

SAAP NDCA REPORT SERIES 10

# **Demand for SAAP assistance by homeless people 2004–05**

**A report from the SAAP National Data Collection**

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare  
Canberra

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Any enquiries about or comments on this publication should be directed to:

Manager

SAAP National Data Collection Agency

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

GPO Box 570

Canberra ACT 2601

Phone: 02 6244 1206

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# Preface

This publication is one of the Series 10 reports on the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) National Data Collection for 2004–05. The series provides information on people who were homeless and people who were at risk of being homeless who accessed SAAP in 2004–05. This report looks at the demand for SAAP services and the ability of agencies to meet this demand.

A productive and cooperative partnership has continued between the SAAP National Data Collection Agency (managed by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare), SAAP agencies and the SAAP Information Sub-committee. Valuable support and encouragement have been provided by the SAAP Coordination and Development Committee, which is responsible for the national direction of SAAP.

The partnership is built on shared goals and mutual trust. The key is agencies' willingness to collect and provide data to the National Data Collection Agency, knowing that any personal information provided by clients is protected by the extremely strict confidentiality provisions of the *Australian Institute of Health and Welfare Act 1987*. The fact that SAAP agencies in Australia continue to provide data for this report is testimony to their collective commitment to, and confidence in, the collection. Statistical adjustments to annual figures from the Client Collection have been made to account for the relatively small proportion of agencies that did not participate.

This large and complex project has not only a high level of support but also a high level of accuracy. We are confident that we can further improve the quality of the information provided to help policy makers and the community better understand and provide for the needs of people who are homeless or at risk of being so.

Penny Allbon  
Australian Institute of  
Health and Welfare

SAAP Coordination and  
Development Committee

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Finally, the authors acknowledge the vital role played by data providers. This report draws together a large amount of statistical material and it could not have been produced without the efforts and cooperation of SAAP service providers and clients (who provided service, client and potential client information) and the Australian Government Department of Family, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and state and territory funding departments (which provided administrative data).

# Abbreviations and symbols

## Abbreviations

|       |  |
|-------|--|
| ABS   | Australian Bureau of Statistics            |
| AIHW  | Australian Institute of Health and Welfare |
| ATSI  | Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander   |
| CAP   | Crisis Accommodation Program               |
| DV    | Domestic violence                          |
| NDC   | National Data Collection                   |
| NDCA  | National Data Collection Agency            |
| SAAP  | Supported Accommodation Assistance Program |
| SMART | SAAP Management and Reporting Tool         |

## Symbols

|        |   |
|--------|---|
| ..     | Not applicable                                |
| –      | Nil or rounded to zero (including null cells) |
| n.a.   | Not available                                 |
| n.e.s. | Not elsewhere specified                       |

# Glossary

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <b>Accompanying child</b>                | <p>A person aged under 18 years who accompanies a <i>client</i> to a SAAP <i>agency</i> during a <i>support period</i> or who requires and/or receives assistance from a SAAP agency as a result of their parent or guardian being a client of the same agency. An accompanying child may or may not require or receive assistance.</p> <p>The term accompanying child is also used to describe a person aged under 18 years who accompanies a parent(s) or guardian(s) to a SAAP agency but whose parent's or guardian's request for accommodation cannot be met.</p>   |
| <b>Accompanying child support period</b> | <p>Refers to each <i>support period</i> in which a child either accompanies their parent or guardian to a SAAP <i>agency</i> or receives assistance as a result of their parent's or guardian's support period.</p> <p>Within an accompanying child support period the child may receive <i>one-off assistance</i> and/or <i>support</i> over a period of time. A child may not be supported for the entire duration of the parent's or guardian's support period. However, it can be reasonably assumed that accompanying children have the same support period start and end dates as their parent or guardian in the majority of cases.</p> |
| <b>Agency</b>                            | <p>An organisation or establishment that receives a specified amount of SAAP funds to provide services.</p>  |
| <b>Alpha code</b>                        | <p>A predetermined combination of letters from a <i>client's</i> name, together with a letter designating the client's gender. A 'valid alpha code' is a legitimate alpha code (that is, one containing only letters from the alphabet and ending in either M or F) joined to the client's reported year of birth and encrypted to create a unique <i>client</i> indicator, or <i>statistical linkage key</i>.</p>   |
| <b>Birthplace</b>                        | <p>The country in which a person was born. Countries are divided into:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Australia</li><li>• other English-speaking countries (Canada; the Republic of Ireland; New Zealand; South Africa; England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland; and the United States of America)</li><li>• mainly non-English-speaking countries.</li></ul>   |
| <b>Casual client</b>                     | <p>A person who:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• receives assistance from a SAAP <i>agency</i> for less than 1 hour on a given day and</li><li>• does not establish an <i>ongoing support relationship</i> with the SAAP agency.</li></ul> <p>A casual client may receive <i>one-off assistance</i> from a SAAP <i>agency</i> on one or more occasions.</p>  |

