



Homelessness Australia
Creating a framework for ending homelessness

People tuned away from specialist homelessness services 2009/10

Sector Briefing

On 9 June 2011, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare released *People Turned Away from Government Funded Specialist Homelessness Services 2009/10*. In previous years the equivalent report has been entitled: *Demand for government funded specialist homelessness services*.

The report presents data on the proportion of people turned away from government funded specialist homelessness services over the course of 18-24 November 2009 and 5-11 May 2010. The report found that services were operating beyond capacity and were unable to completely meet demand for accommodation.

The report found that despite an increase in overall funding for specialist homelessness services of just over 9% and the fact that more services were funded in 2009/10 than in the previous financial year, services still did not have sufficient resources or beds to meet demand for accommodation.

The report found that services were having significant difficulties exiting people into medium term or long term stable accommodation. This is reflected in the high turn-away rates for people requiring new and immediate accommodation when compared with turn-away rates expressed as a proportion of overall demand (including those already accommodated by specialist homelessness services).

The report on the use of government funded specialist homelessness services 2009/10 that was released on 3 June found that the number of persons who received support from specialist homelessness services increased from 204,900 in 2008/09 to 219,800 in 2009/10.

Despite the 7% increase in the number of people who received support from specialist homelessness services the turn-away rate for people seeking new and immediate accommodation fell by 3.2% (see below). This coincides with the largest increase in funding for specialist homelessness services in many years and confirms what the sector has been arguing for many years; that inadequate resources are the main reason services are unable meet overall demand and that if base funding was increased significantly, the proportion of people turned away would significantly decrease.

Proportion of people turned away

The report found that:

- 81.7% of couples presenting with children requiring new and immediate accommodation were turned away (this was up from 80.2% in 2008/09).
- 69.2% of couples presenting without children requiring new and immediate accommodation were turned away (this was down from 75.4% in 2008/09).
- 67% of individuals presenting with accompanying children requiring new and immediate accommodation were turned away (this was down from 69.3% in 2008/09).
- 45% of individuals presenting without children requiring new and immediate accommodation were turned away (this was down from 50.4% in 2008/09).
- 58.3% of all people seeking accommodation were turned away (this was down from 61.5% in 2008/09)

Characteristics of people turned away

- 53.8% of people seeking new and immediate accommodation who were turned away were female, 46.2% were male.
- 55.8% of people seeking new and immediate accommodation who were turned away were aged < 20. 38.1% were aged 20-44 years, 5.5% were aged 55-64 and 0.6% were aged 65+. This is roughly consistent with previous years.
- 30.3% of people seeking new and immediate accommodation who were turned away were Indigenous (this is up from 28% in 2008/09).
- 89% of people seeking new and immediate accommodation who were turned away were born in Australia (this is higher than the proportion of the general population of which around 73% are Australian born).

What types of agencies were people most likely to be turned away from?

- People were most likely to be turned away from family or generalist services.
- People were least likely to be turned away from single men's and single women's agencies.

Why were they turned away?

- The most common reason why people were turned away was because the service had no spare beds. 85% were turned away because the service had no beds.

Factors affecting turn-away

The report identified a number of factors that may affect the level of unmet demand for accommodation in specialist homelessness services. These were:

- An undersupply of specialist homelessness accommodation.
- Patterns of accommodation use by different groups (i.e. families tend be accommodated for longer periods than single adults or young people).
- Lack of exit points, particularly affordable, accessible, safe or secure accommodation.
- Hidden need for accommodation that is masked by significant numbers of people who have given up on the idea that they will be able to be accommodated and hence do not even bother presenting to services.