



**Homelessness Australia**  
*Creating a framework for ending homelessness*

## **Sector briefing: Results from the specialist homelessness services collection 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter 1 January – 31 March 2012**

### **Introduction**

This briefing provides an overview of the main findings from the specialist homelessness services data collection for the third quarter of the new collection covering the period 1 January 2012 – 31 March 2012.

### **Who was supported?**

- There has been an increase in the number of people supported by specialist homelessness services from 98,742 clients between 1 October 2011 and 31 December 2011 to 102,356 between 1 January 2012 and 31 March 2012, an increase of 3,614 clients or just over 4%.
- Of those, 59% of clients were females (60,390 people), 41% were males (41,996 people).
- Accommodation was provided in 34% of all support periods with 'emergency' and 'short term' accommodation the most commonly provided type.
- On 'any given night' during the period an average of 18,600 people were accommodated.
- 48% of clients were aged 25-44 years.
- 46% of clients were aged under 25
- Of these, young people aged 15-24 accounted for the largest group.
- 17% of clients were children aged 0-10, this equates to approximately 1 in 6 people supported.

### **Indigenous status**

- 21% of clients identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, service use by this group were proportionally higher for young children. About 1 in 4 children aged 0-10 identified as Indigenous. This means Indigenous people are overrepresented in the homelessness service system by a factor of six to one.

### **Country of birth**

- 86% of people were born in Australia

- NZ (13%), Sudan (9%) and the UK (7%) were the most common o/s countries of birth.

### **Mental health**

- In the March quarter only 14% of clients had a mental health issue. This is lower than the incidence in the general population suggesting it is under-reported.
- More females (54%) had a mental health issue than males (46%).
- Of those with an identified mental health issue, only 53% reported having ever had a clinical diagnosis prior to receiving services.

### **Presenting units**

- 69% of people seeking assistance from specialist homelessness services presented alone.
- 35% presented in groups or family units, predominantly single women with children.
- The 4% overlay (the 2 figures add up to 104%) because a small proportion of people presented in different presenting unit types at different times during the quarter.

### **Main reason for seeking assistance**

- Domestic and family violence was again the most often cited reason for seeking assistance, especially by women presenting with children. 33% of female clients and 9% of male clients nominated domestic and family violence as their main reason for seeking help. This equated to 24% of all clients.
- For males, housing crisis 'rent too high' and financial crisis were the main reasons for seeking assistance.
- Family breakdown/unable to live at home were the most common reasons given by young people.
- One in four people nominated housing crisis as their main reason for seeking assistance suggesting urgent action is needed on housing affordability.
- 19% of clients did not provide a 'main reason' for seeking assistance.
- When looking at all reasons given by clients (not just their main reason), 37% nominated financial difficulties, followed by domestic and family violence, 30%, housing crisis/unaffordability, 25% and family breakdown at 23%

### **Main source of income**

- 25% of clients reported that Newstart Allowance was their main source of income.
- 24% of people nominated Parenting Payment Single.
- 21% nominated Disability Support Pension.
- 30% of people supported did not nominate a source of income.

### **Labour force status**

- 54% of clients 15 and over whose labour force status was recorded were not in the labour force at the beginning of support.
- 41% of clients were unemployed.
- 11% of clients were in full or part time employment.
- Information on labour force status for 25% of all clients aged 15 and over.

### **Housing situation before support**

- 74% of people who reported their housing tenure living in a flat, townhouse or house before support.
- 33% did not state their tenure.
- 28% of clients had no housing tenure immediately prior to support (some of the 74% are included in this figure).
- 22% were in private rental.
- 6% were sleeping rough.

### **Homelessness in the past month**

- 61% of those who reported on this question had not been homeless a month prior to presenting at a homelessness service.
- 31% reported having been in crisis accommodation.
- 19% reported having slept rough.
- These stats are consistent with the previous quarter.

### **Was accommodation provided?**

- Accommodation was provided in 34% of all support periods. Based on all support periods where accommodation was provided, 63% of clients were accommodated in short-term or emergency accommodation,
- 36% were accommodated in medium term/transitional accommodation and;
- 7% in long-term accommodation.

