



# Homelessness in Australia

Each day nearly 1 in every 200 Australians is homeless, without safe, secure or affordable housing. Last year, 105 000 Australians experienced homelessness. One in every 154 Australians sought help from a homeless assistance service and one in every 42 children aged under 4 slept in a homeless service. 23% of Australia's homeless are children – almost one in four homeless people is under 18. Of every 42 Australian children under four, one has experienced homelessness. Every day, half the people who request immediate accommodation from the homeless service system are turned away. Two in every 3 children who need support are also turned away, as are almost 80% percent of families.

## Counting Australia's Homeless population

The Australian Bureau of Statistics makes a special effort to include homeless Australians in the Census. In 2001 and 2006 the Census indicated that on any given night at least 100 000 Australians are homeless. The Census also tells us where homeless Australians are staying. Approximately:

- 44% are staying temporarily with relatives and friends,
- 20% percent are living in boarding housings and other temporary accommodation,
- 18% percent are sleeping rough on the streets of our cities and towns,
- 18% percent find a bed in the homeless service system.



## Australia's homeless service system

Since 1985, the Federal, State and Territory governments have funded Australia's homeless service system through the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP).

There are 1 300 homeless assistance services across Australia. Each year the homeless service system provides almost 3 million nights of accommodation. Homeless assistance services provide crisis and longer-term accommodation, assistance with living skills and financial management, counselling and advocacy. Specialist services work with specific groups of people (for instance young people or women escaping domestic violence). Agencies often work in partnership with other services to provide services including outreach and early intervention programs, advocacy, legal advice, medical services and meals.

Homeless assistance services are under increasing financial pressure as a result of higher levels of demand, insurance premiums, wage indexation and reporting requirements. As a result, agencies are forced to restructure to minimise staffing costs and lose skilled, experienced workers. Homelessness Australia estimates that maintaining services at existing level costs at least fifteen percent per year. Average annual funding increases from the Federal Government remain well below this level.

## Causes of homelessness

Homelessness can be caused by poverty, unemployment and by a critical shortage of affordable housing. Domestic violence is the single largest cause of homelessness in Australia. Homelessness can also be triggered by family breakdown, mental illness, sexual assault, addiction, financial difficulty, gambling and social isolation.

One in every 2 women with children in the homeless service system is escaping domestic violence. 22% of all people seeking help from assistance services say their homelessness is caused by domestic violence. Family breakdown is one of the primary reasons young men and women seek support from homeless assistance services. Many men who stay in homeless assistance services seek support due to financial difficulty, mental illness and/or drug and alcohol use. Couples with children are most often in the homeless service system because of eviction and financial difficulty. Children who experience homelessness are more likely to become homeless as adults and raise families who, in turn, may also become homeless.

## The impact of homelessness

Homelessness results in social and economic costs to individuals, families, communities and our nation. Homelessness forces people away from their family, friends and communities. It makes it difficult to maintain school or further study, and leaves people vulnerable to long-term unemployment and chronic ill-health. Homeless Australians are often excluded from participation in the social, recreational, cultural and economic life of our communities.

Homelessness means that every day almost 1 in every 200 Australians live without their most fundamental human rights.

## What needs to happen?

1. **A holistic, comprehensive national action plan to prevent and respond to homelessness in Australia.**
2. **Realistic and sustainable funding models for homeless assistance services.**
3. **Children need to be recognised as users of homeless assistance services in their own right, and services funded accordingly to provide appropriate care and support for minors. Although 1 in 3 of those who access homeless assistance services are children, this is not currently the case.**



## Creating a framework for ending homelessness



networking



Dedicated team



events



diversity



policy



large audience



issues



services

**Homelessness Australia**  
Contact: **Aileen Solowiej**

T 02 6247 7744  
E [media@homelessnessaustralia.org.au](mailto:media@homelessnessaustralia.org.au)  
MB 0405 385 431  
[www.homelessnessaustralia.org.au](http://www.homelessnessaustralia.org.au)



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