

### 3 SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS

This chapter describes the social characteristics of the homeless population in Tasmania. 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 the southern states (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 each 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 homeless people 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 Tasmania, it was 2415 in 2001 and 2507 in 2006. We know that the number of homeless people goes up and down, but in Tasmania a typical point-in-time figure is probably about 2500, up from about 2415 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

Next we investigate where homeless people were staying on census night. Across Australia, people staying temporarily with other households accounted for 45 per cent of the homeless on census night, and in Tasmania they accounted for 50 per cent of the homeless (Table 3.3). Nationally, 19 per cent of the homeless were in SAAP accommodation, but in Tasmania the figure was 25 per cent. Twenty per cent of the homeless were in boarding houses nationally, but in Tasmania it was 10 per cent. Fifteen per cent of the homeless were in improvised dwellings, tents or sleeping rough in Tasmania, similar to the national figure of 16 per cent. However, 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 NUMBER OF PEOPLE IN DIFFERENT SECTORS OF THE HOMELESS POPULATION

	Australia		Tasmania	
	N	%	N	%
Boarding houses	21 596	20	252	10
SAAP accommodation	19 849	19	622	25
Friends and relatives	46 856	45	1248	50
Improvised dwellings, sleepers out	16 375	16	385	15
	104 676	100	2507	100

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

In Tasmania, the proportions of people in various types of accommodation were somewhat different in 2001 and 2006 (Table 3.4). In 2006, 50 per cent of the homeless were staying with friends or relatives

on census night, but this figure was down from 66 per cent in 2001. The proportion in SAAP was up from 13 per cent in 2001 to 25 per cent in 2006 (315 people to 622). The proportion in boarding houses was steady at 10 per cent, and the number of people in improvised dwellings increased from 10 per cent of the homeless to 15 per cent (237 to 385 people).

### 3.4 NUMBER OF PEOPLE IN DIFFERENT SECTORS OF THE HOMELESS POPULATION, TASMANIA, 2001 AND 2006

	2001		2006	
	N	%	N	%
Boarding houses	265	11	252	10
SAAP accommodation	315	13	622	25
Friends and relatives	1598	66	1248	50
Improvised dwellings, sleepers out	237	10	385	15
	2415	100	2507	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 a small number 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 Tasmania.

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 Tasmania was significantly younger than the age profile of the national population. Sixty-nine per cent of the homeless in Tasmania were aged 34 or younger and 31 per cent were aged 35 or older. One-third (31 per cent) of the homeless were teenagers aged 12 to 18 (mainly on their own), 50 per cent higher than the national figure of 21 per cent. Fourteen per cent of the homeless were children under 12 who were with one or both parents. Another nine per cent were young adults aged 19 to 24. Altogether, 54 per cent of the homeless in Tasmania were aged 24 or younger, significantly higher than the national figure of 43 per cent.

### 3.5 AGE DISTRIBUTION OF HOMELESS POPULATION

	Australia			Tasmania		
	N	%		N	%	
Under 12	12 133	12	58	342	14	69
12-18	21 940	21		770	31	
19-24	10 504	10		226	9	
25-34	15 804	15		374	15	
35-44	13 981	13	42	295	12	31
45-54	12 206	12		235	9	
55-64	10 708	10		159	6	
65 or older	7 400	7		106	4	
	104 676	100		2507	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), but in Tasmania men outnumbered women, 51 to 49 per cent. In Tasmania, there were more females in the under-12, 12-to-18 and 19-to-24 age cohorts. However, males made up between 55 and 60 per cent of the population in the age cohorts above 24.

### 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

#### Tasmania

	Under 12	12-18	19-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+	All
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Male	49	43	48	55	60	59	57	55	51
Female	51	57	52	45	40	41	43	45	49
	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 Tasmania the figure was 61 per cent.. Amongst people sleeping rough in Tasmania, men outnumbered women, 56 to 44 per cent. There were slightly more women than men staying with other households (52 to 48 per cent), and there were equal proportions of men and women in SAAP.

### 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

#### Tasmania

	Boarding house (N=252)	Friends or relatives (N=1248)	SAAP (N=622)	Improvised dwellings (N=385)	All (N=2507)
	%	%	%	%	%
Male	61	48	50	56	51
Female	39	52	50	44	49
	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 Tasmania, 3.7 per cent of people identified as Indigenous at the 2006 Census. Table 3.8 shows that Indigenous people made up 4.4 per cent of people in boarding houses in Tasmania, 6.2 per cent of people staying with other households, 6.5 per cent of people in improvised dwellings and 15.5 per cent of people in SAAP. Indigenous people were overrepresented in all sections of the homeless population in Tasmania.

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

	Boarding house (N=252)	Friends or relatives (N=1243)	SAAP (N=608)	Improvised dwellings (N=385)	All* (N=2488)
	%	%	%	%	%
Non-Indigenous	95.6	93.8	84.5	93.5	91.7
Indigenous	4.4	6.2	15.5	6.5	8.3
	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 19 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 indicate this fact. 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 Tasmania, we estimate that a typical point-in-time figure is about 2500 homeless people. Half (50 per cent) of the homeless were staying temporarily with other households on census night and 25 per cent were in SAAP. Fifteen per cent were in the primary population, up from 10 per cent in 2001 (237 to 385 people). Only 10 per cent were in boarding houses. However, the homeless population is very mobile and these percentages go up and down. Many homeless people are in the secondary population and they move between different forms of temporary shelter.

Nationally, 56 per cent of homeless people were male and 44 per cent were female. In Tasmania, men outnumbered women, 51 to 49 per cent. The homeless population in Tasmania was younger than the homeless population nationally, with 69 per cent of the homeless aged 34 or younger. Indigenous people were overrepresented in all sectors of the population, but particularly in SAAP.

