



References

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Homelessness and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders



26,744 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders were experiencing homelessness on Census night

On Census night 2011 there were 105,237 people experiencing homelessness. Of these 26,744 were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanderⁱ.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians are **15 times more likely** to be staying in improvised dwellings, tents or sleeping rough than non-Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders

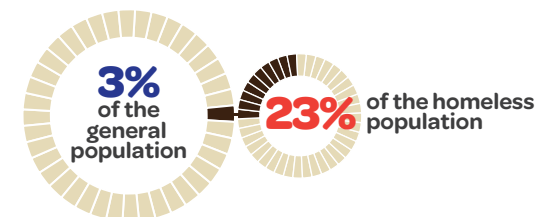


In 2014-15 23%ⁱⁱ of people supported by specialist homelessness services identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander including more than 1 in 4 children aged 0-10ⁱⁱⁱ.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are overrepresented amongst Australia's homeless population.



1 in 15 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people receive support from homelessness agencies each year



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Creating a framework for ending homelessness





Why is homelessness so high for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders?

The concept of home for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders can be different – in addition to physical homelessness, spiritual homelessness (separation from country, customary law and/or kin/skin groups) can be a significant issue for Indigenous Australians.

There is currently a shortage of more than 20,000 properties across Australia that are affordable and appropriate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people^{iv}. The shortage of larger culturally appropriate houses that can accommodate kin and increasingly children in kinship care arrangements means that high numbers of Aboriginal people are in severely overcrowded households.

Due to the remote locations of many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people there is often a lack of specialist homelessness services, less workers and substandard housing, which all contribute to severe overcrowding and other forms of homelessness in remote communities. Many people do not consider themselves homeless because they are staying on country and this may result in an undercount on Census night. Some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience discrimination in the housing market making it difficult to access private rental and even public housing^v.

Family and random violence are significant problems in some Aboriginal communities. Violence occurring within extended kin groups – called “feuding” – can lead to the victimised household becoming homeless. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are 35 times more likely to experience family violence than non Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. They can readily become homeless as a result of this violence^{vi}.

There is some evidence that ‘couch surfing’ is commonplace amongst young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. Some young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men experience homelessness if they are lured to major cities with the prospect of selection on the rookie lists of Aussie Rules and League clubs.

If this does not happen, young men often lack the resources to either secure housing in cities or pay for transport back to country^{viii}.



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Issues of housing and homelessness for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders people

One of the issues facing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is the need for housing that caters to their social and cultural needs. This includes the need to ensure that the Australian Government builds the capacity of Aboriginal Community Controlled Housing Organisations (ACCHOs) in the same way it is seeking to do with mainstream community housing providers.

To Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people the concept of kin (extended family) is very important and not usually taken into account when houses are designed. It is not uncommon for large numbers of extended family members to live the same house. Indeed for most Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people it is not so much a cultural ‘obligation’ as a natural response to the needs of people from skin groups and kinship networks. This can place the household under pressure and cause overcrowding. Overcrowding for extended periods may jeopardise rental arrangements, leading to the eviction of residents.

Temporal mobility can also lead to overcrowding as some Aboriginal people can experience homelessness when they travel to and from country to utilise health services, attend cultural gatherings or to be with kin in the event of a

death in the skin group (sorry business). This can place pressure on services and kin and has led to the development of new transitional accommodation models to address the issue.

In addition, the same factors that can give rise to increased risk of homelessness for other Australians (family violence, mental illness, unaffordable rental housing, and long social housing waiting lists) all contribute to high rates of homelessness amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Family homelessness is a significant problem in Australia and one that may be exacerbated for Indigenous families because they are often larger, meaning that the need for four and five bedroom houses is greater^{ix}. There is a shortage of larger sized houses both in social housing and in the private rental market.

