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## **Occasional Paper**

# **Counting the Homeless**

**Implications for Policy Development**

**1996**



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Issue

**Occasional paper**

# **Counting the Homeless**

## **Implications for Policy Development**

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## PREFACE

There can be no meaningful public debate about the best policy responses to assist homeless people, unless there is reliable information on the number of homeless people in the community. This requires an operational definition of homelessness which can be easily measured, and credible data on the population identified by the definition. The 1996 Census targeted Australia's homeless population with a special enumeration strategy, using the cultural definition of homelessness proposed by Chamberlain and MacKenzie (1992).

This monograph reports the main findings from the project. Chapter 1 discusses what is meant by 'homelessness' and Chapter 2 focuses on methodological issues. Chapter 3 counts the number of homeless people on census night and Chapter 4 examines the number of homeless households. Chapter 5 focuses on the temporal characteristics of the population and Chapter 6 examines the geographical spread of homeless people. Finally, Chapter 7 distils seven key issues for public discussion.

I would like to thank colleagues in the Australian Bureau of Statistics who worked on the project with me. I also owe a special debt to David MacKenzie of RMIT University. We designed the project together and he made detailed comments on an earlier draft of the manuscript. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) provided the SAAP data used in the report. I thank Hongyan Wang, Rose Karmal and Colin Farlow from the AIHW for their assistance.

Chris Chamberlain  
Monash University,  
October 1999.

## MAIN FINDINGS

### 1 Definition of Homelessness: 1996 Census

There can be no meaningful public debate about the best policy responses to assist homeless people, unless there is reliable information on the number of homeless people in the community. This requires an operational definition of homelessness which can be easily measured, and credible data on the population identified by the definition.

The 1996 Census used the cultural definition of homelessness proposed by Chamberlain and MacKenzie (1992). It identifies three segments in the homeless population:

#### *Primary homelessness*

People without conventional accommodation, such as people living on the streets, sleeping in parks, squatting in derelict buildings, or using cars or railway carriages for temporary shelter.

#### *Secondary homelessness*

People who move frequently from one form of temporary shelter to another. It covers: people using emergency accommodation (such as hostels for the homeless or night shelters); teenagers staying in youth refuges; women and children escaping domestic violence (staying in women's refuges); people residing temporarily with other families (because they have no accommodation of their own); and those using boarding houses on an occasional or intermittent basis.

#### *Tertiary homelessness*

People who live in boarding houses on a medium to long-term basis. Residents of private boarding houses do not have a separate bedroom and living room; they do not have kitchen and bathroom facilities of their own; their accommodation is not self-contained; and they do not have security of tenure provided by a lease.

The definition of homelessness contained in the *Supported Accommodation Assistance Act (1994)* states that:

A person is homeless if, and only if, he or she has inadequate access to safe and secure housing. A person is taken to have inadequate access to safe and secure housing if the only housing to which the person has access:

- (a) damages, or is likely to damage, the person's health; or
- (b) threatens the person's safety; or
- (c) marginalises the person through failing to provide access to:
  - (i) adequate personal amenities; or
  - (ii) the economic and social support that a home normally affords; or
- (d) places the person in circumstances which threaten or adversely affect the adequacy, safety, security and affordability of that housing.

The SAAP definition includes: people who are unhappy with their accommodation (for example, it could damage their health or is too expensive); people who are at imminent risk of homelessness (because of domestic violence or threat of eviction); as well as people who are actually homeless. The SAAP definition is a 'service delivery' definition of homelessness, because it recognises that in practical service delivery terms, SAAP must be able to assist those who are about to become homeless (or believe that they are at risk), as well as those who are actually homeless. The census used a definition of homelessness which excluded people in conventional accommodation (house or flat) who were unhappy with that accommodation or might be 'at risk' of homelessness. However, the census definition included people in boarding houses, some of whom would not be considered 'homeless' under the SAAP definition—because some people think of their single rooms as 'home'.

## **2 Special Enumeration Strategy**

The 1996 census was the first census to target Australia's homeless population with a special enumeration strategy. This is outlined in Chapter 2. The analysis is supplemented by information from the National SAAP Data Collection. This gathers information on all persons accommodated in services funded under the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP), such as hostels, refuges and other types of emergency accommodation. Both the census and the National SAAP Data Collection agency include people who are accommodated in a SAAP service on census night as part of the homeless population.

## **3 Census Count: Individuals**

Chapter 3 explains how a count of the homeless population on census night is carried out, including an estimate for undercounting. Table 1 shows that there were 105,300 homeless people across Australia on census night. Many of them move frequently from one form of temporary shelter to another (McCaughy 1992; Hanover Welfare Services 1995; Chamberlain and MacKenzie 1998, Ch. 2; Bartholomew 1999, Ch. 6). However, on census night nearly half (48,500 people) were staying temporarily with other households; one-fifth (20,600 individuals) were in improvised dwellings, tents or sleeping out. Another 23,300 people (22 per cent) were staying in boarding houses on either a short-term or long-term basis. Finally, 12,900 people (12 per cent) were staying in accommodation funded under the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP), such as hostels, refuges, night shelters and other types of emergency accommodation.

**Table 1:** Number of persons in different sectors of the homeless population, census night 1996 (final figures)

	Enumerated	Estimated	Total
Boarding houses	23,299		23,299
SAAP accommodation	12,926		12,926
Friends and relatives	35,500	13,000	48,500
Improvised dwellings, sleepers out	19,579	1,000	20,579
	<b>91,304</b>	<b>14,000</b>	<b>105,304</b>

#### **4 Census Count: Households**

Chapter 4 concludes that there were 73,000 households in the homeless population on census night: 76 per cent were single person households (about 55,000 people); 14 per cent were couples; and 10 per cent were families. There were 7,200 families on census night, but these families included 28,000 people (10,752 parents and 16,928 children = 27,680). Families constitute 10 per cent of homeless households, but they include 26 per cent of homeless people.

#### **5 Duration of Homelessness**

On census night approximately 70 per cent of homeless people had been without secure accommodation for six months or longer (Chapter 5), including a substantial number who had been homeless for more than a year. Between 15 and 20 per cent had been homeless for a few months; and about 10 to 15 per cent of people had come into the population recently (a few weeks of homelessness).

#### **6 State and Territory Variation**

It is usually assumed that the homeless population is fairly evenly spread across the country and SAAP funding is allocated on a population *pro rata* basis. Chapter 6 concludes that this assumption is incorrect.

Table 2 shows that there were between 40 and 50 homeless people per 10,000 of the population in the four 'Southern States': Victoria (41.0 per 10,000), Tasmania (43.9), South Australia (48.1) and New South Wales (49.4). Numbers ranged from just over 2,000 in Tasmania to 29,600 in New South Wales.

**Table 2:** Number of homeless people and rate of homelessness per 10,000 of the population in New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania

	NSW	Vic.	SA	Tas.
Number of homeless people	29,608	17,840	6,837	2,014
Rate per 10,000 of the population	49.4	41.0	48.1	43.9

In Western Australia and Queensland, there were between 70 and 80 homeless people per 10,000 of the population—roughly twice the rate in the ‘Southern States’ (Table 3). There were 12,250 homeless people in Western Australia compared with 6,840 in South Australia, although the two states have a similar population. There were 25,650 homeless people in Queensland compared with 17,840 in Victoria, although Victoria has a million more people than Queensland.

**Table 3:** Number of homeless people and rate of homelessness per 10,000 of the population in Western Australia and Queensland

	WA	Qld
Number of homeless people	12,252	25,649
Rate per 10,000 of the population	71.5	77.3

The Northern Territory had the highest rate of homelessness in the country (523 per 10,000 people) (9,900 homeless people), largely due to indigenous people living in improvised dwellings. The Australian Capital Territory had the lowest rate of homelessness (40.3 per 10,000) (1,200 homeless people).

## 7 Are Most Homeless People in SAAP?

The uneven geographical spread of the homeless population affects the proportion of homeless people accommodated in SAAP on census night. There are also marked differences in how governments appear to spend SAAP money, and this also affects the proportion of homeless people in SAAP. Chapter 6 compares the total number of people accommodated in SAAP on census night with the total number of people who were homeless as measured by the census definition.

The Australian Capital Territory had the lowest rate of homelessness in the country (40.3 per 10,000 of the population). This covered one per cent of homeless people, but the ACT received three per cent of SAAP funding. In Canberra, 40 per cent of homeless people were in SAAP on census night (Table 4).

**Table 4:** Percentage of the homeless population in SAAP accommodation, state and territory comparisons

	ACT	Vic.	SA	Tas.	NSW	Qld	WA	NT
Percentage in SAAP	40	19	22	19	11	9	11	2

In Victoria, Tasmania and South Australia the rate of homelessness was between 40 and 50 per 10,000 of the population. One-fifth (20 per cent) of the homeless were in SAAP in these states.

In Queensland, Western Australia and New South Wales the proportion in SAAP drops to 10 per cent. Queensland had 24 per cent of all homeless people, but it attracted only 14 per cent of SAAP funds. Western Australia had 12 per cent of homeless people, but it received nine per cent of SAAP funds. However, the situation in New South Wales is different. The state had a similar rate of homelessness to Victoria, South Australia, Tasmania and the ACT. However, in NSW 11 per cent of homeless people were in SAAP on census night.

A comparison with Queensland is instructive. New South Wales had 29,600 homeless people and Queensland had 25,650. New South Wales got 36 per cent of SAAP funding and Queensland got 14 per cent. In Queensland there were 2,260 people in SAAP on census night, whereas in New South Wales there were 3,320.

## **8 Do Most SAAP Clients Move to Independent Accommodation?**

One of the goals of the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program is to help homeless people to establish a capacity to live independently (National Evaluation of SAAP 1999, p. 2). There has been a debate about the capacity of SAAP to achieve this goal (Chesterman 1988; National Evaluation Steering Committee 1993; Fopp 1996). The research team carrying out the 1998 National Evaluation of SAAP (National Evaluation of SAAP 1999, p. xviii) reported that 'achieving independent living is difficult for many SAAP clients' and that most clients were either unemployed or not in the labour force when they left SAAP.

Table 5 shows that 26 per cent of SAAP clients moved into private rental accommodation when they left SAAP in 1996–97. Eleven per cent went to public housing and three per cent went to owner occupied homes. Overall, 40 per cent of SAAP clients moved to independent accommodation.

Forty-three per cent of SAAP clients were still homeless: 18 per cent had gone to another SAAP service; 10 per cent were staying with someone rent free; five per cent were in institutions (hospital, the 'detox' etc); four per cent had gone to a boarding house; and two per cent had no accommodation (streets/squats). Another 17 per cent look marginal: 13 per cent were boarding with another family (often short-term); and four per cent were renting a caravan. Nearly everyone (90 per cent) in these groups was unemployed or outside of the labour force. They had not moved on to 'independent living'.

The goal of the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program is to help homeless people to establish a capacity to live independently. This appears to be achieved for about 40 per cent of people who stay in SAAP accommodation.

**Table 5:** Client's type of housing after support in SAAP accommodation (final support period), 1996–97

All Clients (N=20,933)	
	%
<b>Independent Housing</b>	
Private rental	26
Public housing	11
Owner occupied	3
	} 40
<b>Marginal Accommodation</b>	
Boarding with another household	13
Renting a caravan	4
	} 17
<b>Homeless</b>	
SAAP service	18
Friend's place (rent free)	10
Boarding house	4
Institution ('detox', psychiatric hospital etc.)	5
Streets/squat	2
Other	4
	} 43
100	

## 9 Summary

The purpose of this study was to see whether it was possible to produce a credible estimate of the homeless population using ABS census data. It has proved possible.

There were 105,000 homeless people across Australia on census night. Many of them move frequently from one form of temporary shelter to another (McCaughey 1992; Hanover Welfare Services 1995; Chamberlain and MacKenzie 1998, Ch. 2; Bartholomew 1999, Ch. 6), and between 60 and 70 per cent of them had been homeless for six months or longer at that time. However, nearly half (46 per cent) were staying temporarily with other households on census night; one-fifth (20 per cent) were in improvised dwellings, tents or sleeping out; and another one-fifth (22 per cent) were staying in boarding houses. Twelve per cent were in SAAP.

Over a year, just over 100,000 people stay in SAAP accommodation for short periods of time; but many people who exit from SAAP go to other sectors of the homeless population, or they 'move around the system'. Finally, the distribution of SAAP services is not consonant with the spread of the homeless population as measured by the census definition. This is a result which raises policy and planning issues for SAAP.

