

Homelessness and Indigenous Australians

Concepts of home and homelessness may vary across different communities in Australia. Homelessness in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities cannot be understood without reference to the legacy of colonisation and dispossession. A history of physical and cultural displacement leaves many Indigenous people at increased risk of homelessness. Concepts of country are fundamental to the culture and identity of many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Some may not identify as being homeless if they have a spiritual connection to the land they live on, regardless of the type of shelter they live in. Some Indigenous Australians may experience separation from their traditional land, family or kinship groups as spiritual homelessness.

Rates of homelessness

Indigenous Australians are over represented among Australia's homeless population. While they comprise 2.4 percent of the population, they represent 10 percent of the homeless. Rates of homelessness are much higher in rural areas where Indigenous people are sixty-nine percent of service users and in remote areas, where they are eighty-eight percent of service users.

Indigenous Australians are over-represented in every category of homelessness.

They represent:

3.8 per cent of people staying temporarily with friends or family;

6 percent of people living in insecure boarding house accommodation;

16% of rough sleepers;

20% of people living temporarily in homeless services. In WA, 34% of people in the homeless service system are Indigenous Australians: and in NT they represent 63% of homeless service users.



Public places in towns and cities

Many Indigenous people live in remote areas and have to travel to regional centres to access basic services. People who are in town temporarily may stay with family in overcrowded houses or in public places.

Some Indigenous Australians live in public places in urban areas. Some choose to live in these places either temporarily or permanently. Some may wish to return to country but require services that are only available in urban areas; others lack the means to travel home. Connection to country may mean some Indigenous people experience lack of access or a loss of control over their use of public places as homelessness. Indigenous Australians are also disproportionately affected by laws that govern public space.

Overcrowding and adequate housing

Many Indigenous people live in housing that does not meet their needs. Indigenous Australians six times more likely to live in overcrowded conditions than non-indigenous Australians. Overcrowding due to a shortage of housing is more severe in rural and remote areas. Living in overcrowded conditions can contribute to ill health and family violence and can disrupt education and work. Overcrowding is one of the biggest causes of "hidden homelessness" among Indigenous Australian communities.

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Family and domestic violence

- Family violence is the primary cause of homelessness for Indigenous Australians.
- Forty percent of the Indigenous people in homeless assistance services are women escaping domestic violence (compared to 35.5 for the general population).
- Almost a quarter (21%) of women seeking help from a homeless service as a result of domestic violence, are Indigenous women.
- Indigenous Australian women are more likely to be victims of domestic violence and to sustain more serious injuries than non indigenous women.
- Indigenous women living in rural and remote areas are more likely to be affected by domestic violence than the non indigenous population.



What needs to happen?

1. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander homelessness must be addressed as a central aspect of a holistic, comprehensive national action plan on homelessness.
2. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities must be supported to engage directly with local, state and territory and national government about culturally appropriate ways to effectively support and accommodate that community.
3. The supply of long-term, affordable and culturally appropriate housing must be increased, particularly in rural and remote areas of Australia.
4. More homeless assistance services must be managed and staffed by Indigenous Australians.
5. Government policies must focus on restoring traditional connection to country and reconnecting the Stolen Generation with family and culture in order to address the spiritual element of Indigenous homelessness.





Creating a framework for ending homelessness



networking



Dedicated team



events



diversity



policy



large audience



issues



services

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