



**Australian Government**

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# **Counting the homeless 2006**

## **Northern Territory**

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## **Publications**

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## PREFACE

*Counting the Homeless* began as a research project with the Australian Bureau of Statistics, producing one report on the national homeless population in 1996. It has since developed into a cooperatively produced national data collection, involving the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), and RMIT and Swinburne Universities. A national report was published by the ABS in September 2008, and for the first time the state and territory reports are published by the AIHW.

Funding for *Counting the Homeless 2006* was provided by the Community and Disability Services Ministers' Advisory Council and the Housing Ministerial Advisory Committee and coordinated by the Australian Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). We are grateful to senior officers in FaHCSIA and the various state and territory departments which have facilitated this large and complex project at all stages.

The ABS has been a key partner from the outset and provided excellent in-kind support under its Australian Census Analytic Program. We thank our colleagues in the ABS for their continuing commitment to the project and for their generous advice and assistance, as well as their dedicated work in response to our many data requests.

Important supplementary information for the analysis comes from the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) National Data Collection at the AIHW. The AIHW team responded quickly to our inquiries. We have greatly appreciated their interest and support.

Hundreds of people in schools, local council services and homeless agencies have assisted us during the school census and especially during the extensive national local area fieldwork. Their local knowledge has been an invaluable input to this report.

The Council to Homeless Persons (CHP), Homelessness Australia, the National Youth Coalition for Housing (NYCH) and the Women's Services Network (WESNET) have been strong supporters of the project from the beginning and we have greatly appreciated their encouragement. Finally, we thank our editor, Estelle Tang, who provided invaluable editorial assistance.

Chris Chamberlain

David MacKenzie



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### 1 DEFINITION OF HOMELESSNESS

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) uses the cultural definition of homelessness to enumerate the homeless population on census night (Chamberlain and MacKenzie 1992). This definition distinguishes between people in primary, secondary and tertiary homelessness.

Primary homelessness describes the situation of all people without conventional accommodation, such as people living on the streets, sleeping in parks, squatting in derelict buildings, living in improvised dwellings (such as sheds, garages or cabins), and using cars or railway carriages for temporary shelter.

Secondary homelessness describes the situation of people who move frequently from one form of temporary shelter to another. On census night, all people staying in emergency or transitional accommodation provided under the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) are considered part of this category. Secondary homelessness also includes people residing temporarily with other households because they have no accommodation of their own, and people staying in boarding houses on a short-term basis, operationally defined as 12 weeks or less.

Tertiary homelessness describes the situation of people who live in boarding houses on a medium to long-term basis, operationally defined as 13 weeks or longer. Residents of private boarding houses are homeless because their accommodation does not have the characteristics identified in the minimum community standard (Chamberlain and MacKenzie 1992): they do not have a separate bedroom and living room; they do not have kitchen and bathroom facilities of their own; their accommodation is not self-contained; and they do not have security of tenure provided by a lease.

### 2 OVERCOUNTING AND UNDERCOUNTING

Chapter 2 summarises how the national homeless count enumerated the homeless population using census and other data sets. It contains a discussion of how there can be both overcounting and undercounting of homeless people. Undercounting is most likely in the census category

‘improvised homes, tents and sleepers out’, and overcounting is more likely in boarding houses because of misclassification.

The problem of establishing reliable figures is compounded by the fact that the homeless population changes over time. There will always be people who are entering and leaving homelessness, as well as people moving between different locations. The challenge is to identify patterns in the population data that might inform the policy process.

### 3 ACCOMMODATION ON CENSUS NIGHT

The homeless population in the Northern Territory was distributed differently from the national homeless population (Table 1). Nationally, 20 per cent of the homeless were in boarding houses on census night, whereas the comparable figure was 14 per cent in the Territory. Across Australia, 19 per cent of the homeless were in SAAP accommodation, but in the Territory the figure was nine per cent. The largest group in the Territory was people staying temporarily with other households; they were 44 per cent of the homeless on census night, compared with 45 per cent nationally. In the Territory, 33 per cent of the homeless were in improvised dwellings, tents or sleeping out, compared with the national figure of 16 per cent.

**TABLE 1:** PERSONS IN DIFFERENT SECTORS OF THE HOMELESS POPULATION

	Australia		Northern Territory	
	N	%	N	%
Boarding houses	21 596	20	694	14
SAAP accommodation	19 849	19	411	9
Friends and relatives	46 856	45	2092	44
Improvised dwellings, sleepers out	16 375	16	1588	33
	104 676	100	4785	100

*Source:* Census of Population and Housing 2006; SAAP Client Collection 2006; National Census of Homeless School Students 2006.

### 4 AGE DISTRIBUTION

In the Northern Territory, the age profile of the homeless population was older than the national profile (Table 2). Forty-eight per cent of the homeless in the Territory were aged 35 or older, significantly above the national figure of 42 per cent. More than one-third (35 per cent) of the homeless in the Territory were aged 45 or older, up from 25 per cent in 2001 (MacKenzie and Chamberlain 2004, p. 28).

