About

Older clients of specialist homelessness services provides an overview of older Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) clients experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness. It describes the characteristics of clients provided with assistance, services requested, housing situation and outcomes, indicators of economic wellbeing, service use intensity and vulnerabilities.

Cat. no: HOU 314

Findings from this report:

- 24,100 people 55 and over were assisted by Specialist Homelessness Services agencies in 2017–18.

- Over 86,000 older clients received services between 2013–14 and 2017–18, most (68%) in a single year only.
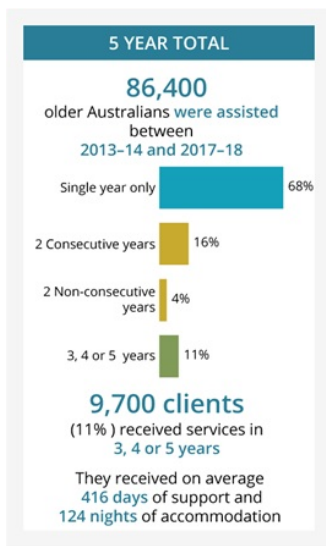
Older clients of specialist homelessness services

Web report | Last updated: **29 Oct 2019** | Topic: Homelessness services

Summary

Housing is critically important for people's wellbeing and security, particularly as people near or reach retirement age (ABS 2017). Governments across Australia fund Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) to support people who are experiencing homelessness or who are at risk of homelessness.

In 2017–18, there were over 24,100 older clients (55 years and over) who received services from SHS agencies. Of these, 20,800 clients either experienced homelessness or were at risk of homelessness. Almost 14,000 clients (67%) were at risk of homelessness at presentation to agencies and a further 7,000 (33%) were experiencing homelessness (housing situation was unknown for around 3,000 clients), which differs to all SHS clients (57% at risk and 43% experiencing homelessness) (AIHW 2019). The rate of older SHS clients (per 10,000 age specific population) increased by an annual average of 5.8% over the five years to 2017–18, over three times the increase for all SHS clients (1.7%). The proportion of SHS clients aged 55 and older increased from 7% of all SHS clients in 2013–14 to 8% in 2017–18.

MALES IN 2017–18

10,300
older males were assisted by SHS

Of those with a known housing situation at first presentation to SHS:

43% Homeless

57% At-risk

68%
of older males presented alone

39%
of older males were unemployed

FEMALES IN 2017–18

13,900
older females were assisted by SHS

Of those with a known housing situation at first presentation to SHS:

25% Homeless

75% At-risk

52%
of older females presented alone

31%
of older females were unemployed

5 YEAR TOTAL

86,400
older Australians were assisted
between
2013–14 and 2017–18

Single year only — 68%

2 Consecutive years — 16%

2 Non-consecutive years — 4%

3, 4 or 5 years — 11%

9,700 clients
(11%) received services in
3, 4 or 5 years

They received on average
416 days of support and
124 nights of accommodation

In the snapshot data, annual data provided a summary of those who received services during a financial year. Over 24,100 older SHS clients accessed assistance in 2017–18, up from 17,300 in 2013–14.

In the 5 year longitudinal data, older clients receiving services over the total period between 2013–14 and 2017–18 were analysed to determine long-term trends in use of SHS, focussing on whether clients received services in a single financial year or multiple years. Over the total 5 year period 2013–14 to 2017–18, there were over 86,000 older clients of SHS agencies. Note: clients aged 55 or older (on 30 June 2018) who received SHS services during this time were included.

References

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Population and housing trends

Population profile of older Australians

The Australian population is ageing. Over the past century, the proportion of older Australians has grown and this trend is predicted to continue. Sustained low fertility rates, falling death rates, higher standards of healthcare, and increasing life expectancy have all influenced the ageing population trend for Australia (ABS 2018a).

The population of older Australians aged 55 and over face challenges related to ageing such as cognitive changes, reduced earning capacity and family changes as well as the lack of suitable housing alternatives (Somes 2017).

The number and proportion of Australians who are aged 55 and over have been increasing over recent decades, and are expected to continue to grow (ABS 2019a).

In 1978, there were around 2.6 million Australians aged 55 and over (18% of the total Australian population) (Figure 1). By 1988, this had increased to 3.3 million (20% of the population) and by 2018 the numbers had further increased to 6.8 million older Australians (27% of the population) (ABS 2019b).

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Figure 1: Australian population, by older age groups, 1978 to 2018
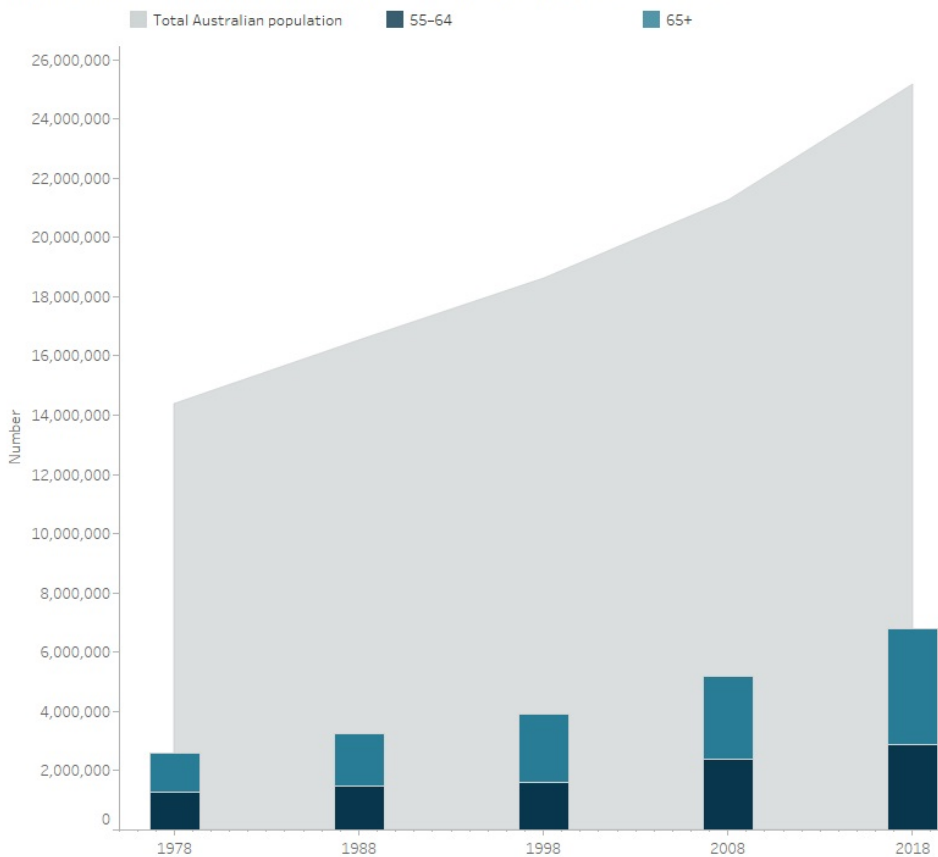
Source: ABS 2019b.

