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*Better information and statistics
for better health and wellbeing*

Counting the homeless 2006

Victoria

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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, 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

Across Australia, 20 per cent of the homeless were in boarding houses on census night and in Victoria it was 22 per cent (Table 1). Nationally, 19 per cent of the homeless were in SAAP accommodation, but in Victoria it was 31 per cent. There were fewer people staying temporarily with other households in Victoria than there were nationally (36 per cent compared with 45 per cent), and there were fewer people in improvised dwellings, tents or sleeping out (11 per cent compared with the national figure of 16 per cent). The census was carried out in August, when people sleeping rough hide away to escape the cold, so there could have been undercounting in this category.

TABLE 1: PERSONS IN DIFFERENT SECTORS OF THE HOMELESS POPULATION

	Australia		Victoria	
	N	%	N	%
Boarding houses	21 596	20	4457	22
SAAP accommodation/THM	19 849	19	6436	31
Friends/relatives	46 856	45	7414	36
Improvised dwellings, sleepers out	16 375	16	2204	11
	104 676	100	20 511	100

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

4 AGE DISTRIBUTION

The age profile of the homeless population in Victoria was significantly younger than the age profile of the national population (Table 2). Sixty-three per cent of the homeless in Victoria were aged 34 or younger, compared with the national figure of 58 per cent. One-fifth (19 per cent) of the homeless in Victoria were teenagers aged 12 to 18 (mainly on their own). Fourteen per cent of the homeless were children under 12 who were with one or both parents. Another 12 per cent were young adults aged 19 to 24, and 18 per cent were adults aged 25 to 34. Altogether, 37 per cent of the homeless in Victoria were aged 35 or older, compared with the national figure of 42 per cent.

TABLE 2: AGE DISTRIBUTION OF HOMELESS POPULATION

	Australia		Victoria		
	N	%	N	%	
Under 12	12 133	12	2794	14	63
12–18	21 940	21	3896	19	
19–24	10 504	10	2512	12	
25–34	15 804	15	3643	18	
35–44	13 981	13	2872	14	37
45–54	12 206	12	2128	10	
55–64	10 708	10	1468	7	
65 or older	7400	7	1198	6	
	104 676	100	20 511	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 Australia's homeless population, 56 to 44 per cent (Table 3), and in Victoria men outnumbered women, 55 to 45 per cent. In Victoria, there were more females in the 12-to-18 age group and roughly equal numbers of males and females in the 19-to-24 and under-12 age groups. However, from age 25 onwards men typically outnumbered women, about 60 per cent to 40 per cent.

TABLE 3: 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

Victoria									
	Under 12	12–18	19–24	25–34	35–44	45–54	55–64	65+	All
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Male	52	45	51	56	60	65	61	58	55
Female	48	55	49	44	40	35	39	42	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 Victoria, 0.6 per cent of people identified as Indigenous at the 2006 Census. Table 4 shows that Indigenous people were 1.4 per cent of those staying with other households, 1.7 per cent of the boarding house population, 2.6 per cent of people in improvised dwellings, tents or sleeping rough, and 8.3 per cent of persons in SAAP. Indigenous people were overrepresented in all sections of the homeless population in Victoria.

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

	Boarding house (N=4457)	Friends/ relatives (N=7414)	SAAP (N=6436)	Improvised dwellings (N=2204)	All (N=20 511)
	%	%	%	%	%
Non-Indigenous	98.3	98.6	91.7	97.4	96.2
Indigenous	1.7	1.4	8.3	2.6	3.8
	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.

7 MELBOURNE

The Melbourne statistical division comprises 16 subdivisions (Map 2). This analysis groups them into four areas which are referred to as the 'City Core', the 'Inner City Ring', the 'Outer City Ring' and the 'Frankston-Dandenong Corridor'.

The City Core is the subdivision of Inner Melbourne. It has a population of 271 000 and includes the central business district, the City of Port Phillip, the City of Yarra, and part of the City of Stonnington (Prahran).

The Inner City Ring (population 1.34 million) includes five subdivisions which have a boundary with the City Core. The subdivisions are Western Melbourne, Moreland, Northern Middle Melbourne, Boroondara and Southern Melbourne.