### **What other types of support were provided?**

- A need for advice/information was identified in 70% of support periods and provided by the agency in 97% of these support periods. .
- A need for advocacy/case management was identified in 43% of cases and provided by the agency in 96% of identified support periods.
- Material aid/brokerage was identified in 28% of cases and provided by the agency in 85% of support periods.
- Tenancy support to prevent eviction/tenancy failure was provided in 21% of support periods. This was provided by the agency in 82% of identified cases.

- In 19% of support periods a need for assistance for domestic and family violence was identified and this was provided by the agency in 90% of identified cases.

### **Length of support periods**

- 42% of clients support periods were less than 2 days in length.
- 25% were more than 6 weeks.
- The average length of a support period was 45 days.
- The ACT had the longest mean length of support periods that closed in the March quarter at 74 days.

### **How did clients' circumstances change with support?**

- In support periods where clients had a case management plan in place, 43% 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.
- 64% of clients had no structured case management plan.
- In just over 57% 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 11% from 10%).
- 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.

### **Changes in housing situation following support**

- 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).

## Homeless clients

- Specialist homelessness services provide a range of services to people who are experiencing homelessness as well as those who are at risk of becoming homeless.
- Overall, 53% of clients who were assisted by specialist homelessness services over the March quarter 2012 were identified as being homeless at the beginning of their support period, and 47% were determined to be 'at risk of homelessness'.
- For clients who were homeless at the beginning of support periods that commenced in the March quarter 2012, 73% reported as having either slept rough or stayed in short term/emergency accommodation the month before presenting to a specialist homelessness agency.
- 86% of clients who were homeless at the beginning of a support period that commenced during the March quarter 2012 also reported a previous period of homelessness in the last 12 months.
- The focus of most SHSC agencies is on provision of short-term/emergency and transitional Accommodation. In 73% of support periods where this service was needed, the need was met.
- In comparison, where long-term accommodation was needed, the need was met in just under half (47%) of support periods.

## Data Spotlights: Families and people in remote communities

### Families

Most people present alone when they receive specialist homelessness services, however around 30% present in family groups.

- The average no. of people presenting in a family group was 3.1 people
- Single people with children were the most common family type (76% of support periods), followed by couples with children (15%)
- Women more likely to be identified as the family spokesperson in families who receive support
- Nearly one-third of all family members who received support identified domestic and family violence as the main reason for seeking support. This was more commonly reported for clients who presented in 'single person with children' families. This is similar to the previous quarter but lower than in past years using the old SMART dataset.
- Housing crisis was the most common main reason for seeking assistance for clients who presented in 'couples with children' families. This is consistent with previous years and previous quarters.

### By Remoteness

- The proportion of females to males increases with increased remoteness:
  - In major cities females represent 57% compared to males at 43%.
  - In very remote areas females represent 82% of clients.

- Domestic and family violence is the most reported main reason for seeking assistance across all geographic areas, but the proportion of clients reporting domestic violence increases overall with remoteness
  - 27% of clients in major cities, 27% of clients in inner regional areas, 21% of clients in outer regional areas, 39% of clients in remote areas and 51% of clients in very remote areas).
- The proportion of Indigenous clients rises with remoteness
  - Indigenous clients represent 15% of clients in major cities compared to 76% in Remote areas and 93% in very Remote areas.
  - While this likely reflects the proportion of Indigenous people in those areas, on the whole Indigenous people are over-represented among those receiving services from homelessness agencies
- Across all remoteness areas the most common type of client group receiving assistance are clients who present alone followed by lone parents with child(ren).
  - This increases with increasing remoteness (25% in major cities compared to 38% in very remote areas)
- Agencies based in major cities are more likely to provide services other than accommodation during a support period, and accommodation length tended to decrease with increasing remoteness.
  - 68 nights for clients in major cities, 51 nights for clients in inner regional areas, 41 nights for clients in outer regional areas, 27 nights for clients in remote areas and 7 nights for clients in very remote areas.

**For more information:**

To access the full AIHW report, please visit: <http://www.aihw.gov.au/publication-detail/?id=10737422986>

**Comments, queries or clarifications**

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