The proportion of the population aged 55 and over differs between the states and territories. As at December 2018, Tasmania (34%) and South Australia (31%) had the highest proportion of older Australians while the Northern Territory (18%) had the lowest (Figure 2). The remaining states and territories varied from 23% to 28% (ABS 2019a).

Figure 2: Proportion of older people (aged 55 or older), by states and territories, 1981 to 2018

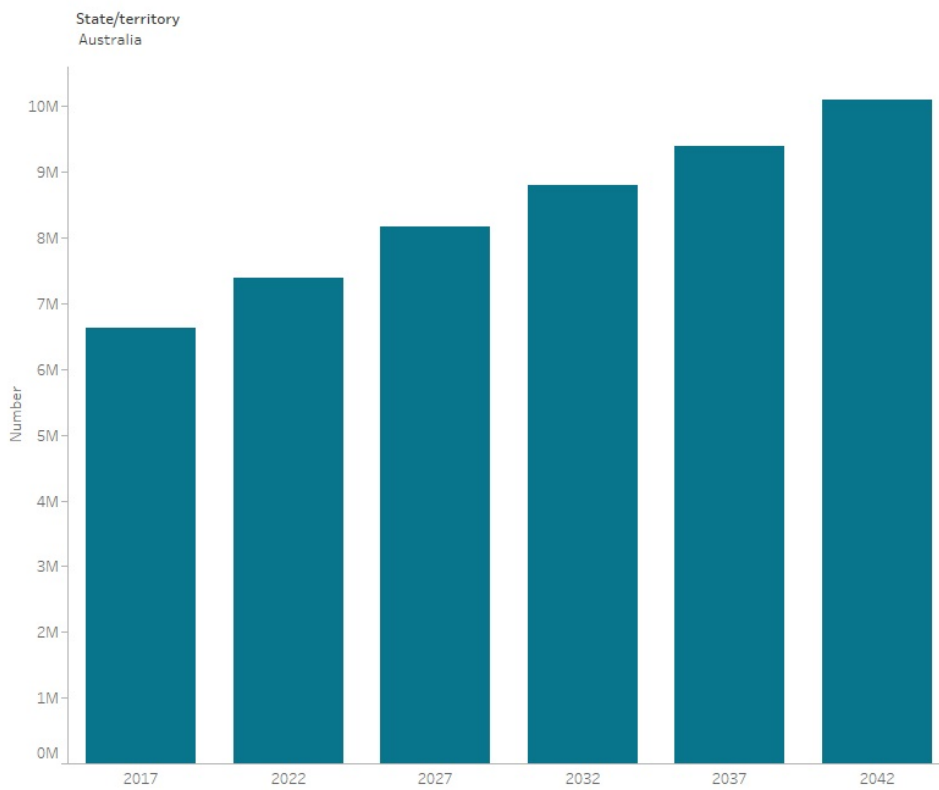Legend: Aust., Vic., WA, Tas, NT, NSW, Qld, SA, ACT
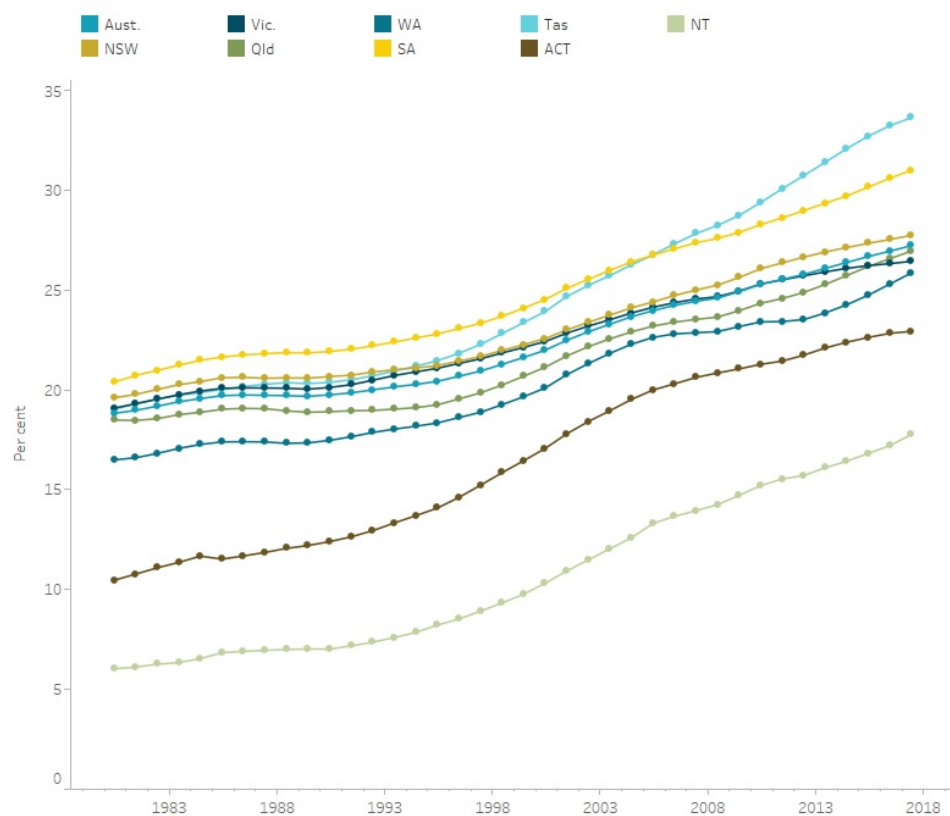
Source: ABS 2019a.

