

Appendix 2 Collection participation and estimation methods

The analysis in this report uses information collected in 4 of the 5 collections conducted for the SAAP National Data Collection in 2001–02. An overview of the 4 collections follows. The level of agency participation in the collections is discussed and estimation methods used to allow for missing data in the Unmet Demand and Met Demand Collections are outlined. A note on interpretation of the report's tables is also provided.

A2.1 The Client Collection

A full-scale trial of the Client Collection, involving all agencies across Australia, began in March 1996 and the Collection proper began on 1 July 1996. The Collection has continued, with some refinements to data items being introduced in July each year.

The Client Collection is the main component of the National Data Collection. It contains information about all clients receiving support of more than 1 hour's duration under SAAP. Data are recorded by service providers during or immediately following contact with clients and are then forwarded to the National Data Collection Agency after clients' support periods have ended or, for ongoing clients, at the end of the reporting period (30 June). Data collected include basic sociodemographic information, information about the services required by and provided to each client, and information about each client's situation before and after receiving SAAP services.

A high level of participation among SAAP-funded agencies is necessary to ensure that the data accurately reflect the work done under the auspices of the Program. Overall, the participation rate for the Client Collection has been very satisfactory: in 2001–02, 95% of SAAP agencies providing support and/or accommodation participated in the Collection (Table A2.1); this is up slightly from the 94% participation rate obtained for 2000–01.

In assessing the quality of data in any collection, it is important to consider not only overall participation rates but also the degree to which the returned data-collection forms are complete. All data collections and surveys invariably have some missing data, but this does not necessarily undermine the validity or reliability of the information obtained. However, high levels of non-response to particular questions mean that some caution should be exercised when interpreting the data because the results may not fully reflect the entire population of interest.

In this context it should be noted that the protocols established for the National Data Collection require that SAAP clients provide information in a climate of informed consent (SAAP 1996). If clients' consent is not obtained, only a limited number of questions can be completed on the data-collection forms and an 'alpha code' is not recorded. Alpha codes are used to create a linkage key, which allows data collected on separate occasions from the same client to be combined without identifying the client. They thus allow enumeration of actual clients in addition to occasions of support.

Nationally, consent and valid alpha codes with consent (termed 'valid consent') were obtained from clients in 87% and 85% of support periods respectively (Table A2.1). These rates were the highest since the inception of the National Data Collection in July 1996. In all

states and territories valid consent was obtained in the majority of cases, ranging from 73% in South Australia to 87% in Queensland. Compared with 2000–01, the 2001–02 valid consent rates were higher for all jurisdictions except South Australia and for every primary target group.

It should also be noted that some participating SAAP agencies are classified as ‘high-volume’ agencies. These agencies, characterised by a high client turnover, complete high-volume data-collection forms that collect only a subset of Client Collection data items. Information from these forms therefore appears only in tables using data from this subset of items; other tables are restricted to information from general agencies. There were 40,099 high-volume forms returned (24% of the total) during 2001–02 (Table A2.1, Note 4). Appendix 3 contains copies of the general client form and the high-volume client form.

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare has developed a scheme – primarily for use when deriving annual estimates – that adjusts for differences between support periods with consent and those without. The scheme also adjusts estimates to allow for agency non-participation, for clients who give valid consent for some support periods but not for others (referred to as ‘mixed consent’), and for clients who do not give consent in any of their periods of support. A description of the scheme is given in the 2001–02 national annual report (AIHW 2002c:79–81). In this current report only Tables 2.1, 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, A1.1, A1.2, A1.3, and A1.4 present annual client data, so only those tables have been adjusted.

