



Sector briefing: 2011 Census night homelessness estimates

13 November 2012

Key points

- The number of people identifiable as experiencing homelessness on Census night 2011 increased by 17% from 89,728 people in 2006 to 105,237 people.
- The rate of homelessness has increased from 45/10,000 to just under 49/10,000 people.
- This means that nearly 1 in every 200 Australians was experiencing homelessness on Census night 2011.
- There has been a significant increase in homelessness in NSW, Victoria, Tasmania and the ACT with overall levels of homelessness increasing by more than 20% in those jurisdictions over the 5 years to 2011.
- Most of the increase in homelessness between 2006 and 2011 was reflected in people living in severely overcrowded dwellings up from 31,531 people in 2006 to 41,390 in 2011.
- There was a sharp increase in the number of people staying in specialist homelessness services on Census night up from 17,329 in 2006 to 21,258 in 2011. This is an increase of more than 20% which is consistent with what services have been saying and what specialist homelessness services data has found.
- The number of people staying in boarding/rooming houses increased from 15,460 people on Census night 2006 to 17,721 on Census night 2011.
- There was a small decrease in the number of people identified as staying temporarily with other households, down from 17,663 in 2006 to 17,329 in 2011.
- There was a six percent reduction in the number of people sleeping rough down from 7,247 in 2006 to 6,813 in 2011.
- The number of people in the newly created category of 'other temporary lodging' soared by more than 35% from 500 in 2006 to 686 in 2011. This category includes people brokered into hotels and motels on Census night.
- For more information on the new ABS definition of homelessness, please see page 10.

Gender breakdown

- 56% of people counted as experiencing homelessness on Census night were males, 44% were females.
- The proportion of males experiencing homelessness declined from 57% in 2006 to 56% in 2011. The proportion of females increased from 43% to 44%.
- In most categories males outnumbered females with the exception of specialist homelessness services, where the majority of people counted as staying in supported accommodation for people experiencing homelessness were females.
- The rate of homelessness amongst males declined slightly while the rate of homelessness amongst females increased between 2006 and 2011.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

- 25% of people who were counted as homeless on Census night 2011 identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. This equates to 26,744 people.
- This was down from 29% in 2006.
- A large proportion of this group are living in severely overcrowded dwellings.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are also significantly over-represented in specialist homelessness services users.
- Homelessness Australia believes this figure is likely to be an under-count.

People born overseas

- 30% of people counted experiencing homelessness were born overseas.
- People born overseas accounted for a significant proportion of the increase in homelessness particularly people living in overcrowded dwellings.
- People born overseas accounted for nearly 50% of the increase in homelessness in severely overcrowded dwellings amongst people aged 19-24 and 25-34.
- People born in China, New Zealand, Afghanistan and India were over-represented in the severe overcrowding figures.

Table 1: Persons in different homeless operational groups (2001, 2006, -2011)

	2001		2006		2011	
Category	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Improvised dwellings, tents, sleepers out	8,946	9	7 247	8	6,813	6
Supported accommodation	13,420	14	17,329	19	21,258	20
People staying with other households	17,880	19	17,663	20	17,369	17
Boarding houses	21,300	22	15,460	17	17,721	17
Other temporary lodgings	338	<1	500	<1	686	<1
Severely overcrowded dwellings	33,430	35	31,531	35	41,390	39
Total	95,314	100.0	89,728	100.0	105,237	100.0

Table 2: Trends in homelessness operational groups 2006-2011

Category	2006 (n)	2011 (n)	Change +/- (n)	Change +/- (%)
Improvised dwellings, tents, sleepers out	7,247	6,813	-434	-5.9
Supported accommodation	17,329	21,258	+3,929	+22.7
People staying with other households	17,663	17,369	-334	-1.9
People in boarding houses	15,460	17,721	+2,261	+14.6
Other temporary lodgings	500	686	+186	+37.2
Severely crowded dwellings	31,531	41,390	+9,859	+31.2
Total:	89,728	105,237	+15,509	+17.3

Trends: 2006 to 2011 (operational groups)

- There was a small decrease in the number of people sleeping rough or in improvised dwellings.
- There was a small decrease in the number of people staying temporarily with friends and relatives.
- There was a significant increase of nearly 23% in the number of people staying in homelessness services; this is consistent with what specialist homelessness services data produced by the AIHW indicates.
- There was a statistically significant increase of nearly 15% in the number of people who were staying in boarding/rooming houses on Census night. This suggests that a sector once thought to be in decline may not be.
- There was a very large increase in the number of people living in dwellings that were severely overcrowded, much of this was in major cities and could reflect a decline in rental affordability.