Population projections are useful to estimate the future size and characteristics of a population. They also help governments plan for future population growth. From 2017 to 2042, Australia's population is projected to increase from 24.6 million to 34.3 million people. The number of Australians aged 55 and over is expected to increase from 6.6 million to 10.1 million over the same period (ABS 2018b).

Based on current trends in fertility, life expectancy at birth and migration, the number of older people in New South Wales is projected to grow the most, increasing from 2.2 million in 2017 to 3.2 million by 2042. In contrast, the number of older people in the Northern Territory is projected to grow the least, increasing from 42,700 in 2017 to 65,600 by 2042 (Figure 3) (ABS 2018b).

Figure 3: Population projections of older people (aged 55 or older), by states and territories, 2017 to 2042

State/territory
Australia

References

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ABS 2019b. Australian Historical Population Statistics, 2016. ABS cat. no. 3105.0.65.001. Canberra: ABS.

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Population and housing trends

## Trends in home ownership and the private rental market

Home ownership

In Australia, home ownership has provided older people with security of housing tenure and long-term social and economic benefits (AIHW 2018). It has often been relied upon as an asset on retirement, reducing the risk of poverty and housing stress in older ages (PA 2016). Australians have high rates of home ownership, yet the rates have been decreasing in more recent years (ABS 2019). The home ownership rate of 30–34 year olds was 64% in 1971, decreasing 14 percentage points to 50% in 2016, according to Census data. For Australians aged 25–29, the home ownership rate was 50% in 1971, decreasing 13 percentage points to 37% in 2016. While more pronounced for younger people, there has also been a decrease in rates of home ownership for older Australians (AIHW 2019).

Home ownership rates for older Australians, both with and without a mortgage (where the household reference person was aged 55 and older), have decreased from 84% in 1995–96 to 81% in 2017–18 (ABS 2019). This largely reflects a drop in rates of home ownership of older people without a mortgage, decreasing from 77% in 1995–96 to 58% in 2017–18. An increase in home ownership with a mortgage offset much of this change, more than tripling from 7% in 1995–96 to 23% in 2017–18. The increase in older households paying off a mortgage may be a reflection of several factors: the large rise in property prices in the last few decades, households paying off their mortgage at older ages than in the past, and the benefits of having access to redraw facilities (ABS 2017b).

Australian Census data on home ownership by birth cohorts further illustrate changes in home ownership rates (with and without a mortgage) of older Australians (Figure 4). For each successive birth cohort after those born between 1947–1951, home ownership rates have fallen. Home ownership rates of those in the 1947–51 birth cohort was 54% when they were 25–29 years of age, increasing to 80% when they were 50–54, or 25 years later. By contrast, the home ownership rate of the birth cohort 1962–1966 was lower at 25–29 years of age (50%), and increased to a leaser extent to 74% when they were 50–54 years (ABS 2017a).

Figure 4: Home ownership rate (%) by birth cohort and age group in Australia
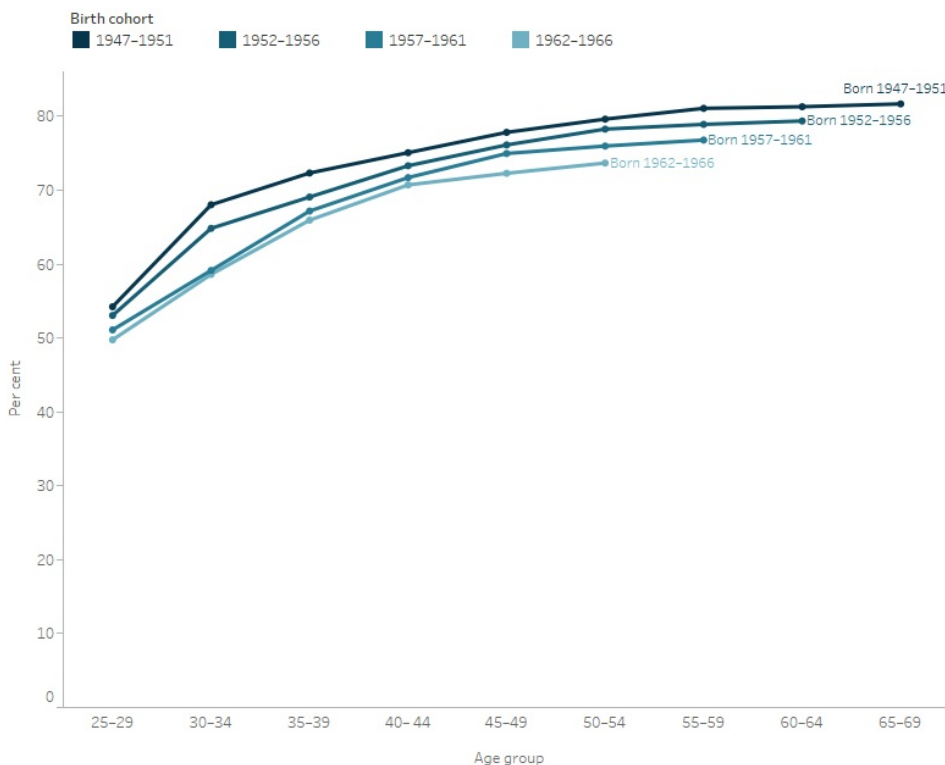
Notes
1. Analysis excludes not stated.
2. Home ownership rates reflect the year the household reference person was born.
3. Census data: data for 1991 has been interpolated.
Source: ABS 2017a.