Table A2.1: SAAP Client Collection: agency participation rates and forms returned with informed consent and valid consent, by state and territory and primary target group for 2001–02, and by reporting period, Australia

	Agencies		Forms returned		
	Total	Participation rate	Total	Consent	Valid consent
State/territory (2001–02)	No.	%	No.	%	%
NSW	385	93.8	44,791	86.9	85.6
Vic	348	96.0	43,133	88.0	86.5
Qld	191	92.7	38,354	90.1	87.3
WA	104	97.1	14,257	88.2	86.3
SA	82.0	92.7	13,349	75.2	73.2
Tas	40.0	92.5	5,405	81.9	80.4
ACT	31.0	96.8	2,583	86.4	84.3
NT	30.0	96.7	4,663	90.9	84.3
Total	1,211	94.5	166,535	87.0	85.1
Primary target group (2001–02)					
Young people	458	93.7	33,308	82.8	80.7
Single men only	95.0	93.7	29,277	93.1	92.4
Single women only	45.0	95.6	3,819	85.7	84.5
Families	114	97.4	8,234	81.8	80.5
Women escaping domestic violence	280	96.1	35,731	80.7	76.8
Cross-target/multiple/general	219	93.2	56,166	91.3	89.9
Total	1,211	94.5	166,535	87.0	85.1
Reporting period					
1997–98	1,159	94.6	156,589	75.4	72.0
1998–99	1,163	95.0	155,005	75.0	71.5
1999–00	1,159	93.2	146,793	79.0	76.5
2000–01	1,178	94.1	160,512	81.5	78.8
2001–02	1,211	94.5	166,535	87.0	85.1

Notes

1. 'Agencies' refers to the number of agencies that were 'in scope'— that is, agencies that should have been participating in the reference period.
2. Based on forms returned from agencies in scope for the Client Collection.
3. 'Valid consent' here refers to all forms with a valid alpha code that were completed with consent, where the alpha code is a predetermined combination of letters from a client's name together with a letter designating the client's gender. It is joined to the client's reported year of birth and encrypted to create a unique client indicator. This is used to combine data from more than one support period without requiring the actual name of the client to be recorded.
4. Of the 166,535 forms returned in 2001–02, 40,099 were high-volume forms.
5. Figures are unweighted.

Sources: AIHW 1997, 1999, 2000a, 2000b, 2001b, 2002c.

A2.2 The Unmet Demand Collection

The Unmet Demand Collection is conducted annually (in two 1-week periods) to gather information on homeless people and people at risk of homelessness who are not accepted as clients of a SAAP agency. It measures the level of unmet demand for SAAP services by collecting information about the number of requests for support or accommodation that are not met, for whatever reason. In 2001–02 the Collection was held between 22 and 28 August 2001 and 8 and 14 May 2002. All SAAP-funded agencies that provide support or accommodation to clients were asked to record each unsuccessful request for assistance during the Collection period; a form was completed for each person (adult or unaccompanied child) or group of people (including accompanying children). In August 2001 and May 2002, 10,941 forms were received (Table A2.2).

The participation rate for the Unmet Demand Collection was lower than that for the Client Collection and lower than the participation rate recorded in 2000–01. Nationally, 83% of agencies returned forms following the 2 weeks of the collection period – slightly lower than the 87% recorded for the previous year (Table A2.2). The majority of jurisdictions recorded a decrease in the participation rate compared with 2000–01; however, New South Wales, Queensland, and South Australia reported slight increases in participation. The participation rate for 2001–02 ranged from a high of 88% in Queensland and South Australia to a low of 73% in the Northern Territory and Western Australia.

Compared with 2000–01, the 2001–02 participation rates were lower for almost every primary target group, with the largest decrease in participation being from agencies targeting families, from 94% in 2000–01 to 84% in 2001–02. In 2001–02, agencies targeting single women had the highest participation rate (91%), an increase from 84% in 2000–01. Cross-target, multiple-target or general agencies recorded the lowest participation rate (74%).

It is not known whether agencies that did not participate in the Unmet Demand Collection received requests they could not meet. Consequently, it is possible that findings from this Collection may understate the true extent of unmet demand. In addition, only data for agencies that participated in the 3 collections used to calculate the turn-away rate in this report – the Unmet, Met and Client Collections – are presented in the tables in Chapters 5, 6 and 7. These agencies accounted for 10,760 Unmet Demand Collection forms, and the analysis in those chapters is based on this reduced number of forms and associated people.