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>Client</b>                                   | <p>A person aged 18 years or more, or a person of any age not accompanied by their parent or guardian, who:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• receives <i>support</i> or assistance from a SAAP <i>agency</i> which entails generally 1 hour or more of a worker's time, either with that client directly or on behalf of that client, on a given day or</li> <li>• is accommodated by a SAAP agency or</li> <li>• enters into an <i>ongoing support relationship</i> with a SAAP agency.</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Closed accompanying child support period</b> | An accompanying child support period associated with a <i>closed support period</i> .   |
| <b>Closed support period</b>                    | A <i>support period</i> that had finished on or before the end of the reporting period – 30 June.   |
| <b>Country of birth</b>                         | See <i>birthplace</i> .   |
| <b>Homeless person</b>                          | <p>A person who does not have access to safe, secure and adequate housing. A person is considered not to have access to safe, secure and adequate housing if the only housing to which they have access:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• damages, or is likely to damage, their health or</li> <li>• threatens their safety or</li> <li>• marginalises them through failing to provide access to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– adequate personal amenities or</li> <li>– the economic and social supports that a home normally affords or</li> </ul> </li> <li>• places them in circumstances that threaten or adversely affect the adequacy, safety, security and affordability of that housing or</li> <li>• has no security of tenure – that is, they have no legal right to continued occupation of their home.</li> </ul> <p>A person is also considered homeless if he or she is living in accommodation provided by a SAAP <i>agency</i> or some other form of emergency accommodation.</p> |
| <b>Immediate accommodation</b>                  | Accommodation required within 24 hours.   |
| <b>Invalid unmet request for accommodation</b>  | <p>An unmet request for accommodation is invalid if:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the request is made at an <i>agency</i> of an inappropriate target group</li> <li>• the person or group is inappropriate for the agency</li> <li>• there is no fee-free accommodation available at the agency</li> <li>• the proffered assistance is refused.</li> </ul> <p>All other <i>unmet requests for accommodation</i> are said to be valid.</p>   |

