



7 Services for homeless people

7.1 Introduction

In Australia, assistance is available to those who are homeless or have experienced some form of crisis in their lives resulting in their loss of secure housing and an immediate need for assistance. This assistance comprises accommodation and support services which have the overall objective of helping individuals and families to overcome the crisis and return to independent living.

The range of assistance available to meet this objective includes:

- accommodation, that is, supported accommodation and/or assistance to obtain short-term accommodation and independent housing;
- financial or employment assistance;
- counselling/personal support in living skills and relationships;
- general support and advocacy, including legal aid;
- specific services, including drug rehabilitation, disability services, health and medical services and culturally appropriate support; and
- assistance with basic needs such as meals and transport.

Governments have provided this assistance via different programs and agencies, recognising that people requiring such services are a diverse group. Some have long-term complex problems, such as those associated with unemployment or conflict in the family, while others are in need of emergency relief due to an external event or crisis.

This chapter examines the characteristics of those persons who may need assistance and the range of assistance provided.

Currently, there is no single universal definition of 'homeless' or 'in crisis' that is generally accepted by those working in this field, but there is a range of definitions embodying the notions of loss of secure housing, being at risk or in immediate need of assistance. These definitions usually focus in varying degrees on four main groups:

- those currently living on the street or in crisis accommodation;
- those living in temporary arrangements without security of tenure, such as moving between friends or relatives or living in squats or improvised dwellings, and those living in boarding houses;
- those living in unstable family circumstances, for example families in which child abuse or domestic violence is occurring; and
- those living on very low incomes and facing extraordinary expenses or personal crisis.

Some definitions consider only people in the first two groups to be 'homeless' since at best they have only temporary accommodation, while other definitions also include those at high risk due to the uncertainty of their current living arrangements. For example, the definition of homeless used in the *Supported Accommodation Assistance Act 1994* and the national Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) data collection includes those living in households experiencing destabilising factors such as violence or abuse (Boxes 7.1 and 7.2). These varying definitions along with other measurement issues make it difficult to estimate the number of persons in need of assistance. Detailed discussion of measurement issues is contained in the evaluation report of the 1996 ABS Census homeless enumeration strategy (ABS 1997).

Box 7.1: Details of the SAAP National Data Collection

The SAAP National Data Collection collects data to describe the usage and nature of the services provided to SAAP clients and to their accompanying children. Data are collected for clients and for support periods (see definitions in Box 7.2). When an agency is unable to support a client and the client is referred elsewhere for assistance, data are also collected on these referrals. The data also describe one-off assistance provided to people whose requests for support or supported accommodation were not met.

In the collection, an individual client may receive support on more than one occasion—either from the same SAAP agency or from different SAAP agencies. Information is presented for clients and also for the number of occasions of support provided to clients. The use of an alpha code enables a distinction to be made between the individual and the occasions of support that a client receives, given that the client has given permission to have an alpha code recorded.

In the first 6 months of the SAAP National Data Collection, from 1 July to 31 December 1996:

- of the 1,130 SAAP agencies in Australia, approximately 990 participated in the data collection. Non-participating agencies include those having only casual clients;*
- participating SAAP agencies reported on 66,886 completed occasions of support. For 22,801 of these support periods (34%), consent was not obtained and client information, including their alpha codes, was not available. For these support periods, only the agency information is available. In addition, errors or omissions meant that alpha codes were not provided for another 2% of support periods. Footnotes for each table indicate the number of records excluded;*
- the number of clients who completed support periods is estimated at 47,100. The total number who received support exceeds this number because current clients (as at 31 December) are excluded from this count.*

Agencies that have a high client throughput, catering for a large number of clients in a short period of time, are not required to record the same level of client detail as other agencies.

Data on the main reason clients sought assistance should be treated with caution, as responses were not provided for over one-half of all support periods.

Data sources

Currently, there is no single source of data on homeless persons in Australia and there are several issues that make information difficult to collect and analyse. The diverse nature of clients and the range of services provided to meet the needs of people seeking assistance affect the collection of accurate and comprehensive information. Many of the data issues discussed here are similar to those raised in Chapter 6 in relation to the reporting of the need for child protection and family assistance, reflecting the strong relationship between the two areas of welfare services.

Since the last *Australia's Welfare* report (AIHW 1995), major advances have been made in collecting national program-related information with the establishment of the national data collection for the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program. SAAP is a joint Commonwealth–State funded program in which services are largely delivered by non-government agencies, with some local government participation. While for this report data were only available for the first six months of collection, they have already provided a depth of detail around the issue of assistance to homeless persons. The availability of annual data over several years will add the potential to examine longitudinal aspects of homelessness and demand for services by enabling the usage patterns of individuals to be seen over time.

The information issues encountered with the 1996 SAAP National Data Collection indicate the range of problems facing data collection on homeless people. These issues include:

- defining the scope and coverage of the collection through a mutually acceptable and operational definition of homelessness;
- the need for several different counting units to capture all aspects of assistance, covering the client, the service provided and the episode of assistance;
- the use of a range of definitions relating to client status to cover the different patterns of use and assistance received, including casual clients, clients with unmet needs and clients referred from other agencies;
- identifying and examining the impact of any significant non-response at the agency, client or service level;
- considering externalities such as how the availability of substitute housing or health-related services, not in the scope of the collection, affect demand, unmet need and usage patterns;
- the need to identify multiple users of assistance and identify them in a confidential manner to minimise double counting of client numbers; and
- developing measures which address difficulties in examining outcomes.

The completion of the first full year of data from the SAAP data collection will enable these information issues to be examined in more detail.

To date there are no nationally consistent data available on those living on the streets, in boarding houses, in other temporary accommodation or in non-SAAP funded agencies, which could be used to augment the SAAP data. However, improved data collection and processing methods in the 1996 ABS Population Census should result in some additional information becoming available.

