

3 SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS

This chapter describes the social characteristics of the homeless population in Queensland. First, we compare the rate of homelessness and the number of homeless people in each state and territory. Then we investigate where homeless people were staying on census night. After that we describe the age and gender characteristics of the population. Finally, we comment on the number of Indigenous people.

3.1 HOW MANY?

There are two ways of approaching the geographical spread of the homeless population and both are important. First, there is the number of homeless people in each state and territory on census night. Second, homelessness can be expressed as a rate per 10 000 of the population. This statistic is required for comparing states and territories of different sizes.

Table 3.1 shows that the rates of homelessness in each state and territory did not change much between 2001 and 2006. In New South Wales, Victoria and the Australian Capital Territory, there were 42 homeless people per 10 000 in 2006, similar to the rates recorded in those states in 2001. South Australia and Tasmania had a rate of 53 per 10 000 in 2006, again similar to 2001. The rates of homelessness in the other states were higher. In Western Australia and Queensland, there were between 64 and 70 per 10 000 at both censuses. In the Northern Territory there were 248 homeless people per 10 000 in 2006.

3.1 RATE OF HOMELESSNESS PER 10 000 OF THE POPULATION

	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	NT	ACT	Aust
2006	42	42	69	68	53	53	248	42	53
2001	42	44	70	64	52	52	288	40	53

Source: Census of Population and Housing 2001, 2006; SAAP Client Collection 2001, 2006; National Census of Homeless School Students 2001, 2006.

Table 3.2 shows the number of homeless people in each state and territory in 2001 and 2006. In Queensland, it was 24 569 in 2001 and 26 782 in 2006. We know that the number of homeless people goes up and down, but in Queensland a typical point-in-time figure is probably about 26 750, up from about 24 500 in 2001.

3.2 NUMBER OF HOMELESS BY STATE AND TERRITORY

	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	NT	ACT	Aust
2006	27 374	20 511	26 782	13 391	7962	2507	4785	1364	104 676
2001	26 676	20 305	24 569	11 697	7586	2415	5423	1229	99 900

Source: Census of Population and Housing 2001, 2006; SAAP Client Collection 2001, 2006; National Census of Homeless School Students 2001, 2006.

3.2 ACCOMMODATION ON CENSUS NIGHT

Across Australia, 20 per cent of the homeless were in boarding houses on census night; in Queensland, it was also 20 per cent (Table 3.3). The percentage of people staying temporarily with other households in Queensland was larger than the national figure (49 per cent compared with 45 per cent), and there were more people in improvised dwellings, tents or sleeping out (19 per cent compared with 16 per cent). Nationally, 19 per cent of the homeless were in SAAP accommodation, but in Queensland it was 12 per cent.

3.3 PERSONS IN DIFFERENT SECTORS OF THE HOMELESS POPULATION

	Australia		Queensland	
	N	%	N	%
Boarding houses	21 596	20	5438	20
SAAP accommodation	19 849	19	3233	12
Friends and relatives	46 856	45	12 946	49
Improvised dwellings, sleepers out	16 375	16	5165	19
	104 676	100	26 782	100

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

The proportions of people in various types of accommodation were fairly similar in 2001 and 2006 (Table 3.4). In 2006, the largest group were those staying with friends or relatives on census night (49 per cent down from 53 per cent in 2001). The proportion of people in boarding houses declined from 22 to 20 per cent, and the proportion in SAAP increased from nine to 12 per cent. The proportion in improvised dwellings went up from 16 to 19 per cent (from 3869 to 5165 people).

3.4 PERSONS IN DIFFERENT SECTORS OF THE HOMELESS POPULATION, QUEENSLAND, 2001 AND 2006

	2001		2006	
	N	%	N	%
Boarding houses	5346	22	5438	20
SAAP accommodation	2285	9	3233	12
Friends and relatives	13 069	53	12 946	49
Improvised dwellings, sleepers out	3869	16	5165	19
	24 569	100	26 782	100

Source: Census of Population and Housing 2001, 2006; SAAP Client Collection 2001, 2006; National Census of Homeless School Students 2001, 2006.

The census takes a 'snapshot' of where homeless people are staying on census night, but it is important to remember that homeless people often move from one form of temporary accommodation to another. There is a high degree of permeability between the four operational categories used to count the homeless population on census night. There would have been some people living in boarding houses on a long-term basis (tertiary homelessness) and some people living permanently in improvised dwellings (primary homelessness). However, most homeless people would have been moving between different forms of temporary accommodation, including friends and relatives, SAAP accommodation, boarding houses and improvised dwellings. Transience is the typical pattern.

3.3 AGE DISTRIBUTION

In the 1950s and 1960s, it was thought that the homeless population was disproportionately made up of middle-aged and older men (de Hoog 1972; Jordan 1973, 1994). For example, Jordan (1994, p. 21) reported that there were few teenagers in the population and that 80 per cent of the men in his sample were aged 35 or older. De Hoog (1972) gives a similar impression in his ethnographic account of life on Sydney's skid row at the end of the 1960s.

Table 3.5 shows that the age profile of the population is now very different. First, we examine the national figures, then we look at the figures for Queensland.

In 2006, 58 per cent of the homeless across Australia were in the younger age groups and only 42 per cent were aged 35 or older. Twelve per cent of the homeless were children under 12. These young people were with parents on census night. Another 21 per cent of the homeless were teenagers aged 12 to 18 (mainly on their own) and 10 per cent were young adults aged 19 to 24. The age profile of the population is now much younger than 40 to 50 years ago.