There can be no meaningful public debate about the best policy responses to assist homeless people, unless there is: reliable information on the number of homeless people in the community; the characteristics of the population (how many families with children, how many people on their own, the number of people with a long-term problem, and so forth); and information on the geographical spread of the population. This monograph attempts to answer these questions, using data from the 1996 Census of Population and Housing. It is supplemented by information from the National SAAP Data Collection. This gathers information on all persons accommodated in services funded under the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP), such as hostels, refuges and other types of emergency accommodation<sup>1</sup>.

Until recently, it was not possible to begin answering questions about the number of homeless people in Australia, because there was no agreement on who should be included in the homeless population. For example, when Sackville (1976) prepared a report on *Homeless People and the Law* for Professor Henderson's Commission of Inquiry into Poverty, he stated that there was 'no universally accepted definition of the homeless population' (1976, p. 5). Ten years later, Field (1988, p. 11) noted:

The questions—What is homelessness? Who are the homeless?—are I think simply unanswerable.

However, at the end of the 1990s there is an emerging agreement about how homelessness should be defined in an Australian context (House of Representatives 1995; Northwood 1997; Department of Health and Family Services 1997). It is based on the theoretical arguments advanced by Chamberlain and MacKenzie (1992).

### 1.1 Theorising Homelessness

Chamberlain and MacKenzie (1992) argue that 'homelessness' and 'inadequate housing' are socially constructed, cultural concepts that only make sense in a particular community at a given historical period. In a society where the vast majority of the population live in mud huts, the community standard will be that mud huts constitute adequate accommodation (Watson 1986, p. 10). In order to define homelessness, it is necessary to identify the shared community standards about the minimum housing that people have the right to expect in order to live according to the conventions and expectations of a particular culture.

Community standards are usually embedded in the housing practices of a society. These identify the conventions and cultural expectations of the community in an objective sense, and will be recognised by most people because they accord with what they see around them. As Professor Townsend (1979, p. 51) suggests:

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<sup>1</sup> For a review of the Australian literature on homelessness, see: Burke (1998).

A population comes to expect to live in particular types of homes ... Their environment ... create(s) their needs in an objective as well as a subjective sense.

In Australia, the vast majority of the population live in suburban houses or self-contained flats, and there is a widespread view that home ownership is the most desirable form of tenure (Kemeny 1983, p. 1; Hayward 1992, p. 1). Most people evidently believe that an independent person or couple should be able to expect at least a room to sleep in, a room to live in, kitchen and bathroom facilities of their own, and an element of security of tenure—because that is the minimum accommodation that most people achieve who rent in the private market. The minimum standard is equivalent to a small rented flat, and this is significantly below the culturally desired option of an owner occupied house.

The 'minimum community standard' is not specified in any formal regulations, although existing housing regulations may imply a minimum standard. Rather, it is a cultural construct which identifies the lower boundary of a particular cultural domain and identifies the standards embodied in current housing practices. It provides a benchmark for assessing 'homelessness' and 'inadequate housing' in the contemporary context.

However, the benchmark cannot be used in a purely mechanistic way, and its application must be sensitive to cultural meaning systems. For example, there are a number of institutional settings where people do not have the minimum level of accommodation identified by the community standard, but in cultural terms they would not be considered part of the homeless population. This includes people living in seminaries, elderly people living in nursing homes, students in university halls of residence, people in prison, and so forth.

While it is true that housing and homelessness constitute a continuum of circumstances, there are four broad 'groups' which fall below the community standard. This results in a three tiered model of the homeless population—'primary', 'secondary' and 'tertiary' homelessness—and a group who are best identified as 'marginally housed'. The model is shown in Figure 1.1.

**Figure 1.1** A model of homelessness based on shared community standards embodied in current housing practices

**Minimum community standard**—equivalent to a small rented flat with a bedroom, living room, kitchen & bathroom

<p><b>Culturally recognised exceptions:</b> where it is inappropriate to apply the minimum standard—e.g. seminaries, gaols, student halls of residence etc.</p>	<p><b>Marginally housed:</b> people in housing situations close to the minimum standard</p>
	<p><b>Tertiary homelessness:</b> people living in single rooms in private boarding houses—without their own bathroom, kitchen or security of tenure</p>
	<p><b>Secondary homelessness:</b> people moving between various forms of temporary shelter including: friends, emergency accommodation, youth refuges, hostels and boarding houses</p>
	<p><b>Primary homelessness:</b> people without conventional accommodation (living on the streets, in deserted buildings, improvised dwellings, under bridges, in parks etc.)</p>

Source: Chamberlain and MacKenzie 1992, p. 291

*Primary homelessness* is the least contentious category because it accords with the common sense assumption that homelessness is the same as ‘rooflessness’. It includes all people without conventional accommodation, such as people living on the streets, sleeping in parks, squatting in derelict buildings, or using cars or railway carriages for temporary shelter. In the census, people in these circumstances are recorded under the category ‘improvised dwellings, tents and sleepers out’.

*Secondary homelessness* includes people who move frequently from one form of temporary shelter to another. It covers: people using emergency accommodation (such as hostels for the homeless or night shelters); teenagers staying in youth refuges; women and children escaping domestic violence (staying in women’s refuges); people residing temporarily with other families (because they have no accommodation of their own); and those using boarding houses on an occasional or intermittent basis.

*Tertiary homelessness* refers to people who live in boarding houses on a medium to long-term basis. Residents of private boarding houses do not have a separate bedroom and living room; they do not have kitchen and bathroom facilities of their own; their accommodation is not self-contained; and they do not have security of tenure provided by a lease. They are homeless because their accommodation is inferior to the characteristics identified in the community standard.

The *marginally housed* refers to people in accommodation situations which are only slightly below the community norm. This category could include: a couple living in a single room with their own kitchen and bathroom, but without a separate room for sleeping; or a family staying with relatives on a long-term basis (doubling up); or a couple renting a caravan without security of tenure. There will be some cases on the margins which are difficult to classify, and some groups—such as families with children—may be seen as particularly in need of welfare support.

Finally, it is important to remember that homeless people often move around. Someone may stay in a boarding house for a few weeks, then move to a friend's place, then to a SAAP service, and so on (McCaughey 1992; Hanover Welfare Services 1995; Chamberlain and MacKenzie 1998, Ch. 2; Bartholomew 1999, Ch. 6). This means that people may show up in a particular segment of the homeless population on census night, but in practice they move between different forms of temporary accommodation.

## 1.2 Definitions Serve Different Purposes

The range of definitions in the literature can now be explained. It is a consequence of the fact that different groups formulate operational definitions which are needed in particular contexts. These definitions are rarely informed theoretically, but they serve a range of practical purposes. They come in two main forms.

First, there are *service delivery definitions*. Government departments often develop these definitions in order to decide who may have access to particular benefits. Service delivery definitions are usually complex and they specify exactly which criteria have to be fulfilled for a person to be eligible for a particular welfare benefit, such as the youth allowance at the homeless rate. They are about who is deemed eligible for particular benefits.

One important example of a service delivery definition is contained in the *Supported Accommodation Assistance Act (1994)*:

A person is homeless if, and only if, he or she has inadequate access to safe and secure housing. A person is taken to have inadequate access to safe and secure housing if the only housing to which the person has access:

- (a) damages, or is likely to damage, the person's health; or
- (b) threatens the person's safety; or
- (c) marginalises the person through failing to provide access to:
  - (i) adequate personal amenities; or
  - (ii) the economic and social support that a home normally affords; or
- (d) places the person in circumstances which threaten or adversely affect the adequacy, safety, security and affordability of that housing.

This definition includes: people who are unhappy with their accommodation (for example, it could damage their health or is too expensive); people who are at imminent risk of homelessness (because of domestic violence or threat of eviction); as well as people who are actually homeless. It is not possible to use census data to enumerate the homeless population using this definition, because the census does not inquire whether people believe that they have 'inadequate access to safe and secure housing'. The SAAP definition is a service delivery definition which recognises that in practical service delivery terms, SAAP must be able to assist those who are about to become homeless (or believe that they are at risk), as well as those who are actually homeless. The SAAP definition provides a mandate for the program's major activities and this is its over-riding purpose.

Second, there are *advocacy definitions*. These are developed by welfare agencies to draw the community's attention to the plight of homeless people. They are usually couched in broader terms than the cultural definition proposed above. They often lack specificity and they are primarily designed to point out that certain sections of the population are needy:

A homeless person is without a conventional home ... She/he is often cut off from the support of relatives and friends, she/he has few independent resources and often has no immediate means and in some cases, little future prospects of self-support. (Council to Homeless Persons, Victoria).

Advocacy definitions often include statements about need. It is also common for advocacy definitions to claim that their constituents are homeless if they find their accommodation unsatisfactory (see, for example: National Youth Coalition for Housing 1985, 1997; Nunan and Johns 1996).

From a policy point of view, it is unwise to use an individual's subjective assessment of their situation as 'the criterion' by which to establish whether or not they are homeless. A formerly wealthy family living in a Housing Commission flat may consider it 'totally inadequate', whereas another family will consider it 'home'. This does not mean that one family is 'housed' and the other is 'homeless'.

Similarly, poor white families living in improvised dwellings are homeless. But in some parts of Northern Australia, Indigenous people live in improvised dwellings (steel frame 'tarp like' structures), and pursue 'traditional lifestyles', often moving fairly regularly from one camp site to another (Keys Young 1998). Should one argue that Indigenous Australians in these circumstances are adequately housed (because they live a semi-nomadic lifestyle), whereas white families in similar circumstances are 'homeless'? The policy implications in the two situations may be different (Keys Young 1998), but it would be publicly unacceptable for any government to conclude that homelessness depends on people's perceptions.

Different groups formulate operational definitions which they believe are needed in particular contexts, but this does not mean that all definitions are equally plausible, or that homelessness is just a matter of opinion. The purpose of theorising a cultural definition is to provide a 'higher order' definition, which is grounded in the housing practices that are all around us. The cultural definition is a sensitising concept that provides a benchmark for thinking about the various operational definitions used in particular contexts.

### **1.3 Emerging Consensus**

There has been a long debate about the definition of homelessness in Australia, but there is now an emerging consensus around the idea of 'primary', 'secondary' and 'tertiary' homelessness. A number of researchers have endorsed variants of this position (Neil and Fopp 1992; Burke 1993; Charman, McClelland, Montague and Sully 1997; Driscoll and Wood 1998).

Most importantly, the House of Representatives (1995) *Report on Aspects of Youth Homelessness* used similar categories to frame its 'recommendations relating to public policy initiatives' (1995, p. 26), although it added that 'this definition is not necessarily appropriate for targeting benefits and programs, but (it) does reflect an emerging community consensus' (1995, p.26). The Australian Bureau of Statistics also used the three tier definition for its strategy to improve the enumeration of homeless people in the 1996 census (Northwood 1997).

The cultural definition was also used in another project to enumerate the homeless population. This was commissioned by the former Commonwealth Department of Health and Family Services (now the Department of Family and Community Services), as part of the 1998 National Evaluation of the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP).

The SAAP program is widely recognised as Australia's flagship program for assisting homeless people. It is jointly funded by the Commonwealth, State and Territory governments. The Program provides funds to non-government organisations in order to provide accommodation and related support services to homeless people. The recurrent allocation was \$220 million in the 1996-97 financial year, and there were just under 1,200 services across the country.

### **1.4 Two Ways of Counting**

There are two ways of counting the homeless population and the relationship between them is not widely understood (Freeman and Hall 1987; Jencks 1994, Ch. 2). The first is a census count which gives the number of homeless people on a given night. These are also known as 'point in time' estimates. The second method examines the number of people who become homeless over a year. These are called 'cumulative annual totals' or 'annual counts', and welfare agencies usually gather statistics in this way.

A cumulative annual total may be many times larger than a census figure, if most people are homeless for a short period of time. For example, if 120,000 people become homeless this year, and each person remains homeless for one month, then a census count will reveal 10,000 homeless people on a typical night ( $120,000 \times 1/12 = 10,000$ ). This is not widely understood.

Advocates usually assume that the bigger the number, the stronger the claim, and that a higher number puts more pressure on those in power to take action. However, as the annual figure increasingly diverges from the census figure, there is a sense in which homelessness becomes *less serious*, especially if the census figure is *low* and the cumulative annual total is *high*. Two examples will illustrate this point.

