

5 WESTERN VICTORIA

5.1 OVERVIEW

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

Barwon has a population of 259 000 and includes three subdivisions. Geelong is the major regional centre with a population of 161 000. East Barwon includes Queenscliff, Greater Geelong Part B and the Surf Coast (population 58 000). West Barwon is a rural community with a population of 39 700.

The Central Highlands has a population of 142 000. The major regional centre is Ballarat (population 85 000). There are two rural subdivisions: East Central Highlands and West Central Highlands.

The Western District (population 98 900) has three subdivisions. The major urban area is Warrnambool with a population of 30 400. Glenelg includes Portland and Hamilton, and Hopkins is a rural subdivision.

The Wimmera includes North and South Wimmera (populations 13 600 and 34 900 respectively).

In some country areas there are small numbers of homeless people spread across large geographical areas. There can be high rates of homelessness in these communities, but relatively few homeless people.

5.1 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.

Table 5.1 compares the rates of homelessness in Western Victoria and Melbourne. 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.

The rate of homelessness was 35 per 10 000 in the three urban subdivisions (Geelong, Warrnambool and Ballarat) (Table 5.1), similar to the rate in the eight rural subdivisions (37 per 10 000). However, there were some important differences within urban and rural communities.

5.2 URBAN

There were 465 homeless people in Geelong, where the rate of homelessness was 29 per 10 000 (Table 5.2). The rate was 37 per 10 000 in Warrnambool and 47 per 10 000 in Ballarat.

5.2 NUMBER OF PEOPLE IN DIFFERENT SECTORS OF THE HOMELESS POPULATION, GEELONG, BALLARAT AND WARRNAMBOOL

	Geelong	Ballarat	Warrnambool	Total
Number	465	399	111	975
Rate	29	47	37	35

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

5.3 PEOPLE IN DIFFERENT SECTORS OF THE HOMELESS POPULATION, GEELONG, BALLARAT AND WARRNAMBOOL

Percentage

	Geelong	Ballarat	Warrnambool	Total
Boarding house	10	31	4	18
SAAP/THM	38	35	51	38
Friends/relatives	43	28	39	36
Improvised dwellings	9	6	6	8
	100	100	100	100

Number

	Geelong	Ballarat	Warrnambool	Total
Boarding house	49	125	4	178
SAAP/THM	175	138	57	370
Friends/relatives	200	111	43	354
Improvised dwellings	41	25	7	73
	465	399	111	975

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

The proportion of people in different sectors of the population also varied between the urban subdivisions (Table 5.3). In Geelong, 43 per cent

of the homeless were staying with friends or relatives, 38 per cent were in SAAP/THM accommodation and 10 per cent were in boarding houses.

In Warrnambool, 51 per cent of the homeless were in SAAP/THM accommodation, 39 per cent were with other households, and only four per cent were in boarding houses.

In Ballarat, 35 per cent were in SAAP/THM accommodation, 31 per cent were in boarding houses and 28 per cent were with other households.

Ballarat had more people in boarding houses than Geelong and Warrnambool, but all three cities had a substantial number of people in SAAP/THM accommodation (35 to 51 per cent), a significant number with other households (28 to 43 per cent), and few people in the primary population (six to nine per cent).

5.3 RURAL

There was variation in the number of homeless people in the eight rural subdivisions (Table 5.4). There were 28 homeless people in North Wimmera where the rate was 21 per 10 000. The number was highest in West Barwon where there were 214 homeless and the rate was 54 per 10 000. In most rural subdivisions, there were between 110 and 190 homeless people.

5.4 NUMBER OF HOMELESS PEOPLE AND RATE PER 10 000 OF THE POPULATION, RURAL SUBDIVISIONS, WESTERN VICTORIA

	Barwon		Central Highlands		Western District		Wimmera		Total
	East	West	East	West	Hopkins	Glenelg	South	North	
Number	111	214	186	62	115	152	137	28	1005
Rate	19	54	47	35	36	42	39	21	37

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

Table 5.5 shows the distribution of homeless people in different sectors of the population. Once again, there is variation across the subdivisions but three points stand out. First, nearly half (44 per cent) of the homeless in rural Victoria were staying with other households. A number of local informants told us that 'couch surfing is very common'.

Second, about one-fifth (18 per cent) were in SAAP accommodation, usually provided in regional centres, and few people were in boarding houses (five per cent).

Third, about one-third (33 per cent) of the homeless were in improvised dwellings or sleeping rough, compared with eight per cent in urban areas (Table 5.3). We investigated the situation in two rural subdivisions. One

informant said, 'most people couch surf but sometimes people sleep out'. Another talked about 'young people sleeping rough occasionally', and a third had provided blankets to 'people sleeping in unregistered vehicles.'

However, the census data indicated that most people in the primary population were living in improvised dwellings that were owned or being purchased. These dwellings were usually 'some distance out of town'. One informant described various dwellings 'out in the bush'. She said one man lived in 'a shack with just one room and an external pit toilet'. Another couple 'get water from the local river'. A third family lived in 'a large shed with an outdoor toilet'. Most of these people had low incomes and were living in rural poverty.

5.5 PEOPLE IN DIFFERENT SECTORS OF THE HOMELESS POPULATION, RURAL SUBDIVISIONS, WESTERN VICTORIA

Percentage

	Barwon		Central Highlands		Western District		Wimmera		Total
	East	West	East	West	Hopkins	Glenelg	South	North	
Boarding house	0	6	9	0	8	0	2	25	5
SAAP/THM	0	17	15	28	12	30	26	11	18
Friends	61	35	40	53	28	44	36	64	44
Improvised dwellings	39	42	36	19	32	26	36	0	33
	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Number

	Barwon		Central Highlands		Western District		Wimmera		Total
	East	West	East	West	Hopkins	Glenelg	South	North	
Boarding house	0	13	17	0	9	0	3	7	49
SAAP/THM	0	36	28	17	14	46	36	3	180
Friends/relatives	68	76	74	33	55	67	49	18	440
Improvised dwellings	43	89	67	12	37	39	49	0	336
	111	214	186	62	115	152	137	28	1005

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

5.4 MARGINAL RESIDENTS OF CARAVAN PARKS

It was pointed out earlier that in some communities caravan parks are used as an alternative to boarding houses. There were 49 boarding house residents in Geelong (Table 5.3), but 121 marginal residents of caravan parks (Table 5.6). The pattern in the rural subdivisions of Western Victoria was similar to the pattern in Geelong. There were 49 people in boarding

houses (Table 5.5), but 169 marginal residents of caravan parks (Table 5.6). There are many communities across the country where caravans are used as an alternative to boarding houses.

5.6 HOMELESS PEOPLE AND MARGINAL RESIDENTS OF CARAVAN PARKS, GEELONG, BALLARAT, WARRNAMBOOL AND RURAL WESTERN VICTORIA

	Geelong	Ballarat	Warrnambool	Rural	Total
Homeless	465	399	111	1005	1980
Rate per 10 000	29	47	37	37	36
Caravan	121	22	19	169	331
Total	586	421	130	1174	2311
Rate per 10 000	36	49	43	43	42

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

Overall, in Western Victoria, there were 36 homeless people per 10 000 of the population using the ABS definition of homelessness, but 42 per 10 000 if marginal residents of caravan parks are included.

