



Northern & Western Homelessness Networks

Annual Consumer System Survey 2019: Consumer experiences of the homelessness service system



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Background

Every year the Northern and Western Homelessness Networks survey people who have accessed homelessness assistance through the 180 homelessness programs operating in Melbourne's north and west.

This is the eighth year that the North and West Homelessness Local Area Service Networks (LASNs) have run this survey. For the first four years the consumer survey focussed on consumer experiences of the newly coordinated homelessness service system.

In the fifth year the survey was more qualitative, exploring the responses received in the previous four years.

In the sixth year the survey focussed specifically on consumers' experiences of emergency accommodation, in response to feedback received in the previous survey. In the seventh year the survey was also primarily a qualitative survey – focussing on consumers' experiences of homelessness and a lack of housing.

This year the survey sought information on four key areas: consumer experiences of the homelessness service system, suggested improvements, whether consumers had to re-tell their stories, whether they felt respected and how they would like to be contacted.

Victoria is experiencing a housing crisis - there is not enough affordable housing for everyone who needs it. The Networks use the consumer feedback to improve the quality of our service system responses and to advocate for changes in the broader environment.

Over 1,400 people have taken part in the eight consumer surveys and many changes have been made as a result.

The most significant actions arising from consumer feedback have been:

- The release of the "Crisis in Crisis: the appalling state of emergency accommodation in Melbourne's north and west" report: <http://nwhn.net.au/Crisis-in-Crisis.aspx>
- The 'More Houses for People' and 'Every Victorian Should Have a Home' advocacy campaigns, which has seen hundreds of signed postcards from people with lived experience of homelessness, and other members of the community, sent to the Prime Minister of Australia and the Premier of Victoria.

Results: Participation

123 adults and 46 young people undertook the survey, with a total of 174 participants (six fewer than in 2018).

Results: Demographics:

- 67% of adult respondents were women and 66% of young respondents were women.
- 8% of adult respondents and 6% of young respondents identified as Aboriginal and 3% of young respondents identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.
- 62% of adult respondents and 90% of young respondents identified as having a mental health issue
- 49% of adult respondents and 39% of young respondents were single people with children.
- 29% of adults and 47% of young people, who identified their country of birth, were born overseas.
- 62% of adults and 90% of young people who reported experiencing some form of disability identified experiencing mental health issues.

Results: Summary statistics

Table 1: Gender

	# of adults	# of young people	% of those adults answering	% of young people answering
Female	71	21	67%	66%
Male	34	11	32%	34%
Prefer not to specify	0	0		
Trans	0	0		
Non binary/gender neutral	1	0	1%	
Total	106	32		
Did not answer	13	14		

Table 2: Age Distribution of Participants

	#	% of those answering
<18	4	3%
18-24	28	21%
25-34	35	27%
35-44	37	8%
45-54	20	15%
55+	8	6%
Total	132	
Did not answer	42	

Table 3: Use of interpreters

	# of adults	# of young people	% of adults answering	% of young people answering
Yes	9	3	8%	7%
No	108	42	92%	93%
Total	117	46		

Table 4: Disability

	# of adults	# of young people	% adults with disability	% of young people with disability
Intellectual	2	1	3%	10%
Physical	20	1	30%	10%
Mental Health	41	17	62%	90%
Vision	1	0	2%	5%
Hearing	2	0	3%	%%
Total	66	19		
Did not answer	53	27		

Table 5: Living arrangement

	# of adults	# of young people	% of adults answering	% of young people answering
Lone person	38	14	36%	42%
Lone person with children under 18	52	13	49%	39%
Couple	3	0	3%	
Couple with children	9	0	8%	
Other	4	6	4%	18%
Total	106	33		

Table 6: ATSI status

	# of adults	# of young people	% of adults answering	% of young people answering
No, Neither	96	30	92%	91%
Yes, Aboriginal descent	8	2	8%	6%
Yes, Torres Strait Islander descent	0			
Yes, both	0	1		3%
Total	104	33		
Did not answer	15	13		

Table 7: Sexual orientation

LBGQTI+	# of adults	# of young people	% of adults answering	% of young people answering
Yes	6	1	6%	3%
No	94	31	94%	97%
Total	100	32		
Did not answer	19	14		