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <b>Met request for accommodation</b>     | A request for accommodation is met if the agency offers <i>supported accommodation</i> to the person or group requesting accommodation and that offer is accepted. All met requests for accommodation are considered to be valid as the accommodation could be provided.   |
| <b>Occasion of support</b>               | See <i>support period</i> .  |
| <b>One-off assistance</b>                | Assistance provided to a person who is not a <i>client</i> . It might include the provision of a meal, a shower, transport, money, clothing, telephone advice, information or a <i>referral</i> . Instances of <i>unmet need</i> for one-off assistance are not recorded in the SAAP National Data Collection.   |
| <b>Ongoing support relationship</b>      | <p>A relationship between a SAAP <i>agency</i> and a person whereby some assistance has been provided to that person, and it is agreed that future contact will occur between the person and the agency for the purpose of providing additional assistance. An invitation to return to the agency if the need arises does not constitute an ongoing support relationship.</p> <p>This definition is one of the criteria used to establish whether a person is considered a <i>client</i> for the purposes of the National Data Collection.</p>   |
| <b>Potential client</b>                  | <p>A person aged 18 years or more, or a person of any age not accompanied by a parent or guardian, who requests <i>supported accommodation</i> from a SAAP <i>agency</i> but who is not provided with that accommodation.</p> <p>People are not considered potential clients if their only <i>unmet requests for accommodation</i> are <i>invalid</i>.</p> <p>A potential client for one SAAP agency may at the same time be a client of another. A potential client may receive <i>one-off assistance</i> or <i>support</i> from a SAAP agency after making an unmet request for accommodation. Information on potential clients who make requests for <i>support</i> only are not collected.</p> |
| <b>Record</b>                            | A unit of analysis. In any particular situation, it can refer to a <i>client</i> , an <i>occasion of support</i> , an <i>unmet request for accommodation</i> , and so on.  |
| <b>Referral</b>                          | A (formal) referral occurs when a SAAP <i>agency</i> contacts another agency (SAAP or non-SAAP) and that agency accepts the person concerned for an appointment or interview. A referral has not been provided if the person is not accepted for an appointment or interview.  |
| <b>Statistical linkage key (SLK)</b>     | A statistical linkage key (SLK) is a derived variable used to link data for statistical purposes that is generated from elements of an individual's personal demographic data. The SAAP SLK is comprised of the <i>alpha code</i> and year of birth.   |
| <b>Substantial support or assistance</b> | <i>Support</i> or <i>supported accommodation</i> provided to a <i>client</i> as part of an <i>ongoing support relationship</i> between a SAAP <i>agency</i> and the client.  |
| <b>Support</b>                           | Assistance, other than <i>supported accommodation</i> , provided to a <i>client</i> as part of an <i>ongoing support relationship</i> between a SAAP <i>agency</i> and the client. For the purposes of the National Data Collection,   |

support also includes contact with, or work on behalf of, a client for generally more than 1 hour on a given day. Support may be provided to the client individually or in group sessions.

**Support period**

A support period commences when a *client* begins to receive *support* and/or *supported accommodation* from a SAAP *agency*. The support period is considered to finish when:

- the client ends the relationship with the agency; or
- the agency ends the relationship with the client.

If it is not clear whether the agency or the client has ended the relationship, the support period is assumed to have ended if no assistance has been provided to the client for a period of 1 month. In such a case, the date the support period ended is 1 month after the last contact with the client.

**Supported accommodation**

Accommodation paid for or provided directly by a SAAP *agency*. The accommodation may be provided at the agency or may be purchased using SAAP funds – at a motel, for example.

**Unmet need**

An unmet need occurs when a *client* expresses a need for a particular support service, or either directly or indirectly acknowledges a need for a particular support service during their *support period*, and that service is not provided or referred.

**Unmet request for accommodation**

An unmet request for accommodation occurs when a person requests, but does not receive, *supported accommodation*; that is, the person wishes to become a *client* of a SAAP *agency* but is not accepted, or the person does not accept the agency's offer of supported accommodation.

A person whose request for supported accommodation cannot be fulfilled might be given *one-off assistance*. Such a person would be a *casual client*, but not a *client*, of the agency.

**Valid unmet request for accommodation**

An unmet request for accommodation is valid if:

- the request is made at an *agency* of an appropriate target group
- the agency cannot offer accommodation because insufficient accommodation is available or the agency is a referral agency with no vacancies on the books
- the agency cannot offer accommodation because the type of accommodation requested is not provided by the agency
- the agency cannot offer accommodation because there are insufficient staff to provide support
- the agency cannot offer accommodation because facilities for special needs are not available
- the request is made at a domestic violence agency and the age of the male child is inappropriate
- proffered accommodation is not refused.

All other unmet requests for accommodation are said to be *invalid*.