Private rental market

Many older private renters are vulnerable and economically disadvantaged; a group who may rent out of necessity rather than choice (PC 2015). Renting privately may be problematic, particularly for older Australians in retirement. Renting in older ages can be associated with the risk of poverty and adverse impacts on health and wellbeing, and older people renting can be disproportionately affected by insecure

tenures (PC 2015). Households experiencing less security of housing tenure are likely to be at an increased risk of homelessness (AIHW 2019). Furthermore, older households who rent can be more likely to move than those owning their homes outright. Research has shown that many older Australians strongly prefer to age in place, staying in their family home (PC 2015).

Australia has seen a decline in home ownership for older people, offset by an increase in the proportion of older Australians in the private rental market; increasing from 6% of all those 55 and over in 1995-96 to 12% in 2017-18 (ABS 2019). More older people in the rental market rent from a private landlord (70% of older renters) than from state or territory housing authorities (20%). When considering rental tenure by various age groupings, the proportion renting from state or territory housing authorities increases with age. Of older people renting in 2017-18, 16% of those aged 55-64 were renting from a state or territory housing authority, compared with 21% of those aged 65-74 and 29% of those aged 75 and over (ABS 2019).

Low-income renters

Older households with low-income in the private rental market may be at greater risk of housing affordability stress. One measure of housing stress is the 30/40 rule, which focuses on low-income households and their housing costs. According to this rule, households in financial housing stress are lower-income households (lowest 40% of income distribution) that spend more than 30% of gross household income on housing costs (ABS 2019).

For low-income older households in the private rental market, the proportion of gross income spent on housing costs varied between older age groups (based on the reference person of the household) and family living arrangements. In 2017-18, housing costs as a proportion of gross income:

- was highest for lone person households aged 65 and over (44%); similar for lone person households aged 55-64 (43%)
- was higher for couple only households aged 65 and over (36%), than couple only households aged 55-64 (32%) (ABS 2019).

The impact of housing stress on older low-income renters may be different from younger low-income renters as they may have retired from the paid workforce, lack the capacity for future earnings and have low levels of wealth to draw upon. They also may have limited capacity to secure suitable housing that meets their changing needs (AHURI 2018). Further, older households with low-income may find it difficult to compete with higher-income households in the private rental market and may therefore seek assistance with housing costs or seek to rent a social housing property.

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Population and housing trends

Housing assistance can provide critical support for Australians struggling to access safe and affordable housing. There are a range of government programs providing social housing and targeted financial assistance that are intended to address and prevent homelessness. These programs are underpinned by the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA).

The National Housing and Homelessness Agreement

The objective of the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA), between the Australian Government and states and territory governments, is to contribute to improving housing outcomes across the housing spectrum, including outcomes for Australians who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. This agreement started 1 July 2018. Older Australians are a national priority homelessness cohort in the NHHA, recognising the severe impact homelessness may have on older Australians (Council on Federal Financial Relations 2018).

Government financial assistance

Australia has a long history of providing financial support to older Australians, with the first Old-aged Pension introduced in the early 1900's (ABS 1988). The Australian government currently provides a range of financial benefits and payments to eligible older Australians including:

- the Age Pension,
- Commonwealth Rent Assistance,
- Disability Support Pension,
- Carer Payment and Allowance,
- Newstart Allowance, and
- Family Tax Benefit A.

The first payment listed above is specifically for those who have reached their Age Pension age, whereas the other payments are not specifically targeted at older Australians.

The Age Pension was one of the largest support payments made by the Australian Government in 2017–18, provided to around 2.5 million Australians aged 65 years and over at a total cost of $44.6 billion (DHS 2018).

Older Australians on low or moderate incomes renting through the private rental market may receive assistance with the cost of housing through Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA), provided by the Australian government (DSS 2019b). In December 2018, 36% of the 1.3 million income units (individuals or couples) receiving CRA were aged 55 and over. (For more information, see DSS 2019a; AIHW 2019).

A considerable proportion of Australians receiving the other types of government assistance were aged 55 and over. In December 2018:

- Under half (46% or 344,400 people) receiving Disability Support Pension were aged 55 and over; of these 79% were aged 55–64 and 21% were aged 65 and over.
- Almost half (49% or 303,500 income units) receiving Carer Allowance were aged 55 and over; of these 41% were aged 55–64 and 59% aged 65 and over.
- One in four (25% or 183,900) people receiving the Newstart Allowance were aged 55 and over; of these, 94% were aged 55–64 and 6% were aged 65 and over.

Examples of other forms of financial assistance older people may receive include the:

- Pensioner Concession Card
- Commonwealth Seniors Health Card
- Sickness Allowance
- Partner Allowance (closed to new claims) and
- Widow Allowance (closed to new claims) (DHS 2019b).