Table 8: Country of Birth

Country	# of adults	# of young people
Australia	72	17
Ethiopia	6	3
Somalia	4	
Macedonia	3	
Sudan	3	2
Congo		2
New Zealand		2
Iraq	2	
Vietnam	2	
Liberia	1	1
Malaysia		1
Argentina		1
Nigeria		1
Pakistan		1
Papua New Guinea		1
Egypt	1	
Lebanon	1	
Hungary	1	
Sri Lanka	1	
Iran	1	
Afghanistan	1	
Greece	1	
Western Samoa	1	

Table 9: Main language spoken at home

	# of adults	# of young people
English	90	36
Arabic	3	2
Somali	3	
Oromo		2
Albanian		1
Swahil		1
Vietnamese	1	
Dori	1	
Dinka	1	
Amharic	1	
Persian	1	
Macedonian	1	
Tigrinya	1	
Asyrian	1	
Auslan	1	
	105	42

Results: Qualitative questions

Question 6: What can you tell us about your experience of the homelessness service system?

Themes: Adults

Theme	Number
Very good	21
Long waiting times for assistance	7
Immediate assistance	6
Stressful and uncertain (hard with kids)	5
Still homeless	5
Appointment system not helpful	2
THMS are good	3,
PRAP useful	1
Not an easy system to navigate	6
Poor conditions in emergency accommodation	4

Themes: Young people

Theme	Number
Good	19
Long wait for housing	5
Difficult to access with a disability (deaf)	1
Emergency accommodation unclean and unsafe	3
Changed service for an improved response	1
Not easy to navigate	1

Quotes from adults

- I felt I got immediate help from the first point. Happy services fulfilled my needs Waiting but fulfilled
- Stressful at homelessness, hard with kids, wait was stressful with kids
- It took 3 months to get into a hostel
- It hard to get real housing Bad conditions in rooming houses Expensive accommodation options
- Helpful there when you need them
- Trying to get assistance was hard. Difficult to get the right service. Felt palmed off. Trying to get into homeless service very hard

Quotes from young people:

- There is a lot of support but it's hard and a lengthy wait to get access to good accommodation has made me sometimes hopeless
- Services treated me well. Emergency accommodation: Hotel was dirty. People were doing drugs
- There is a lot of waiting and people get placed for only one night. It is hard. There have been times where I have been working and still haven't got help. There are times when I have had to sleep on the streets.
- It hasn't been very good I have been homeless for 3 years and I seek imprisonment as a form of housing
- Housing is an important thing for a human being. If you don't have a house, you will feel unbalanced. Very happy staying in this accommodation (Catchment Refuge). It is a good place for people like me.
- It's absolute crap. When I was experiencing Family violence I could not be moved due to lack of housing. Still stuck in insecure - system FAILED

Question 7: What can homelessness services do to make it a better experience for you?

Themes: Adults

Theme	Number
More houses	26
Quicker response to needs	12
Good feedback to services	10
More equipped staff/more staff	10
More crisis accommodation options	9
More funding	7
Improve safety of hotels/motels/rooming houses	7
More affordable housing options	5
Demand government provide more support	5
More information and education	3
More long term housing options	3
More transitional housing	2

Themes: Young people

Theme	Number
Assistance to get a house	11
Nothing	8
Better communication from access point	3
Shorter wait for housing	2
Auslan training	1
Improve crisis accommodation	1
Advocate with housing services	1

Quotes from adults:

- Better emergency accommodation. Family been put into small hotel room with not enough beds, high price per night when we had to pay out of pocket. Some motels were so dirty (bed bugs), unsafe being female by myself with kids.
- More resources, more funding, more houses.
- Nothing, I'm happy, couldn't ask for more.
- Better security in services, reduce violence somehow. I've been attached in both rooming houses without staff – but I feel safe in XXXX (government funded crisis supported accommodation).
- Shorter wait for housing. Services are good – easy to deal with. It's just about the housing availability.
- I guess more time to spend with clients.
- Understand I'm homeless not by choice. Not much, they have been great so far.
- They are trying the best they can.
- Cure my homelessness.
- Be better funded to enable quicker assistance for consumers.
- No queuing. Not use horrible hotels.
- I like to access a safe place to live.
- More information and details.
- They are wonderful but I would like it if there was more funding available.