Table A2.2: SAAP Unmet Demand Collection: agency participation rates and forms returned, by state and territory and primary target group for 22–28 August 2001 and 8–14 May 2002 and by reporting period, Australia

	Agencies	Participation rate	Forms returned
State/territory			
(22–28 August 2001 and 8–14 May 2002)	Number	(%)	Number
NSW	394	86.8	2,844
Vic	376	79.5	3,199
Qld	195	88.2	2,390
WA	124	73.4	873
SA	84.0	88.1	688
Tas	41.0	85.4	323
ACT	35.0	80.0	402
NT	37.0	73.0	222
Total	1,286	83.0	10,941
Primary target group			
(22–28 August 2001 and 8–14 May 2002)			
Young people	476	83.4	3,454
Single men only	97.0	86.6	1,084
Single women only	46.0	91.3	371
Families	121	84.3	1,642
Women escaping domestic violence	289	87.9	1,796
Cross-target/multiple/general	257	73.5	2,594
Total	1,286	83.0	10,941
Reporting period			
13–26 November 1997	1,152	76.3	7,239
12–25 November 1998	1,168	78.6	7,001
11–24 November 1999	1,164	70.9	7,394
29 November – 5 December 2000 and 9–15 May 2001	1,236	86.5	10,685
22–28 August 2001 and 8–14 May 2002	1,286	83.0	10,941

Notes

1. Based on forms returned from agencies in scope for the Unmet Demand Collection.
2. 'Agencies' refers to the number of agencies that were 'in scope'— that is, agencies that should have been participating in the reference period.
3. In August 2001 and May 2002, 543 forms were returned for people who refused assistance.
4. Figures are unweighted.

Sources: SAAP Administrative Data Collection and Unmet Demand Collection; AIHW 1997, 1999, 2000a, 2000b, 2001b, 2002c.

Estimation methods

During the 2001–02 Unmet Demand Collection period, SAAP agencies across Australia reported 10,398 requests for support or accommodation that were not met, excluding those in which people refused to accept assistance (Table A2.2). However, many of these requests were made at inappropriate agencies; this includes requests for accommodation at agencies that do not provide accommodation or where the person did not fall within the agency's target group. Invalid requests may be followed by successful requests at another agency, especially if a referral has been arranged. Consequently, the number of valid unmet requests is a more useful measure of unmet demand. In addition, not all valid unmet requests involve accommodation. In the context of homelessness, the level of unmet requests for immediate accommodation is of particular importance. It must also be emphasised that the number of valid unmet requests does not represent the actual number of people, since a person can make requests on more than one occasion and of more than SAAP agency. There are thus two types of estimates of primary interest: numbers of valid unmet requests and numbers of people with valid unmet requests.

Several difficulties are associated with estimating both the number of valid unmet requests and the number of people who make these requests but who, for various reasons, do not receive the assistance sought. First, a proportion of people who make an unsuccessful request for support or accommodation may subsequently receive ongoing support or accommodation from another SAAP agency, quite possibly soon after the initial request. Use of a linkage key (the alpha code) has proved unworkable in the context of unmet need, so previously it was not possible to identify when this situation occurred. Second, people may have their needs met by other means and no longer require SAAP assistance. Third, a person may make several requests for the same assistance; again, without a linkage key related requests cannot be identified with certainty. Finally, data required to identify valid unmet requests may be missing from returned forms. These possibilities pose 4 main problems:

- Estimates of the number of unmet requests obtained from the Collection may overstate the actual level of unmet demand.
- Estimates of the number of valid unmet requests may be too low as a result of missing data.
- The number of people making valid unmet requests cannot be obtained directly from the collection.
- An accurate final turn-away rate for those seeking assistance cannot be calculated.

Although it is not currently possible to resolve the first of these problems, a method has been developed for deriving estimates of both the number of valid unmet requests and the number of individuals, or potential clients, whose valid requests were not met each day of the 2-week collection period. It should be noted, however, that the resulting estimate of potential clients would overstate the number of people involved if people make requests for different services on different approaches to SAAP agencies within the collection period. Additionally, because people might make several approaches on the same day to SAAP agencies throughout the year, the daily figure cannot be pro-rated up to give an estimate of the number of people turned away from SAAP agencies annually. People often approach SAAP services more than once within 12 months, as is illustrated by the fact that nationally 32% of SAAP clients had more than one support period in 2001–02 (AIHW 2002c).