Nonetheless, a majority (52 per cent) of homeless people in the Territory were in the younger age groups. Twenty-three per cent of the

homeless were teenagers aged 12 to 18 (mainly on their own). Ten per cent of the homeless were children under 12 who were with one or both parents on census night. Another six per cent were young adults aged 19 to 24, and 13 per cent were adults aged 25 to 34.

**TABLE 2: AGE DISTRIBUTION OF HOMELESS POPULATION**

	Australia		Northern Territory		
	N	%	N	%	
Under 12	12 133	12	478	10	52
12-18	21 940	21	1102	23	
19-24	10 504	10	308	6	
25-34	15 804	15	633	13	48
35-44	13 981	13	598	13	
45-54	12 206	12	634	13	
55-64	10 708	10	718	15	
65 or older	7 400	7	314	7	
	104 676	100	4785	100	

Source: Census of Population and Housing 2006; SAAP Client Collection 2006; National Census of Homeless School Students 2006.

## 5 MALES AND FEMALES

In 2006, men outnumbered women in the national homeless population, 56 to 44 per cent (Table 3), and in the Northern Territory men outnumbered women, 55 to 45 per cent. In the Territory, there were slightly more females in the 12 to 18 age group (53 to 47 per cent) and in the 25 to 34 age group (51 to 49 per cent). From age 35 onwards, men outnumbered women, about 60 to 40 per cent.

**TABLE 3: PERCENTAGE OF MALES AND FEMALES BY AGE GROUP**

<b>Australia</b>									
	Under 12	12–18	19–24	25–34	35–44	45–54	55–64	65+	All
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Male	52	46	53	57	63	64	61	64	56
Female	48	54	47	43	37	36	39	36	44
	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

<b>Northern Territory</b>									
	Under 12	12–18	19–24	25–34	35–44	45–54	55–64	65+	All
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Male	56	47	55	49	60	59	59	63	55
Female	44	53	45	51	40	41	41	37	45
	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Census of Population and Housing 2006; SAAP Client Collection 2006; National Census of Homeless School Students 2006.

## 6 INDIGENOUS AND NON-INDIGENOUS

In the Northern Territory, 30 per cent of people identified themselves as Indigenous at the 2006 Census. Table 4 shows that Indigenous people made up 8.3 per cent of people staying with other households, 37.7 per cent of persons in boarding houses, 52.3 per cent of people in SAAP and 63.2 per cent of those in improvised dwellings. Indigenous people were overrepresented in all sections of the homeless population in the Northern Territory, except amongst those staying with other households.

**TABLE 4: PERCENTAGE OF INDIGENOUS AND NON-INDIGENOUS PEOPLE IN DIFFERENT SECTORS OF THE HOMELESS POPULATION, NORTHERN TERRITORY**

	Boarding house (N=687)	Friends or relatives (N=2092)	SAAP (N=411)	Improvised dwellings (N=1588)	All* (N=4778)
	%	%	%	%	%
Non-Indigenous	62.3	91.7	47.7	36.8	65.4
Indigenous	37.7	8.3	52.3	63.2	34.6
	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Census of Population and Housing 2006; SAAP Client Collection 2006; National Census of Homeless School Students 2006.

\* Figures have been adjusted for missing data on Indigenous status, except in seven cases where there was inadequate information to make the adjustment.

## 7 GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION

### *Darwin*

The census identified 2478 homeless people in Darwin and the rate of homelessness was 234 per 10 000 (Table 5). This is higher than the rates of homelessness in other major capital cities such as Sydney (39 per 10 000), Melbourne (41 per 10 000) and Adelaide (47 per 10 000). Table 5 shows the rates of homelessness in Darwin's three subdivisions: it was 276 per 10 000 in Darwin City where there were 1829 homeless people; 75 per 10 000 in Palmerston where there were 180 homeless people; and 302 per 10 000 in Litchfield Shire where there were 469 homeless people.

**TABLE 5:** NUMBER OF HOMELESS PEOPLE AND RATE PER 10 000 OF THE HOMELESS POPULATION, DARWIN

	Darwin City	Palmerston	Litchfield Shire	All
Number	1829	180	469	2478
Rate	276	75	302	234

*Source:* Census of Population and Housing 2006; SAAP Client Collection 2006; National Census of Homeless School Students 2006.

### *Northern Territory Balance*

Northern Territory Balance has a population of 84 910 and includes Alice Springs (population 23 895), Katherine (population 8191), and Tennant Creek (population 2922). There were 49 902 people in remote communities.

**TABLE 6:** NUMBER OF HOMELESS PEOPLE AND RATE PER 10 000 OF THE POPULATION, NORTHERN TERRITORY BALANCE

	Katherine	Tennant Creek	Alice Springs	Remote	All
Number	415	43	446	1403	2307
Rate	507	147	187	281	272

*Source:* Census of Population and Housing 2006; SAAP Client Collection 2006; National Census of Homeless School Students 2006.

Table 6 shows that the rate of homelessness was 507 per 10 000 in Katherine where there were 415 homeless people; 147 per 10 000 in Tennant Creek where there were 43 homeless people; 187 per 10 000 in Alice Springs (446 homeless); and 281 per 10 000 in remote communities (1403 homeless).