Let us suppose that 30,000 Australians become homeless this year and all of them are homeless for 12 months. The cumulative annual total will be 30,000, and the census count will be 30,000 ( $30,000 \times 12/12 = 30,000$ ). This is a desperate situation where there are 30,000 chronically homeless people who are part of an underclass from which they have little chance of escaping.

Now let us suppose that 260,000 Australians become homeless this year, but each one returns to secure accommodation after two weeks. The cumulative annual total will be 260,000, but the census count will reveal 10,000 homeless people ( $260,000 \times 2/52 = 10,000$ ), because most people experience a short period of homelessness. The fact that the cumulative annual total is 260,000 in this example should have no bearing on policy decisions. On a typical night, there will be fewer people requiring assistance than in the previous example (10,000 compared with 30,000), and it will be much easier to help them—because no-one has an intractable problem.

From the point of view of policy makers, the important figure is always the census count combined with information on the length of time that people have been homeless. The cumulative annual total is of little intrinsic significance. The census figure will usually be lower because people move in and out of homelessness—but it is the census figure which is important.

The main reason for attempting to count the annual figure is to estimate the temporal characteristics of the population on census night. For example, if 120,000 become homeless this year but a census count reveals 30,000, then each person is probably homeless for about three months ( $120,000 \times 3/12 = 30,000$ ). The relationship between the annual figure and the census figure is mediated by the length of time that people remain in the homeless population. However, for policy purposes a census count is always more important than a cumulative annual total. This is the fundamental point informing the analysis which follows.

**2.1 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Project**

The ABS project focused on using data from the 1996 Census of Population and Housing, combined with data from the National SAAP Data Collection. The 1996 census was the first census to target Australia's homeless population with a special enumeration strategy.

The census distinguishes between persons who are resident in private dwellings and non-private dwellings. A private dwelling is usually a house or a flat in a block. Non-private dwellings provide communal or transitory types of accommodation. They include hotels, motels, prisons, religious and charitable institutions, defence establishments, hospitals and other communal dwellings. Two categories are relevant to counting the homeless population. They are 'Boarding House, Private Hotel' and 'Hostels for the Homeless, Night Shelter, Refuge'.

In order to identify homeless people who are staying temporarily with friends or relatives on census night, the ABS instituted an important change to the census in 1996. Since 1976 there has been a question which asked, 'What is the person's usual address?' However, prior to 1996 it included the instruction that if a respondent had 'no usual residence', then they should tick 'this address'—which meant they were enumerated 'at home'. More than 2,000 people overrode this instruction in 1991 and wrote 'no usual address' (Northwood 1997, p. 8). In 1996, an instruction was included that if a person had no usual address, then they should write 'no usual address'. This makes it possible to count homeless people staying temporarily with other families.

In 1991, the census included a dwelling structure category 'improvised home, campers out'. However, it was not possible to distinguish between homeless people with nowhere to go and those who were taking camping holidays. In 1996, the category was changed to 'improvised home, tent, sleepers out'. According to Northwood (1997, p. 8), the motivation for this change was to 'adopt a terminology which was more appropriate to homeless people than in the 1991 category of 'improvised home, campers out''.

However, the census is likely to undercount street people and those squatting in derelict buildings (primary homelessness), because they often move frequently from one form of temporary shelter to another, and they 'have an interest in concealing where they sleep ... (for fear of) being harassed or victimised' (Peroff 1987, p. 39). In 1996, the ABS encouraged field managers to take appropriate action to identify the street population in their community. This could include strategies such as: visiting locations where street people were known to 'hang out'; census staff handing out refreshments to encourage people to fill in forms; or census staff travelling with mobile food vans which provide services for homeless people.

Northwood (1997) has reviewed what happened in different parts of the country. In some areas there was a sustained effort to count the 'roofless' population. For example, in New South Wales census staff made contact with the Homeless Persons Information Centre before the census. They were able to provide a list of organisations that provide free or cheap meals in inner Sydney. Census staff accompanied one of the food vans on census night:

The bus staff turned out to be very helpful, calling out as people got their food 'Has everybody been Censured?' ... 20 were gathered from the stop at Central Station. A couple were located near the Devonshire Street Tunnel, and staff also found quite a large group of older men at the bus station ... In total, 97 short forms were filled out in these operations in the Sydney CBD area, and another 60 people were counted who could not be approached. (Northwood 1997, pp. 12-13)

There were important initiatives in various parts of Queensland. In Cairns, the ABS field manager held talks with a number of organisations which operate welfare services and 'soup kitchens' for homeless people. They told him that many street people would come to their services on census night:

As a consequence, special collectors were appointed to three of these establishments. Two people were needed in the Salvation Army centre, and welfare workers took on the role in the other locations ... around 100 forms (were) filled out at the Salvation Army hostel, and 70 to 80 at each of the other establishments. In total, about 300 forms were collected ... (Northwood 1997, p. 22)

However, in Adelaide the attempt to count those sleeping rough was more limited:

... some people sleeping rough were counted, (but) others were missed. No effort was made ... to contact the street characters of Adelaide or to contact young people squatting in derelict inner city buildings ... similarly people who inhabit some of the parks of Adelaide were not approached for reasons of safety. (Northwood 1997, p. 27)

In Perth, the Salvation Army bus carried census forms on its run. Salvation Army officers were appointed as assistant collectors, but they also had their regular duties to perform which had to take priority:

... there was no time to try to get a good response rate ... About 10 forms were completed. Some people ... wanted to mail the forms back. It is not expected that they would have done so ... the Field Manager thought that the count would have been much lower than the actual homeless population ... (Northwood 1997, p. 28)

Northwood (1997) concludes that the overall coverage across the country was uneven. The category 'improvised home, tent, sleepers out' is a starting point for estimating the primary population, but it cannot do the job completely.

## 2.2 Individuals and Households

Chapter 1 pointed out that there are two ways of counting the homeless population—at a point in time (census count) and over a year (cumulative annual total). We also saw that the relationship between the two ways of counting is complicated, and that a census count is more important than a cumulative annual total.

However, there is another distinction which is also fundamental. Whether one is counting the homeless population over a year or at a point in time, there are always two possible units of enumeration: individuals or households.

If a woman, her husband and three children request emergency accommodation from a SAAP service, this is ‘five individuals’. If a man turns up on his own, this is ‘one person’. However, the woman, her husband and three children are one household (a family household), and the man on his own is one household (a single person household).

The number of households in the population will always be smaller than the number of individuals, because there will always be some families (with children) and some couples (without children). Only in exceptional circumstances—where all homeless people are on their own—will the number of households be the same as the number of homeless people.

It is important to understand the relationship between the number of individuals in the population and the number of households. For example, are people using SAAP services mainly in family groups? If this is the case, then the number of households in this sector will be significantly lower than the number of individuals. Similarly, it is important to know how many households include children—and what are the characteristics of those families? It is always important to think about the relationship between the number of individuals in the population and the number of households. This is taken up in Chapter 4.

A census count must enumerate: (1) people staying in boarding houses; (2) individuals using SAAP services; (3) persons staying with other families; and (4) people who are in improvised dwellings, tents or sleeping out. Each group is examined in turn.

### 3.1 Boarding houses

The census has 19 coding categories for non-private dwellings, including 'Hotel, motel' and 'Boarding house, private hotel'. This distinction draws attention to the fact that there are major differences between conventional hotels which many travellers use, and boarding houses (often called 'private hotels') where it is possible to rent a single room for \$10 to \$30 per night.

The census enumerated 35,730 individuals in boarding houses, but three groups have to be taken out. First, it is necessary to exclude owners and staff members who were 'sleeping over' that night (1,400 people). Then it is necessary to exclude guests who are staying in cheap accommodation while visiting another town—they report a 'usual address' elsewhere (12,000 people). Third, it is necessary to remove overseas visitors who are staying in boarding houses catering for backpackers (5,700). This left 16,500 people.

However, the research team<sup>1</sup> identified some boarding houses where most people were employed. For example, in one country town there were 18 people living in a boarding house. All were working and some reported incomes above \$1,000 per week. This had to be accommodation for workers in a remote community who had full-time jobs. It could not be a boarding house.

The team also found some 'hotels' where everybody reported that they were at their 'usual address', and most residents had incomes below \$300 per week. This did not make sense. Most people stay in hotels on a short-term basis, and they do not have low incomes. These 'hotels' were actually boarding houses.

Local census collectors decide whether a dwelling should be classified as a 'boarding house' or a 'hotel', and they interpret the categories differently. Consequently, some boarding houses were classified as 'hotels', and some hotels were recorded as 'boarding houses'. The error was not large—but it had to be rectified.

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1 The research team was Chris Chamberlain (Monash University), Sally Goodspeed (Australian Bureau of Statistics) and Kristen Northwood (Australian Bureau of Statistics).

After examining many cases, it was decided to reclassify 'boarding houses' as hotels if more than 60 per cent of the adult residents were working, and 60 per cent were earning over \$400 per week<sup>2</sup>. These were not boarding houses, but private accommodation for working people, often in remote locations or regional centres. This removed five per cent of dwellings (98 hotels) from the boarding house population.

A decision was also made to reclassify 'hotels' as boarding houses, if they had the following characteristics:

- (1) more than 20 per cent of their residents reported that they were living there permanently (very unusual for a hotel)
- (2) more than 75 per cent of residents were either unemployed or outside of the labour force and earning less than \$400 per week (hotels are not full of people on low incomes who do not have a job)

Consequently, eight per cent of 'hotels' (647 dwellings) were recoded as boarding houses. The average number of persons in these dwellings was 6.6. Hotels are normally much bigger than this.

There were two further adjustments. There were still 1,314 individuals left in the 'hotel/motel' category who reported no usual address, were either unemployed or outside of the labour force, and had an income below \$300 per week. They could not have been staying in conventional hotels—possibly paying \$100 per night. They were included as part of the boarding house population.

Finally, there were a small number of people in other non-private dwellings who reported 'no usual address' on census night. They included 150 people in psychiatric hospitals, about 300 in other types of hospitals, 140 in other welfare institutions, a small number who were probably in the 'lock up', and some who were staying temporarily with religious orders. It was decided to include just over 1,000 people in other non-private dwellings as part of the boarding house population.

The final number in boarding houses on census night was 23,300, of whom four-fifths (81 per cent) reported that they were 'at home' and one-fifth reported 'no usual address'.

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<sup>2</sup> This is after excluding proprietors, persons who have a usual address elsewhere in Australia, and overseas visitors.

### 3.2 SAAP Services

One of the census categories for coding non-private dwellings is 'hostels for the homeless, night shelter or refuge'. This is the starting point for counting people in accommodation provided under the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP). Once staff were excluded, there were 5,799 people left in hostels and shelters on census night. However, SAAP censuses in May and November 1995 indicated that there were between 12,000 and 15,000 people in SAAP accommodation on both occasions. How could the figure be under 6,000 in 1996?

One possibility is that the number in SAAP was lower in 1996. The other possibility is that the census misses some SAAP services. The ABS *Collector's Manual* informs collectors that:

In most cases a Non-Private Dwelling will be clearly identified by an external sign such as 'Hotel', 'Motel', 'Hospital', etc. (ABS 1996a, p. 20)

However, this is not the case with women's refuges.

There are nearly 240 SAAP services across the country which provide support for women and children escaping domestic violence. These addresses are kept secret, because male partners often try to find women who have left them. Women's refuges usually look no different from other houses in their street, and there will not be a sign indicating the purpose of the accommodation. This means that some refuges may not be identified by census collectors, unless they make appropriate enquires, or someone in the dwelling volunteers the information.

There are just under 400 youth refuges across the country, and a similar argument applies. There is not the same degree of concern about anonymity, but most youth refuges are small and they look like suburban houses. Refuges can be missed by census collectors, if they do not make specific enquires.

It was decided to replace the census figures with information from the National SAAP Data Collection which began on 1 July 1996. This is an annual data collection on people in SAAP, but the data can be manipulated to give point in time counts.

There were 8,187 adults in SAAP accommodation on census night and 4,739 children. The total number was 12,926.

### 3.3 Friends and Relatives

Many people who become homeless initially stay temporarily with friends or relatives. This is common in all age groups. In 1996, the census included an instruction that if a person had no usual address, then they should write this in. The figure was 36,498. However, it is necessary to make an adjustment to avoid double counting.