# Summary

In 2004–05, 1,294 non-government, community and local government organisations were funded nationally under the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) (Chapter 1). This report provides information on the wide range of substantial support services provided by these agencies to people experiencing homelessness or at imminent risk of becoming homeless. An analysis of one-off or casual assistance provided by SAAP agencies on a daily basis is also included.

Additionally, the report presents information about the level of unmet demand for SAAP services, as agencies cannot always meet all of the requests from existing SAAP clients, or the requests from potential clients (that is, people who request services but are turned away). A major focus of this report is the level of unmet demand for accommodation, as the provision of accommodation is one of the core activities of SAAP. The companion bulletin to this report, *Demand for SAAP accommodation by homeless people 2004–05*, examines more fully the pattern of accommodation requests according to the group requesting accommodation (AIHW 2006d).

The following section provides an overview of this report. It is followed by a guide to the more detailed information contained in each chapter. A Glossary of the key terms used in this report is provided on page xiii.

## Overview

SAAP clients are people over the age of 18, or people of any age who are not accompanied by a parent or guardian to a SAAP agency, and who received substantial SAAP support. In 2004–05, there were 100,400 SAAP clients (Table 2.2). These clients received support that lasted for more than 1 hour, or had an ongoing relationship with a SAAP service provider, on 173,100 occasions. About half of these support periods (85,200) involved accommodation whereas the other half involved only support services.

SAAP clients requested 855,800 distinct types of services in 149,300 closed support periods (Table 3.1). The majority of service types requested by clients were able to be provided by the agency by the end of the client's support (90% or 773,200 services). The most common broad types of services provided to these clients were basic support services, such as meals (98%), general support or advocacy services (96%), and counselling services (91%). In addition to this, clients were referred on to other organisations for 53,600 types of support, most commonly for specialist or health services (26%), employment and training assistance (24%) and assistance to obtain or maintain independent housing (14%). SAAP clients may also have requested services, including accommodation, that could be neither provided directly by the agency nor referred on (unmet needs). The most common unmet needs were for employment and training assistance (14%), assistance with independent housing, and specialist or health services (both 9%). Requests for SAAP or Crisis Accommodation Program (CAP) accommodation could not be met in 4% of requests by clients for that type of service.

Some of the clients supported by SAAP had children accompanying them. There were 78,500 accompanying child support periods for 56,800 accompanying children recorded in 2004–05 (Table 2.2). These children were also provided with support services, most commonly basic support services (in 98% of requests for this type of service), followed by

culturally sensitive services (96%) and general support or advocacy (95%) (Table 3.6). They were referred most often for health or medical services (30%), counselling (10%) and school liaison or child care (7%). The service that was requested but remained unmet most often was counselling (in 5% of requests for this type of service), followed by health or medical services (3%) and school liaison or child care (2%). Requests for SAAP accommodation could not be met in 1% of cases for accompanying children.

### **People assisted on a daily average basis**

There were 33,700 periods of support on an average day in 2004–05 for those who received substantial SAAP support (derived from Table 2.1). This was comprised of 20,950 client support periods and 12,750 accompanying child support periods (Table 2.1).

In addition, there were casual contacts made by an estimated 1,917 individuals who received one-off assistance. That is, these contacts are not counted as clients, but as casual clients. These figures are collected during the 2-week Casual Client Collection. Casual clients most commonly received information (in 57% of casual contacts) (Table 4.1). These people may also have been seeking SAAP accommodation but were not provided with it.

Using the Australian population in conjunction with the daily average numbers of SAAP support periods, accompanying child support periods and casual clients, it is possible to give an estimate of the number of people in the general population provided with SAAP assistance on a daily average basis. In 2004–05, it is estimated that between 17 and 18 people per 10,000 people in the general Australian population received some form of SAAP assistance each day (Chapter 2).

### **Daily average requests for SAAP accommodation**

As already noted, some clients and accompanying children, and casual clients, have unmet requests for accommodation. These requests for accommodation, in addition to those made by people who do not receive any assistance from SAAP at all, are counted during the 2-week Demand for Accommodation Collection.

