

### 3 SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS

This chapter describes the social characteristics of the homeless population in Victoria. 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 their rates in 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 Victoria, it was 20 305 in 2001 and 20 511 in 2006. We know that the number of homeless people goes up and down, but

in Victoria a typical point-in-time figure is probably about 20 500, up from about 20 300 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 and in Victoria it was 22 per cent (Table 3.3). 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 (36 per cent compared with 45 per cent nationally), 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.

### 3.3 PERSONS IN DIFFERENT SECTORS OF THE HOMELESS POPULATION, 2006

	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.

In Victoria, the homeless population was distributed somewhat differently in 2006 compared to 2001 (Table 3.4). The largest group on census night was people staying with other households (36 per cent in 2006 compared with 40 per cent in 2001). Boarding house residents accounted for 22 per cent of the homeless in 2006, down from 26 per cent in 2001. The number in SAAP was up from 25 per cent to 31 per cent, reflecting a significant expansion in Victoria's Transitional Housing Management (THM) program. The number of people in improvised dwellings or sleeping rough increased from nine per cent to 11 per cent (1871 to 2204 people).

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

	2001		2006	
	N	%	N	%
Boarding houses	5264	26	4457	22
SAAP accommodation/THM	5146	25	6436	31
Friends/relatives	8024	40	7414	36
Improvised dwellings, sleepers out	1871	9	2204	11
	20 305	100	20 511	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 Victoria.

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.

The age profile of the homeless population in Victoria was significantly younger than the age profile of the national population (Table 3.5). 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.

### 3.5 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.

### 3.4 MALES AND FEMALES

Men outnumbered women in the national homeless population 56 to 44 per cent in 2006 (Table 3.6), and in Victoria men outnumbered women 55 to 45 per cent. 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 60 per cent 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

#### 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.

Table 3.7 shows the proportion of males and females in different sectors on census night. Nationally, 72 per cent of boarding house residents were male and in Victoria the proportion was 70 per cent. Amongst people in improvised dwellings or sleeping rough, men outnumbered women 58 to 42 per cent in Victoria. There were more women in SAAP than men (53 per cent female and 47 per cent male), and there were roughly equal numbers of males and females staying with other households (51 to 49 per cent).

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

#### Australia

	Boarding house (N=21 596)	Friends/ 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

#### Victoria

	Boarding house (N=4457)	Friends/ relatives (N=7414)	SAAP (N=6436)	Improvised dwellings (N=2204)	All (N=20 511)
	%	%	%	%	%
Male	70	51	47	58	55
Female	30	49	53	42	45
	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 Victoria, 0.6 per cent of people identified as Indigenous at the 2006 Census. Table 3.8 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 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.

### 3.8 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.

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.

### **3.6 SUMMARY**

The number of homeless people fluctuates because people move in and out of homelessness. In Victoria, we estimate that a typical point-in-time figure is about 20 500, up from about 20 300 in 2001.

In Victoria, 36 per cent of the homeless were staying temporarily with other households on census night and 22 per cent were in boarding houses. The proportion in SAAP was up from 25 per cent in 2001 to 31 per cent in 2006, reflecting a significant expansion in Victoria's Transitional Housing Management (THM) program. The number of people in improvised dwellings or sleeping rough increased from nine per cent to 11 per cent (from 1871 to 2204 people).

Nationally, 56 per cent of homeless people were male and 44 per cent were female. In Victoria, men outnumbered women, 55 to 45 per cent. The homeless population in Victoria was younger than the homeless population in other states, with 63 per cent of the homeless aged 35 or younger, compared with 58 per cent nationally. In Victoria, Indigenous people were overrepresented in all sectors of the population, but particularly in SAAP.