Homelessness by age (change between 2006 & 2011)

Table 3: Change in homelessness trends by age 2006 – 2011

Age group	Number (2006)	Number (2011)	Change (n)	Change (%)
0-12	15,715	17,845	+2,130	+13.6
12-18	9,788	10,913	+1,125	+11.4
19-24	12,155	15,325	+3,170	+26.1
25-34	15,848	19,312	+3,464	+21.8
35-44	13,180	14,484	+1,304	+9.9
45-54	10,581	12,507	+1,926	+18.2
55-64	6,950	8,649	+1,699	+24.4
65-74	3,560	4,174	+614	+17.2
75+	1,951	2,028	+77	+3.9

Gender balance and age trends in different operational groups

Severely overcrowded dwellings

- The gender division in this category was about equal.
- Of the 41,390 people in severely overcrowded dwellings on Census night 2011, 21,036 were males and 20,354 were females.
- 50.9% males, 49.1% females.
- People in severely overcrowded dwellings were fairly evenly spread across a range of age cohorts, though there were a higher proportion of children aged <12 and young people aged 12-18 in this group than in the homeless population as a whole.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were over-represented in this group.
- There was an increase in the number of people living in severely crowded dwellings in the more populous states of New South Wales and Victoria.

Persons in supported accommodation

- There were slightly more females than males in this category.
- Of the 21,258 people, 10,742 were females, 10,516 were males.
- 51% females, 49% males.
- This gender division is more balanced than we see in quarterly specialist homelessness services reports.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were over-represented in this group.
- There were a high proportion of young people aged 12-24 in this operational category on Census night.
- 28% of people aged 12-18 who were counted as experiencing homelessness on Census night were in this form of accommodation.
- 31% of children under 12 years of age who were counted as homeless on Census night were staying in specialist homelessness services.
- Very young children were over-represented in this group.
- Older Australians were dramatically under-represented in this group.

People staying in boarding houses

- This group was overwhelmingly dominated by males.
- Of the 17,721 people staying in boarding houses on Census night 2011, 13,246 were males and 4,475 were females.
- 74.8% were males, 25.2% were females.
- Older males were significantly over-represented in this group.
- 46% of the boarding house population is aged 45 and over compared to 22% of all people experiencing homelessness on Census night.
- Younger people were under-represented in this group.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were also under-represented.
- It is likely that the figure of 17,721 people represents a significant undercount of the actual number of people who were in boarding/rooming houses on Census night 2011.
- Older people were proportionally over-represented in this operational group compared to their percentage of the overall homelessness population.

People staying temporarily with other households

- The gender split in this group mirrored that for people counted as experiencing homelessness on Census night as a whole. There were 9,725 males in this group and 7,644 females.
- 56% were males, 44% were females.
- There were fewer younger people in this group than in severely crowded households or supported accommodation but a higher proportion than in boarding houses.
- Surprisingly only 8% of people aged 12-18 who were counted as experiencing homelessness on Census night 2011 were found in this group.

- Just 14% of people aged 19-24 who were counted as experiencing homelessness on Census night 2011 were found in this group.
- This suggests a high number of young people staying temporarily with friends/relatives have been missed.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were also under-represented in this group compared to in other operational categories.
- This suggests that large groups of people in situations of ‘hidden homelessness’ (youth, women escaping violence and Aboriginal people staying with kin) continue to not be picked up as experiencing homelessness based on data on the Census form.
- We would have also expected to see a higher percentage of women identified in this group if women escaping domestic and family violence were being accurately enumerated as in situations of homelessness in this group.

People who are in improvised dwellings, tents, sleepers out

- There were significantly more males in this group than females.
- Of the 6,812 people enumerated in this category on Census night 2011, 4,602 were males and 2, 210 were females.
- 67.6% were males and 32.4% were females.
- There were a high proportion of people aged 25-54 years in this group while younger people and children aged <12 were under-represented.
- 1 in 5 people in this group was aged <25.
- Older people were proportional over-represented in this group compared to their percentage of the overall homelessness population.

Persons in other temporary lodging

- Of the 686 people in this group, 390 were females and 296 were males.
- 56.8% were females, 43.2% were males.
- This could reflect a high number of people in this group being brokered into hotels/motels on vouchers after escaping domestic violence.

