



Homelessness Australia

Creating a framework for ending homelessness

Sector briefing: Results from the Specialist Homelessness Services Collection December quarter 2011

Summary

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare has released its report on the results of the specialist homelessness services data collection for the December quarter (1 October-31 December 2011). The report describes the characteristics of clients who received support and/or accommodation in the 3 months to 31 December 2011, the types of support received and the main reasons given by people for seeking assistance. In this report there is a spotlight on young people presenting alone and older people.

Who was supported?

- 98,742 clients were supported over the course of 3 months between 1 October and 31 December 2011.
- Of those; 58,258 (59%) were females and 40, 484 (41%) were males.
- This represents a rate of service use of 44/10,000 people which is comparable to the rate of service use between 1 July and 30 September 2011.
- Just under half (48%) of all people supported (47,396) were children or young people aged 0-25 (this is comparable to the proportion supported between 1 July and 30 September 2011)
- Almost 1 in 5 clients supported (18% or 17,774 people) were young children aged 0-10.
- Young people aged 12-24 accounted for the largest age demographic of clients supported by specialist homelessness services.
- There was an increase in the number of older people (aged 55+) supported by specialist homelessness services and the report shines a spotlight on this group.

Accommodation circumstances before, during and after support

- On average, 18,574 people were accommodated by specialist homelessness services on 'any given night' over the course of the 3 month period the report covers.
- Accommodation was provided to clients in 35% of all support periods. This suggests services are supporting a significant number of people who are at risk of homelessness.
- Short-term or emergency accommodation was provided most often (in 60% of cases).
- 74% of people reported living in a house, townhouse or flat (not necessarily with tenancy rights to the dwelling) before presenting to specialist homelessness services.
- 5% of people had no dwelling at the time they presented.

- 26% of people had no tenure when they presented seeking assistance.
- 38% of people who provided information about their conditions of occupancy had some security of tenure and were nominated on the lease.
- 31% of people reported having stayed in short-term accommodation in the month prior to seeking support.
- 19% reported having slept rough.
- There were slightly fewer clients living without shelter after support (11% compared with 14% at the beginning of their support periods).
- There were fewer clients living with no tenure following support (21% compared with 25% prior to seeking assistance).
- There was no change in the proportion of clients renting in private housing after support but a small increase in the number of people in social housing. This suggests that exiting people from homelessness services into stable accommodation remains a challenge due to the shortage of affordable rental properties.
- There was an increase in clients who were nominated on the lease of the accommodation following support (42% compared with 38% before seeking assistance).

Types of services/support provided

- Information, referral and advocacy services were provided in over 80% of support periods.
- Assistance to prevent tenancy failure was identified in 20% of support periods and provided by agencies in 83% of cases.
- More than 40% of clients were provided with on-going case management.
- 20% of clients were provided with specialist support for domestic and family violence.
- Material aid/brokerage was provided in over 30% of cases.
- Accommodation was provided in just over 35% of support periods.
- In 60% of cases, this accommodation was short-term.
- In 34% of cases it was medium term.
- In 6% of cases it was long term.

Length of accommodation/support provided

- The average length of accommodation was 66 nights.
- The ACT had the longest mean duration of accommodation at 110 nights.
- For clients supported in the December quarter of 2011, 44% of support periods were less than 2 days in length.
- 22% of support periods were more than 6 weeks in length.
- For clients with support periods that were on-going at 31 December 2011, 72% had been open for more than 6 weeks.
- The average length of support periods that closed in the December quarter was 42 days.
- The ACT recorded the highest average length of support at 130 days.

Case management and support outcomes

- In support periods where clients had a case management plan in place, 42% met the goals of that plan during the support period and 48% achieved at least a portion of the goals identified in the plan.
- In 10% of cases, no goals were achieved.
- 63% of clients had no structured case management plan.
- In just over 60% of cases this was because the support period was too short.
- In 17% of cases, clients were already receiving case management from another agency or service.
- The most common reason for ending support periods was that the clients' goals had been met.
- There was little change in the employment status of people before and after support (up to 12% from 11%).
- More clients were connected to Centrelink and receiving income support following the closure of their support periods and fewer had no source of income at all.

Country of birth

- 86% of clients were born in Australia.
- 14% were born outside of Australia.
- This means people born outside of Australia are under-represented in the data.