Box 7.2: Definitions used in the SAAP National Data Collection

A person is **homeless** if he/she has inadequate access to safe and secure housing. A person is considered not to have access to safe, secure and adequate housing if the only housing to which the person has access:

- damages, or is likely to damage, the person's health; or threatens the person's safety; or
- marginalises the person through failing to provide access to:
 - adequate personal amenities; or
 - the economic and social supports that a home normally affords; or
 - places the person in circumstances which threaten or adversely affect the adequacy, safety, security and affordability of that housing; or
- has no security of tenure; that is, the person has no legal right to continued occupation of their home.

A person is also considered homeless if he/she is living in accommodation provided by a SAAP agency or some other form of emergency accommodation (AIHW 1997).

A **client** is a person who receives from a SAAP agency support or assistance which entails generally 1 hour or more of a worker's time, either with that client directly or on behalf of that client, on a given day; or is accommodated by a SAAP agency; or enters into an ongoing support relationship with a SAAP agency.

A **support period**, or case, is an occasion of assistance provided to a SAAP client. A support period commences when a client begins to receive support from a SAAP agency. The support period is considered to finish when the client ends the relationship with the agency; or the agency ends the relationship with the client. If it is not clear whether either has ended the relationship, the support period is assumed to have ended if no assistance has been provided to the client for a period of 1 month.

One-off or **casual assistance** includes the provision of a meal, a shower, transport, clothing, information and the like. A distinction is made in the National Data Collection between such one-off assistance, which takes less than 1 hour of a worker's time, and support which requires a greater time commitment and which is normally provided as part of an ongoing support relationship. Recipients of one-off assistance are referred to as casual clients. Details of casual assistance and casual clients are not included in the main client data. A casual client data collection was conducted in May–June 1997.

Unmet demand occurs 'when the particular needs of clients and their accompanying children cannot be met either by the provision of services directly by SAAP agencies or through referrals to other agencies'. Another aspect of unmet demand 'stems from an inability to provide supported accommodation or support alone to all homeless people who request such assistance—not all those who wish to become clients of SAAP can be accepted as clients' (AIHW 1997:58).

7.2 Assessing need for assistance

In the early 1990s emergency relief agencies were reporting large increases in demand for services (Parity 1992). As well, SAAP agencies were turning away many seeking crisis accommodation due to the unavailability of beds (AIHW 1995:89). In the light of such demand, it is clear that in order to plan and provide effective crisis assistance, it is necessary to have estimates of the number in need or at imminent risk of homelessness and therefore requiring assistance. The Commonwealth and States, through SAAP and the Commonwealth Advisory Committee on Homelessness, are cooperating in the development of better methods of estimating the extent of homelessness.

The number of homeless people

Estimating the number of homeless people depends on the definition used and how it is applied to available data. A variety of definitions and approaches have been offered, and used, in the literature (Table 7.1).

Table 7.1: A summary of estimates of homeless people in Australia, 1989–95

Source	Homeless people	Estimated number
Burdekin (1989)	Homeless children and young people	20,000–25,000
Fopp (1989)	Young people who are homeless or at risk	50,000–70,000
Mackenzie & Chamberlain (1992)	Young people between the ages of 12 and 24 who were homeless in 1991	15,000–19,000
Mackenzie & Chamberlain (1995)	School students who were homeless in a year (1994 study)	25,000–30,000
AIHW (1993)	Total number of homeless people based on approach in Mackenzie & Chamberlain (1992)	48,000–61,000

There has been very little progress over the last few years in estimating the number of homeless people in Australia, and no improved national estimates have been presented since the Institute's 1993 biennial report. In that report, estimates of homeless people of between 48,000 and 61,000 were put forward for 1992 (AIHW 1993). These estimates are based around the first two groups of persons mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, namely, those living on the streets, in crisis accommodation or in other temporary arrangements. Discussion of the two remaining areas often considered as part of the homeless population, covering persons with unstable living arrangements, follows.

People living in untenable family circumstances

As already mentioned, definitions of the number of homeless persons often includes persons who are living in housing that is physically adequate yet, due to circumstance, the living arrangements are seen as tenuous. The majority of such people are women and children living in abusive situations—sexual, physical, emotional or economic. Whether or not they are considered to be homeless, they require immediate support to avoid complete family breakdown and/or loss of shelter.

While there are no national data on the number of children or youth in tenuous living arrangements, an indication of the number of women living in abusive situations is provided in the 1996 ABS Survey of Women's Safety (ABS 1996a). Using a definition of

violence based on actions which would be considered offences under criminal law, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) estimated that around 111,000 women (3% of all women aged 18 years and over) who were married or in a de facto relationship had experienced physical or sexual violence by a current partner in the last 12 months. In addition, 80,000 women had experienced violence by a previous partner. The incidence of violence was higher for younger than older women. Of women who had experienced violence at some time during the relationship with the current partner, about 42,000 were still living 'in fear'.

In relation to women's experience during the last 12 months, data on the occurrence of 'emotional' abuse are not available, neither are data on the presence of children during episodes of violence. However, of the 345,000 women who had experienced violence with a current partner at any time, around 40% said that children had witnessed the violence. Moreover, around 60% of women (or 203,000) who had experienced violence by their current partner during the relationship had also experienced emotional abuse. A further 176,000 women were subjected solely to emotional abuse during the relationship.

Families on very low incomes

In addition to those at risk of homelessness due to the breakdown of relationships, there are also persons whose financial circumstances create a need for assistance. Families on very low incomes are at risk of becoming homeless and could require crisis assistance or more general support. While some of these households may have economic or social resources which they could use in a crisis, many would be under extreme stress and would be vulnerable to external pressures such as unexpected expenses or a personal crisis.

