal actors. Society places greater demands on government calling for the establishment of partnerships.
Alhbrandt, R.S. Jr (1986)	Complex Problems. Holistic Approach
Otiso, K.M. (2003)	Cross sectoral issues. Holistic approach.
Knapp, J.S. and Jamieson, L.M. (2004)	Cross sectoral issues require cross sectoral responses.

<i>Author</i>	<i>Motivation for the creation of partnerships</i>
Lownes, V. and Skelcher, C. (1998)	Resource dependency. Collaboration required to achieve common purposes. Ability to address complex issues. Sharing of risk.
Teisman, G.R. and Klijn, E.H. (2002)	Sharing of risk. Solve governance issues through collaboration. Governments and private sector increasingly reliant on each other. Sharing of knowledge and skills.
Alhbrandt, R.S. Jr (1986)	Resource dependency. Sharing of risk.
Otiso, K.M. (2003)	Ability to increase service provision and meet community needs. Support community capacity building. Increasing resource availability. Sharing of risk.
Knapp, J.S. and Jamieson, L.M. (2004)	Ability to increase service provision. Fiscal limitations of public sector. Collaboration required to meet objectives. Sharing of risk.

<i>Author</i>	<i>Vision for the partnership</i>
Lownes, V. and Skelcher, C. (1998)	Development of strategic direction. Program enhancement through sharing of resources.
Teisman, G.R. and Klijn, E.H. (2002)	Management of interdependencies. Greater ability to meet societal demands.
Alhbrandt, R.S. Jr (1986)	Increased inclusion and satisfaction of citizens. Strengthen local capacity.
Otiso, K.M. (2003)	Increase service provision. Promote community participation. Local capacity building.
Knapp, J.S. and Jamieson, L.M. (2004)	Synergistic provision of services. Increased community involvement. Local capacity building. Increased service provision.

<i>Author</i>	<i>Benefits of the partnership</i>
Lownes, V. and Skelcher, C. (1998)	Increased efficiency through sharing of skills and resources.
Teisman, G.R. and Klijn, E.H. (2002)	Increased efficiency through sharing skills and resources.
Alhbrandt, R.S. Jr (1986)	Increased efficiency through sharing of skills and resources.
Otiso, K.M. (2003)	Enable resource pooling and efficient resource mobilisation. Utilization of skills from each sector.
Knapp, J.S. and Jamieson, L.M. (2004)	More effective use of resources. Utilization of skills from each agency.

<i>Author</i>	<i>Context of the partnership</i>
Lownes, V. and Skelcher, C. (1998)	Partnerships need to appeal to, and hold incentives for all stakeholders.
Teisman, G.R. and Klijn, E.H. (2002)	Partnerships involve ongoing learning, Partnerships are complex; the incentives for stakeholders need to outweigh complexities.
Alhbrandt, R.S. Jr (1986)	Partnerships must hold incentives for all stakeholders. Partnerships must be broad in context to ensure they are transferable to other areas and other issues.
Otiso, K.M. (2003)	Partnerships offer benefits to community and stakeholders.
Knapp, J.S. and Jamieson, L.M.(2004)	Partnerships offer benefits to involved agencies and community.

<i>Author</i>	<i>Process of the partnership</i>
Lownes, V. and Skelcher, C. (1998)	Tensions between co-operation and competition need to be managed.
Teisman, G.R. and Klijn, E.H. (2002)	Tensions exist between the hierarchical structure of government and the partnership model, Process analysis is an important part of partnerships.
Alhbrandt, R.S. Jr (1986)	Organisational capacity of each partnering agent needs to be taken into account, Partnership arrangements must be flexible enough that they can be tailored to meet local needs.
Otiso, K.M. (2003)	Each actor has different objectives so conflict can arise, Government has inflexible hierarchical structure which does not fit with partnership model, Weaker partners can become subjugated.
Knapp, J.S. and Jamieson, L.M. (2004)	Partnerships can be complex, Partnerships can have different attributes, There needs to be a willingness to address conflicts as they arise.

<i>Author</i>	<i>Requirements of successful partnership</i>
Lownes, V. and Skelcher, C. (1998)	Flexibility, Willingness to accept different levels governance in different stages of partnership. Willingness to share power. Willingness to commit to process.
Teisman, G.R. and Klijn, E.H. (2002)	Flexibility. Willingness to share power. Willingness to commit to process.
Alhbrandt, R.S. Jr (1986)	Flexibility. Strong leadership, Willingness to share power. Willingness to commit to process. Strong leadership.
Otiso, K.M. (2003)	Flexibility. Willingness to share power. Willingness to commit to process.
Knapp, J.S. and Jamieson, L.M. (2004)	Flexibility. Willingness to commit to process. Trust. Shared vision.