Breakdown by State & Territory

Table 4: Homelessness by State & Territory change in number and rate/10,000 people between 2006 and 2011

State/Territory	2006 (n)	2011 (n)	+/- (n)	+/- (%)	2006(rate / 10,000)	2011 rate/ 10,000)	+/-Rate %
NSW	22,219	28,190	+5,971	+26.9	33.9	40.8	+20.4
Victoria	17,410	22,789	+5,379	+30.9	35.3	42.6	+20.7
QLD	18,856	19,838	+982	+5.2	48.3	45.8	-5.1
WA	8,277	9,592	+1,315	+15.9	42.3	42.8	+1.1
SA	5,607	5,985	+378	+6.7	37.0	37.5	+1.4
Tasmania	1,145	1,579	+434	+37.9	24.0	31.9	+32.9
ACT	949	1,785	+836	+88.1	29.3	50.0	+70.6
NT	15,265	15,479	+213	+1.4	791.7	730.7	-7.8

NSW

- The biggest increase in homelessness in NSW came from people in severely overcrowded dwellings. This group increased from 5,902 people in 2006 to 9,658 people in 2011. This was an increase of nearly 64% and could reflect in housing/rental affordability across the state.
- The number of people in specialist homelessness services in NSW increased by nearly 25% from 3,867 in 2006 to 4,926 in 2011.
- There were smaller but not insignificant increases in the boarding house and rough sleeping populations.
- There was a 30% increase in homelessness amongst children in NSW.
- Youth homelessness (12-24) increased by more than 33% between 2006 and 2011.
- Homelessness amongst older people remained about the same.

Victoria

- There was a significant increase in rough sleeping in Victoria. The number of people in the improvised dwellings, tents and sleepers out category increased by 39% in Victoria between 2006 and 2011, increasing from 786 people to 1,092.
- There was also a sharp rise in the number of people in severely overcrowded dwellings in Victoria. In 2006, 3,345 people were in this circumstance. By 2011, this had increased to 6,041 people, up by just over 44%.
- The number of people in boarding houses increased by just over 25% from 3,050 in 2006 to 4,397 in 2011.
- There was an increase in the number of people in specialist homelessness services and a small increase in the number of people staying temporarily with other households.
- There was a large increase in homelessness amongst children and people aged 12-24 in Victoria but a fall in homelessness amongst older Victorians.

Queensland

- While there was a small increase in the number of people counted as experiencing homelessness on Census night 2011 in Queensland, the rate of homelessness actually fell.
- The number of people sleeping rough or in improvised dwellings in Queensland fell sharply from 2,026 in 2006 to 1,584 in 2011, a decrease of nearly 22%.

- The number of people in specialist homelessness services increased by more than 20% between Census night 2006 to Census night 2011 going from 3,065 to 3,784.
- There was a fall in the number of Queenslanders staying temporarily with other households between 2006 and 2011 while the number in boarding houses remained largely unchanged.
- There was a slight increase in homelessness amongst children in Queensland between 2006 and 2011.
- Youth homelessness (12-24 year olds) declined slightly between 2006 and 2011.
- Homelessness across all other age groups in Queensland remained about the same.

Western Australia

- The number of people sleeping rough in WA fell from 1,016 in 2006 to 925 in 2011, a fall of 91 people or just under 9%.
- There was a decrease of nearly 8% in the number of people in specialist homelessness services on Census night between 2006 and 2011. WA was the only jurisdiction to record a decline.
- The number of people staying temporarily with other households remained about the same between 2006 and 2011.
- The number of people staying in boarding houses in WA increased by about 30% between 2006 and 2011 as did the number of people living in severely crowded dwellings.
- The number of older people experiencing homelessness in WA increased by nearly 20% between 2006 and 2011.
- There was a 22% increase in homelessness amongst people aged 25-34 between 2006 and 2011.
- There was a slight decrease in homelessness amongst children and young people in WA between 2006 and 2011.

South Australia

- The number of people counted sleeping rough or in improvised dwellings fell by 41% in SA between Census night 2006 and 2011 from 436 people to 258.

- There was a 10% increase in the number of people staying in specialist homelessness services in SA between 2006 and 2011.
- There was a 26% increase in the number of people living in severely overcrowded dwellings in SA rising from 1,362 in 2006 to 1,712 in 2011.
- Other categories of homelessness remained virtually unchanged.
- The number of children aged 0-12 experiencing homelessness fell by about 3% between 2006 and 2011 in SA.
- Youth homelessness (aged 12-24) figures remained virtually unchanged between 2006 and 2011.
- The number of people aged 25-34 experiencing homelessness on Census night in SA fell by nearly 15% between 2006 and 2011.

