



Creating a framework for ending homelessness

Homelessness and CaLD and Migrants



Some people who are homeless are from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CaLD) backgrounds. There is limited data available about the experiences of homelessness amongst people from CaLD backgrounds or the pathways in and out of homelessness. The housing and homelessness service system can be difficult enough to navigate particularly when a person is in crisis. Some people from CaLD backgrounds may have come to Australia from nations with limited Government services and/or no similar bureaucratic system that which operates in Australia. This creates extra barriers to accessing emergency accommodation, long-term housing and other support to resolve homelessness. Refugees and asylum seekers can face particular issues related to legal and language barriers that make it difficult to work and to use social services, increasing their vulnerability to homelessness. With few specialist providers of culturally diverse support models in an over-stretched homeless service system, the homelessness of people from non-English speaking and migrant backgrounds often remains hidden.

Ethnic backgrounds of people using services

Approximately 1 in 10 people who receive support from specialist homelessness services are of non-English speaking backgrounds. 13% of men and 18% of women who received support from specialist homelessness services in 2009-10 were born outside Australia. People born outside Australia are less likely than the Australian-born population to access specialist homelessness services. While people born in Australia are 73% of the country's population, they were 84% of the clients of specialist homelessness services in 2009/10 and just 6% of accompanying children. People of non-English speaking backgrounds are not less likely than others to become homeless or to suffer the poverty, ill-health and violence that are among its causes. However they may be unaware of the support services that are available. Due to funding restrictions, homelessness services are not always able to provide culturally appropriate support such as translation services and bilingual staff.

Barriers to accessing services

People born outside of Australia may face more barriers to accessing services than people who are born in Australia. This is also true for housing and homelessness services. CaLD service providers have identified a number of these barriers in their correspondence with Homelessness Australia. They include:

- Insufficient knowledge of the service delivery system.
- Inability to navigate the service delivery system.
- Being discouraged from accessing services because they are 'culturally unfriendly'.
- Insufficient literacy in English, making administrative forms difficult to comprehend.
- Lack of access to interpreter and other multicultural services.
- An aversion to seeking external help and support.
- Discouragement from accessing 'support' services by members of their own communities.
- Past experiences of discrimination
- Services not appropriately tailored to meet cultural needs.

Refugee and asylum seeker issues

Refugees and asylum seekers are very vulnerable to homelessness. According to the [Refugee Council of Australia](#), young refugees are 6 times more likely to become homeless than other young people.

There are a number of reasons for this. Many young entrants on humanitarian visas have come to Australia from nations with poorly developed bureaucracies and little Government infrastructure.

They may have experienced significant trauma at the hands of authorities in their countries of origin and may be distrustful of Government Services. It may also be the case that they simply do not know where to go to access housing services or what to do when they are evicted. It is also the case that humanitarian visa entrants have less material resources than other migrants. They may not be able to afford to sustain a tenancy in the private rental market where they may also face discrimination. In addition, residential tenancy agreements are complex contractual documents that people with limited English literacy skills may have difficulty understanding. This is not limited to asylum seekers and refugees.

Depending on which category of visa an asylum-seeker or refugee holds, their visa conditions may mean they cannot legally work, access social security, Medicare or government assistance to undertake education or training. This means refugees and asylum-seekers may be dependent on community support services, which are generally under-resourced.

Recently arrived migrants and refugees can be especially vulnerable to social isolation as a result of separation from family as well as language and cultural barriers. This is primarily due to the temporary and transitory nature of their accommodation and limited knowledge of our service delivery system.



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Culturally appropriate services

Homelessness service models are not always appropriate to the cultural norms of people from diverse backgrounds. For instance, many youth crisis accommodation models raise barriers for particular groups such as young Muslim women who are unable to share accommodation with young men. Discrimination on basis of age and race occurs in the private rental system and this is also a challenge.

Prior to resettling in Australia, many asylum seekers and refugees spend several years in transition; in refugee camps, as illegal immigrants in second countries, or as internally displaced peoples in their countries of origin. Exposure to conflict, war and transition trauma can limit people's ability to resettle in a safe country. Young people may arrive in Australia alone. Parents and guardians may be less able to support children as a result of their refugee experiences.

As for the total Australian population, domestic violence is a common cause of homelessness for NESB and migrant women and children. Women may be unaware of services, or lack the confidence, independent income or language skills to leave the violent situation and access services.

What needs to happen?

- Ensure access to social services for asylum-seekers and refugees;
- Provide enhanced support for recent migrants including those seeking asylum or awaiting confirmation of refugee status. Adequately resourced case-work models appear to be most effective in this context;
- Increase the provision of funding to homelessness services for interpreters and other multicultural services.
- Increase the provision of affordable housing. Homelessness Australia encourages all political parties to support policies and programs that will deliver an additional 220,000 affordable homes by 2020;
- Expand culturally appropriate domestic violence service delivery including funding for free-to-user translation services and dedicated bilingual workers in domestic violence services;
- Review spouse visas and active dissemination of clear guidelines for the support of women experiencing domestic violence who have been supported to enter Australia by violent or neglectful partners;
- Provide interpreter services in homelessness and other community services free of charge, rather than on a fee for service basis; and,
- Ensure that services are culturally friendly for people from CaLD backgrounds and new migrants.

References

Locked Out: Position Paper: Asylum Seeker Resource Centre
Refugee Council of Australia: Youth Homelessness Paper
The Use of Government Funded Specialist Homelessness Services 2009/10 AIHW NDCA Report

