



Homelessness and Women

More women than men seek assistance from the homeless service system each year. Almost 78 000 women sought help in 2007-08 – that's 61% of all people who were assisted.

Just over 44% of the estimated homeless population are women. Women are 40% of the primary homeless (people sleeping rough), 28% of the tertiary homeless (people living in insecure accommodation like boarding houses), and 48% of the secondary homeless (staying with family or friends).

One in every 49 young women between 18 and 19 stayed in a homeless assistance service last year. Young women are the people most likely to use homeless services.

The majority of people turned away from homeless assistance services are women and their children. One in two people who request immediate accommodation are turned away each night due to high demand and under-resourcing.

A majority of these people are women and their children. 66% of the children who accompanied an adult to a homeless service last year were in the care of a woman, usually their mother, escaping domestic violence.

Women's homelessness cannot be understood without reference to the situation of women in Australia more broadly. Women and female headed households are at increased risk of homelessness as a result of their greater exposure to violence, poverty and inequality. Domestic violence is the major cause of women's homelessness.

Family and domestic violence

Domestic violence can take the shape of physical, sexual, emotional, economic or spiritual abuse. In most cases the perpetrators of domestic violence are men. Almost half of the women with children staying in homeless assistance services are escaping domestic violence. One in four women escaping domestic violence are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are also more likely to have four or more children accompanying them to homeless services. One in every two women who approach services for women escaping domestic violence is turned away. Women in rural and remote areas have less access to assistance from services, family, friends and police which puts them at increased risk of homelessness or unsafe housing.

One in every five women over 15 in Australia will experience sexual violence and one in three women over 15 will experience physical violence. Young women who grow up in families affected by domestic violence are more likely to be in violent relationships as adults. Women also experience higher levels of poverty than men, have lower rates of employment and levels of pay. This inequality and experience of violence puts women and female headed households at increased risk of homelessness.

Single women

The homeless service system is also used by women who do not have children in their care. Like women with children, domestic violence is the most common reason single women seek support from homeless assistance services. Some of the experiences and needs of women without children in their care may be different to women with children. Some single women have children in the care and protection system or in the charge of family or friends and may need assistance to recover care. Homeless assistance services targeting single women receive the smallest proportion of national homeless service system funding, although they are a significant client group.

What needs to happen?

1. The homeless service system must be resourced to meet the needs of women including women with children.
2. Women and their children are the majority of the people being turned away from homeless assistance services.
3. Women in rural and remote areas escaping domestic violence require an increased range of safe housing options and services.
4. Homelessness assistance services for single women must be adequately resourced to meet the needs of women who do not have children in their care.
5. Centrelink crisis payments should be provided to women experiencing domestic violence who choose to stay in their homes when this is a safe option. Women are currently eligible for a crisis payment only if they leave their homes. A crisis payment would allow women who can stay in their homes safely to take security measures and repair any damage to their houses.



Creating a framework for ending homelessness

National Homeless Persons' Week



advocacy



diversity



policy



issues

events



services

networking



Homelessness Australia
Contact: Aileen Solowiej

T 02 6247 7744
E media@homelessnessaustralia.org.au
MB 0405 385 431
W www.homelessnessaustralia.org.au