An indication of the number at risk due to poor family resources can be obtained by estimating the number of households on very low incomes. Using data from the 1994 ABS Australian Housing Survey (ABS 1996b), it is estimated that around 414,000 households had incomes below the Henderson after-housing poverty line; that is, according to the estimated poverty line, they had insufficient income to meet basic non-housing expenses.

Households renting privately are particularly at risk since they have little control over continued occupation of their dwelling and are less likely to have financial assets, such as ownership of a house, on which to fall back—around 122,000 households renting privately had incomes below the Henderson after-housing poverty line.

Summary

The above data indicate the varying size of what may constitute the homeless population, depending on the groups included in the definition. The 1996 SAAP National Data Collection for the 6 months from 1 July 1996 reported that some 47,100 individuals and families used SAAP services, providing a minimum estimate of the number of people who needed assistance over that period (AIHW 1997:15). However, the SAAP data cannot provide an estimate of the total number of homeless in Australia, even in terms of the definition used in the collection, as it only covers those who contact SAAP agencies.

There is a group of persons who may be considered homeless but who do not receive or do not seek SAAP services. Some of these are likely to be from among those living in untenable family circumstances (a group comprising 111,000 women in a 12-month period), or from the group of people in financial hardship (a group estimated to be 414,000 households that may be financially 'at risk' at a point in time). While these data indicate the extent of the numbers of people who may in some sense be considered homeless, it is important to note that the number of people in crisis or at serious risk of homelessness is a sub-group of the people or households referred to above.

The SAAP National Data Collection analysis of unmet demand estimated that there were 103,000 requests for assistance, including multiple requests from the same client, that could not be met in a 6-month period (AIHW 1997:59). These relatively large numbers indicate a significant difference between the 'at risk' group that obtain assistance from supported accommodation services and those who do not for some reason receive such assistance. The availability and use of 'mainstream' health and welfare services is also important in examining the need for assistance. Data on these aspects are discussed later in this chapter in relation to met and unmet demand for services.

7.3 Services and assistance

To assist those in need, governments provide different types of crisis services and assistance. Crisis services, such as those provided by SAAP-funded agencies, provide people who are homeless or at imminent risk of becoming homeless with either supported accommodation or support only. However, many people in crisis because of homelessness receive assistance from health and welfare services whose primary function is not related to assisting homeless persons. While programs such as SAAP are primarily targeted at the 'homeless' population, services for homeless persons or those in crisis are also often provided through 'mainstream' community services such as child protection and family support programs, and programs for the mentally ill, people with a disability or those with substance abuse problems.

Information on the links between services specifically targeted at homeless persons and other broader health and welfare services is incomplete. For example, national information on the links between public and community housing assistance and crisis accommodation is limited. Similarly, national information for services targeted at homeless people which are funded outside major programs such as SAAP are poor. For these reasons this section examines only the national programs that specifically provide assistance for supported accommodation.¹

1 This chapter also excludes programs which provide income support to homeless people. In relation to DSS income support payments, for instance, the Independent Homeless Rate (IHR) provides additional income support to under 18 year olds receiving DSS payments who are unable to live with family because of 'unreasonable circumstances' (DSS 1996:160).

The two major national programs providing assistance to people in crisis because of homelessness are SAAP and the Crisis Accommodation Program (CAP) which is part of the Commonwealth–State Housing Agreement (CSHA).² SAAP provides recurrent funding for services for homeless persons, while CAP provides capital funding to acquire or upgrade properties for community-based accommodation and support services. There is overlap between these two types of assistance as SAAP programs are often provided in accommodation funded by the Crisis Accommodation Program.

In acknowledgment of the multiple needs of people in crisis, programs like SAAP are moving away from focusing solely on immediate needs, such as accommodation, towards addressing the underlying causes of a crisis. For example, to avoid gaps in the services for the homeless and to ensure that their needs are met, a client-focused case-management approach is being emphasised in the latest SAAP agreement. Similarly, pilot projects being conducted by the Prime Ministerial Youth Homeless Taskforce over the two financial years 1996–97 and 1997–98 are designed to explore new models of family reconciliation, focused on early intervention. These projects recognise the need for a range of approaches with particular emphasis on developing ‘family relations’ strategies that focus on the re-engagement of young homeless people in family, work, education, training and the community (Prime Ministerial Youth Homeless Taskforce 1996:1).

Funding the services

Major government funding for crisis accommodation and support services is provided through the Youth Social Justice Strategy, the Crisis Accommodation Program and the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program.

Youth Social Justice Strategy

The Youth Social Justice Strategy, in addition to capital funding, provides recurrent funding for innovative support services and medium- to long-term accommodation for homeless youth. Commonwealth recurrent funding is matched on a dollar-for-dollar basis by State and Territory Governments (DCSH 1990:153). In 1994–95, Commonwealth and State expenditure under the strategy was \$10.9 million (Table 7.2). From 1 July 1995 the Youth Social Justice Strategy funds were transferred to SAAP.

Table 7.2: Youth Social Justice Strategy (Accommodation and Prevention of Homelessness), Commonwealth and State expenditure by funding source, 1994–95

	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Australia
	(current \$'000)								
Commonwealth	1,674	1,276	840	545	765	..	163	163	5,426
State/Territory	1,674	1,276	840	545	765	..	163	163	5,426
Total	3,348	2,552	1,680	1,090	1,530	..	326	326	10,852

² The CSHA also provides assistance to people who are homeless or in crisis, in most States, through priority allocations to public housing, and in some States through support in the private rental market.