Information on the demand for accommodation is available for only 2 weeks of the year – from 1–7 December 2004 and 11–17 May 2005. Given that there can be seasonal influences and people can have several unmet requests in a year, the daily and 2-week figures for requests by individuals and groups cannot be used as a basis for deriving annual figures. It should also be noted that the numbers of unmet requests, people who made those requests, and people turned away presented in this report are underestimates. This is because only data from agencies that participated in the Client Collection and the Demand for Accommodation Collection were used to calculate a turn-away rate and provide an indication of the overall ability of SAAP to cope with the demand for accommodation (see Chapter 9 and Appendix A2.2.1). Because of the above reasons, small numbers are sometimes presented. While small numbers raise some statistical issues concerning the accuracy and usefulness of the data, they are included in order to provide an indication of the demand for SAAP accommodation and the profile of people who made a valid unmet request for accommodation or who were turned away.

### **Potential clients and accompanying children**

Adults or unaccompanied children who made a valid unmet request for accommodation are referred to as potential clients. On an average day during the 2004–05 Demand for Accommodation Collection, there were 212 potential clients and 120 accompanying children

who made a valid unmet request for immediate accommodation from a SAAP agency (Table 2.1). Of these, 193 potential clients and 111 accompanying children were unable to be accommodated by the end of the day (were turned away) with the remainder able to find accommodation on their second, third or subsequent attempt during the same day.

### **Daily request for accommodation turn-away rate**

Nationally, on an average day during the Demand for Accommodation Collection period, more people who made a valid request for immediate accommodation were turned away than were newly accommodated by SAAP agencies (54% of adults and unaccompanied children and 60% of accompanying children) (Tables 9.1 and 9.4). However, the proportions of people being turned away from accommodation varied across the states and territories, by requesting group, and by the primary target group of the agency.

Nationally, by requesting group, family groups – couples both with and without children and individual(s) with children – were turned away in high proportions (78%, 81% and 64% on an average day, respectively, compared with 47% for individual(s) without children). By primary target group of the agency, people who approached agencies that primarily catered for families were also turned away in high proportions (81%, compared with between 33% and 60% for the other target group agencies) (Table 9.3). In addition, on an average day 60% of accompanying children were turned away. This could indicate that there are insufficient agencies capable of accommodating families in particular areas or that there is a shortage of accommodation space in agencies targeting families.

### **Unmet demand to total demand for accommodation ratio**

The daily request for accommodation turn-away rate shows that a large proportion of people requesting immediate accommodation on an average day were unable to find it. It does not, however, take into account the large numbers of people already accommodated in SAAP. When unmet demand for accommodation is expressed as a ratio of people who were not accommodated relative to the total expressed demand for immediate SAAP accommodation (people who requested SAAP accommodation that day and people who were continuing their accommodation from a previous day), 3 out of 100 adults or unaccompanied children could not be accommodated on an average daily basis. The unmet demand to total demand for accommodation ratio was similar for accompanying children (2 in 100 accompanying children). It is important to note that, although this provides a measure of the overall ability of SAAP to accommodate clients and therefore the average daily undersupply of SAAP accommodation, the unmet demand to total demand for accommodation ratio does not provide a measure of the additional capacity required in SAAP. For example, it does not take into account how long a given group generally stays in SAAP accommodation once they are accommodated, and therefore the additional capacity required the next day and the day after.

As with the daily request turn-away rate, the unmet demand to total demand for accommodation ratio varied across the states and territories, by requesting group, and by the primary target group of the agency. Nationally, according to requesting group, while family groups generally accounted for smaller proportions of the total SAAP population, they had higher ratios of unmet demand to total demand for accommodation than individual(s) without children, although this did vary by state and territory (Appendix 1). Note, however, that when adults, unaccompanied children and accompanying children were considered together, one type of family group, individual(s) with children, accounted for the largest number of people who were unable to find SAAP accommodation as well as the largest

group accommodated overall on an average day (Tables 9.1 and 9.5). Once in SAAP accommodation, family groups also tended to stay longer (Table 9.7).