3.5 AGE DISTRIBUTION OF HOMELESS POPULATION

	Australia		Queensland		
	N	%	N	%	
Under 12	12 133	12	2914	11	51
12–18	21 940	21	4469	16	
19–24	10 504	10	2624	10	
25–34	15 804	15	3820	14	
35–44	13 981	13	3471	13	49
45–54	12 206	12	3464	13	
55–64	10 708	10	3667	14	
65 or older	7 400	7	2353	9	
	104 676	100	26 782	100	

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

In Queensland, the age profile of the homeless population was older than the national profile. Forty-nine per cent of the homeless in Queensland were aged 35 or older, significantly above the national figure of 42 per cent. More than one-third (36 per cent) of the homeless in Queensland were aged 45 or older, up from 28 per cent in 2001 (Chamberlain and MacKenzie 2004a, p. 27).

Nonetheless, a majority (51 per cent) of homeless people in Queensland were in the younger age groups. Sixteen per cent of the homeless were teenagers aged 12 to 18 (mainly on their own). Eleven per cent of the homeless were children under 12 who were with one or both parents. Another 10 per cent were young adults aged 19 to 24, and 14 per cent were adults aged 25 to 34.

3.4 MALES AND FEMALES

In 2006, men outnumbered women in Australia's homeless population, 56 to 44 per cent (Table 3.6), and in Queensland men outnumbered women, 58 to 42 per cent. In this state, there were roughly equal numbers of males and females in the two youngest age cohorts, but from age 25 onwards men typically outnumbered women, about 60 to 40 per cent.

3.6 PERCENTAGE OF MALES AND FEMALES BY AGE GROUP

Australia

	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

Queensland

	Under 12	12-18	19-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+	All
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Male	52	49	56	58	64	62	59	68	58
Female	48	51	44	42	36	38	41	32	42
	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.

Table 3.7 shows the proportion of males and females in different sectors of the homeless population on census night. In Queensland, 72 per cent of boarding house residents were male, the same as the national figure. Amongst people in improvised dwellings or sleeping rough, men outnumbered women 61 to 39 per cent. There were slightly more men than women staying with other households (53 to 47 per cent), and there were roughly equal numbers of men and women in SAAP (49 to 51 per cent).

3.7 PERCENTAGE OF MALES AND FEMALES IN DIFFERENT SECTORS OF THE HOMELESS POPULATION

Australia

	Boarding house (N=21 596)	Friends or relatives (N=46 856)	SAAP (N=19 849)	Improvised dwellings (N=16 375)	All (N=104 676)
	%	%	%	%	%
Male	72	52	47	60	56
Female	28	48	53	40	44
	100	100	100	100	100

Queensland

	Boarding house (N=5438)	Friends or relatives (N=12 946)	SAAP (N=3233)	Improvised dwellings (N=5165)	All (N=26 782)
	%	%	%	%	%
Male	72	53	49	61	58
Female	28	47	51	39	42
	100	100	100	100	100

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

3.5 INDIGENOUS AND NON-INDIGENOUS

In Queensland, 3.5 per cent of people identified as Indigenous at the 2006 Census. Table 3.8 shows that Indigenous people made up 3.7 per cent of people staying with other households, 8.4 per cent of persons in boarding houses, 10.2 per cent of those in improvised dwellings and 21.9 per cent of people in SAAP. Indigenous people were overrepresented in all sections of the homeless population in Queensland.

3.8 PERCENTAGE OF INDIGENOUS AND NON-INDIGENOUS PEOPLE IN DIFFERENT SECTORS OF THE HOMELESS POPULATION, QUEENSLAND

	Boarding house (N=5438)	Friends or relatives (N=12 946)	SAAP (N=3128)	Improvised dwellings (N=5165)	All* (N=26 677)
	%	%	%	%	%
Non-Indigenous	91.6	96.3	78.1	89.8	91.9
Indigenous	8.4	3.7	21.9	10.2	8.1
	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 105 cases where there was inadequate information to make the adjustment.

There is a risk that Indigenous people staying temporarily with other households were undercounted. The census asked for each person's usual address, and people with no usual address were asked to write this in. Indigenous people interpret this question within a different cultural frame of reference.

Often, Indigenous people do not think of 'home' as a particular dwelling, because they are attached to their traditional land. Indigenous people also have extended kinship networks and they move between dwellings belonging to extended family members. When Indigenous people leave home to escape domestic violence or other family problems, they usually move in with households that are related to them. In these circumstances, it is not culturally appropriate to record 'no usual address' on census night, because 'home' is understood in a different way. This creates undercounting in this category.

3.6 SUMMARY

The number of homeless people fluctuates because people move in and out of homelessness. In Queensland, we estimate that a typical point-in-time figure is about 26 750, up from about 24 500 in 2001.

In Queensland, half (49 per cent) of the homeless were staying temporarily with other households on census night and 20 per cent were in boarding houses. Nineteen per cent were in the primary population, up from 16 per cent in 2001 (3869 to 5165 people). Only 12 per cent were in SAAP.

Nationally, 56 per cent of homeless people were male and 44 per cent were female. In Queensland, men outnumbered women 58 to 42 per cent. The homeless population in Queensland was older than the homeless population in other states, with 49 per cent of the homeless aged 35 or older. In Queensland, Indigenous people were overrepresented in all sectors of the population, but particularly in improvised dwellings and SAAP.