In the previous section we saw that the census enumerated 5,799 people in hostels and refuges on census night, but SAAP data indicated that the figure was 12,926. This means that the census ‘missed’ 7,127 people (12,926 – 5,799 = 7,127). Most of the 7,127 were in women's refuges or youth refuges which were classified as private dwellings. There is a risk that these people will be double counted.

An example will help to make this clear. Let us suppose that all 7,127 had written ‘no usual address’ on their census form. The census collectors did not realise that they were in emergency accommodation for homeless people and classified them as residents of private dwellings. By checking the SAAP data it was found that they were missing, and they were put back into the SAAP count. However, all 7,127 are still ‘sitting there’ in the private dwelling category reporting no usual address. When we counted just over 36,500 people (above) in private dwellings with no usual address, the 7,127 individuals would have been counted again.

Double counting is sloppy scholarship and must be corrected. It is necessary to know how many of the 7,127 wrote ‘no usual address’ on their census form. Unfortunately, they cannot be identified, but it is possible to identify the 5,799 individuals who were recorded by the census as staying in hostels and refuges. How did they answer the ‘usual address’ question?

Table 3.1 shows that 65 per cent said that the SAAP service where they were staying was ‘home’. Another 21 per cent said that they had a home elsewhere. Most were probably escaping domestic violence—they were referring to the ‘home’ they had left. Finally, 14 per cent said they had no ‘usual address’.

**Table 3.1:** Usual address of people in ‘hostels for the homeless, night shelters or refuges’ on census night

	All (N=5,799)
	%
This is my usual address	65
Usual address is elsewhere in Australia	21
Have no usual address	14
	100

There were 7,127 homeless people who were misclassified as living in private dwellings. If we assume that 14 per cent of them wrote 'no usual address' on their census form, then the double count was 998 ( $7,127 \times 14/100 = 998$ ). This means that the number of people doubling up with friends and relatives on census night was 35,500 ( $36,498 - 998 = 35,500$ ).

### 3.4 Improvised Homes, Tents, Sleepers Out

The final category is 'improvised home, tents, sleepers out'. This category includes:

... people enumerated in sheds, humpies and other improvised dwellings ... it also includes people sleeping on park benches or in other 'rough' accommodation ... Also, tents occupied on census night which are not in caravan parks are in this category. (ABS 1996b, p. 160)

This is the hardest category in the homeless population to count, and it is the category where there is the greatest risk of undercounting. It depends upon census collectors having good local knowledge. They have to know where families might be living in improvised dwellings; similarly, they have to know whether there are young people squatting in their local community; or whether there are people sleeping out. As we saw in Chapter 2, there was a sustained effort to count this population in 1996, but the coverage across the country was uneven.

This category can also include people who are on camping holidays and they have to be excluded. This is easy because they report a usual address elsewhere in Australia or they report a usual address overseas. Once this was done, it left 19,579 individuals. Just over 95 per cent reported that they were at their 'usual address'. It is likely that many were in improvised dwellings.

Half were Indigenous Australians (Table 3.2). However, in the Northern Territory, 89 per cent of people were Indigenous, as were 54 per cent in Western Australia, but this declined to seven per cent in New South Wales and to one per cent in Victoria.

**Table 3.2:** Percentage of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in improvised dwellings, tents and sleeping out by state and territory\*

	NT (N=6,710)	WA (N=2,341)	Qld (N=4,707)	SA (N=698)	NSW (N=3,685)	Tas. (N=230)	Vic. (N=1,202)	Australia (N=19,580)
Indigenous	89	54	38	27	7	4	1	50
Non-Indigenous	11	46	62	73	93	96	99	50
	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

\* N sizes relate to the total number of persons in each state/territory. Percentages are derived from information on 90 per cent of cases. The ACT is excluded because the number of persons was less than 10.

The overall figure so far is 91,300 (Table 3.3). There were 23,300 people in single rooms on census night. There were another 12,900 in SAAP services, such as hostels, refuges and shelters. In addition, there were 35,500 people staying temporarily with friends and relatives. Finally, the census identified 19,600 people in improvised dwellings, tents or sleeping out.

**Table 3.3:** Number of persons in different sectors of the homeless population, census night 1996 (provisional figures)

	N
Boarding houses	23,299
SAAP accommodation	12,926
Friends and relatives	35,500
Improvised dwellings, sleepers out etc.	19,579
	91,304

### 3.5 Checking the Estimate

It has already been pointed out that the census does not enumerate everyone squatting in derelict buildings, dossing down in railway carriages, sleeping by creek beds, and so on. There is always some undercounting, but it is difficult to assess the size of the problem. However, there is the opportunity to check the census figures for the age groups 12 to 18 and 19 to 24.

In 1994, MacKenzie and Chamberlain (1995) carried out a national census of homeless school students. They contacted all government and Catholic secondary schools across the country in the final week of May, and 99 per cent of schools took part in the census. Welfare staff reported that 11,000 school students were homeless that week. However, the census used a 'service delivery' definition of homelessness which included young people who were attempting to return to secure accommodation. Chamberlain and MacKenzie (1998, pp. 106–108) point out that 7,700 of the young people were homeless using the definition guiding the current project. This figure can be used to estimate number of homeless people aged 12 to 18 at that time, and the number in the age group 19 to 24.

The school census was carried out in the same week as a census of people using SAAP services. This indicated that school students were 36.5 per cent of the homeless population aged 12 to 18 at that time. Using this information, Chamberlain and MacKenzie calculated that there were 21,000 homeless teenagers in census week ( $7,700 \times 100/36.5 = 21,000$ ).

**Table 3.4:** Age range of homeless young people in SAAP accommodation on census night, May 1993 to November 1994

	May 1993 (N=3,468)	Nov 1993 (N=3,090)	May 1994 (N=3,186)	Nov 1994 (N=2,787)	Total (N=12,531)
	%	%	%	%	%
Age 12–18	58	56	56	56	57
Age 19–24	42	44	44	44	43
	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Chamberlain and MacKenzie 1998, p. 108

Chamberlain and MacKenzie also wanted to know the number of homeless young people aged 19 to 24. They used SAAP data to show that young people aged 12 to 18 were consistently just below 60 per cent of the homeless population aged 12 to 24 (Table 3.4). This means that there were about 37,000 homeless young people aged 12 to 24 in census week ( $21,000 \times 100/57 = 37,000$ ). If 21,000 were aged 12 to 18, it leaves 16,000 aged 19 to 24.

Table 3.5 compares Chamberlain and MacKenzie’s 1994 estimate for the age group 19 to 24 (16,000) with the estimate from the present study in 1996 (14,710). The two figures are close. Moreover, there could easily have been another 1,000 young people across the country who were sleeping rough in 1996—and were not identified by census collectors. Young people are more likely to sleep out than older people, and there are many young men in the age group 19 to 24 who are prepared to sleep rough or go to squats. This brings the estimate to 15,700—effectively the same as for May 1994.

**Table 3.5:** Two estimates of the homeless population, aged 19 to 24

	Chamberlain and MacKenzie (May 1994)	ABS project (August 1996)
Number of persons	<b>16,000</b>	<b>14,710</b>

**Table 3.6:** Two estimates of the homeless population, aged 12 to 18

	Chamberlain and MacKenzie (May 1994)	ABS project (August 1996)
Number of persons	<b>21,000</b>	<b>7,100</b>

Table 3.6 compares Chamberlain and MacKenzie’s estimate for the age group 12 to 18 (21,000) with the figures from the present study (7,100). What is going on? It will take a few paragraphs to explain this discrepancy, using two examples.

How would a middle-aged husband and wife fill out the census form in the following circumstances? *Example one*: they have a young man aged 24 staying temporarily with them. He has no accommodation to return to. His mother lives in another state, and he has lost contact with his father. How would they answer the question, 'What is the person's usual address?'. The census offers three choices:

- (1) The address shown on the front of this form
- (2) Elsewhere in Australia—please specify address
- (3) For persons who now have no usual address, write 'no usual address'

Most people would write 'no usual address'.

*Example two*: the middle-aged couple have a 15 year old daughter. Her school friend is staying temporarily with them because her mother has thrown her out after a serious family argument. How would the couple answer the question, 'What is the person's usual address?' Most parents would feel reluctant to write 'no usual address'. They would reason that the young person has a usual address, even if she is not staying there at present.

It is more likely that adults filling out a census form will put in a young person's home address, if he or she is still in their teens—especially if the person is still at school. The young person is considered to be having 'time out', and the expectation is that they will return home shortly. Some do, but others move on to another temporary place. The present method of identifying homeless teenagers fails, because it depends on the adults in the household recording 'no usual address' against their young visitor. These young people appear to be visitors on census night, because they are reported as having a usual address elsewhere. This causes a dramatic slump in the identification of homeless teenagers aged 12 to 18—possibly 13,000 to 14,000 are missing.

There were 26,300 young people aged 12 to 18 who were recorded as 'visitors' to private dwellings on census night, and were not accompanied by an adult aged 19 or over. Some of them would have been 'staying over' with their parents' permission, but others had probably run away from home or had been thrown out. The breakdown between the two groups is not known, but if it were close to 50/50 then this would account for the missing 13,000.

We have seen that the national census of homeless school students identified 7,700 homeless young people in census week 1994, and we know that school students were about 36.5 per cent of the homeless population aged 12 to 18. There must have been about 21,000 homeless teenagers at that time ( $7,700 \times 100/36.5 = 21,000$ ). The number is unlikely to have dropped dramatically between 1994 and 1996—especially when the number in the age group 19 to 24 is almost identical. It is also possible to explain why the census 'missed' 13,000 homeless teenagers, and it is probable that they were hidden in the visitors category. On balance, the evidence points towards an undercount of about 13,000. Table 3.7 takes this into account<sup>3</sup>.

**Table 3.7:** Number of persons in different sectors of the homeless population, census night 1996 (final figures)

	Enumerated	Estimated	Total
Boarding houses	23,299		23,299
SAAP accommodation	12,926		12,926
Friends and relatives	35,500	13,000	48,500
Improvised dwellings, sleepers out	19,579	1,000	20,579
	<b>91,304</b>	<b>14,000</b>	<b>105,304</b>

On census night 1996, the homeless population was 105,300. There were 23,300 people living in boarding houses. There were 12,900 staying in SAAP services (hostels, refuges and night shelters). Another 48,500 were staying temporarily with friends and relatives. Finally, there were 20,600 people in improvised dwellings, tents or sleeping out. It is important to remember that homeless people often move around. Some people may show up in a particular segment of the population on census night, but in practice they move around.

<sup>3</sup> Readers who dissent from this interpretation can see the figures without the adjustment for undercounting. Corday and Pion (1995, 75) recommend presenting data for different sub-groups in the homeless population. They call it 'intelligent segmentation'.

Chapter 2 pointed out that it is important to understand the relationship between the number of individuals in the homeless population (105,300) and the number of households. For the purposes of this analysis three household ‘types’ will be identified: *single person* households (individuals on their own); *couple* households (including people in *de facto* relationships); and *family* households (at least one adult and one child aged 17 or younger).

#### 4.1 How Many Households?

The census distinguishes between persons who live in private dwellings and those who live in non-private dwellings. It is easy to identify the number of households in the former category and difficult to do so in the latter.

A private dwelling is usually a house or a flat in a block, and persons who are staying temporarily with friends or relatives will be identified here. However, there are other private dwelling categories, including ‘improvised homes, tents and sleepers out’. All private dwellings are enumerated using household forms which gather information on family relationships. This means that it is possible to identify the number of lone persons, couples and families without much difficulty. It is also straightforward to identify the number of households in SAAP, although the information is gathered differently.

However, there are two groups where it is difficult to count the number of households. All non-private dwellings are enumerated using personal forms. This means that boarding house residents are not asked to provide information on other family members who are with them on census night. This makes it impossible to identify the exact number of households—because there is no family coding for people in boarding houses. It is also not possible to identify the precise number of households amongst people who are outside of the census net (1,000 persons aged 19 to 24, and 13,000 aged 12 to 18)—because there is only indirect information on these groups.

There is a choice. Either, one can exclude people in boarding houses and those outside of the census net from the analysis. This would remove 36,000 people from the homeless population and destroy the possibility of seeing the overall picture. Or one can include both groups, if one is prepared to make assumptions about the number of people in different household types. The latter course of action will be taken here, bearing in mind that some figures may have to be revised if new information becomes available. Let us deal with the easy task first.

Table 4.1 shows that there were 7,886 households in the SAAP population; there were 23,820 households staying with friends and relatives; and there were 7,384 households in improvised dwellings or sleeping rough. Now for the assumptions.