### **Referrals for accommodation**

Referrals for accommodation were arranged in 52% of valid unmet requests for accommodation. Couples without children had higher proportions of referrals for accommodation made when accommodation could not be provided (61%), followed by individual(s) with children (56%), couples with children (54%) and individual(s) without children (49%) (Chapter 5).

### **Conclusion**

The high turn-away rate for daily requests mentioned above (54%), the low daily turnover of people in SAAP accommodation (there are relatively few people leaving their accommodation and taking up accommodation compared with those continuing their accommodation), and the relatively low referral rate for those requiring immediate accommodation suggest that finding accommodation in a SAAP agency is difficult for some. The relatively small ratio of people not accommodated relative to the total expressed demand for SAAP accommodation (3 in 100) seems to suggest that a small increase in the number of places available on an average day could have a significant impact on the level of unmet demand for accommodation. However, the people missing out relatively more often are those who generally require SAAP accommodation for the longest periods of time. This conclusion also assumes that all those who need SAAP accommodation are currently approaching SAAP agencies and that demand is consistent across client groups, target groups and geographical locations. There is sufficient evidence to suggest that this is not the case. Increased capacity may also have flow-on effects on the number of people seeking accommodation. A discussion of meeting the expressed demand for SAAP accommodation is contained at the end of Chapter 9.

## **Chapter contents**

The above analysis is drawn from the nine chapters in this report that contain detailed information about the demand for SAAP assistance in 2004–05.

- Chapter 1 provides the context as to where SAAP fits into the larger picture of homelessness.
- Chapter 2 provides an overview of the total demand for SAAP assistance in 2004–05 using a summary of the daily and annual SAAP figures from the Client Collection, the Casual Client Collection and the Demand for Accommodation Collection.
- Chapter 3 focuses on the level of service provision to clients and accompanying children.
- Chapter 4 discusses one-off assistance provided to casual clients.
- Chapter 5 outlines the one-off assistance provided to individuals and groups with unmet requests for accommodation, including referrals made for accommodation.
- Chapter 6 discusses the number of unmet requests for SAAP accommodation made by individuals and groups, examines invalid and valid requests, and also discusses the immediacy of when accommodation was required.
- As individuals and groups can have more than one unmet request in a day, Chapter 7 gives the number of people with valid unmet requests for accommodation.

- Chapter 8 presents demographic information about the people outlined in Chapter 7.
- Chapter 9 provides an analysis of the daily average number of adults and children who could not be accommodated by SAAP agencies, and gives the average daily request turn-away rate for each requesting group, state and territory, region, and primary target group. It also discusses the overall demand for SAAP accommodation and presents an unmet demand to total demand for accommodation ratio as a measure of the ability of SAAP to meet the total expressed demand for accommodation on an average day during the Demand for Accommodation Collection period.
- Appendix 1 provides additional tables including state and territory breakdowns of the daily turn-away and demand for SAAP accommodation rates for adults and unaccompanied children by requesting group and primary target group.
- Appendix 2 provides an overview of the methodologies used in the Client Collection, Demand for Accommodation Collection and the Casual Client Collection. Also included are agency participation rates and the number of forms returned during the different collections.
- Appendix 3 provides copies of the forms used to collect data for the various collections. It should be noted that data for the Client and Casual Client Collections were also supplied by agencies via the electronic collection tool, SMART (SAAP Management and Reporting Tool).

The companion bulletin, *Demand for SAAP accommodation by homeless people 2004–05* (AIHW 2006d, available in published form and via the internet <[www.aihw.gov.au](http://www.aihw.gov.au)>), explores more fully the pattern of accommodation requests made by clients, accompanying children and potential clients according to requesting group.