On any day from 22 to 28 August 2001 and from 8 to 14 May 2002 there was an estimated daily average of 357 valid unmet requests for immediate SAAP accommodation (Table 5.3).

Furthermore, it is estimated that a daily average of 344 potential clients made these requests and that these people were accompanied by a total of 202 children (Table 6.1). The method used to derive these estimates is outlined in the following section.

To address the fourth concern, it was decided to implement a new collection, the Met Demand Collection (see Section A2.3). Using the estimated number of people mentioned above in conjunction with the Met Demand and Client Collections, it is now possible to estimate the number of people with a valid prior request on a particular day who successfully gained SAAP accommodation later that day as well as the estimated number of people who were turned away with their needs unmet. This analysis is provided in Chapter 7.

Adjusting for missing information

The foregoing discussion makes it clear that two types of estimates from the Unmet Demand Collection are particularly important:

- numbers of valid unmet requests for immediate accommodation; and
- numbers of potential clients.

These estimates are crucial because they show the volume of requests for immediate accommodation, indicate the number of people with unmet needs within the collection period, and are used in conjunction with data from other collections to examine total demand for SAAP services. Missing data in items used to derive these estimates will therefore affect the estimates' utility because they lead to estimates being too low.

The information used to derive these estimates is elicited through 4 questions on the Unmet Demand Collection form (see Appendix 3):

- question 6, asking about immediacy of the need for accommodation;
- question 7, asking whether or not the same request for accommodation had been made and turned away earlier that day and if the request was made at a SAAP agency;
- question 8, asking if the person refused an offer of accommodation; and
- question 9, asking if the person made a valid request – that is, sought support from an appropriate agency (in terms of target group and type of assistance provided by the agency).

Missing information for any of these questions affects estimates of valid unmet requests and/or estimates of potential clients.

To maximise the utility of estimates from the Unmet Demand Collection, an answer was imputed where information was missing for one of these key questions. The imputation itself was done at the form level by randomly assigning an answer for the missing question using the distribution of answers for that question. To improve accuracy, this imputation also used information from related questions.

An estimate of the total number of valid unmet requests can then be derived by identifying forms that correspond to valid unmet requests. This is done using both the original and the imputed answers: initially valid requests are identified using question 9, then any requests in which an offer of assistance was refused are excluded using the results of question 8.

Question 6 can then be used to divide these valid unmet requests into requests for immediate accommodation and other requests.

Potential clients are identified by finding those valid unmet requests that correspond to first valid unmet requests. This can partly be done by excluding repeat requests at SAAP agencies

(identified via question 7) from identified valid unmet requests (estimated as described). In addition to this, however, to estimate the number of potential clients one further piece of information is needed – whether a first (invalid) request at an inappropriate agency later becomes an unmet (valid) request at an appropriate agency. This information is very difficult to obtain and is not available from the current Collection. In reports before the 1999–00 *Demand for SAAP assistance* report (AIHW 2001a), adjustments were made for this gap in information at the state and territory level. The adjustments were based on the ratio of valid second (or further) unmet requests to the total number of first unmet requests. In the current analysis this ratio was also applied, but it was used at the form level to provide an estimate of the probability of an invalid first unmet request later becoming a valid unmet request. Using this probability, a proportion of invalid first unmet requests were imputed to become first valid unmet requests. These imputed first valid unmet requests can then be combined with observed first valid unmet requests to estimate the total number of potential clients. This ‘unit-level’ approach allows for greater flexibility in the tables that can be produced than the ‘state-level’ adjustments.

In this report imputed data are included in all tables that use information from questions 6 to 9 on the Unmet Demand Collection form or that present information on potential clients.