**Table 4.1:** Number of households enumerated in *three* segments of the homeless population

	Number of households
SAAP	7,886
Friends and relatives	23,820
Improvised homes etc.	7,384
	39,090

The boarding house population was 23,299 on census night. All persons were asked, 'What is the person's present marital status?' One could tick either 'never married', 'widowed', 'divorced', 'separated but not divorced', or 'married'. In total, 2,548 individuals ticked 'married'. If all of these people were with their husband or wife on census night, then there would have been 1,274 couples in the population. Unfortunately, there is no basis for estimating the number of *de facto* couples.

There were 868 young people aged 14 or younger in boarding houses. I am going to assume that all of them were accompanying one or both parents, and that each family unit had on average 1.8 children. This means that there were 482 families with children on census night ( $868/1.8 = 482$ ). The final assumption is that half (241) of these families were two parent families, and half were single parents. When these assumptions are plugged in, it gives a figure of 21,157 households in the boarding house population.

The next task is to estimate the number of households amongst the 14,000 homeless young people aged 12 to 24 who were outside the census net. Approximately 1,000 were sleeping rough (aged 19 to 24). Another 13,000 (aged 12 to 18) were staying temporarily with friends and relatives, but it was reported that they had a usual address. They were identified in the census as 'visitors' rather than 'homeless'.

On the basis of field experience (Chamberlain and MacKenzie 1998, Ch. 1 and 2), I know that there are unlikely to be families with dependent children in either group. It is also unlikely that there will be married couples, but there will be people in *de facto* relationships. The largest group will be young people who are on their own. I estimate that 20 per cent were young people in couple relationships and 80 per cent were single person households. When these assumptions are plugged in, it adds 11,700 households to 'friends and relatives' and 900 households to 'improvised dwellings'.

Table 4.2 gives the overall picture. There were 73,000 households in the homeless population on census night. They included 35,500 households doubling up with friends and relatives; another 21,000 households were staying in boarding houses; approximately 8,200 households were in improvised dwellings or sleeping rough; and there were 7,900 households in SAAP accommodation.

**Table 4.2:** Number of households in *all* segments of the homeless population

	Enumerated	Estimated	Total
Boarding house	0	21,157	21,157
SAAP	7,886	0	7,886
Friends/relatives	23,820	11,700	35,520
Improvised dwellings etc.	7,384	900	8,284
	39,090	33,757	72,847

Table 4.3 shows that 76 per cent were lone person households (55,000 people). Fourteen per cent were couple households, although this figure might increase if a significant number of *de facto* couples were missed in the boarding house population. Finally, 10 per cent were family households (7,177 families). Each group will be examined in turn.

**Table 4.3:** Number of single person, couple and family households

	Number of households	%
Single person	55,363	76
Couple	10,307	14
Family	7,177	10
	72,847	100

## 4.2 Single Persons

There were 55,400 homeless people who were on their own when they were enumerated on census night. Single person households were by far the largest household type. However, Table 4.4 shows that only 10 per cent of single person households were accommodated in SAAP. Almost half (47 per cent) were staying temporarily with friends and relatives. The other big group—36 per cent—were in boarding houses.

**Table 4.4:** Accommodation of single person households on census night

	Number of households	%
Boarding house	19,642	36
SAAP	5,647	10
Friends/relatives	26,275	47
Improvised dwellings etc.	3,799	7
	55,363	100

### 4.3 Couples

There were 10,300 homeless couples without children. One per cent were staying in SAAP (Table 4.5). The great majority (65 per cent) were staying temporarily with friends and relatives; another quarter (24 per cent) were in improvised dwellings or sleeping rough.

**Table 4.5:** Accommodation of couple households on census night

	Number of households	%
Boarding house	1,033	10
SAAP	111	1
Friends/relatives	6,713	65
Improvised dwellings etc	2,450	24
	10,307	100

Why were so many couples staying with friends and relatives? In general, couples have a 'stronger' financial position than other homeless people. Even if both persons in a couple are unemployed, they usually have a higher combined income than a single person, and they have more disposable income than a household with children. This probably makes it easier for other families to accept them doubling up for short periods of time. One indication of this is that there were 2,100 families (with children) staying with friends or relatives on census night, whereas 6,700 couples (without children) had found someone to put them up.

### 4.4 Families

There were 7,200 homeless families on census night. Table 4.6 shows that 30 per cent were accommodated in SAAP; another 33 per cent were in improvised dwellings; and 30 per cent were staying temporarily with friends and relatives. Finally, there were 500 families in boarding houses.

**Table 4.6:** Accommodation of family households on census night

	Number of households	%
Boarding house	482	7
SAAP	2,128	30
Friends/relatives	2,172	30
Improvised dwellings etc.	2,395	33
	7,177	100

How many were couple families with children and how many were single parent households? Table 4.7 indicates that there are sharp differences between different sectors of the population. The vast majority (77 per cent) of families in improvised dwellings were couples with children. In contrast, the vast majority in SAAP (91 per cent) were single parent households. Amongst those staying with other families, 60 per cent were couples. The reason for these differences are not obvious, but the overall pattern is clear (Table 4.7). Half (50 per cent) of all homeless families are couples with children; and half are single parents with kids.

**Table 4.7:** Characteristics of families in different segments of the homeless population

	Boarding house (N=482)	SAAP (N=2,128)	Friends/relatives (N=2,172)	Imp. dwellings (N=2,395)	Total (N=7,177)
	%	%	%	%	%
Couple	50	9	60	77	50
Single parent	50	91	40	23	50
	100	100	100	100	100

There were 7,200 families in the homeless population on census night. However, there were 10,800 adults in these families—because half the families included two parents and half included one. In addition, they had 17,000 children with them (Table 4.8).

**Table 4.8:** Number of children in different segments of the homeless population

	Number of children
Boarding house	868
SAAP	4,739
Friends/relatives	5,318
Improvised dwellings etc.	5,983
	16,928

Table 4.8 shows that there were 6,000 children staying with their parents in an improvised dwelling on census night. Another 4,700 young people were with one or both parents in a SAAP service, such as a hostel or refuge. There were 5,300 children staying with their parents in a doubling up situation (friends/relatives). Finally, there were 900 kids who were with one or both parents in a single room.

It has been pointed out that it is important to understand the relationship between the number of individuals in the homeless population and the number of households. Now it should be clear why. There were 7,200 homeless families on census night, but this included 28,000 people (10,752 parents and 16,928 children = 27,680). Families were 10 per cent of all homeless households, but they included one-quarter (26 per cent) of the homeless population.

This chapter examines the social and temporal characteristics of four groups on census night: (1) people in boarding houses; (2) those staying with other families; (3) households in improvised dwellings; and (4) people in SAAP accommodation. The chapter uses Census and SAAP data. The analysis is complicated because there is direct temporal information on only one group: people staying in SAAP. Each group is examined in turn and the 'big picture' is assembled at the end.

### 5.1 Boarding House Population

There were 23,300 individuals in boarding houses on census night and most people were on their own (Chapter 4). In the 1950s and 1960s, the boarding house population was disproportionately made up of middle-aged and older men (de Hoog 1972; Jordan 1973/94). However, on census night 1996, two-fifths (41 per cent) of all boarding house residents were either teenagers or young adults (aged 15 to 34); one-third were 'middle-aged' (35 to 54); and only a quarter (26 per cent) were aged 55 or older.

Table 5.1 shows that men still predominate in most age groups. However, the female share rises to 43 per cent among those aged 15 to 24, and to 42 per cent among those aged 75 or older. How many boarding house residents were staying in single rooms on a long-term basis, or moving between different forms of temporary accommodation?

**Table 5.1:** Number of males and females in the boarding house population, by age group\*

	15-24 (N=4,772)	25-34 (N=4,500)	35-44 (N=3,769)	45-54 (N=3,474)	55-64 (N=2,747)	65-74 (N=2,009)	75+ (N=1,158)	All (N=22,429)
Male	57	71	82	85	87	82	58	74
Female	43	29	18	15	13	18	42	26
	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

\* Excluding accompanying children aged 14 or younger

The labour force participation rate for adult males aged 25 to 54 is about 90 per cent, and for adult females it is about 70 per cent (Table 5.2). However, among boarding house residents, the labour force participation rate is consistently between 20 and 30 percentage points lower than the participation rate for people in the general population (Table 5.2). This probably indicates that a substantial minority of boarding house residents aged 25 to 54 are on invalid or sickness benefits, or have dropped out of the labour force. It is unlikely that many of them will save enough money to move into a conventional house or flat.

**Table 5.2:** Labour force participation rate of boarding house residents compared with the general population, by gender (selected age groups)

	Men				Women				
	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	
All men	91.7	90.4	87.5	61.2	All women	68.6	71.4	68.8	30.9
Residents	66.3	64.5	55.0	35.4	Residents	47.7	46.3	40.3	16.2

The prognosis is also poor for those aged 55 or older (26 per cent of the population). The labour force participation rate drops to 35 per cent for men aged 55 to 64 and to 16 per cent among women in the same age group (Table 5.2). Among those aged 65 or older, participation in the labour force is negligible. Most boarding house residents in the older age groups are on low incomes and many rely on government benefits. In the main, they are poor and they are unlikely to exit from boarding houses.

The overall labour force participation rate for boarding house residents (aged 15 or older) is 46 per cent. However, only 38 per cent have a full-time job. Another 22 per cent have part-time work. The largest group (40 per cent) are unemployed. Table 5.3 gives the overall picture. Nearly three-quarters (72 per cent) of all boarding house residents are unemployed or outside of the labour force.

**Table 5.3:** Labour force status of boarding house residents aged 15 or over

	All persons* (N=19,905)
	%
Employed full-time	18
Employed part-time	10
Unemployed	18
Not in the labour force	54
	100

72

\* Information on 89 per cent of cases

There are a number of other indicators that the overall turnover in the boarding house population is low. Table 5.4 shows that between 75 and 80 per cent of those aged 55 or older report that they were in the same boarding house one year before census night. Amongst those aged 35 to 54, the figure was between 51 and 63 per cent. In both age groups, it is likely that many of those who were 'elsewhere' were in different boarding houses or other forms of temporary accommodation. This raises the number who have a long-term problem to about 80 per cent amongst those aged 35 and over.

**Table 5.4:** Usual address of boarding house residents one year ago, by age group

	15-24 (N=4,124)	25-34 (N=3,868)	35-44 (N=3,249)	45-54 (N=3,085)	55-64 (N=2,437)	65+ (N=2,787)	All* (N=19,550)
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Same	23	33	51	63	75	80	51
Elsewhere	47	45	44	34	23	18	37
Overseas	30	22	5	3	2	2	12
	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

\* Information on 87 per cent of cases

It is only in the youngest age groups that there appears to be significant mobility. Just under 50 per cent of the youngest age group were 'elsewhere in Australia'. Some would have been in secure accommodation, but others were probably moving between different boarding houses or other temporary accommodation. Between a quarter and a third were new migrants. Some will stay in boarding houses for a short period of time, but those who are unemployed will probably remain for much longer. On balance, it is likely that at least half in the younger age group have a sustained problem.

On census night, the boarding house population will always include people with different temporal characteristics. There will be some who have a short-term problem (a few weeks of homelessness). There will be others who have been around for some months; and there will be many (possibly 65 to 75 per cent) who are in the homeless population on a long-term basis. The dominant pattern is of a *low turnover* population.

## 5.2 Friends and Relatives

There were 48,500 people staying temporarily with other families on census night: 35,500 people were identified in the census; and there were 13,000 young people aged 12 to 18 who were 'missed' by the census. Chapter 3 argued that the latter group were staying temporarily with other families. However, adults filling out the census forms reported that these teenagers had a 'usual address' elsewhere in Australia. In many cases, this is probably because the young person had left home fairly recently, and the adult assumed that the family quarrel would be patched up. It means that many of them probably had a 'short-term' problem. This is mainly a *high turnover* group.

There is direct information on the main group of 35,500 who reported that they have no usual address on census night. Two-thirds (68 per cent) were single person households, one-quarter (23 per cent) are couples, and nine per cent are families with children.

In the youngest age group (15 to 24), there is no significant difference between the number of males and females, but in all age groups above 25 men outnumber women by about three to two. The overall picture is 58 per cent men and 42 per cent women.