Table 7.2: Youth Social Justice Strategy (Accommodation and Prevention of Homelessness), Commonwealth and State expenditure by funding source, 1994–95

Notes

1. Constant value figures adjusted using the GFCE Price Deflator (ABS 1996c) are contained in Table A7.1.
2. Tasmania was not part of the Youth Social Justice Strategy.
3. Youth Social Justice Strategy funds were transferred to SAAP from 1 July 1995.

Source: Unpublished DHFS data.

Crisis Accommodation Program

The Crisis Accommodation Program provides capital funding for dwellings to be used to accommodate people who are homeless or in crisis. In 1994–95, expenditure under the program was \$42.2 million, and in 1995–96 this had risen to \$46.9 million (Table 7.3), representing an increase in real terms from \$37.8 million to \$41.2 million in constant (1989–90) prices (Table A7.2).

Table 7.3: Crisis Accommodation Program expenditure, by States and Territories, 1994–95, 1995–96

	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Australia
	(current \$'000)								
1994–95	18,300	10,000	9,000	500	3,200	0	800	400	42,200
1995–96	14,800	9,900	7,200	7,100	4,500	2,200	500	700	46,900

Notes

1. Constant value figures adjusted using the GFCE Price Deflator (ABS 1996c) are contained in Table A7.2.
2. Allocations are made on a per capita basis.

Source: Unpublished DSS data.

Supported Accommodation Assistance Program

Recurrent funding for salaries and other operational costs associated with providing housing and support assistance to people who are homeless and in crisis is allocated primarily through SAAP. The year 1994–95 marked the beginning of a further 5-year SAAP agreement. In 1995–96, funding was \$206 million (Table 7.4), and between 1994–95 and 1995–96 expenditure increased 8% in real terms, partly due to the transfer of Youth Social Justice Strategy funds to SAAP (Table A7.3).

Supported accommodation agencies have six primary target populations: young people, single men only, single women only, families, women escaping domestic violence, and cross-target or multiple-target groups (AIHW 1997:123). SAAP expenditure directed to these primary target populations is shown in Table 7.5. In all States and Territories, the two largest expenditure groups are agencies targeting young people and women escaping domestic violence.

Table 7.4: Supported Accommodation Assistance Program, Commonwealth and State/Territory recurrent funding liability by funding source, 1994–95, 1995–96

	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Australia
	(current \$'000)								
1994–95									
Commonwealth	36,459	24,739	15,942	9,056	9,315	3,739	3,269	2,594	105,113
State/Territory	32,418	17,931	10,855	6,706	6,044	2,854	2,968	1,729	81,505
Total	68,877	42,670	26,797	15,762	15,359	6,593	6,237	4,323	186,618

Table 7.4: Supported Accommodation Assistance Program, Commonwealth and State/Territory recurrent funding liability by funding source, 1994–95, 1995–96

1995–96 ^(a)									
Commonwealth	38,838	26,496	17,177	9,863	12,221	3,838	3,519	2,827	114,779
State/Territory	34,723	20,062	12,653	7,441	8,240	2,929	3,210	1,938	91,196
Total	73,561	46,558	29,830	17,304	20,461	6,767	6,729	4,765	205,975

(a) Includes Youth Social Justice Strategy funding (transferred to SAAP along with services as from 1 July 1995).

Note: Constant value figures adjusted using the GFCE Price Deflator (ABS 1996c) are contained in Table A7.3.

Source: Unpublished DHFS data.

Table 7.5: Supported Accommodation Assistance Program and Youth Social Justice Strategy, combined expenditure by target group, 1994–95, 1995–96

	NSW ^(a)	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas ^(b)	ACT ^(c)	NT
1994–95	(%)							

Table 7.5: Supported Accommodation Assistance Program and Youth Social Justice Strategy, combined expenditure by target group, 1994–95, 1995–96

Young people	36.4	38.1	35.4	26.9	46.7	37.2	31.8	27.6
Women escaping domestic violence	27.6	23.2	28.6	36.8	28.0	22.1	32.7	31.9
Families	5.7	6.0	9.5	3.3	7.8	7.4	14.0	2.9
Single women	3.8	3.2	1.4	4.8	1.3	10.3	0.0	3.6
Single men	15.4	7.5	8.6	9.6	12.0	13.9	2.4	15.0
Multiple	11.0	22.0	16.6	18.5	4.2	9.2	19.1	19.1
<i>Total</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>
Total funding (current \$'000)	71,642	41,013	26,867	16,405	13,931	7,363	6,270	4,631
Total funding (1989–90 constant \$'000)	62,954	36,040	23,609	14,416	12,242	6,470	5,510	4,069
					(%)			
Young people	37.0	40.1	36.1	28.1	45.8	38.0	31.9	27.8
Women escaping domestic violence	27.9	22.6	27.9	35.6	26.7	22.3	32.8	32.3
Families	5.5	5.5	9.5	3.3	7.9	6.5	14.0	2.9
Single women	3.5	3.1	1.4	5.4	2.0	11.2	0.0	3.7
Single men	14.4	7.9	8.6	9.5	12.5	12.4	2.4	14.8
Multiple	11.7	20.9	16.5	18.2	5.0	9.6	18.9	18.4
<i>Total</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>
Total funding (current \$'000)	72,581	43,180	27,608	16,841	15,967	8,589	6,409	4,637
Total funding (1989–90 constant \$'000)	62,516	37,192	23,780	14,506	13,753	7,398	5,520	3,994

- (a) For NSW, figures are estimated funding per target group as target group specifications do not exactly match the Department's information base.
- (b) For Tasmania, figures include supplementary funds (\$1.08 million in 1994–95 and \$2.16 million in 1995–96) paid to agencies to cover increases in salaries due to changes to the Community Services Award. Supplementation to cover the Award will be included in base funding from 1997–98.
- (c) For the ACT, all family and single women's services which include women escaping domestic violence are included in the category 'Women escaping domestic violence'. Funding for single women's services represents 12% of the total funds allocated but is included in the domestic violence category.