The Outer City Ring includes seven subdivisions with a population of 1.597 million. The subdivisions are Melton-Wyndham, Hume, Northern Outer Melbourne, Eastern Middle Melbourne, Eastern Outer Melbourne, the Yarra Ranges and South Eastern Outer Melbourne.

The Frankston-Dandenong Corridor includes the Greater Dandenong, Frankston City and Mornington Peninsula subdivisions. It has 380 000 people.

Table 5 shows that there were 3490 homeless people in the City Core, where the rate of homelessness was 129 per 10 000. The City Core had eight per cent of Melbourne's population, but 24 per cent of its homeless people. It is usual to find a higher rate of homelessness in the inner suburbs of capital cities. This is the case in Sydney, Brisbane, Adelaide, Hobart and Perth. People often gravitate to the inner city, where services for homeless people have traditionally been located.

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

	City Core	Inner City Ring	Frankston-Dandenong	Outer City Ring	Total
Number	3490	5047	1530	4501	14 568
Rate	129	38	40	28	41

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

In the Inner City Ring, there were 5047 homeless people and the rate was 38 per 10 000. There were 4501 homeless people in the Outer City Ring, where the rate was 28 per 10 000. The rate was 40 per 10 000 in the Frankston-Dandenong Corridor, where there were 1530 homeless people.

Altogether, there were 11 078 homeless people in suburban Melbourne, compared with 3490 in the City Core. The provision of certain homeless services in suburban areas assists people in the early stages of homelessness, including those at risk, and reduces the move to the inner city.

8 WESTERN VICTORIA

There are four statistical divisions in Western Victoria: Barwon, Central Highlands, Western District and Wimmera (Map 1).

TABLE 6: NUMBER OF HOMELESS PEOPLE AND RATE PER 10 000 OF THE POPULATION, WESTERN VICTORIA AND MELBOURNE

	Three urban subdivisions	Eight rural subdivisions	Total	Melbourne
Number	975	1005	1980	14 568
Rate	35	37	36	41

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

There were 1980 homeless people in Western Victoria, where the rate of homelessness was 36 per 10 000, compared with 41 per 10 000 in Melbourne (Table 6). The rate of homelessness was 35 per 10 000 in the three urban subdivisions (Geelong, Warrnambool and Ballarat), which was similar to the rate in the eight rural subdivisions (37 per 10,000) (Table 6). There were 465 homeless people in Geelong, 399 homeless people in Ballarat and 111 in Warrnambool.

9 EASTERN VICTORIA

There are two statistical divisions covering Eastern Victoria (Map 1). They are Gippsland and East Gippsland. There were 962 homeless people in Eastern Victoria and the rate was 40 per 10 000, slightly higher than the rate in Western Victoria (36 per 10 000) and similar to the rate in metropolitan Melbourne (41 per 10 000). There were 285 homeless people in the La Trobe Valley subdivision and 260 in East Gippsland Shire.

TABLE 7: NUMBER OF HOMELESS PEOPLE AND RATE PER 10 000 OF THE POPULATION, EASTERN VICTORIA, WESTERN VICTORIA AND MELBOURNE

	Eastern Victoria	Western Victoria	Melbourne
Number	962	1980	14 568
Rate	40	36	41

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

10 NORTHERN VICTORIA

There are four statistical divisions in Northern Victoria (Map 1): Loddon, Goulburn, Ovens-Murray and Mallee. Table 8 shows that there were 1176 homeless people in the four urban subdivisions, where the rate of homelessness was 54 per 10 000. In the nine rural subdivisions, there were 1825 homeless people and the rate was 56 per 10 000. There were 315 homeless people in Bendigo, 306 in Wodonga, 300 in Mildura and 255 in Shepparton.

TABLE 8: NUMBER OF HOMELESS PEOPLE AND RATE PER 10 000 OF THE POPULATION, URBAN AND RURAL SUBDIVISIONS, NORTHERN VICTORIA

	Four urban subdivisions	Nine rural subdivisions	Total
Number	1176	1825	3001
Rate	54	56	55

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