How many people staying with other families have a short term problem? Table 5.5 divides the population into three groups. First, there are *working* households. In these households there is at least one person who has employment. It could be a single person who has a part-time job, a couple where one person is working full-time, and so on. Table 5.5 shows that half of those staying temporarily with other families fall into this group.

The second group are *unemployed* households. In these families, there is at least one person who is in the labour force, but he or she is unemployed. Third, there are *not in the labour force* (NILF) households. In these families no-one is employed and no-one is currently looking for work. Half (48 per cent) of those staying with other families were unemployed or NILF households (Table 5.5).

**Table 5.5:** Labour force classification of households who were staying with other families

	All (N=23,820)
Working household	49
Unemployed household	19
No-one in labour force household	29
Other	3
	100

← 48

**Table 5.6:** Weekly income for people staying with other families, by household type

	Working households (N=11,615)	Unemployed or NILF households* (N=12,205)	All (N=23,820)
	%	%	%
\$500 or more	52	8	29
\$300-499	28	14	21
Below \$300	20	78	50
	100	100	100

← 48

\* Including 647 households classified as 'other' at table 5.5

Close to 80 per cent of unemployed and NILF households report a family income of below \$300 per week (Table 5.6). In general, they are unlikely to have the financial resources to find one month's rent in advance for a flat, the money required for a bond, and money to pay for the other costs associated with setting up a home. Some will get financial assistance from government funded welfare agencies which may enable them to move into a flat, but their chances of maintaining that accommodation are uncertain, and a number will reappear in the homeless population on more than one occasion. Many unemployed and NILF households will have a long-term problem on census night. This is a *low turnover* group.

Half of those staying with friends and relatives were employed households. Table 5.6 shows that 52 per cent report an income above \$500 per week, and 48 per cent report an income below \$500, including 20 per cent with incomes below \$300 per week. Amongst the latter group, many have part-time work. Their attachment to the labour force is marginal and their chances of finding secure accommodation are poor. Households with an income above \$500 per week usually have one member with full-time employment. The financial needs of these groups will vary, but where one person has a full-time job, there is a tendency for the family to access welfare support to return to secure accommodation, or in some cases to have sufficient resources to manage this themselves. In the main, these households probably remain in the homeless population for a short period of time. Employed households will include families with different temporal characteristics on census night; but, overall, this is a *medium turnover* group.

### **5.3 Improvised Dwellings, Tents and Sleepers Out**

The census identified 19,580 people in improvised dwellings, tents or sleeping out and most (95 per cent) reported that they were at their usual address. Many people were probably living in improvised dwellings, such as humpies or other poor quality accommodation. It has already been explained that half were indigenous Australians, but there was marked variation between different states and territories (Chapter 3). In the Northern Territory, 90 per cent identified as Indigenous as did 54 per cent in Western Australia, but in New South Wales and Victoria it was seven per cent and one per cent respectively.

There were more families in this sector of the population and fewer single persons. Overall, 37 per cent were single persons households, 32 per cent were couples, and 31 per cent were families with children.

There were even numbers of men and women in the age group 15 to 24, but after that the percentage of males gradually increases. The overall pattern is 58 per cent men and 42 per cent women.

Table 5.7 divides the population into: working households (at least one person employed); unemployed households (nobody working); and not in the labour force (NILF) households. About two-fifths (42 per cent) of the households had at least one person in the labour force, and 46 per cent were either unemployed or NILF households. Another 12 per cent did not supply enough information to be coded. However, nearly all reported low incomes (below \$300 per week), and most were probably unemployed or outside of the labour force.

**Table 5.7:** Labour force classification of households who were staying in improvised dwellings, tents or sleeping out

	All (N=7,837)
	%
Working household	42
Unemployed household	12
No-one in labour force household	34
Other	12
	100

} 46

Just under half (46 per cent) of the working households reported an income above \$500 per week, and just over half (54 per cent) reported an income below \$500, including one-quarter who had an income below \$300 per week (Table 5.8). Amongst unemployed and NILF households, almost 80 per cent reported an income of below \$300 per week. Many people living in improvised dwellings are poor.

**Table 5.8:** Income of people staying in improvised dwellings, tents or sleeping out, by household type

	Working households (N=3,338)	Unemployed or NILF households* (N=4,469)	All (N=7,807)
	%	%	%
\$500 or more	46	7	24
\$300-499	29	15	21
Below \$300	25	78	55
	100	100	100

} 54

\* Including 890 households classified as 'other' in Table 5.7

Table 5.9 indicates that three-quarters of the people living in improvised dwellings were in the same dwelling one year before the census. People who 'sleep rough' often move around, and some families with higher incomes can probably exit from the population. But, overall, this is a *low turnover* group.

**Table 5.9:** Accommodation one year previously for people in improvised dwellings, tents and sleeping out, by age group\*

	15-24 (N=2,489)	25-34 (N=3,142)	35-44 (N=2,742)	45-54 (N=1,983)	55-64 (N=1,285)	65+ (N=931)	All (N = 12,572)
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Same	71	71	73	76	79	87	74
Elsewhere	26	27	26	23	20	13	22
Overseas	3	2	1	1	1	0	1
	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

\*Excluding accompanying children aged 14 or younger

#### 5.4 SAAP Population

The SAAP population is the only group where we have direct information on the temporal characteristics of the population at a point in time. However, there are a number of technical issues when using SAAP data. The National Data Collection requires that clients give consent for information to be included in the data base. In the first year this was obtained in 68 per cent of cases, but consent rates vary for different target groups. In order to estimate the overall picture, it is necessary to assume that: (1) the characteristics of clients who did not give consent are the same as those who gave consent; and then (2) to use re-weighting procedures for different segments of the population—because of the different consent rates. This is possible when analysing the number of males and females in the SAAP population, but it does not work when analysing the temporal characteristics of homeless people—because only a quarter of households answered the temporal questions on census night.

Overall, 51 per cent of SAAP clients are female and 49 per cent are male. There are significantly more women in the younger age groups, but men outnumber women by about two to one in the age groups above 35.

Just over 70 per cent of all households in SAAP were individuals on their own. Another quarter (25 per cent) were single parents with children; and two per cent were couples with children.

When clients seek accommodation in SAAP for the first time, they are asked how long they have been without secure accommodation. It is possible to add this information to the length of time that they have been in SAAP on census night. This gives us an idea of their length of homelessness. It is a 'rough' estimate because a client may have stayed in SAAP for a week, then moved to a friend's place, before returning to SAAP on census night. The period with friends is not included in the calculation. It is also 'rough' because many households do not provide the necessary information.

**Table 5.10:** Length of homelessness of accommodated households on census night

	Total (N=1,388)
	%
Less than 4 weeks	22
4–25 weeks	38
26 weeks–51 weeks	13
One year or longer	27
	100

*Note:* A bracket on the right side of the table groups the categories '26 weeks–51 weeks' and 'One year or longer', with a value of 40 next to it, indicating that 40% of households were homeless for six months or longer.

Table 5.10 shows that 22 per cent of SAAP households had been homeless for less than a month on census night; 38 per cent had been homeless for between four and 25 weeks; and 40 per cent had been homeless for six months or longer. This has to be interpreted cautiously, but 91 per cent of the adults in SAAP were either unemployed or outside of the labour force. They are likely to remain homeless for a sustained period of time. This is probably a *low turnover* population.

### 5.5 Big Picture

It has already been explained that it is the census count which is important for policy makers, combined with information on the temporal characteristics of the population at a point in time. Bearing this in mind, we can now assemble the big picture.

There were 105,300 homeless people on census night (Chapter 3). Nearly half (46 per cent) were staying temporarily with other families. One-fifth (20 per cent) were in improvised dwellings, tents or sleeping out. Another one-fifth (22 per cent) were staying in boarding houses, and 12 per cent were in SAAP accommodation (refuges, hostels, night shelters etc.).

**Table 5.11:** Number of persons in various segments of the homeless population with different temporal profiles

Temporal profile		All (N=105,304)
<b>Low turnover</b>		%
1 Boarding house population	23,299	71
2 People staying with other families (unemployed and NILF households)	18,105	
3 People in improvised dwellings (including sleeping rough)	20,579	
4 SAAP population (refuges, hostels etc.)	12,926	
<b>Medium turnover</b>		
1 People staying with other families (employed households)	17,395	17
<b>High turnover</b>		
1 Young people (aged 12 to 18), staying with other families	13,000	12
		<b>100</b>

Table 5.11 shows that 71 per cent of the homeless were in low turnover segments of the population on census night: there were 23,300 people in boarding houses; 20,600 were in improvised dwellings (including people sleeping rough); 18,100 were staying temporarily with other families; and 12,900 were in SAAP. There would have been some people in each segment who had a short-term problem on census night (a few weeks of homelessness), and there would have been others who had been homeless for a few months. But the dominant pattern in each group was that most people had a problem lasting six months or longer (a low turnover population).

Just over 15 per cent of the homeless were in a medium turnover segment of the population. Finally, there were 13,000 young people aged 12 to 18 who were staying with other families on census night. This is the only group where we can be fairly certain that a majority would have had a short-term problem.

Based on the information in Table 5.11, we can now make informed estimates about the temporal characteristics of the population on census night. Approximately 70 per cent of the people had been homeless for more than six months, including a substantial minority who had been homeless for more than a year. About 10 to 15 per cent of people had come into the population recently (a few weeks of homelessness), and between 15 and 20 per cent had been homeless for a few months.

## CHAPTER 6

## STATE AND TERRITORY VARIATION

It is usually assumed that the homeless population is spread fairly evenly across the country and SAAP funding is allocated on a population *pro rata* basis. Table 6.1 shows that 59 per cent of people live in New South Wales and Victoria and those states received 58 per cent of SAAP funding. Similarly, 17 per cent of the population are in South Australia and Western Australia and those states received 18 per cent of SAAP funds. Tasmania, the ACT and the Northern Territory did slightly better than other states, and Queensland did slightly worse. Nonetheless, the dominant assumption underpinning current funding arrangements is that the homeless population is distributed in the same way as the general population. This chapter investigates whether this assumption is correct.

**Table 6.1:** Australian population, SAAP agencies and SAAP funding (\$), state and territory comparisons, 1996–97

	Australian population (N=18.3 million)	SAAP agencies (N=1,183)	SAAP funding (recurrent) (\$220 million)
NSW	34 ←	33 ←	36 ←
Vic.	25 ←	27 ←	22 ←
Qld	18	16	14
WA	9 ←	9 ←	9 ←
SA	8 ←	6 ←	9 ←
Tas.	3 ←	4 ←	5 ←
ACT	2 ←	3 ←	3 ←
NT	1 ←	2 ←	2 ←
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 1997, p. xv and p. 23.

### 6.1 Assumptions and Approaches

There were 105,300 homeless people on census night and there is information on the geographical spread of the population in 87 per cent of cases. These people were identified using census data and information from the National SAAP Data Collection. Chapter 3 showed that another 13,000 people were staying temporarily with other families and 1,000 were 'sleeping rough'. It will be assumed that they are distributed in the same way as other persons staying with 'friends and relatives' or in 'improvised dwellings'.

There are two ways of approaching the geographical spread of the homeless population and both are important. First, there is the actual number of homeless people in different states and territories on census night. This is the 'raw count', and it is important for policy makers.

Second, one can think about the number of people expressed as a rate per 10,000 of the population. This is a fairer way to compare states and territories of different sizes. For example, the number of homeless people will always be greater in New South Wales than the Northern Territory because the population of New South Wales is so much larger. But for comparative purposes, it is important to know whether the incidence of homelessness is similar in the two communities.

## 6.2 Typical Pattern: Four 'Southern States'

The first pattern (Table 6.2) is that there were between 40 and 50 homeless people per 10,000 of the population in the four 'Southern States': Victoria (41.0 per 10,000), Tasmania (43.9), South Australia (48.1) and New South Wales (49.4). However, the actual number was just over 2,000 in Tasmania, but almost 15 times higher in New South Wales (29,600). Similarly, South Australia had just over 6,800 homeless people whereas Victoria had 17,800.

**Table 6.2:** Number of homeless people and rate of homelessness per 10,000 of the population in New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania

	NSW	Vic.	SA	Tas.
Number of homeless people	29,608	17,840	6,837	2,014
Rate per 10,000 of the population	49.4	41.0	48.1	43.9

In each state about half of the homeless were staying with other families (Table 6.3). There were more people in boarding houses in New South Wales and Victoria (29 and 26 per cent respectively), compared with 16 and 19 per cent in Tasmania and South Australia. In all states, only a minority were recorded in improvised dwellings, tents or sleeping out, although people 'sleeping rough' are more likely to have been missed than other groups.