Notes

- These figures exclude non-service items such as administration, training, surveys, evaluation, consultancies and research.
- 'Multiple' includes agencies which target more than one client group.
- YSJS funds have been included for 1994–95 except for Tasmania which did not take part in the strategy. Total YSJS expenditure for 1994–95 was \$11 million compared with a recurrent funding liability of \$187 million for SAAP in same year.
- Constant figures have been adjusted using the GFCE Price Deflator (ABS 1996c).

Source: Unpublished data from States and Territories.

7.4 The recipients of assistance

This section focuses on SAAP data to report on accommodation and support services for people in crisis because of homelessness. The data relate to July to December 1996, the first 6 months of data collected by the SAAP National Data Collection Agency (AIHW 1997). Details of the collection are contained in Box 7.1 and definitions are given in Box 7.2. The significant level of non-response should be borne in mind when examining the data: for many purposes results may only be indicative of the total level and range of assistance and activity.

The number of clients and support periods

In the first 6 months of the SAAP National Data Collection agencies reported on 66,886 completed support periods. The SAAP data is presented at both the client and support period levels so that frequency of assistance can be examined. On average, clients received support on 1.42 occasions over this period. The large majority of clients (84%) accessed the program only once; 10% on two separate occasions; 3% on three separate occasions; and 1% of clients on six or more separate periods (AIHW 1997:99). The number of individual clients who completed support periods in the 6 months was estimated at 47,100.

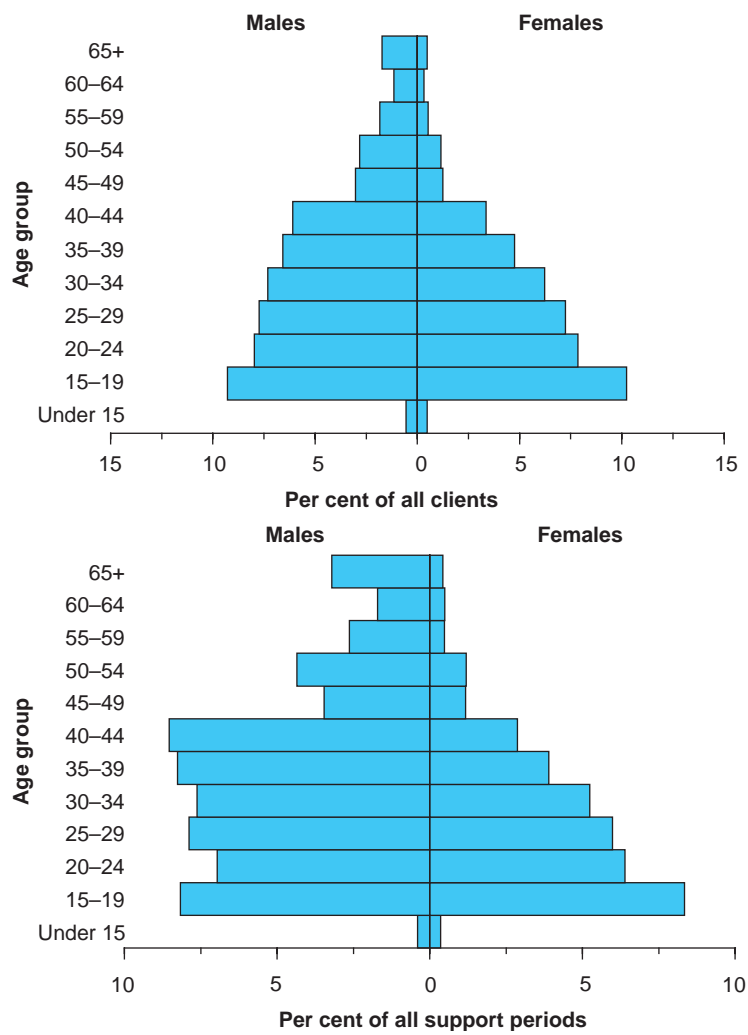
The age/sex profile of recipients of SAAP services across clients and also across support periods is presented in Figure 7.1 (page 231). The data show that agencies provided support to more male clients (56%) than female clients (44%) (Table A7.4). Clients between 15 and 19 years of age were the single largest age grouping, accounting for one-fifth of all clients. Those aged between 20 and 24 also constituted 16% of the total. However, the distribution changes when multiple usage of services is examined using the support period. Here, almost two-thirds (63%) of all support periods were provided to male clients, with 37% provided to female clients.

The differences in the two population pyramids reflect the higher incidence of multiple use of services by men aged 25 and over. Men in these age groups (25–44, 45–64, 65 and over) had higher proportions receiving more than one support period than their younger counterparts (see Table A7.4).

Assistance provided and duration of support

Over three-quarters of all support periods between July and December 1996 involved the provision of accommodation, either directly at SAAP agencies or through other arrangements organised or paid for by agencies (for example, at hotels or motels). General support or advocacy (60%) and 'other' support services (67%) were also provided in more than one-half of all support periods (Table 7.6).

The table indicates the diverse nature of the SAAP client population, with different service provision patterns evident among the six target groups. Almost all support periods for single men involved accommodation (93%), with relatively few counselling services provided (9%). For agencies targeting women escaping domestic violence, the rate of counselling services provided (47%) was nearly twice that for all agency types (25%). Financial/employment assistance services were more frequently provided to families than to other target groups.



Source: Table A7.4.

Figure 7.1: Age and sex distribution of SAAP assistance, by clients and support periods, July–December 1996 (%)

Specialist services (such as disability services, psychiatric services, drug/alcohol support and other health/medical services) were provided through these agencies in 18% of all support periods, reflecting the important links to other programs.

