



First results from the new specialist homelessness services data collection

A sector briefing

Results from the first quarterly dataset from the new specialist homelessness services data collection were published on 4 April 2012. They report on the use of specialist homelessness services between 1 July and 30 September 2011.

The report includes findings from data collected by NAHA funded specialist homelessness services as well as some services funded under the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness including service use data, support provided and outcomes following support.

As the report presents data from the September quarter, caution must be used when attempting to compare results with those extracted from the SAAP NDCA collection on the use of specialist homelessness services which reported findings for the full financial year.

Notwithstanding this important distinction the findings from the first quarterly dataset of the new collection are in and of themselves alarming.

Key findings

- In the 3 months to 30 September 2011, 91,627 people were supported by specialist homelessness services.
- Of those, 50% (45,314) were aged under 25 and 18% (16,493) were aged under 10.
- 59% were female, 41% were male.
- 2/3 of people (60,474) presented alone while 1/3 were children (31,153) presenting with a single parent (usually a mother) or as part of a family unit.
- Children aged 0-10 and young people aged 18-24 were the two largest age demographics of service users.
- Women were most likely to nominate domestic and family violence as their main reason for seeking support. Men were most likely to nominate housing or financial crisis. Younger people were most likely to nominate family breakdown or being unable to live at home.
- The report found that in more than 80% of cases, services were able to meet the needs of their clients or secure referrals to services that could meet their needs.

Number of clients in 'special groups of interest'

Table 1.1: Number of clients in special groups of interest, and overlap with other groups, September quarter 2011^(a)

	Indigenous	Children	Domestic and family violence	Primary homelessness	People exiting care and custodial settings	None of the above
Indigenous	15,649	6,105	5,239	3,506	1,009	..
Children		25,086	9,513	3,109	1,504	..
Domestic and family violence			26,987	3,399	933	..
Primary homelessness				15,012	1,083	..
People exiting care and custodial settings					4,348	..
None of the above						22,328

(a) Numbers of clients in groups of interest are not weighted.

As the table above shows First Australians are again overrepresented in homelessness service use data and very high numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people nominate domestic and family violence as their main reason seeking assistance (33% of cases).

More than 1 in 4 clients and 36% of female clients nominated escaping domestic and family violence as their main reason for seeking assistance from homelessness services.

One in six people had experienced primary homelessness prior to seeking support from homelessness services.

One in twenty people supported were exited into homelessness services from custodial and care settings showing there is more work to do to realise the policy of 'no exits' into homelessness.

Age Profile

Of the 91,627 people supported by specialist homelessness services in the 3 months to 30 September 2011:

- Almost 16,500 were aged 0-10.
- Just over 12,000 were aged 10-17.
- Almost 17,000 were aged 18-24.
- Just over 15,000 were aged 25-34.

- 14,000 were aged 35-44.
- Just over 8,000 were aged 45-54.
- The remaining 6,200 were aged 55 and over.

Children

- 58% of children were aged 0-10 years.
- 28% of all children supported were Indigenous (31% of children aged <10).
- Just over 2/3 of children attended as part of a family unit, 32% presented to services alone.
- 31% of children presented for support related to experiencing/witnessing domestic & family violence. 14% presented following housing crisis. 10% for family breakdown
- 47% of children were provided with accommodation and housing outcomes improved following support. 91% were provided with or referred to assistance with education or school liaison.
- 43% of children had a case management plan. Of those, 51% met case plan goals.

People escaping domestic and family violence

- People escaping domestic and family violence accounted for 34% of all clients supported, this equates to 26,987, people.
- 77% people escaping violence were females. 23% were males but half of all males escaping violence were children aged <10.
- 22% of people escaping domestic and family violence were Indigenous.
- 43% of people escaping violence received accommodation, about half of this group for more than 6 weeks.
- 53% of people supported by domestic and family violence had a case management plan in place and 38% achieved the goals of this plan during support.

People experiencing primary homelessness prior to support

- 15,012 people receiving support had experienced primary homelessness (19% of all clients). The largest number of this group were aged 25-44.

- 55% of people who had experienced primary homelessness were males, 45% were females.
- Children accounted for 21% of people experiencing primary homelessness.
- 25% of people experiencing primary homelessness were Indigenous.
- The main reasons for seeking assistance cited by this group were housing & financial crisis, inadequate conditions in their previous dwelling and escaping violence.
- Clients were in a primary homelessness situation before support in just over 32% of support periods. This decreased to 23% following support.
- 46% had a case management plan in place and after support the majority had met some or all of the goals of their plans.

People leaving care and custodial settings

- 4,348 people (almost 5%) were reported to have received support from specialist homelessness services following discharge from care and custodial settings.
- 59% were male, 41% female.
- 19% were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander
- This is a small proportion of overall client numbers but attention is focused on this group due to the adoption of the 'no exits policy' from these settings. It should also be noted that to be included in this category people had to have spent time in hospital or a care or custodial setting in the week prior to receiving support.
- 40% had left a mental health facility or hospital. 33% had exited a custodial setting (including prison & JJ). 27% of young people had a statutory care or child protection order in place.
- Almost half of clients leaving custodial & care settings were aged 25-44.
- 53% of people with a care and protection order were aged 15-17. 37% were Indigenous. More of this group were females (60%) than males (40%).
- Transitioning from care/custody, mental health issues, housing crisis and problematic alcohol and/or other drug use were the main reasons for seeking support.
- 55% of people in this group had a case management plan in place.

