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Brendan O'Flaherty , Rosanna Scutella , Yi-Ping Tseng

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Private Information, Exits from Homelessness, and Better Ways to Operate Rehousing Programs

By Brendan O’Flaherty*, Rosanna Scutella‡ and Yi-Ping Tseng†

* Department of Economics, Columbia University

† Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research,
The University of Melbourne

‡ Centre for Applied Social Research, RMIT University

Abstract

Do people experiencing homelessness have private information that helps predict when they will leave homelessness? Our answer is yes: homeless people know important things about their future. We use data from Journeys Home, a path-breaking longitudinal study of homeless people and people at risk of homelessness in Australia. We suggest ways that private information can be used to improve service delivery. In particular, we show why decentralized intake systems may be more effective than command-and-control systems, despite the popularity of the latter.

* This paper uses data from the Journeys Home study, which was initiated and is funded by the Australian Government Department of Social Services (DSS), and is managed by the Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research (Melbourne Institute). The findings and views in this paper should not however be attributed to either the DSS or the Melbourne Institute. We are grateful to Martha Burt, Pierre-Andre Chiappori, Abraham Chigavazira, Dennis Culhane, Beth Shinn, participants at the 2016 Workshop on Homelessness and Housing Insecurity at the Melbourne Institute, and members of the National Alliance to End Homelessness (US) research council for helpful comments and questions.

Keywords: exits from homelessness, private information, rehousing, unified intake systems

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