A2.3 The Met Demand Collection

The Met Demand Collection was conducted for the first time in 2001–02 and was designed to work in conjunction with the Unmet Demand Collection. It was conducted at the same time as the Unmet Demand Collection, between 22 and 28 August 2001 and 8 and 14 May 2002, and gathered information on clients starting their accommodation during the collection period. All SAAP-funded agencies that provide accommodation were asked to record each successful request for accommodation during the specified Collection period. A form was completed for each person (adult or unaccompanied child) or group of people (including accompanying children) that started accommodation during this period. The purpose was to measure the number of instances where a person or group was newly accommodated on a particular day after being turned away from a SAAP agency earlier in that day. With this information it is possible to estimate the number of people who required accommodation and were not accommodated by SAAP on a particular day (see Chapter 7).

In order that the 3 collections used to calculate the turn-away rate can be used in conjunction, only data from agencies that participated in the Met Demand, Unmet Demand and Client Collections are presented in the tables in Chapters 5, 6 and 7. During the Met Demand Collection period SAAP agencies across Australia reported 4,577 met requests for accommodation. When considering only those agencies that participated in the Met Demand, Unmet Demand and Client Collections, this number dropped to 4,504. The analysis in Chapter 7 is based on the reduced number of forms and associated people.

Since the Met Demand Collection is essentially a subset of the Client Collection, the participation rates are similar to those recorded for the Client Collection (see Table A2.1).

Estimation methods

A proportion of people who make an unsuccessful request for accommodation might subsequently receive accommodation from another SAAP agency on the same day. This is why the Met Demand form was used to count the number of times this occurred, so that a turn-away rate could be calculated (see Chapter 7). In order for the Met Demand Collection

to be used as part of the calculation of the turn-away rate, the number of people who had a valid unmet request earlier in the day but were subsequently accommodated later that day needed to be estimated. Accompanying children are excluded from the analysis in Chapter 7 since the design of the 3 collection instruments do not allow turn-away rates to be calculated for accompanying children.

The information used to derive the estimated number of clients who were potential clients earlier on the same day is elicited through question 4 on the Met Demand form (see Appendix 3) which asks whether the person or group had made a request for accommodation at a SAAP agency earlier that day and whether that request was valid. For the purposes of this report, only people who had a valid unmet request earlier in the day are considered. Whether the request was valid is determined on the basis of the response recorded against the second part of question 4 on the Met Demand form. Invalid requests include those made for accommodation at agencies that do not provide accommodation or where the person did not fall within the agency's target group.

Adjusting for missing information

Missing information about whether a client was previously turned away affects estimates of the number of people who successfully gained accommodation later in the day on which they had made an unmet request. Therefore, to maximise the utility of estimates from the Met Demand Collection, an answer was imputed for question 4 where information was missing for this question. The imputation was done at the form level by randomly assigning an answer for the missing response using the distribution of answers for that question.

In this report, imputed data are included in all tables that use information from the Met Demand Collection.

A2.4 The Casual Client Collection

The two-week Casual Client Collection is conducted annually to elicit information about short-term or one-off assistance provided to homeless people and people at risk of homelessness. In 2001–02 it was conducted from 21 February to 6 March. A total of 33,530 records were returned for the collection period (Table A2.4).

The participation rate for this collection was relatively low, with 63% of agencies across Australia returning forms. This was a decrease from 67% in 2000–01. It should be noted that the methodology used to calculate agency participation was changed for 2000–01. In previous years, participation was based on the number of agencies that participated in both the Client and the Casual Client Collections during the month in which the Casual Client Collection was held; that is, it was assumed that agencies that returned Client Collection forms had also participated in the Casual Client Collection. For the years 1997 to 2000, reported Casual Client participation rates were considerably higher than the rate for 2000–01 because this latter rate is based only on agencies that returned data for the Casual Client Collection (see, for example, AIHW 2001a).

There was some variation in participation across states and territories: 73% of agencies in Tasmania participated, compared with 58% of agencies in both the Australian Capital Territory and South Australia. The participation rates in the majority of jurisdictions decreased from those recorded for 2000–01, with the exception of New South Wales, Tasmania and the Northern Territory, which had slight increases in participation. The largest

decrease in participation was recorded in South Australia, where the rate dropped from 72% in 2000-01 to 58% in 2001-02.