- More transitional and public housing. Not make me feel like I am being judged. Have more funding available to help people like me.
- Have more options and opportunities for a better life and recovery process. More houses and support for mental health.

Quotes from young people:

- To make it a better experience for me they can help me to get a house
- Shorten the waiting period for transitioning into the next housing
- Have staff learn Auslan to communicate with deaf clients
- More houses; cheaper houses
- Other accommodation options. Have more long term options.
- Have more/better emergency services for accommodation stuff that is more long term, not just one night.
- They are empowering and help in confidence building
- Provide more housing options for young people
- They are doing all they can to help
- More housing & houses
- Would love if they could provide temporary accommodation. Listen to the peoples issues and support as much as they can.
- More housing options and more easy access for those experiencing family violence
- More housing with support. Services need to influence government and speak up more for housing

Question 8: How many homelessness services have you had contact with in the last year?

Homelessness services	# adults	# young people	% adults	% young people
1	37	13	33%	35%
2-5	62	22	56%	60%
6-10	9	2	8%	5%
10+	3		2%	

Question 9: Some people have told us that they have had to repeat their information when they move from one homelessness service to another.

What has been your experience of this?

Response	# of Adults	# of young people	% adults	% young people
Yes	45	16	44%	48%
Yes but it's OK	12	5	12%	15%
No	32	4	31%	12%
Somewhat	4	2	4%	6%
NA	10	6	10%	18%
Total	103	33	101%	96%

Quotes from adults:

- Good experience of info being relayed and not any repetition.
- Services not communicating with one another. No time to investigate/look into previous contact
- can be a bit draining and bring up emotions. same paperwork
- Feel like a broken record that plays over forever
- Repeat everything from start to end/5-6 services.
- Having some kind of centralized record system could reduce information repeating
- Most definitely. The disconnect or lack of proper and prompt liaising b/w services meant a lot of repetitiveness
- Crap in the past had to repeat story find the services I am now working with good
- No not really. I feel discrimination because they act like they don't want to help me. Different people at front desk at different times and days give different information and makes it confusing at times to understand
- Yes, felt trauma. More than 10 times
- I found communications not linked so I had to constantly had to tell my story
- Happens a lot. In D/V Services too. Need Central database
- Yes you need to tell your story again which can be harmful to your mental health when you are trying to work through your issues
- No, not necessarily. I have been lucky to have a great bunch of workers with great handover skills.
- Yes, it's true! It's worse at the start with the access point because you see different workers all the time which is very frustrating. if you could even have one allocated worker at the access point that would make it easier.

Quotes from young people:

- Makes me feel sad. Make me think of the past again. Brings up too much memories.
- The same. It would be more convenient to forward their details to the next service.
- OK to repeat problems and information as they can assist my circumstances. Only those I trust.
- I don't mind if I get asked a lot of questions, as long as they try to help me.
- I would agree and it's annoying and time consuming to repeat my story over and over again.
- Exhausting, to have to retell story. Services should exchange information.
- Yes, I have had to repeat my information as previous services were reluctant to share across service providers.

Question 10: Do you feel you were treated respectfully by homelessness services?

Response	# of adults	# of young people	% of adults	% of young people
Yes	86	28	79%	76%
No	4	2	4%	5%
Somewhat	5	3	5%	8%
Depended on service	10	3	9%	8%
Depended on worker	3	1	3%	3%
Total	109	37		

Overall themes

Most people were happy with their overall experiences with the Specialist Homelessness Service System, however some people qualified their answers with exceptions such as the service provider or the type of service they were engaging with or the worker they encountered.

