



References

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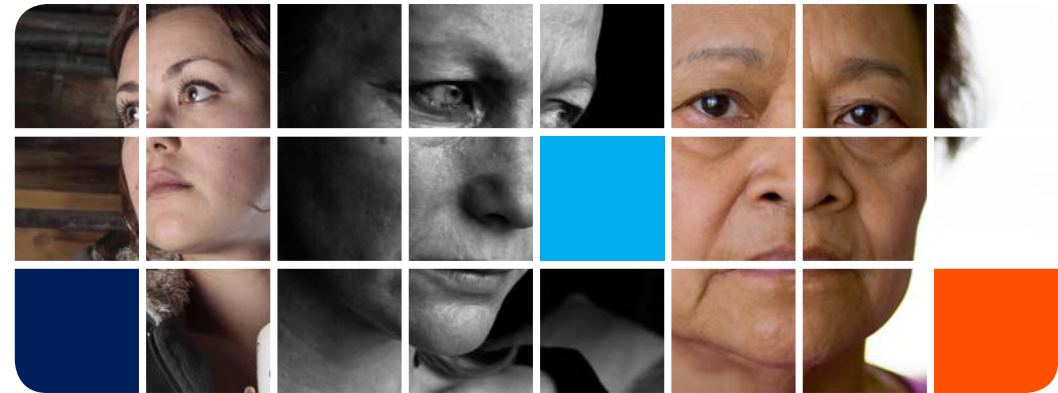
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Homelessness Australia

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Homelessness and Women



45,813 women

were experiencing homelessness on Census night

There are over **2,200 women** in improvised dwellings, tents or sleeping out



There were around **85,000 women** supported by specialist homelessness services in the past year

On Census night 2011 there were 105,237 people experiencing homelessness, with 45,813 or 44% of these womenⁱ.

While more males were homeless on Census night, 59% of people supported by specialist homelessness services are femaleⁱⁱ.

Women aged 18-34 were the group most likely to access specialist homelessness services with 37% of all clientsⁱⁱⁱ.

Each year 1 in 42 women aged 15-24 will access a specialist homelessness service^{iv}.



Homelessness Australia

Creating a framework for ending homelessness





Why are women at risk?

All Australians are affected by the shortage of affordable and available rental housing but women, particularly those reliant on either part-time wages/salaries or parenting payment (single), may be more at risk than men. One of the main reasons is related to gender-based economic/financial inequality. On the whole, women earn less income than men^v.

Women are more likely to take leave from the workforce (due to caring responsibilities) and to return to paid employment on a part-time or casual basis. 75% of part-time workers in Australia are women^{vi}. Returning to the workforce after extended leave can also be difficult for women – a third of women returning to the workforce after maternity leave believe they work for non-‘family-friendly’ organisations resulting in double the likelihood of psychological distress^{vii}.

Domestic and family violence

Women are more likely to be victims of domestic and family violence^{viii}, and because of this threat to their safety women (and children) are forced, or make decisions to leave their home. Over a third of women over the age of 15 have experienced physical, psychological and/or sexual violence at the hands of a current or former partner^{ix}.

Domestic and family violence is the number one reason why people present to

specialist homeless services, with 55% of female clients citing this reason and a total of 25% of all clients^x.

Vulnerable groups of women

■ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women

The culture of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians has an impact on their ability to access homelessness services. The closeness and breadth of kinship groups can prevent women from accessing counselling, legal and medical support services, particularly in remote communities and regional locations.

Aboriginal women may also face discrimination in the housing market or may be unable to find housing that is appropriate to their needs due to higher birth rates^{xi} and the need for more four or five bedroom homes which are in short supply both in social housing and private rental.

There are many issues in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities that can lead to homelessness including factors relating to alcohol and substance use, living in remote communities and social stressors. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are also 35 times more likely to be victims of domestic violence^{xii}.

■ Older women

Older single women may be forced out the workforce early, have insufficient



superannuation/ savings to fund the cost of living, face discrimination in the housing market, experience the death of an income earning spouse, or poor health or serious illness^{xiii}.

■ Women with a mental illness

Young women may be particularly vulnerable to housing insecurity and homelessness as a result of mental illness. There is also evidence that people living with mental illness are overrepresented in the population of people experiencing homelessness^{xiv}.

■ Women with a disability

Women with disabilities are over-represented in the main factors that increase the risk of homelessness, including: lack of affordable, secure housing; unemployment and inadequate income; and domestic and family violence^{xv}.

■ Women in rural and remote locations

According to specialist homelessness services collection data, the proportion of female clients accessing services increases with remoteness^{xvi}.

For both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in remote and rural areas, access to independent services can be limited due to their geographical isolation and the limited availability of resources in local areas.

■ Women who are culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD)

Specialist homelessness services data indicates that the proportion of people born overseas who are supported by services is significantly lower than the proportion of people born overseas in the general population^{xvii}. This should not be used to infer that rates of homelessness amongst people born overseas are significantly lower than for people born in Australia and in any case it is not a useful measure of homelessness amongst women from CALD backgrounds.

Limited access to and knowledge of how to navigate the complex housing system has been posited as a factor placing people from CALD backgrounds at increased risk of homelessness, in particular young humanitarian entrants^{xviii}.

Feedback from the homelessness sector has shown that women from CALD backgrounds are an emerging group in the homelessness population, particularly in relation to domestic and family violence.