For those support periods where clients reported the reason for seeking assistance, for female clients domestic violence was recorded for over one-third of support periods, while for men financial difficulty was most frequently reported, comprising one-fifth of support periods. The breakdown of relationships or families was also a frequent reason across all support periods (AIHW 1997:22).

By far the largest proportion of support periods (34%) lasted 1 to 3 days. In addition, a significant number—18% of all support periods—were less than 1 day. Only 8% of support periods were for periods greater than 13 weeks (Table 7.7; Figure 7.2).

Table 7.6: Support periods, by service provided and by agency primary target group, July–December 1996 (%)

Support services provided	Young people	Single men only	Single women only	Families	Women escaping domestic violence	Cross-target/multiple/general	Total
Housing/accommodation	69.3	92.5	85.1	79.4	71.4	74.1	77.9
Financial/employment assistance	33.0	12.8	27.7	40.9	25.8	30.2	25.8
Counselling	29.5	9.4	38.1	38.7	46.9	16.6	24.7
General support/advocacy	66.5	43.3	70.2	71.2	62.0	67.2	60.0
Specialist services	17.9	21.2	23.9	19.4	22.1	11.5	18.0
Other	62.1	86.5	73.9	56.9	63.4	55.1	66.8
Total number of support periods ('000)	13,473	17,434	1,418	2,811	13,169	18,581	66,886

Notes

1. Clients may have needed multiple services so percentages do not total 100.
2. Percentages are based on valid values only.

Source: AIHW 1997:38.

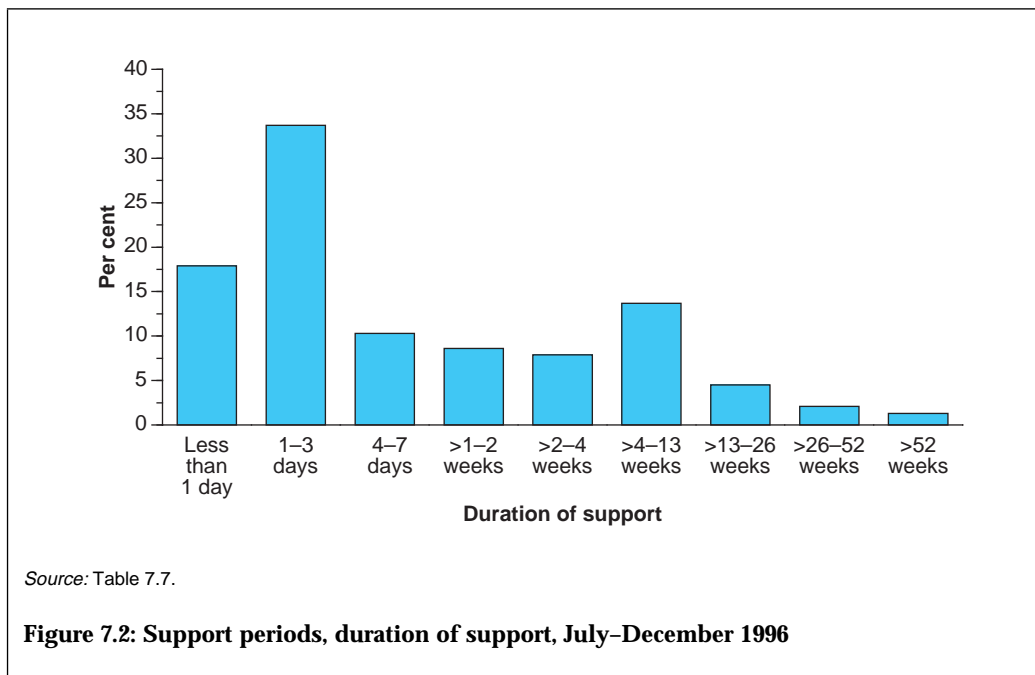
Table 7.7: Support periods, by duration of support and by agency primary target group, July–December 1996 (%)

Duration of support	Young people	Single men only	Single women only	Families	Women escaping domestic violence	Cross-target/multiple/general	Total
Less than 1 day	16.6	10.1	10.9	9.7	18.3	27.6	17.9
1–3 days	21.3	42.0	29.5	13.3	30.9	39.8	33.7
4–7 days	11.1	13.6	13.0	7.7	11.7	5.8	10.3
>1–2 weeks	9.8	10.9	11.6	9.2	8.7	5.1	8.6
>2–4 weeks	10.3	7.7	10.6	12.1	9.0	4.9	7.9
>4–13 weeks	16.2	12.2	15.0	28.6	14.6	10.6	13.7
>13–26 weeks	7.5	2.1	4.8	11.8	4.5	3.6	4.5
>26–52 weeks	4.2	0.8	2.9	5.2	1.6	1.6	2.1
>52 weeks	3.0	0.6	1.6	2.5	0.7	1.1	1.3
<i>Total</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>
Total number	12,550	16,802	1,343	2,534	12,492	17,958	63,679

Notes

1. Number of records excluded due to errors or omissions: 3,207.
2. Percentages are based on valid values only.

Source: AIHW 1997:41.



There was significant variation in the duration of support periods across the primary target group agency types. Agencies targeting single men only, women escaping domestic violence and cross-target/multiple groups recorded around half of support periods lasting 3 days or less. For families, over one-quarter of support periods (29%) lasted between 4 and 13 weeks. Approximately 7% of support periods for young people and families were of more than 26 weeks duration.

Reason for seeking assistance

Data on client circumstances prior to receiving SAAP services are not collected from high-volume agencies, resulting in data not being available for over one-half of all support periods.³ For the 21,347 support periods where reason was recorded (Table 7.8):

- across all agency types, domestic violence was the most frequently recorded main reason for seeking assistance (20%);
- for agencies targeting young people, the most frequently reported reason was relationship or family breakdown (27%); and
- financial difficulty (29%) was reported most often in agencies targeting single men only, while in agencies targeting single women it was domestic violence (24%).