Finally, in Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania about 20 per cent of homeless people were in SAAP accommodation, but this drops to 11 per cent in New South Wales. This is surprising. On census night, there were 3,371 people accommodated in SAAP in Victoria and there were 3,324 accommodated in New South Wales. However, Victoria received 22 per cent of SAAP funding in 1996–97 whereas New South Wales received 36 per cent (Table 6.1).

**Table 6.3:** Percentage of homeless people in different sectors of the population in New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania

	NSW (N=29,608)	Vic. (N= 17,840)	SA (N=6,837)	Tas. (N=2,014)
	%	%	%	%
Boarding house	29	26	19	16
SAAP	11	19	22	19
Friends/relatives	47	48	48	53
Imp. dwelling	13	7	11	12
	100	100	100	100

### 6.3 'Growth States': Western Australia and Queensland

The second pattern is in Western Australia and Queensland. These states have grown at a faster rate than the 'Southern States' in recent decades, and they also had significantly more homeless people on census night. Table 6.4 shows that there were between 70 and 80 homeless people per 10,000 of the population in both communities. There were 25,649 homeless people in Queensland and 12,252 in Western Australia. It is instructive to compare Queensland with Victoria, and Western Australia with South Australia.

**Table 6.4:** Number of homeless people and rate of homelessness per 10,000 of the population in Western Australia and Queensland

	WA	Qld
Number of homeless people	12,252	25,649
Rate per 10,000 of the population	71.5	77.3

The population of Western Australia is slightly larger than the population of South Australia (1.7 million compared with 1.4 million), but Table 6.5 shows that Western Australia had almost twice as many homeless people: 12,250 compared with 6,840 in South Australia. There were more people in boarding houses in WA (1,923 compared with 1,332); more people staying with other families (6,498 versus 3,253); and more people in improvised dwellings (2,461 compared with 734). The only category where South Australia had slightly higher numbers was amongst those accommodated in SAAP: 1,518 versus 1,370. Both states received nine per cent of SAAP funding in 1996–97 (Table 6.1), but Western Australia had many more homeless people.

**Table 6.5:** Number of homeless people in Western Australia and South Australia

	WA	SA
	N	N
Boarding house	1,923	1,332
SAAP	1,370	1,518
Friends/relatives	6,498	3,253
Imp. dwelling	2,461	734
	12,252	6,837

**Table 6.6:** Number of homeless people in Queensland and Victoria

	Qld	Vic.
	N	N
Boarding house	5,774	4,557
SAAP	2,264	3,371
Friends/relatives	12,665	8,648
Imp. dwelling	4,946	1,264
	25,649	17,840

The population of Victoria is significantly larger than Queensland (4.4 million compared with 3.3 million), but Table 6.6 shows that Queensland had more homeless people than Victoria (25,650 versus 17,840). There were more people in boarding houses (5,774 compared with 4,557); more people staying with other families (12,665 compared with 8,648); and more people in improvised dwellings (4,946 versus 1,264). The only category where Victoria had higher numbers was amongst those staying in SAAP (3,370 compared to 2,260). This is because Victoria got 22 per cent of SAAP funding in 1996–97 whereas Queensland got 14 per cent (Table 6.1).

The comparison with New South Wales is instructive. New South Wales had 29,600 homeless people and Queensland had 25,650. New South Wales got 36 per cent of SAAP funding and Queensland got 14 per cent. In Queensland there were 2,260 people in SAAP on census night, whereas in New South Wales there were 3,320.

The overall picture for Western Australia and Queensland is shown in Table 6.7. In both states about half of the homeless were staying with other families on census night. Approximately 20 per cent were in improvised dwellings, and another 20 per cent were in boarding houses. Finally, 10 per cent were in SAAP accommodation.

**Table 6.7:** Percentage of homeless people in different sectors of the population in Queensland and Western Australia

	Qld (N=25,649)	WA (N=12,252)
	%	%
Boarding house	23	16
SAAP	9	11
Friends/relatives	49	53
Imp. dwelling	19	20
	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

#### 6.4 Worlds Apart: Canberra and the Northern Territory

The population of the Australian Capital Territory was 297,000 at the 1996 census and the population of the Northern Territory was 189,000. There were 1,200 homeless people in the ACT and there were 9,900 in the Northern Territory. The rate in the ACT was 40.3 per 10,000 of the population—similar to the other Southern States. The rate in the Northern Territory was 523.1 per 10,000. This is roughly seven times higher than the rate in Western Australia or Queensland, largely due to indigenous people living in improvised dwellings in the Territory (Table 3.2).

Table 6.8 compares the percentages in different sectors of the homeless population in Victoria, South Australia, Tasmania and the ACT. The number in boarding houses and improvised dwellings is much lower in the ACT (six per cent and less than 0.5 per cent respectively); compared with about 20 per cent and 10 per cent in the other states; the number with other families is about the same (50 per cent); and the number in SAAP is double (40 per cent compared with 20 per cent).

**Table 6.8:** Percentage of homeless people in different sectors of the population in Victoria, South Australia, Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory

	Vic (N= 17,840)	SA (N=6,837)	Tas (N=2,014)	ACT (N=1,198)
	%	%	%	%
Boarding house	26	19	16	6
SAAP	19	22	19	40
Friends/relatives	48	48	53	54
Imp. dwelling	7	11	12	*
	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

\* less than 0.5 per cent

**Table 6.9:** Percentage of homeless people in different sectors of the population in Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory

	Qld (N=25,649)	WA (N=12,252)	NT (N=9,906)
	%	%	%
Boarding house	23	16	9
SAAP	9	11	2
Friends/relatives	49	53	18
Imp. dwelling	19	20	71
	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 6.9 compares the percentages in different sectors of the population in Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory. The number in improvised dwellings in the Territory is much higher (71 per cent compared with about 20 per cent). Almost 90 per cent of people in improvised dwellings in the Territory are Indigenous Australians (Chapter 3), and the policy implications of this are complex. The number in all other groups in the Territory is much lower than in Queensland and Western Australia (18 per cent are with other families, nine per cent are in boarding houses and two per cent are in SAAP).

There is a sense in which the Northern Territory and the ACT are 'worlds apart', but they are different from the other states as well.

## 6.5 Big Picture

The Supported Accommodation Assistance Program is widely recognised as Australia's flagship program to assist homeless people. It is jointly funded by the Commonwealth, State and Territory governments, and the recurrent allocation was \$220 million in the 1996–1997 financial year. This funds just under 1,200 SAAP agencies across the country. The dominant assumption underpinning current funding arrangements is that the homeless population is distributed in the same way as the general population. This section compares the total number of people accommodated in SAAP on census night with the total number of people who were homeless as measured by the census definition.

The prevalence of homelessness is similar in New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, Tasmania and the ACT (40 to 50 homeless people per 10,000 of the population). However, it is significantly higher in Queensland and Western Australia (70 to 80 per 10,000 people). It is also much higher in the Northern Territory where there are many Indigenous people living in improvised dwellings.

There appear to be marked differences in how effectively different governments spend SAAP money, and this also affects the proportion of homeless people accommodated in SAAP on census night. Table 6.10 identifies four distinct patterns.

First, the Australian Capital Territory had the lowest rate of homelessness in the country (40.3 per 10,000 of the population). This covered one per cent of homeless people, but the ACT received three per cent of SAAP funding. In Canberra, 40 per cent of homeless people were in SAAP on census night (Table 7.10).

In Victoria, Tasmania and South Australia the rate of homelessness was between 40 and 50 per 10,000 of the population. Victoria accounted for 17 per cent of homeless people, South Australia accounted for seven per cent and Tasmania for two per cent (total 26 per cent). However, these states attracted 36 per cent of SAAP funding. Table 6.10 shows that one-fifth (20 per cent) of the homeless were in SAAP in these states.

**Table 6.10:** Percentage of the homeless population in SAAP accommodation, state and territory comparisons

	ACT	Vic.	SA	Tas.	NSW	Qld	WA	NT
Percentage in SAAP	<b>40</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>2</b>

In Queensland, Western Australia and New South Wales the proportion in SAAP drops to 10 per cent. Queensland had 24 per cent of all homeless people, but it attracted only 14 per cent of SAAP funds. Western Australia had 12 per cent of homeless people, but it received nine per cent of SAAP funds. However, the situation in New South Wales is different. The state had a similar rate of homelessness to Victoria, South Australia, Tasmania and the ACT, and overall 28 per cent of homeless people were in NSW. Moreover, NSW attracted 36 per cent of SAAP funds. However, in NSW only 11 per cent of homeless people were in SAAP on census night.

Finally, the Northern Territory had the highest rate of homelessness in the country. It accounted for nine per cent of the homeless population, but it received two per cent of SAAP funds. In the Territory, roughly one in fifty was in SAAP.

The analysis in this monograph has been complicated. It will help to distil seven key issues for public discussion.

### 7.1 Definition: An Emerging Consensus

First, there is the hoary issue of definition. There has been a long debate about the definition of homelessness in Western countries and very little agreement (Neil and Fopp 1992; House of Representatives 1995; Avramov 1995; Hopper 1997). However, in Australia there is an emerging consensus around the definition developed by Chamberlain and MacKenzie (1992) (Chapter 1). They argue that homelessness is best defined in relation to shared community standards about the minimum accommodation that people have the right to expect in order to live according to the conventions of contemporary life. The minimum community standard is equivalent to a small, rented flat—with a bedroom, living room, bathroom and kitchen.

This has led to the identification of 'primary', 'secondary' and 'tertiary' homelessness (Chapter 1). Primary homelessness includes all people without conventional accommodation, such as people living on the streets, sleeping in parks, and squatting in derelict buildings. Secondary homelessness covers people residing temporarily with other families; those using boarding houses on an occasional or intermittent basis; and people using various types of emergency accommodation (refuges, hostels for the homeless, night shelters etc.). Tertiary homelessness refers to people who live in boarding or rooming houses on a long-term basis. They are homeless because a single room in a boarding house does not have the characteristics identified in the minimum community standard.

In practice, it was necessary to enumerate the homeless population using four categories on census night (Chapter 2): people in boarding houses; individuals staying with other families; people in SAAP accommodation (hostels, refuges etc.); and those in 'improvised dwellings, tents and sleeping out'. These categories do not correspond exactly with primary, secondary and tertiary homelessness. Men and women staying in boarding houses approximates to the tertiary segment of the population. People staying temporarily with other families and those using SAAP accommodation equate with 'secondary homelessness'. The census category 'improvised dwellings, tents, sleepers out' fits less neatly with primary homelessness.

Chapter 1 pointed out that there may be operational definitions of homelessness which are needed in particular contexts. For example, government departments may need more specific definitions when it comes to deciding who is eligible for particular welfare benefits. Similarly, welfare agencies may use broader definitions because they are often concerned with assisting people who are 'at risk', as well as people who are attempting to return to secure accommodation. The purpose of theorising a cultural definition is to provide a benchmark for thinking about the validity of operational definitions used in particular contexts.

## **7.2 Two Ways of Counting**

There are two ways of counting the homeless population and it is important to understand the relationship between them. The first is a census count. This gives the number of homeless people on a given night. The second is a cumulative annual total. This examines the number of people who become homeless over a year. The central theme of this monograph has been that a census count is always more important for policy purposes than a cumulative annual total—although the census count is usually lower. It will help to summarise the core argument, using an example.

Let us suppose that 50,000 Australians become homeless this year and all of them are homeless for 12 months. The cumulative annual total will be 50,000, and the census count will be 50,000 ( $50,000 \times 12/12 = 50,000$ ). This is a desperate situation where there are 50,000 chronically homeless people who are part of an underclass from which they have little chance of escaping.

Now let us suppose that 520,000 Australians become homeless this year, but each person returns to secure accommodation after one week. The cumulative annual total will be 520,000, but the census count will reveal 10,000 homeless people ( $520,000 \times 1/52 = 10,000$ ), because most people experience a short period of homelessness. The fact that the cumulative annual total is 520,000 should have no bearing on policy decisions. On a typical night, there will be fewer people requiring assistance than in the previous example (10,000 compared with 50,000), and it will be much easier to help them—because no-one has an intractable problem.

