



# Homelessness and Older Australians

**Older Australians experience homelessness. Seventeen per cent of homeless Australians are aged over 55 – that’s almost 18,000 people. People in this age group are also over-represented among those living in temporary and insecure housing and at risk of homelessness. There is a chronic shortage of age-appropriate and affordable housing for older people who have been homeless, and this problem is likely to grow worse with an ageing population placing increasing pressure on the aged care system and community services generally.**

## Older homeless people: the stats

- The 2006 Census count tells us that about 64 per cent of homeless older Australians are men, and 36 per cent are women.
- While they are 17 per cent of the homeless population, older Australians are under-represented among people assisted by homeless services: just 6% of the people who stayed in homeless assistance services in 2006-07 were over 55.
- People in this age group are over-represented among people living in boarding houses, and as marginal residents of caravan parks. A quarter of the people staying in boarding houses are over 55 and 42 per cent of marginal residents of caravan parks in this age bracket.
- People who are homeless for long periods of time often suffer from premature ageing, caused by the hardship of living rough. While they may be relatively young, they share a health and care needs profile with much older people



## Homeless assistance services

The older Australians who do access homeless assistance services are more likely to have been sleeping rough (in a car, in a tent, or on the street or in a squat) than any other age group. A study of older homeless people in the US, UK and Australia found the mean duration of previous homelessness among people over 50 to be 9.6 years.

There are many reasons why older Australians are less likely than other people experiencing homelessness to access support and accommodation services. These include high-turn away rates from services, caused by high demand and under-resourcing. Older Australians may suffer from health issues including physical frailty, mental health issues and entrenched isolation that make it difficult to seek assistance. People may feel a sense of shame and stigma about their situation. Older people may also feel out of place in homeless services, where the majority of residents are aged between 15 and 45, and may include families.



## Causes of homelessness

- Homelessness for this population is caused by a lack of affordable housing, including the shortage of public housing. The loss of private boarding houses in cities and caravans on Australia’s east coast has compounded the problem in recent years.
- A single person living on the full social security pension plus full rent assistance will receive just over \$385 per week, barely over a conservatively estimated poverty line of \$328 per week.
- The death of a spouse can mean that people’s income halves, and they may no longer be able to afford to pay their rent, which can lead to eviction.
- Older women escaping domestic violence are particularly vulnerable to homelessness, as they may have only a small amount of money from a settlement which is enough to preclude them from public housing but not enough to purchase or rent a home.
- This situation is compounded by the lack of appropriate care for older people with complex needs in the aged care system.

## What needs to happen?

Scale-up of innovative models that provide long-term aged care and housing services for people with histories of homelessness and marginal housing. This has been flagged as a priority in the Federal Government’s White Paper on Homelessness, which has allocated funds for this purpose.

The aged pension must be increased to a level that ensures people receiving this payment do not fall into poverty.



Homelessness  
Australia

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National Homeless Persons' Week



advocacy



Creating a framework for ending homelessness

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