³ 'High-volume' agencies are characterised by having a high client turnover, including agencies providing very short-term accommodation, often only 8 hours in duration, to intoxicated persons (AIHW 1997:5).

Table 7.8: Support periods, by main reason for seeking assistance and by agency primary target group, July–December 1996 (%)

Main reason for seeking assistance	Young people	Single men only	Single women only	Families	Women escaping domestic violence	Cross-target/multiple/general	Total
Long-term homeless	9.6	4.6	6.5	4.4	1.4	3.9	5.2
Time-out from family situation	6.5	2.8	4.9	3.1	3.2	2.4	4.0
Relationship/family breakdown	27.1	8.3	9.0	13.0	5.4	11.5	14.1
Interpersonal conflicts	5.9	3.6	5.4	4.0	1.9	4.0	4.0
Physical/emotional/sexual abuse	4.9	0.6	9.5	5.4	7.5	3.4	4.6
Domestic violence	3.5	0.6	23.7	14.4	67.9	7.6	20.1
Financial difficulty	7.5	28.7	7.3	18.5	1.9	23.1	13.8
Eviction	7.8	6.2	3.2	10.4	1.5	8.8	6.3
Substance abuse	2.0	11.7	7.7	2.2	1.0	11.7	5.6
Psychiatric illness	0.6	4.8	4.3	1.1	0.7	1.5	1.7
At imminent risk but not homeless	3.6	1.9	1.9	3.2	1.2	3.8	2.7
Other	21.2	26.2	16.7	20.2	6.6	18.5	18.0
<i>Total</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>
Total number	6,238	3,837	633	1,488	4,952	4,199	21,347

Notes

1. Number of high-volume agency records excluded: 22,737.
2. Number of records excluded because consent was not obtained: 17,487.
3. Number of records excluded due to errors or omissions: 5,315.
4. Percentages are based on valid values only.

Source: AIHW 1997:25.

For support periods where details were reported, the majority of clients (51%) were not in the labour force and a substantial proportion (41%) were unemployed and looking for work. In only 6% of support periods were clients employed on either a full-time or part-time basis prior to receiving support. Data relating to all support periods show that the majority of clients (84%) were on government payments immediately prior to receiving support. In 11% of cases, clients reported having no income immediately prior to receiving support. For young people, however, this figure was much higher—82% of clients aged less than 15 years and 32% in cases where clients were aged between 15 and 19 years (AIHW 1997:26).

Housing and accommodation

In relation to the housing circumstances of clients prior to their usage of services, the data indicate that the largest proportion of support periods (31%) was for those living in the private rental market. Almost one-quarter of support periods (24%), however, were for clients who had no shelter at all or who had been living in a car, tent or squat prior to seeking assistance, while in 20% of support periods, clients had been staying at

Table 7.9: Support periods, by type of housing/accommodation prior to support and by age of client, July–December 1996 (%)

Type of housing/ accommodation prior to support	Under 15 years	15–19 years	20–24 years	25–44 years	45–64 years	65 years and over	Total
SAAP/CAP funded accommodation							
Crisis/short-term accommodation	18.7	19.2	14.0	12.0	11.0	9.5	13.2
Medium/long-term accommodation	4.2	4.4	2.3	1.0	0.9	1.0	1.7
Other	6.7	3.3	4.0	5.3	6.3	7.7	5.1
Non-SAAP housing/ accommodation							
Non-SAAP emergency accommodation	0.0	0.8	0.8	0.6	0.3	0.1	0.6
Private rental	19.1	27.8	42.6	33.5	23.5	15.0	31.2
Owner-occupied	0.4	1.2	0.9	3.4	3.8	3.1	2.8
Public housing	6.0	3.7	7.8	8.4	5.7	4.3	6.9
Institutional	4.6	4.0	3.7	4.4	3.9	2.7	4.1
Living in a car/tent/park/ street/squat	2.5	6.8	12.2	25.4	40.6	53.2	24.2
Other non-SAAP accommodation	37.8	28.7	11.7	6.0	4.1	3.4	10.3
<i>Total</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>
Total number	283	6,557	5,284	19,213	7,033	1,480	39,850

Notes

1. Number of records excluded because consent was not obtained: 22,801.
2. Number of records excluded due to errors or omissions: 4,235.
3. Percentages are based on valid values only.

Source: AIHW 1997:28.

SAAP or Crisis Accommodation Program funded accommodation. This indicates that at least 44% of support periods were for those requiring 'immediate' accommodation assistance (Table 7.9).

Crisis or short-term accommodation was provided much more frequently than other types of accommodation—in 84% of support periods where clients were accommodated. Medium- or long-term accommodation was provided in only 15% of such cases. In a large proportion (65%) of support periods in which clients were accommodated, the duration of accommodation was 1 week or less. In 12% of support periods, accommodation was provided for between 4 and 13 weeks and in only 2% of support periods, for more than 26 weeks (AIHW 1997:43, 44).

One-off assistance

During the 2-week Unmet Demand Collection held between 14 and 27 November 1996, SAAP workers recorded details of one-off assistance (see Box 7.2) given to people who requested support or accommodation but who were not provided with these services. Information about 7,985 such requests was received which, if representative of the

entire 6-month reporting period, indicate over 103,000 requests in a 6-month period (AIHW 1997:59).

For 68% of these requests, one-off assistance in the form of information was provided. Referrals for accommodation were made following 46% of requests and for non-accommodation services, following 10%. Other types of one-off assistance provided included: financial assistance or material aid (5%); meals (5%); and transport (4%) (AIHW 1997:36).