Tasmania

- The number of people sleeping rough or in improvised dwellings increased by nearly 30% in Tasmania between 2006 and 2011 from 122 people to 156 people.
- The number of people staying in specialist homelessness services increased from 224 in 2006 to 480 in 2011. This is an increase of more than 114% and suggests there has been a significant expansion in bed capacity in Tasmania and that there is no issue with getting people into the service system.
- There was a decrease in the number of people staying temporarily with other households in Tasmania between 2006 and 2011.
- The number of people staying in boarding houses in Tasmania on Census night increased significantly from 139 in 2006 to 235 in 2011, an increase of 97 people or just over 41%.
- The number of children aged 0-12 experiencing homelessness in Tassie increased from 169 on Census night 2006 to 236 in 2011, an increase of almost 40%.
- The number of young Tasmanians aged 12-24 experiencing homelessness increased from 257 in 2006 to 400 in 2011, an increase of nearly 56%.

Australian Capital Territory

- There was a massive increase in homelessness in the ACT. The number of Canberrans counted as experiencing homelessness increased from 949 on Census night 2006 to 1,785 on

Census night 2011. This was an increase of over 88% while the rate/10,000 increased by more than 70%

- The largest increase in the ACT was in people in specialist homelessness services. In 2006, 461 people were accommodated in these settings on Census night; by 2011 this had ballooned to 1,105 people, an increase of nearly 140%.
- There was a sharp increase in the number of Canberrans in severely overcrowded dwellings rising from 77 on Census night 2006 to 280 on Census night 2011. This is an increase of more than 263% and could suggest that the housing affordability problem in Canberra is forcing people into larger group households.
- Conversely there was a reduction of more than 43% in the number of people sleeping rough or in improvised dwellings in the ACT between 2006 and 2011.
- The number of children aged 0-12 experiencing homelessness increased by more than 100% from 142 in 2006 to 288 in 2011.
- The number of young people aged 12-24 experiencing homelessness in the ACT increased by more than 90% between 2006 and 2011.
- There was also a sharp rise in homelessness amongst people aged 35-54, increasing by more than 100% between 2006 and 2011.

Northern Territory

- The rate of homelessness fell significantly in the Northern Territory from 791.7/10,000 in 2006 to 730.7 in 2011 despite a slight rise in number of people counted as homeless.
- There was a 30% reduction in the number of people sleeping rough or in improvised dwellings in the NT falling from 1,213 in 2006 to 848 in 2011.
- The number of people in specialist homelessness services increased by more than 250% between 2006 and 2011 from 221 people to 571 people.
- In other categories numbers and rates of homelessness remained similar.
- There was a fall in youth homelessness of nearly 10% between 2006 and 2011 but homelessness amongst children increased.
- Homelessness among older people increased in the NT while amongst people aged 25-54 the numbers remained fairly similar between 2006 and 2011.

The following link will enable you to access the full document:

[Catalogue 2049.0: Census of population and housing: estimating homelessness](#)

Summary of the new ABS statistical definition used to generate these estimates

The ABS has developed a statistical definition of homelessness. Details of the definition is in [Information Paper – A Statistical Definition of Homelessness](#) (cat. no. 4922.0).

In brief, the ABS statistical definition is that:

When a person does not have suitable accommodation alternatives they are considered homeless if their current living arrangement:

- is in a dwelling that is inadequate; or
- has no tenure, or if their initial tenure is short and not extendable; or
- does not allow them to have control of, and access to space for social relations.

The ABS definition of homelessness is informed by an understanding of homelessness as 'home'lessness, not rooflessness. It emphasises the core elements of 'home' in Anglo American and European interpretations of the meaning of home as identified in research evidence (Mallett, 2004). These elements may include: a sense of security, stability, privacy, safety, and the ability to control living space. Homelessness is therefore a lack of one or more of the elements that represent 'home'.

The definition has been constructed from a conceptual framework centred around the following elements:

- Adequacy of the dwelling;
- Security of tenure in the dwelling; and
- Control of, and access to space for social relations.

The ABS definition of homelessness will be used to produce statistics on homelessness from a range of ABS collections. This includes prevalence estimates of homelessness from the five-yearly Census of Population and Housing, and from household surveys such as the General Social Survey, Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers, Personal Safety Survey, National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey, and other surveys, as appropriate.

This definition can also be used by other organisations to collect and output their statistics in line with the ABS definition and ABS statistical outputs.

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