## Findings

An interpretive synthesis conducted through constant comparison involved synthesising the common themes that occurred across the five studies, enabling a set of higher order findings to be produced from the aggregative matrix (Table 2), as per Question 3 in the research design. These higher order findings were compiled to produce Table 3.

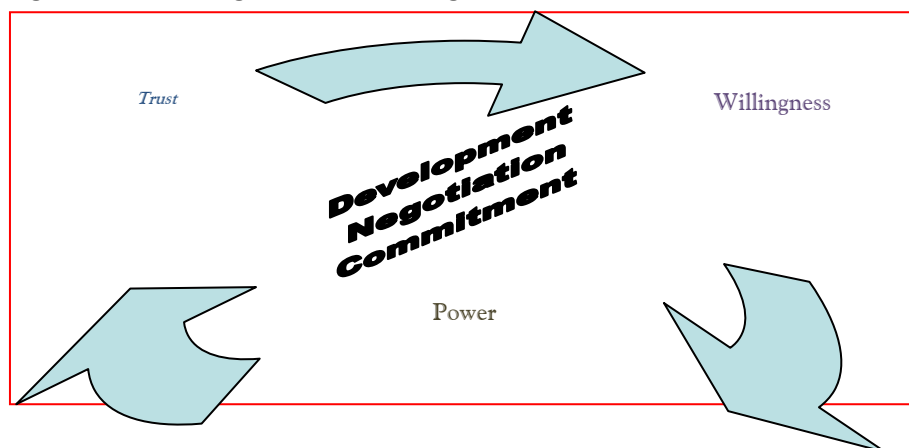
**Table 3. Findings**

<i>Nature of the issue and approach</i>	Societal issues have become more complex. These issues cross organisational boundaries. In order to address complex issues, there needs to be a holistic response.
<i>Motivation for the creation of partnerships</i>	There is greater financial and resource pressures on the government and non government and private sectors, these sectors have also become increasingly dependent on each other. The creation of partnerships between sectors enables the sharing of risk and the pooling of resources to increase the ability to meet the needs of a complex society.
<i>Vision for the partnership</i>	Partnerships enable community participation and capacity building. Partnerships enable the strategic setting of goals through a shared vision. Partnerships increase the ability to deliver effective targeted services.
<i>Benefits of the partnership</i>	Partnerships enable the skill sets of each of the sectors to be drawn out, and the weaknesses of each sector to be mitigated. The pooling of resources enables the ability to provide more comprehensive services than any one organisation could.
<i>Context of the partnership</i>	For each sector to be willing to enter into partnership arrangements there needs to be incentives for them to do so. Partnerships are not an easy option, they can be very complex and those entering into partnerships need to be willing to work on issues that arise within the partnerships in a co-operative manner for them to be successful. Despite the complex nature of partnerships, they are of benefit to local communities and citizens. Any partnership models that are set up on a national level need to be broad in context to ensure they are transferable to the regional and local level.
<i>Process of the partnership</i>	As each actor that enters into a partnership arrangement has their own ideas and agenda, conflict can arise. The actors in a partnership will hold different levels of power throughout the different stages of the partnership, this needs to be reflected upon, with the actors involved being willing to share power throughout the process. As it is possible that some members of partnership may become subjugated, it is necessary that the process is analysed. In the government sector in particular, hierarchical models of management, and managerialist levels of thinking need to be reflected on as these traditional models of government thinking do not fit with the partnership model, in particular the need for there to be willingness to share power, and the need for each contributing actors strengths to be recognised and equally valued.

<i>Requirements of successful partnership</i>	<p>For partnerships to be successful there needs to be a common goal or shared vision that offers incentive for each of the actors to enter into the partnership arrangement at the first instance, and a strong sense of leadership, and commitment to community from the actor that is setting up the partnership arrangement. There also needs to be willingness on behalf of each actor that enters into a partnership to take the necessary steps, including focusing on ideals of co-operation as opposed to competition, and ensuring the policy around partnership arrangements is flexible enough to ensure the partnership is successful. There is also a requirement that each actor is willing to share power, resources and skills and respects the positive attributes that each other actor brings to the partnership arrangement. This requires a level of trust and transparency from each of the actors.</p>
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When these findings were further analysed, they indicated that while there were many factors that needed to be taken into account to ensure that partnership arrangements are successful, they could all be placed into three broad categories - trust, willingness, and power - and they are inherently intertwined.