Social housing assistance

Social housing may be owned and managed by government and non-government organisations. Social housing rents are generally set below market levels and are influenced by the income of the household. It includes public housing, state owned and managed Indigenous housing (SOMIH), community housing and Indigenous community housing. The majority of social housing dwellings were public housing stock, yet the number of community housing dwellings has more than doubled over the decade from 39,800 in 2008–09 to 87,800 in 2017–18 (AIHW 2019).

The increase in the number of older people renting on low incomes, coupled with the growth in the population of older Australians, may increase demand for social housing managed or provided by state and territory governments and community organisations.

In 2017–18, over a third (35%) of all tenants in public housing were aged 55 and over, 30% of those in community housing were aged 55 and over, while older people made up a smaller share of tenants in SOMIH, at 13% (AIHW 2019).

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Population and housing trends

Homelessness can be the result of many social, economic and health-related issues. Individual factors, such as low educational attainment, whether someone is working, experience of family and domestic violence, ill health (including mental health issues), disability, trauma, and substance misuse may make a person more at risk of becoming homeless (Fitzpatrick et al. 2013). Structural factors, including lack of adequate income and limited access to affordable and available housing, also contribute to risk of homelessness (Johnson et al. 2015; Wood et al. 2015). Determining how individual and structural risk factors interact to influence a person's vulnerability to, and experience of, homelessness is an important ongoing focus of homelessness research (Fitzpatrick & Christian 2006; Lee et al. 2010).

Australians experiencing homelessness

Estimates of the homeless population in Australia can be derived from the Census of Population and Housing (ABS 2018a). These estimates are underpinned by the ABS definition of homelessness wherein a person is homeless if they do not have suitable accommodation alternatives and their current living arrangement:

- is in a dwelling that is inadequate
- has no tenure, or if their initial tenure is short and not extendable or
- does not allow them to have control of, and access to space for social relations.

On Census night in 2016, 116,400 people enumerated in the Census were experiencing homelessness, an increase from 102,400 people in 2011. The number of older homeless people (aged 55 and over) also increased, from 14,600 in 2011 to 18,600 in 2016. During this time, the rate of older people experiencing homelessness increased from 26 persons per 10,000 of the population in 2011 to 29 persons in 2016. By comparison, the homeless rate for the total population increased from 48 persons per 10,000 population in 2011 to 50 persons in 2016.

In 2016, older people represented 16% of the total homeless population, an increase from 14% in 2011. While the number of older homeless females increased by 31% (from 5,300 in 2011 to 6,900 in 2016), males continued to make up the majority (63% in 2016 and 64% in 2011) of older persons who were homeless (ABS 2018a, 2012b).

In 2016, most homeless older people were living in boarding houses (29%) or staying temporarily in other households (25%). In contrast, the majority of younger homeless persons (aged 12–24) were living in 'severely' crowded dwellings (59%) or in supported accommodation for the homeless (18%) (ABS 2018a).

Older women

Older women are increasingly experiencing homelessness due to lower lifetime incomes, less access to financial assets such as superannuation because they are more likely to take on informal care responsibilities, relationship breakdown, and the consequences of family and domestic violence (Power et al. 2018; Cameron 2013). In 2016, there were an estimated 6,900 older homeless women on Census night, an increase of 2,100 (44%) from 4,800 in 2006 (ABS 2012a, ABS 2018a). Research has suggested that there may be more homeless women given the hidden nature of older women's homelessness (Australian Human Rights Commission 2019).

During their lifetime, women are more likely to take leave from the workforce and return to paid employment on a part-time or casual basis, which influences their lifetime superannuation savings.

- In 2017-18, a smaller proportion of women (64%) than men (75%) aged 20-74 years were employed and of those employed, women (44% of those employed) were more likely to be working part-time compared with men (16%) (ABS 2018b).
- In 2015-16, the median superannuation balance at, or approaching, 55-64 years, for women was $96,000, considerably lower than $166,300 for men (ABS 2018b).
- In 2015-16, for those aged 65 years and over who were not in the labour force, a smaller proportion of women relied on their superannuation pension or annuity as their main source of income than men (14% of women compared with 22% of men) (ABS 2018b).

Real stories from older tenants

Understanding the experiences and challenges of older people in maintaining safe, secure and stable housing is central to understanding their overall wellbeing. Data about use of homelessness services provide important evidence about demand for services, nevertheless individual stories provide people's lived experiences and perspectives but there is always more to learn about people's circumstances and experiences. Ageing on the Edge — Older Persons Homelessness Prevention Project is a national research project that provides valuable insight into the housing situations of older people across Australia. For the New South Wales phase of the project, more than 120 older people told their stories, a sample of which are included here (Fiedler & Faulkner 2017).

So I am left with $177 per fortnight for everything else

My Centrelink income is currently $727 per fortnight, inclusive of rent allowance, medical and miniscule power subsidies. The rent is $550 per fortnight that is about 75% of my income. So I am left with $177 per fortnight for everything else.

Specialist Homelessness Services clients

People experiencing homelessness and those at risk of homelessness are among Australia's most socially and economically disadvantaged. Governments across Australia fund services to support such people, known as Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS). These services are delivered mainly by non-government organisations, including those specialising in delivering services to specific target groups (such as young people or people experiencing family and domestic violence) and those providing more generic services to people facing housing crises (AIHW 2019).

A detailed profile of older people accessing SHS services is the focus of the remainder of this report. In summary, in 2017–18, 8% (24,100 clients) of all SHS clients were people aged 55 or older; comprising 10,300 males and 13,800 females (supplementary Table 1). The number of older people receiving services has increased by 40% since 2013-14 (from around 17,300 clients) (AIHW 2019). The rate of older clients increased from 29 older clients per 10,000 persons in Australia (aged 55 and over) in 2013–14 to 36 in 2017–18 (Supplementary table 1). By way of contrast, the rate of all SHS clients who presented to SHS agencies increased from 110 per 10,000 Australian population to 117 over the same period (AIHW 2019). The proportion of SHS clients aged 55 and older increased from 7% of all SHS clients in 2013-14 to 8% in 2017–18.