From the point of view of policy makers, the important figure is always the census count combined with information on the length of time that people have been homeless. The cumulative annual total is of little policy significance. It can be accompanied by a big number on census night if the turnover in the homeless population is low, or a small number if the turnover is high.

### 7.3 Census Count: Individuals

In order to count the homeless population on census night, it is necessary to enumerate: (1) people staying in boarding houses; (2) individuals using SAAP services; (3) persons staying with other families; and (4) people who are in improvised dwellings, tents or sleeping out.

Chapter 3 found that some hotels were classified as 'boarding houses' in the census, and some boarding houses were classified as 'hotels'. This made it necessary to work between two census categories. Owners and staff were removed from the calculation, as well as overseas visitors such as backpackers, and people who have a usual address elsewhere in Australia. The final figure in boarding houses was 23,300.

Data from the National SAAP Data Collection was used to count the number of people in refuges, hostels and other types of emergency accommodation. This is an annual data collection which began on 1 July 1996, but the data set can be manipulated to give point in time counts. There were 12,926 individuals in SAAP services on census night.

Many people who become homeless stay temporarily with other families. In 1996, the census included an instruction that if a person had no usual address, then they should write this in. The figure was 35,500.

The final census category was 'improvised homes, tents, sleepers out'. This category includes:

... people enumerated in sheds, humpies and other improvised dwellings ... it also includes people sleeping on park benches or in other 'rough accommodation' ... (ABS 1996, p. 160)

This is the category where there is greatest risk of undercounting. The final figure was 19,579 individuals.

Chapter 3 also showed that there was an undercount of about 14,000 in the younger age groups. When this was taken into account, the final estimate is 105,300 homeless people on census night (Table 7.1). It means that 12 per cent of homeless people were in SAAP accommodation on census night ( $12,926/105,304 \times 100 = 12$  per cent).

**Table 7.1:** Number of persons in different sectors of the homeless population, census night 1996 (final figures)

	Enumerated	Estimated	Total	Percentage
Boarding houses	23,299		23,299	22
SAAP accommodation	12,926		12,926	12
Friends and relatives	35,500	13,000	48,500	46
Improvised dwellings, sleepers out	19,579	1,000	20,579	20
	<b>91,304</b>	<b>14,000</b>	<b>105,304</b>	<b>100</b>

#### **7.4 Census Count: Households**

There is another distinction which is fundamental. Whether one counts the homeless population at a point in time or over a year, there are always two possible units of enumeration: individuals and households (Chapter 2). If a man, his wife and two children request emergency accommodation from a SAAP service, this is 'four people'. If a woman turns up on her own, this is 'one person'. However, the man, his wife and two children are one household (a 'family household'), and the woman on her own is one household (a 'single person household'). The number of households in the population will always be smaller than the number of individuals—because there will be some families (with children) and some couples (without children).

Chapter 4 showed that there were about 73,000 households in the homeless population on census night. Seventy-six per cent were single person households (about 55,000 people), 14 per cent were couples, and 10 per cent were families. There were 7,200 families on census night, but these families included 28,000 people (10,752 parents and 16,928 children = 27,680). Families constitute 10 per cent of homeless households, but they include 26 per cent of homeless people.

#### **7.5 Temporal Characteristics**

Chapter 5 showed that we can estimate the temporal characteristics of the homeless population using census and SAAP data. Table 5.11 indicated that approximately 70 per cent of people have been homeless for six months or longer on census night, including a substantial number who have been homeless for more than a year. Between 15 and 20 per cent have been homeless for a few months; and about 10 to 15 per cent of people have come into the population recently (a few weeks of homelessness).

#### **7.6 Do Most SAAP Clients Move to Independent Accommodation?**

One of the goals of the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program is to help homeless people to establish a capacity to live independently (National Evaluation of SAAP 1999, p. 2). There has been a debate about the capacity of SAAP to achieve this goal (Chesterman 1988; National Evaluation Steering Committee 1993; Fopp 1996). The research team carrying out the 1998 National Evaluation of SAAP (National Evaluation of SAAP 1999, p. xviii) reported that 'achieving independent living is difficult for many SAAP clients' and that most clients were either unemployed or not in the labour force when they left SAAP. The general tone of their report was that SAAP was not doing well when judged by this criterion:

Overall, the perceptions are that significant and often insurmountable barriers exist for many clients to achieve independent living and self-sufficiency ... Major concerns were expressed about the inadequacy of existing arrangements with respect to 'entry' and 'exit' points from SAAP. (National Evaluation of SAAP 1999, p. 57.)

This would have been convincing, except the National Evaluation team also reported that:

- (1) 55 per cent of SAAP clients were in independent accommodation when they first came to SAAP (p. vii). (This means that they were ‘at imminent risk’, but not actually homeless).
- (2) the duration of support provided to most SAAP clients was short—in two-thirds of the cases it was two weeks or less (p. xi); and that
- (3) three-quarters of the clients left SAAP to move into independent accommodation (p. vii)

Taken together, these points had to mean SAAP is effective at helping many clients move to independent living: more than half are ‘at risk’ when they come; two thirds receive support for two weeks or less; and three-quarters go to independent accommodation when they leave.

In fact, these points were not accurate. Table 7.2 shows that 80 per cent SAAP clients are already homeless when they come to SAAP. It was pointed out earlier that people usually prefer to stay with friends or relatives if they become homeless. The majority may access SAAP only once, but 80 per cent are already homeless when they come. Some stay in SAAP for a significant period of time (or return to SAAP more than once). Table 7.3 shows that 47 per cent per cent of SAAP clients had been homeless for six months or longer when they left SAAP in 1996–97. It is not correct to conclude that most SAAP clients have a short-term problem.

**Table 7.2:** Length of homelessness of accommodated clients when they first enter SAAP, annual data, 1996–97

	Total (N=27,661)
	%
At imminent risk	20
Homeless less than 4 weeks	39
Homeless 4–25 weeks	17
Homeless 26 weeks or more	24
	<b>100</b>

80

**Table 7.3:** Length of homelessness of accommodated clients when they exit from SAAP, annual data, 1996–97

	Total (N=22,328)
Less than 4 weeks	24
4–25 weeks	29
26 weeks–51 weeks	12
One year or longer	35
	<b>100</b>

*Note: A bracket groups the '26 weeks–51 weeks' and 'One year or longer' categories, with a '47' next to it, indicating their combined percentage.*

Moreover, only 40 per cent of SAAP clients move to independent accommodation when they leave. This is not obvious at first, and it will take a few paragraphs to explain.

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) (1997, p. 100) reported that 43 per cent of people who left SAAP went to private rental accommodation; another 15 per cent went to public housing; three per cent went to owner occupied dwellings; and 13 per cent went to other independent housing. This is the basis for the claim that:

At the conclusion of 74 per cent of support periods, clients were living in accommodation that could be characterised as ‘independent’ ... (AIHW 1997, p. xvii)

This was quoted in the National Evaluation of SAAP (1999) on pages vii, xviii, 99 and 105.

However, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (1997) included the following people as moving to independent housing: (1) people who were renting a caravan; (2) boarding with another family; (3) staying in a rooming or boarding house; and (4) people who were living rent free in somebody else's flat. Nobody appreciated what the AIHW had done, because the counting rules were tucked away in a technical appendix (AIHW 1997, p. 146).

**Table 7.4:** Client's type of housing after support in SAAP accommodation (final support period), 1996–97

	All Clients (N=20,933)	
		%
<b>Independent Housing</b>		
Private rental	26	40
Public housing	11	
Owner occupied	3	
<b>Marginal Accommodation</b>		
Boarding with another household	13	17
Renting a caravan	4	
<b>Homeless</b>		
SAAP service	18	43
Friend's place (rent free)	10	
Boarding house	4	
Institution ('detox', psychiatric hospital etc.)	5	
Streets/squat	2	
Other	4	
	100	

In reality, 26 per cent of clients moved into private rental accommodation when they left SAAP in 1996–97 (Table 7.4). Eleven per cent went to public housing and three per cent went to owner occupied homes. Only 40 per cent moved to accommodation that 'could be characterised as independent' (Table 7.4).

Forty-three per cent of SAAP clients were still homeless: 18 per cent had gone to another SAAP service; 10 per cent were staying with someone rent free; five per cent were in institutions (hospital, the 'detox' etc.); four per cent had gone to a boarding house; and two per cent had no accommodation (streets/squats). Another 17 per cent look marginal: 13 per cent were boarding with another family (often short-term); and four per cent were renting a caravan. Nearly everyone (90 per cent) in these groups was unemployed or outside of the labour force. They had not moved on to 'independent living'.

The goal of the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program is to help homeless people to establish a capacity to live independently. However, many people who exit from SAAP go to other sectors of the homeless population or they move 'around the system'.

## 7.7 State and Territory Variation

There are two ways of approaching the geographical spread of the homeless population. First, one can think about the actual number of homeless people in different states and territories on census night. This is the 'raw count', and it is important for policy makers. Second, one can think about the number of homeless people expressed as a rate per 10,000 of the population. This is a fairer way to compare states and territories of different size.

There were between 40 and 50 homeless people per 10,000 of the population in the four 'Southern States' (Chapter 6): Victoria (41.0 per 10,000), Tasmania (43.9), South Australia (48.1) and New South Wales (49.4). However, the actual number was just over 2,000 in Tasmania, but almost 15 times larger in New South Wales (29,600). In Western Australia and Queensland, there were between 70 and 80 homeless people per 10,000 of the population—roughly twice the rate in the 'Southern States'.

There were 12,252 homeless people in Western Australia compared with 6,837 in South Australia, although the two states have a similar population. There were 25,650 homeless people in Queensland compared with 17,840 in Victoria, although Victoria has a million more people than Queensland.

There are also marked differences in how effectively different governments appear to spend SAAP money, and this also affects the proportion of homeless people accommodated in SAAP on census night. Table 7.5 identifies four distinct patterns.

First, the Australian Capital Territory had the lowest rate of homelessness in the country (40.3 per 10,000 of the population). This covered one per cent of homeless people, but the ACT received three per cent of SAAP funding. In Canberra, 40 per cent of homeless people were in SAAP on census night (Table 7.5).

In Victoria, Tasmania and South Australia the rate of homelessness was between 40 and 50 per 10,000 of the population. Table 7.5 shows that one-fifth (20 per cent) of the homeless were in SAAP in these states.

**Table 7.5:** Percentage of the homeless population in SAAP accommodation, state and territory comparisons

	ACT	Vic.	SA	Tas.	NSW	Qld	WA	NT
Percentage in SAAP	40	19	22	19	11	9	11	2

In Queensland, Western Australia and New South Wales the proportion in SAAP drops to 10 per cent. Queensland had 24 per cent of all homeless people, but it attracted only 14 per cent of SAAP funds. Western Australia had 12 per cent of homeless people, but it received nine per cent of SAAP funds. However, the situation in New South Wales is different. The state had a similar rate of homelessness to Victoria, South Australia, Tasmania and the ACT. However, in NSW 11 per cent of homeless people were in SAAP on census night.

A comparison with Queensland is instructive. New South Wales had 29,600 homeless people and Queensland had 25,650. New South Wales got 36 per cent of SAAP funding and Queensland got 14 per cent. In Queensland there were 2,260 people in SAAP on census night, whereas in New South Wales there were 3,320.

Finally, the Northern Territory had the highest rate of homelessness in the country (523 per 10,000). It accounted for nine per cent of the homeless population, but it received two per cent of SAAP funds. In the Territory, roughly one in fifty was in SAAP.

## **7.8 Conclusion**

The main purpose of this study was to see whether it was possible to produce a credible estimate of the homeless population using ABS census data. This has proved possible.

There were 105,000 homeless people across Australia on census night. Many of them move frequently from one form of temporary shelter to another (McCaughey 1992; Hanover Welfare Services 1995; Chamberlain and MacKenzie 1998, Ch. 2; Bartholomew 1999, Ch. 6), and between 60 and 70 per cent of them had been homeless for six months or longer at that time. However, nearly half (46 per cent) were staying temporarily with other households on census night; one-fifth (20 per cent) were in improvised dwellings, tents or sleeping out; and another one-fifth (22 per cent) were staying in boarding houses. Only 12 per cent were in SAAP.

Over a year, just over 100,000 people stay in SAAP accommodation for short periods of time; but many people who exit from SAAP go to other sectors of the homeless population, or they 'move around the system'. Finally, the distribution of SAAP services is not consonant with the spread of the homeless population as measured by the census definition. This is a result which raises policy and planning issues for SAAP.

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