**Figure 2. Linked Higher Order Findings**



At the development phase of partnerships, each of the partnering agents needs to be willing to enter into the arrangement and focus on a shared vision to ensure its success. Each of the partnering agents needs to be committed to the processes involved in achieving a successful partnership and be willing to negotiate and forgo notions of self-interest and competition to focus on co-operation and the desire to achieve the best outcome. The government agencies need to be willing to be flexible in relation to policy around partnership arrangements to ensure that they can work, and need to be willing to let go of their need for primacy in the process to ensure that private actors are willing to bring their knowledge and skills to the table. All actors involved in the partnership need to be willing to negotiate financial and other arrangements within the partnership that enable good outcomes for both themselves and the other agents.

Both the public and private agents involved need to be willing to listen to the needs of communities to ensure they are included in the process, this involves a willingness on behalf of all the agents to ensure that the community holds a level of power in the process. Both the public and private agents need to be willing to share power with each other and recognise that at different stages of the partnership it is likely that one agent will hold more power.

To achieve all of the above, there is a fundamental need for trust. Therefore, when analysing the underlying factors in the higher order findings in terms of the requirements of a successful public private partnership, the three reoccurring themes are trust, willingness and power. Trust is required for partnership development in the first instance, and for it to continue to be successful; a willingness to be committed to the process of negotiation and to the work involved in maintaining a successful partnership is required; and the willingness to share power throughout the process is required.

### **Tool for use by MRRRH**

The findings of the meta-synthesis were used to create a framework to pose some questions to the members of the MRRRH Community Advisory Group. The questions are for consideration when reflecting on the desire and need to increase social housing stock in the region, and a tool to enable greater viability of any public private partnership initiatives considered in the region.

The MRRRH Community Advisory Group consists of key stakeholders that could possibly also enter into a partnership model with MRRRH to address issues. These stakeholders include the Department of Housing, social housing agencies, other human service agencies, as well as community members.

Aim 3 of the MRRRH model focuses on building partnerships within the sector locally, and aims to build the capacity of stakeholders to address homelessness in the region by:

*Developing and facilitating mechanisms such as forums and networks for joint action by stakeholders to address homelessness issues on an ongoing basis, and by resourcing stakeholders to develop and implement innovative strategies to address homelessness.*

(Pilat 2007, no page no)

This shows that the MRRRH project is already establishing networks with other services providers in the region, and could consider working within those networks to advocate for public private partnerships within their community to address the ongoing housing affordability and availability issues, as well as advocating for the social housing stock in the region to be increased. The key aspects that would need consideration by the MRRRH Community Advisory Group, as highlighted by the linked higher order findings (Figure 4) are:

1. Does MRRRH have the networks and level of *trust* required within those networks, to consider advocating for and entering into partnerships with different levels of Government and developers to increase the social housing stock in the region?

2. Does MRRRH as a pilot program have the capacity and level of time required to *commit* to the process of establishing and engaging in partnerships?
3. Does MRRRH working within a network of organisations have the capacity to *commit* to the process of engaging with the community to ensure their views are considered and heard when considering any partnership-led development in the region; and be *willing* to share *power* in this situation?
4. Does the MRRRH service itself, and other organisations working within the network of organisations, have the *trust* of the community?
5. Given that the financial arrangements of the MRRRH project are managed by the Mareeba Shire Council; is the council *willing* to provide the level of leadership and *commitment* required to *develop* and engage with the process of partnership initiatives to address the housing issues in the region?
6. Is the policy of the Queensland Government in relation to public private partnerships flexible enough to ensure that public private partnerships can be *negotiated*, and are a viable option?
7. Is the Federal Government *willing* to consider the value of public private partnerships, and does it have the capacity to engage with other sectors to address the ongoing housing crisis in the region?
8. Are there developers (private sector) in the region *willing* to consider engaging in public private partnerships to address the ongoing housing crisis in the region?
9. Is there enough *trust* between the stakeholders that could be involved in any public private partnership initiatives for them to be *willing* to enter into the partnership arrangement; be willing to be *committed* to the arrangement and the level of *negotiation* required for success: and be *willing* to share *power* throughout the process in order to achieve a shared vision for the region?