Variation also occurred across target groups. Participation was highest among agencies targeting families (69%) and lowest among agencies targeting single men (59%). Compared with 2000-01, the 2001-02 participation rates were lower for every primary target group, except for young people where the rate was the same. In particular, the participation of agencies targeting single women dropped significantly, from 76% in 2000-01 to 62% in 2001-02.

Table A2.3: SAAP Casual Client Collection: participation rates and forms returned, by state and territory and primary target group for 21 February – 6 March 2002, and by reporting period, Australia

	Agencies	Participation rate	Records returned
State/territory			
(21 February – 6 March 2002)	Number	(%)	Number
NSW	390	62.3	7,220
Vic	353	61.8	7,884
Qld	194	66.5	11,509
WA	111	66.7	3,157
SA	83.0	57.8	2,398
Tas	40.0	72.5	528
ACT	33.0	57.6	549
NT	30.0	70.0	285
Total	1,234	63.3	33,530
Primary target group			
(21 February – 6 March 2002)			
Young people	462	61.0	5,590
Single men only	95.0	58.9	3,840
Single women only	45.0	62.2	1,449
Families	114	69.3	2,324
Women escaping domestic violence	281	61.6	3,451
Cross target/multiple/general	237	68.8	16,876
Total	1,234	63.3	33,530
Reporting period			
22 May – 4 June 1997	1,127	n.a.	40,762
21 May – 3 June 1998	1,175	n.a.	25,257
20 May – 2 June 1999	1,183	n.a.	27,050
18 May – 31 May 2000	1,173	n.a.	30,050
22 February – 7 March 2001	1,196	66.5	30,302
21 February – 6 March 2002	1,234	63.3	33,530

Notes

1. 'Agencies' refers to the number of agencies that should have been participating in the reference period.
2. The methodology used to calculate agency participation was changed for 2000–01. In previous years participation was based on the number of agencies that participated in both the Client and the Casual Client Collections for the month in which the Casual Client Collection was held; that is, it was assumed that agencies that returned Client forms had also participated in the Casual Client Collection. For the years 1997 to 2000, reported Casual Client participation rates were considerably higher than the rate for 2000–01 because the latter rate is based only on agencies that returned data for the Casual Client Collection.
3. Figures are unweighted.

Sources: SAAP Administrative Data Collection and Casual Client Collection; AIHW 1997, 1999, 2000a, 2000b; 2001b, 2002c.

A2.5 Interpretation of the tables

When interpreting the tables in this report, a number of points should be noted:

- The reference period for the table is specified in the title. This may vary from table to table, depending on the collection being used.
- The population to which the table refers is specified in the title. A number of tables use data from more than one collection, so a table may have two reference populations. This is specified in the title.
- The main unit used in the table (for example, percentages or numbers) is usually shown at the end of the table title; if no unit is given there, the units used are given in the body of the table. Two-week estimates based on the Unmet Demand Collection and all figures from the Casual Client Collection are rounded to the nearest 10. Annual estimates derived from the Client Collection are rounded to the nearest 100. Daily figures on demand for accommodation are not rounded. Average daily estimates are rounded to 1 decimal place.
- Adjustments have been made for agency non-participation in Tables 2.1, 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, A1.1, A1.2, A1.3, and A1.4 (see A2.1).
- Adjustments have been made for agency non-participation and client non-consent in Tables 2.1, A1.1, and A1.2 (see A2.1).
- Unless otherwise indicated, records with missing data (resulting from errors or omissions) are not included in the percentages or numbers in a table. Care should be taken when interpreting and using figures in a table if the numbers of errors and omissions are relatively high – as a rule of thumb, more than one-third as big as the number of records included in the table.
- Components may not add to totals due to rounding.
- In a number of tables people may have had more than one response, so percentages do not total 100. A note to the table indicates whether this is the case.
- Where percentages sum to 100, the rows above the 'Total' row sum to 100. In the 'Total (%)' row, the figures to the left of '100.0' sum to 100.

In general, numbered notes at the bottom of the tables indicate the following:

- the number of records excluded from the table because of missing data. The number missing for each collection used in the table is given separately;
- whether an adjustment for non-participation and/or client non-consent has been made;
- whether any imputed data have been used (see Section A2.2.2); and
- any additional information needed to interpret the table.