Indigenous people

- 21,744 Indigenous people were supported.
- Of those, 6,105 were children.
- Escaping family violence, financial/housing crisis and the inadequacy of the previous dwelling are the main reasons given by Indigenous people for seeking assistance.

Country of birth

- 85% of people supported by specialist homelessness services in the 3 months to 30 September 2011 were born in Australia, 15% were born overseas.
- New Zealand (14%) , Sudan (9%) and England (6%) were the most common countries of birth.
- This suggests that while people from CaLD backgrounds are underrepresented in service use data, people from Sudan are probably overrepresented.

Reasons for seeking support

- 26% of people nominated domestic and family violence as their main reason for seeking assistance. Of those 21% were women, and 5% were men.
- 36% of female clients cited escaping violence as their main reason for seeking assistance.
- Young people were most likely to nominate family breakdown or being unable to remain in the family home as their main reasons for seeking assistance.
- Men were most likely to nominate housing and financial crises as their main reasons for seeking assistance (19% of people)
- The inadequate or inappropriateness of previous accommodation was the next most often cited reason for seeking support (9% of people).
- Being asked to or having to leave previous accommodation was cited by 7% of people as their main reason for seeking assistance.

Types of services provided

- 72% of people were provided with information and basic support.
- 51% were provided with additional support including advocacy and assessment.

- 48% were provided with accommodation.
- 43% were provided with brokerage and material aid.
- 32% were provided with support to help them sustain their tenancy or prevent eviction.
- 26% were provided with assistance for domestic and family violence.
- 25% were referred to providers of long term housing and 9% were successful in attaining a tenancy with long term security of tenure.

Were support needs met?

- Services were able to meet the support needs of clients in more than 80% of cases.
- In other cases services were able to meet some needs but had to refer people to ensure other support needs were addressed.
- In just under 15% of cases, services were not able to secure timely referrals to external services.

Support periods

- 38% were less than 2 days.
- 13% were between 2 days and 1 week.
- 24% were greater than 6 weeks.
- 39% were on-going at the conclusion of the September quarter.

Outcomes

- Before and at the end of support, most clients were living in a house, townhouse, or flat (65% at the beginning of support; 66% at the end of support).
- There was a small decrease in clients who had no dwelling, were living in a motor car or in an improvised dwelling (10% at the beginning of support; 7% at the end of support). This suggests the increased focus on supporting people sleeping rough to access housing had an impact.
- Before and at the end of support, the most common type of tenure for clients was renting in private housing (20% both at the beginning and at the end of support). This suggests private rental is difficult to access for people experiencing homelessness. It also underscores the need for urgent action to address Australia's housing affordability crisis.

- There was an increase in the proportion of clients renting in social housing following intervention by/support from specialist homelessness services (14% at the beginning of support; 17% at the end of support). This could reflect services gaining access to stimulus dwellings.
- The majority of people were in medium or long term housing following support.
- 43% of people achieved their case plan goals during support. 51% of Indigenous people achieved some or all of their case plan goals during support.
- Engagement with and enrolment in education, employment and vocational training improved following support from homelessness services.
- There was a measurable improvement in housing outcomes for people who had exited state care or custody or who had been rough sleeping prior to support.

State & Territory data

Table 2.1: Service use by State and Territory

State/Territory	Number (n)	% of clients
New South Wales	24,311	27
Victoria	26,132	29
Queensland	17,130	18.5
Western Australia	9,699	10.5
South Australia	7,638	8.4
Tasmania	2,866	2.4
ACT	2,264	2.2
Northern Territory	2,084	2.1
TOTAL:	91,627	100.0

Table 2.2: Accommodation circumstance prior to support by State/territory

Previous homelessness status	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Australia
Sleeping rough	17.8	20.8	24.9	14.2	11.0	21.6	26.8	19.3	19.1
Short-term or emergency accommodation	33.5	35.6	29.6	20.5	29.6	37.4	34.4	22.1	31.4
Not homeless	53.6	52.2	51.8	68.1	59.3	49.2	48.0	62.3	55.1
<i>Total valid responses (number)</i>	<i>17,704</i>	<i>20,648</i>	<i>13,505</i>	<i>8,296</i>	<i>7,809</i>	<i>2,029</i>	<i>1,295</i>	<i>1,496</i>	<i>72,782</i>
Not stated	34.7	39.2	29.0	26.0	6.1	36.4	45.5	32.7	32.2
Total (number)	27,099	33,982	19,018	11,213	8,318	3,189	2,375	2,224	107,418

The full report can be accessed via the AIHW website:

<http://www.aihw.gov.au/publication-detail/?id=10737421507&tab=2>