The key factors for consideration in relation to potentially increasing the viability of any public private partnership initiatives in the region are outlined in Table 4.

**Table 4 . Partnership Assessment Tool**

<i>Issue</i>	<i>Questions</i>
<i>Nature of the issue and approach</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What is each agent’s view of the nature of the issue, and what approach do they consider is best to try to address the issue?</li> <li>2. Does their view include principles of holism?</li> <li>3. Is there recognition that problems that cross-organisational boundaries require a response that crosses organisational boundaries?</li> </ol>
<i>Motivation for the creation of partnerships</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. What is each agent’s motivation for wanting to enter into a partnership arrangement?</li> <li>5. Is there recognition that better outcomes can be achieved for society through the pooling of resources and sharing of risk, or are motivations purely self-interest driven?</li> </ol>
<i>Vision for the partnership</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6. What is the vision for the partnership?</li> <li>7. Does it include wanting to achieve a shared vision of increased targeted service or infrastructure provision to the local community?</li> <li>8. Does the vision of each agent include engaging community in the process to enable community participation and capacity building?</li> </ol>
<i>Benefits of the partnership</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>9. What resources and skills does each agent bring into the partnership?</li> <li>10. Are they willing to pool resources and share their skills in order to make the partnership successful and provide a more comprehensive level of service?</li> </ol>
<i>Context of the partnership</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>11. Are there enough incentives for each agent to be willing to develop a partnership?</li> <li>12. Are the agents willing to work on issues that arise within the partnership in a co-operative manner?</li> <li>13. Is the framework of the partnership flexible enough for it to be transferable?</li> <li>14. Will the partnership benefit the local community?</li> </ol>
<i>Process of the partnership</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>15. Are the agents involved willing to share power throughout the process?</li> <li>16. Are the agents involved willing to reflect on each stage of the process?</li> <li>17. Are the public agents involved willing to forgo traditional hierarchical models of governance to enable the partnership to work?</li> </ol>
<i>Requirements of successful partnership</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>18. Do the agents have a shared vision?</li> <li>19. Does the partnership have a strong sense of leadership?</li> <li>20. Are agents in the partnership committed to meeting community need?</li> <li>21. Is each agent willing to work in a cooperative manner with the other actors?</li> <li>22. Is there trust and respect between each of the agents?</li> <li>23. Is each agent willing to negotiate and share power throughout the process?</li> <li>24. Is the policy concerning partnerships flexible enough for them to be viable options?</li> <li>25. Does each of the agents have the capacity to commit to the partnership?</li> </ol>

## **Conclusion**

The findings from the meta-synthesis indicated that public private partnerships are an option, and given the pressure on the government and non government sectors at the current time to commit to a process that will address the ongoing housing crisis, and the inability of any of the sectors to address the issue on their own, perhaps a very timely option. The findings also indicated that partnerships are not an easy option for any of the sectors, with the success of any partnership model dependent on the willingness of the actors involved to commit to the process and meet all of the requirements of a successful partnership. For the MRRRH project in particular, the findings indicate that all of the above questions need consideration before any moves to enter into partnership arrangements in order to achieve the goal of increasing the social housing stock in the region.

## **Research Recommendations**

Public private partnerships were viewed as viable alternatives to address service provision issues and infrastructure issues for many years, and have been written into the legislation in many countries around the world (Bovaird 2004). There has also been a shift to public private partnership models in Australia. However, no empirically based research that focused on Australian instances of public private partnership and their legal and policy implications was located.

Further research needs to be conducted at the national and local levels that is empirically based, on public private partnerships, focusing on the policy implications, the legal implications, and the impact they have on the local community, as well as the partnership model that was used.

There are instances of public private partnerships to increase social housing in Australia. Any future empirically based Australian research on public private partnerships to increase social housing would further benefit the sector if it also focused on the key areas highlighted in this research, which were:

1. *Nature of the issue and approach*
2. *Motivation for the creation of partnerships*
3. *Vision for the partnership*
4. *Benefits of the partnership*
5. *Context of the partnership*
6. *Process of the partnership*
7. *Requirements of a successful partnership*

Furthermore, there is a need for research on the outcomes of these initiatives. At the regional level, there is a need for research on the nature of the stakeholders, the ability of partnership models to increase community capacity, as well as a capacity assessment of regional organisations to participate in partnership models.

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