Indigenous status

- 21% of people who received support were first Australians.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are significantly over-represented in specialist homelessness service use data.

Presenting units

- 87.8% of people who presented to services did so alone.
- 9.0% of people presented as a single person with children.
- 1.2% presented as couples without children.
- 1.1% presented as couples with children.
- 1.0% presented as 'other groups'.
- The unit status of the remainder was not stated.

Main reasons for seeking assistance

- The most often cited reason for seeking assistance was financial crisis (37.6% of clients).
- Domestic and family violence was the main reason for seeking assistance given by women, especially women with children and was cited by 30.8% of clients. In 24.8% of cases it was the main reason for seeking assistance.
- Housing crisis was the main reason for seeking assistance given by 24.6% of clients.

- Family breakdown/unable to live at home was the main reason cited by young people and was the main reason for seeking assistance offered by 23.4% of clients.
- Housing affordability stress was a major reason for seeking assistance given by 16.9% of clients. This number has increased steadily over the past few years suggesting the worsening affordability problem is pushing people into homelessness services.
- A lack of family and social support was cited by 14.7% of people as a main reason for seeking assistance.
- Mental health issues were cited as key reasons for seeking assistance by 12.6% of clients.
- Problematic alcohol and/or other substance use was given by 12.1% of people as main reason for seeking help (7.1% for other drugs, 5% for alcohol).
- Needing time out from family was offered by 11.9% of clients as a reason for seeking assistance.
- Medical issues were cited by 8.4% of people as reasons for seeking help.
- Unemployment was a main reason for seeking help given by 7.8% of people.

Homelessness and risk of homelessness

- 52% of clients were reported experiencing homelessness at the commencement of their support period.
- 48% were reportedly at imminent risk of becoming homeless.

Main sources of income

- Parenting payment was the main income source for 24.3% of clients.
- Newstart allowance was the main source of income for 24% of clients.
- Disability Support Pension was the main source for 21.2% of people.
- Youth Allowance was the main source of income for 10.8% of people.
- 7.2% of people derived their main income from employment.

Previous experiences of homelessness (past 12 months)

- 56.9% of people reported not having experienced homelessness in the past 12 months.
- 36% of people had been in temporary accommodation or emergency shelter/refuges at some time during the past 12 months.
- 22.2% had slept rough.

Previous experiences of homelessness (month prior to support)

- 61.5% had not experienced homelessness in the month prior to receiving support from specialist homelessness services.
- 31.1% of people had spent time in emergency accommodation, insecure tenure or other crisis settings due to a lack of options.
- 18.7% had slept rough.

Spotlight #1 for the December quarter: Young people presenting alone

- 18,819 clients were young people presenting alone.
- 64% of young people presenting alone were female, 36% were male.
- Housing crisis was the main reason for seeking assistance given by young people presenting alone (18%).
- Family breakdown was nominated as the main reason for seeking assistance by 17% of young people presenting alone.
- Domestic and family violence was cited by 15% of young people presenting alone.
- 23% of young people were boarding (with someone or in a rooming house) before seeking assistance.
- 22% were couch-surfing.
- 10% were in emergency accommodation.
- 5% were sleeping rough or in a squat.
- 20% of young people presenting alone identified as Indigenous, this is roughly consistent with all clients.
- 39% of young people were receiving youth allowance, 19% were receiving parenting payment, 17% Newstart. The remainder derived income from 'elsewhere'.
- The majority of young people who presented alone were engaged in education or vocational training.
- 58% of young people presenting alone had no case management plan.
- Of those with a case management plan more than 57% met the majority of goals in the plan.
- 25% of young people presenting alone were under a care/protection order.

Spotlight #2 for the December quarter: Older people

- In the December quarter of 2011, 5,661 clients aged 55 and over were supported by specialist homelessness services.
- 52% of older clients were men, 48% were women.
- Over 2/3 of older clients were recipients of the aged or disability support pension.
- 69% of older clients were living in a house, townhouse or flat prior to presenting to specialist homelessness services.
- 8% were sleeping rough.
- Financial difficulty, housing crisis and domestic and family violence were the main reasons given by older people for seeking assistance.

For more information:

The full report is available to download from the Australian Institute of Health & Welfare.

Please visit: <http://www.aihw.gov.au/publication-detail/?id=10737422221>