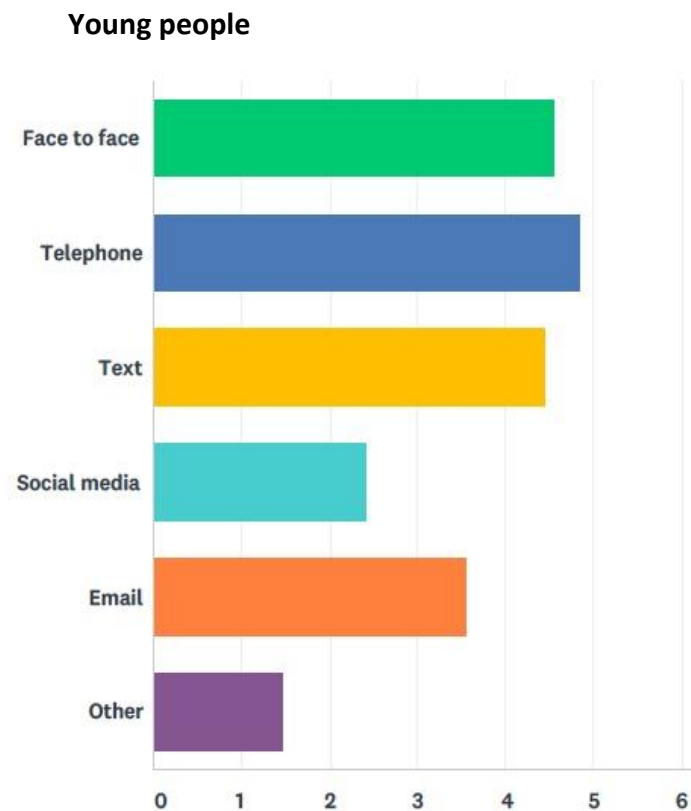
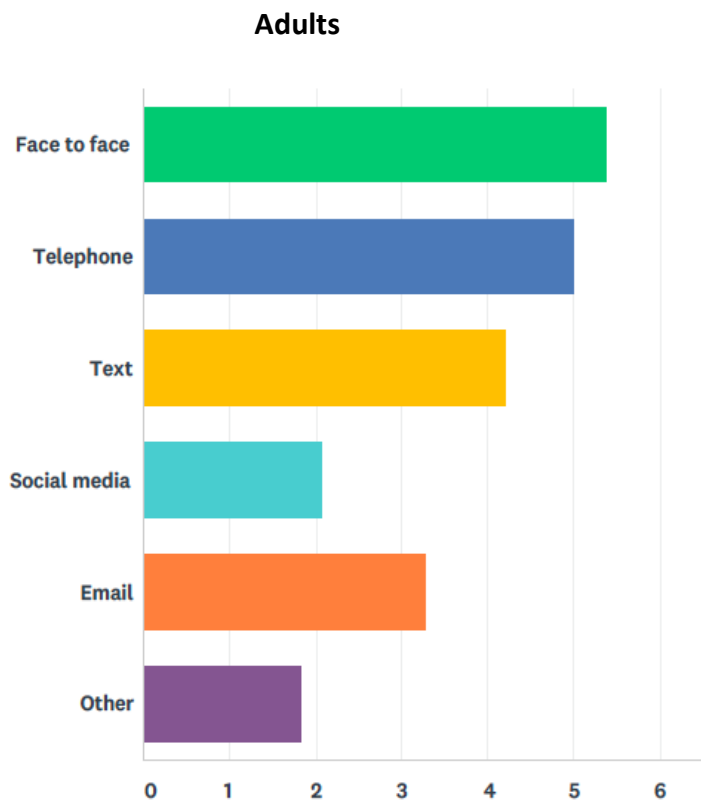
Quotes from adults

- When I had to wait for mould in my THM to be resolved or Child Protections said it must be fixed or I would lose my kids. People said to me “there is no housing”. “We cannot help you.” It felt like I was being told there were no solutions. I felt very sad. I cried a lot. The stress led to a premature birth as I was pregnant at the time. The hospital has said my child will have stunted growth.
- Yes! Workers always asked for my consent and followed things up.
- My worker is helping me a lot. Very understanding and very respectful.
- Some organisations are promising contact and not returning it.
- Sometimes I feel that they are racist towards me because I look different.
- Some workers at access points treated me very badly and some workers were OK.

Quotes from young people

- All were respectful but lied to me about getting me a house. Took me from 16-19 years old to get accommodation and support.
- Yes, respect is important.
- Not always. Sometimes it’s just like you want a handout and you actually need help. Some people treat you like bad luck – it’s not their problem, when all you need is help.

Question 11: Can you rank how you would most like to be contacted by homelessness services (with 1 being your preferred option)?



Calculated on the top three preferences:

Contact	Adults	Young people
Face to face	253 (46%)	61 (33%)
Telephone	197 (35%)	70 (38%)
Text	104 (19%)	54 (29%)