In 2017–18, most older SHS clients presented to agencies were housed, but at risk of homelessness (67%), with the remaining 33% presenting as homeless. By contrast, around 57% of all SHS clients were at risk of homelessness at presentation to agencies and 43% were experiencing homelessness (AIHW 2019).

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Clients, services and outcomes

Financial and housing security challenges faced by older Australians may mean an increase in the number of older people who need help to maintain their housing situation or help with finding stable accommodation. This section explores key issues and characteristics of older Australians seeking support from Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) from 2013–14 to 2017–18. It focuses on the differences based on the age, sex and state/territory of older people, as well as reasons for seeking assistance, country group of birth, living conditions, service use and additional vulnerabilities of older Australians. The section also considers the various housing situations of older people who received assistance, namely those who at the start of support were:

- experiencing homelessness, living in no shelter/improvised dwelling, short term accommodation, and couch surfer/no tenure, and
- at risk of homelessness, living in public/community housing, private/other housing, and an institutional setting.

In 2017–18, around 24,100 people aged 55 and over received assistance from SHS agencies, equating to around 36 older clients per 10,000 persons in Australia (aged 55 and over) (Figure 5). This was an increase from around 17,300 SHS clients in 2013–14, or 29 per 10,000 population.

Of the older SHS clients in 2017–18, more were female (13,800) than male (10,300). The proportion of older SHS clients who were female increased from 54% in 2013–14 to 57% in 2017–18 (Supplementary table 1).

Figure 5: Older SHS clients, by sex, and states and territories, 2013–14 to 2017–18
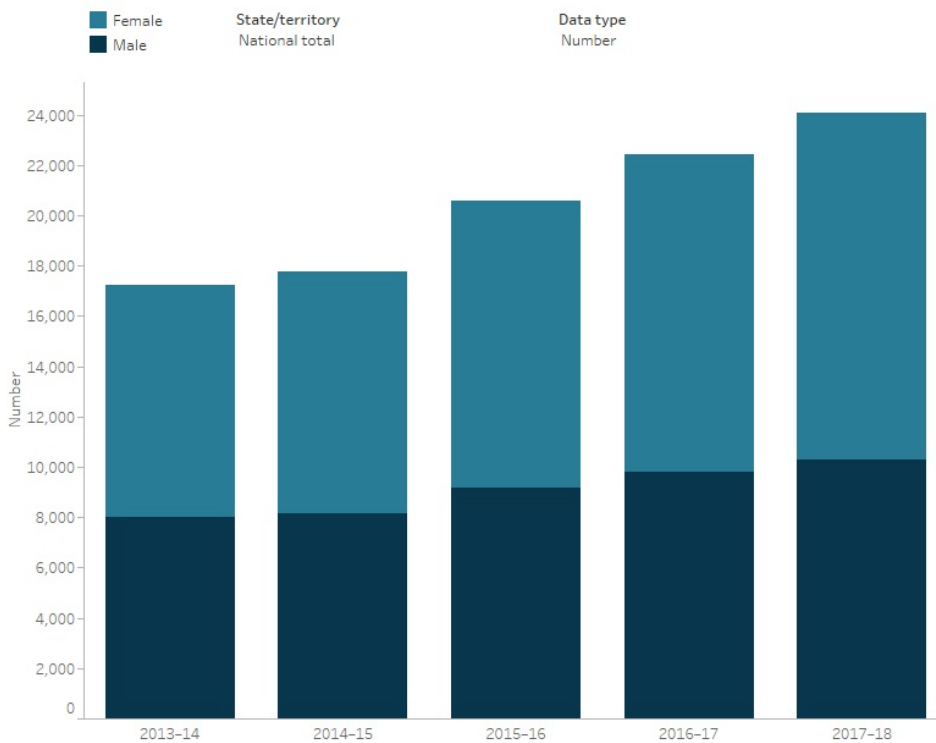
Notes
1. Clients may access services in more than one state or territory. Therefore the total will be less than the sum of jurisdictions.
2. Older clients are defined as any client 55 years or older at 30 June 2018, accessing services between 2013–14 and 2017–18.
3. Data for 2013–14 to 2016–17 have been adjusted for non-response. Due to improvements in the rates of agency participation and SLK validity, 2017–18 data are not weighted. The removal of weighting does not constitute a break in time series and weighted data from 2013–14 to 2016–17 are comparable with unweighted data for 2017–18.
Source: Older clients of Specialist Homelessness Services, Supplementary TABLE.1.

In 2017–18, most of the 24,100 older clients were aged 55-64 (15,600 clients or 65%); almost 6,000 (25%) were aged 65-74 and the remaining 2,500 (10%) were aged 75 and over. From 2013-14 to 2017-18, there has been a change in the age profile, with the proportion of those aged 75 and over increasing from 8% to 11%, while the proportion aged 55-64 has decreased from 67% to 65% (Supplementary table 2).

Half (50% or 12,000) of older clients accessed SHS agencies in Victoria. From 2013-14 to 2017-18, Victoria consistently recorded the highest number of older SHS clients and this number has increased at an average annual rate of 8%. New South Wales (5,300 clients), with the second highest number of older clients in 2017-18, had a higher average annual growth , increasing by 16% over the period from 2013-14. Western Australia had the second highest average annual growth, at 13% from 2013-14 to 2017-18 (Supplementary table 1). Note: clients may access services in more than one state or territory. Therefore, the national total will be less than the sum of the states and territories.

