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Media release

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Australians anxious about cluttered homes

The Australian home has become so cluttered that it is affecting many people emotionally, according to a recent nationally representative survey.

The survey into the extent to which Australians buy and hoard goods that are rarely or never used found that 88 per cent of Australian homes have at least one cluttered room, and the average home has three or more cluttered rooms. The spare room is commonly the most cluttered area in the home.

The survey results are found in a new report by Australia Institute Research Fellow Josh Fear, entitled *Stuff Happens: Unused things cluttering up our homes*.

The paper finds that four in ten Australians report being anxious, guilty or depressed about the amount of clutter in their homes, and sometimes go to extraordinary lengths to deal with their superfluous 'stuff'.

"People move houses, add rooms to homes and even purchase more 'stuff', such as storage containers, to accommodate the stuff they have bought or acquired but never used," Mr Fear said.

"One person interviewed said that at one stage she actually wanted her home to burn down in a bushfire - it was that cluttered."

Mr Fear said that the research was in some respects light-hearted but that it touched a nerve for many people. Significant numbers of people are distressed by their clutter yet are still unable to rid themselves of the problem. Some people become depressed and anxious at the amount of stuff cluttering their lives, while others feel guilty or embarrassed.

"It's a little like the obesity problem," Mr Fear said. "Most of us would prefer to have less clutter, just like most of us would like to be slimmer and fitter than we actually are."

"Of course, the alternative to 'fat' homes is simply to avoid acquiring unwanted or useless items in the first place. Among other things, this requires a more conscious approach to shopping, one that is about purchasing what we really need and will use, rather than shopping impulsively or as a way of entertaining ourselves.

"It also requires a healthy scepticism towards commercial messages trying to convince us to buy things that we don't really want or need. If we follow these principles, perhaps we can reclaim our homes."

The paper can be read on the Institute's website - www.tai.org.au