7.5 Crisis assistance outcomes

Emergency accommodation and support services are provided to meet the needs of people who experience crisis associated with homelessness. However, not all individuals in need of crisis accommodation and services seek or receive assistance.

Accessibility—met and unmet demand

Identifying the relationship between the number of persons who may be in need of services and those who present to mainstream or crisis services for assistance is difficult. For example, the 1996 ABS Survey of Women's Safety reported that, among women who had experienced physical assault by a man during the previous 12 months, only 14% (or approximately 42,000 women) used 'services' such as crisis, legal and financial services (ABS 1996a:36). The corresponding figure for women who had experienced sexual assault in the previous 12 months was approximately 9% or 9,000 women. The major reason given for not using a service was that the victim thought she could deal with the problem herself. However, some 20% of women either did not know of any services they could access or, for a variety of reasons,⁴ would not approach a service. While these data relate to specific population groups, excluding women experiencing emotional abuse only and women experiencing violence from a former partner, they illustrate the issues underlying the measurement of unmet need.

The SAAP data also indicate another important aspect in relation to the extent of met and unmet demand for SAAP services (see Box 7.2). During July–December 1996, the large majority (91%) of needs identified by clients were met either by the provision of services directly by SAAP agencies or through referral to other agencies or both. Of the needs that were unmet, in percentage terms, specialist services had the highest level of unmet demand as approximately one-fifth (20%) of the requested services were neither provided nor referred. However, in absolute terms, the number of unmet needs for housing or accommodation services was larger than for other support types—approximately 6,800 requests (10%) were unmet (Table 7.10).

4 Reasons included were: ashamed/embarrassed, did not think a service could help, thought they would not be believed, feared the perpetrator, and had cultural/language reasons for not approaching a service.

Table 7.10: SAAP support services needed, met and unmet demand by type of support requested, July–December 1996 (%)

Met and unmet demand	Housing/ accommodation	Financial/ employment assistance	Counseling	General support, advocacy and information	Specialist services	Other	Total
Provided only	74.4	60.5	58.6	78.3	39.2	92.5	75.2
Referred only	8.9	15.6	16.1	5.4	27.1	1.3	8.5
Provided and referred	6.7	12.2	10.0	9.6	13.4	2.1	7.3
Unmet	10.1	11.7	15.4	6.7	20.4	4.1	9.0
<i>Total</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>
Total number	68,305	27,001	32,575	76,718	27,455	101,777	333,831

Source: AIHW 1997:91.

Outcomes observed

The linking of the effectiveness of SAAP services to specific outcomes often cannot be clearly demonstrated as it is only one aspect of assistance. Income support, housing assistance and health and community services may also contribute. The following points indicate information relating to outcomes reported in the SAAP data (AIHW 1997:52–56).

A large proportion of clients upon their departure from SAAP were living in housing that could be characterised as ‘independent’ (74%). Most frequently—in 43% of support periods—this involved living in the private rental market. In 15% of support periods, clients were living in public housing after being provided with support, and in 4% of support periods clients were living in dwellings they owned or were purchasing. In 26% of support periods, however, clients were not living in independent housing and, at the conclusion of 14% of support periods, clients had moved to or remained in SAAP accommodation.

For young SAAP clients who were residing with parents prior to receiving support, 43% returned to this home. For women escaping domestic violence, 30% returned to live with a spouse or partner at the conclusion of the support period.

For the majority of SAAP clients (82%), the primary income source did not change following the completion of support periods. Young people maintained their student status for a high proportion of support periods (72%) and approximately 16% were employed.

7.6 Summary

Services to homeless people in Australia cover a wide range of assistance. The number of persons homeless or 'in crisis' is not easily defined or measured and currently several definitions and estimates are available.

In 1995–96, government expenditure on crisis accommodation and support services through the Crisis Accommodation Program was \$47 million, and \$206 million through the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program. Both the SAAP Agreement and the Crisis Accommodation Program under the Commonwealth–State Housing Agreement expire on 30 June 1999, providing an opportunity for further changes in the provision of services for homeless people.

The 1996 SAAP National Data Collection shows that some 47,100 persons considered homeless under the SAAP definition received assistance from agencies in the 6 months from June to December 1996. These contacts comprised a total of 66,900 completed support periods over that time. The majority of support periods involved the provision of accommodation. Crisis or short-term accommodation was provided much more frequently than other types, with the duration of this accommodation mostly being for 1 week or less. Specialist services (such as disability services, psychiatric services, drug/alcohol support and other health/medical services) were provided in 18% of all support periods, reflecting the important links to other programs.

The SAAP data highlight the diversity of need for assistance, with over half of support periods lasting less than 3 days, while 22% were of more than 4 weeks duration. Almost two-thirds (63%) of all support periods were provided to male clients, and 37% to female clients.

Different service provision patterns are also evident between the agency-specific target groups. For women escaping domestic violence, the rate of counselling services provided (47%) was nearly twice that for all agency types (25%). Financial/employment assistance services were more frequently provided by agencies targeting families than by agencies targeting other groups, while agencies targeting single men provided accommodation (93%) at above-average levels but relatively few counselling services (9%).

There is significant unmet demand for SAAP services with 6,800 requests for housing or accommodation unmet and a high proportion of requests for specialist services also being identified as unmet in the 6-month period.

While SAAP data have the potential to allow further examination of issues such as the longitudinal aspects of the need for crisis assistance at the individual level, there is still a range of data reporting problems such as the effect of non-response to be examined. Further development of information is required to ensure consistent definitions to identify the population in need and to facilitate measurement of all the possible ways crisis assistance may be obtained through the vast array of health, housing and community services that have the potential to assist homeless people.

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