Clients, services and outcomes

Information about older SHS client's housing situation at the beginning and end of support is useful for understanding the needs of clients when they present to agencies as well as their outcomes following SHS support. The housing situation of SHS clients is categorised as those who were:

- homeless (no shelter/improvised dwelling, short term accommodation, and couch surfer/no tenure), or
- at risk of homelessness (public/community housing, private/other housing and Institutional setting).

The following analysis is limited to those whose housing situation at the start of support was known, that is, it excludes clients whose housing situation was not stated.

## Housing situation at the start of support: homeless vs at risk of homelessness

In 2017–18, there were just over 20,800 older SHS clients presenting to agencies as either experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness. Of these older SHS clients:

- One-third (33% or 6,900 clients) presented experiencing homelessness; comprising of more males (4,100 clients) than females (2,800), and
- 2 in 3 (67% or 13,900 clients) presented at risk of homelessness; comprising of more females (8,300 clients) than males (5,500) (Figure 6).

(See the Housing outcomes section below for information on the housing situation of older SHS clients at the end of SHS support.)

Of all states and territories, Queensland had the highest proportion of older clients presenting to SHS agencies experiencing homelessness (43% or just over 1,000 clients). In terms of numbers, Victoria had the greatest number of clients reporting to SHS agencies as homeless (2,700 clients).

Figure 6: Older SHS clients, by age group, homeless status at first presentation, by sex, and states and territories, 2013–14 to 2017–18
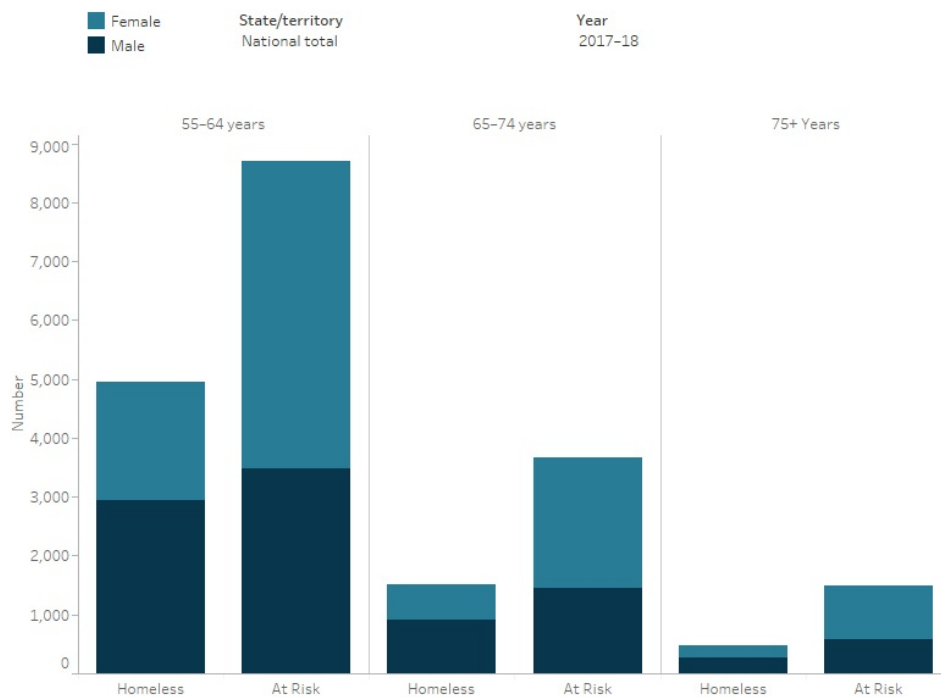
Notes

1. Clients may access services in more than one state or territory. Therefore the National total will be less than the sum of jurisdictions.
2. Older clients are defined as any client 55 years or older at 30 June 2018, accessing services between 2013–14 and 2017–18.
3. Data for 2013–14 to 2016–17 have been adjusted for non-response. Due to improvements in the rates of agency participation and SLK validity, 2017–18 data are not weighted. The removal of weighting does not constitute a break in time series and weighted data from 2013–14 to 2016–17 are comparable with unweighted data for 2017–18.
4. Total older clients homeless or at risk does not include clients where homelessness status is not stated.

Source: Older clients of Specialist Homelessness Services, Supplementary TABLE.2.

Change over time

From 2013–14 to 2017–18 (Figure 6):

- The number of older homeless SHS clients increased from 4,700 to 6,900 and the number of clients at risk of homelessness increased from 9,900 to 13,900.

- The largest increase in the number of clients was females aged 55-64 who were at risk of homelessness; from around 3,800 clients in 2013–14 to 5,200 in 2017–18.
- Overall, the average annual increase in the number of clients was 9%; similar for homeless (10%) and at risk clients (9%).
- The highest average annual increase among older clients was homeless females aged 75 and over (increasing 28% on average per year, from 70 clients in 2013–14 to 200 in 2017–18) (Supplementary table 2).

Housing outcomes

The housing outcomes of SHS clients can be examined by considering the housing situation at the beginning and end of support, for those clients with a closed support period. The following analysis focuses on the clients who had a known housing situation at the beginning of support (excluding around those whose housing situation was not stated/other). In 2017–18, there were around 19,500 older SHS clients with closed support periods, with around 4,000 excluded from the analyses below due to unknown housing situation information at the start of support.

In 2017–18, of the 15,500 older SHS clients with closed support (and known housing situation at the start of support), most (10,400 clients or 67%) were at risk of homelessness upon presentation to the SHS agency, and most of these (9,600 clients or 92%) were able to maintain housing (Figure 7).

There were a further 5,200 (33%) older clients who presented to SHS agencies experiencing homelessness. Of these, 3,100 (61% of homeless clients) were homeless and 1,700 (33%) clients were no longer experiencing homelessness at the end of support. At the end of SHS support, there were similar numbers of people in short term temporary accommodation (1,200 clients), rough sleeping (900) and couch surfing (1,100).

In 2017–18, at the beginning of support, males were more likely than females to present to SHS agencies experiencing homelessness (42% for males and 26% for females). Males were more likely to present sleeping rough or in short term temporary accommodation while females were more likely to present as couch surfers. At the end of SHS support, there were fewer males (29%) and females (18%) experiencing homelessness.

Figure 7: Older SHS clients, by housing situation at first presentation and at end of support, by sex, 2013–14 to 2017–18
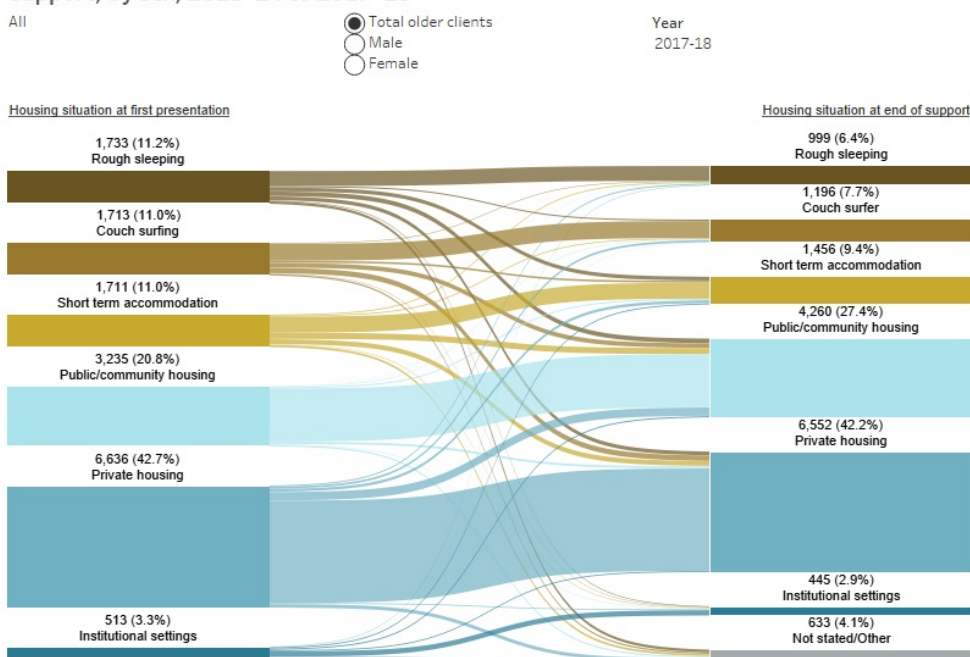
Notes
1. Older clients are defined as any client 55 years or older at 30 June 2018, accessing services between 2013–14 and 2017–18.
2. Excludes clients with unknown housing situation.
3. Includes only those clients who ceased receiving support during the financial year (meaning that their support period(s) had closed and they were not in ongoing support at the end of the year).
4. An individual client may have multiple support periods, therefore, clients may be counted in more than one year.
5. Data for 2013–14 to 2016–17 have been adjusted for non-response. Due to improvements in the rates of agency participation and SLK validity, 2017–18 data are not weighted. The removal of weighting does not constitute a break in time series and weighted data from 2013–14 to 2016–17 are comparable with unweighted data for 2017–18.
Source: Older clients of Specialist Homelessness Services, Supplementary TABLE.3.

Clients, services and outcomes

Indigenous clients

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are over-represented among SHS clients, including at older ages (AIHW 2019a). Older Indigenous clients are considered to be those aged 50 and over. Almost one-fifth of SHS clients aged 50 and over identified as being Indigenous (17% or 5,300 older clients) (Figure 8). Note: This section differs to elsewhere as the age range is 50 and over. Also, the percent calculations presented throughout this section are limited to those with known homelessness status and Indigenous status. For information about the complex and varied needs of older Indigenous people, see *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 50 and over 2019*.

Housing situation

In 2017–18, at the beginning of support older SHS Indigenous clients (aged 50 and over) were more likely to be at risk of homelessness (3,100 clients or 59%) than homeless (2,200 clients or 41%). Non-Indigenous clients had a similar distribution (16,300 or 64% and 9,200 or 36% respectively). Of the 5,300 Indigenous older SHS clients, there were more females (2,100 clients) at risk of homelessness at the start of SHS support than males (1,000). There were similar numbers of male (1,100 clients) and female (1,100) older Indigenous SHS clients who presented experiencing homelessness (Supplementary table 4).

Age profile

In 2017–18, the majority of older Indigenous SHS clients (50 and over) were aged 50–64 years (87% or 4,600 clients); 45% aged 50–54 and 42% aged 55–64 years. A further 13% were aged 65 and older. There were similar age profiles for male and female Indigenous clients.

There were different age profiles for Indigenous clients presenting as experiencing homelessness compared with at risk of homelessness. Of the homeless older SHS Indigenous clients, more were in the younger age group (51% aged 50–54 years), higher than the proportion at risk (41% aged 50–54 years).

Change over time

From 2013–14 to 2017–18 (Figure 8):

- The number of older Indigenous SHS clients increased from 2,900 (14% of all older clients) in 2013–14 to 5,300 (17%) in 2017–18. Almost half (44%) of this increase was for clients aged 50–54.
- The number of Indigenous clients presenting to a SHS agency experiencing homelessness almost doubled, from 1,100 clients to around 2,200.
- The largest increase in the number of Indigenous clients was females aged 50–54 at risk of homelessness; increasing from around 480 clients in 2013–14 to around 840 in 2017–18 (Supplementary table 4).

Figure 8: Older SHS clients (aged 50 or older), by Indigenous status, homeless status, age group, sex, and states and territories, 2013–14 to 2017–18
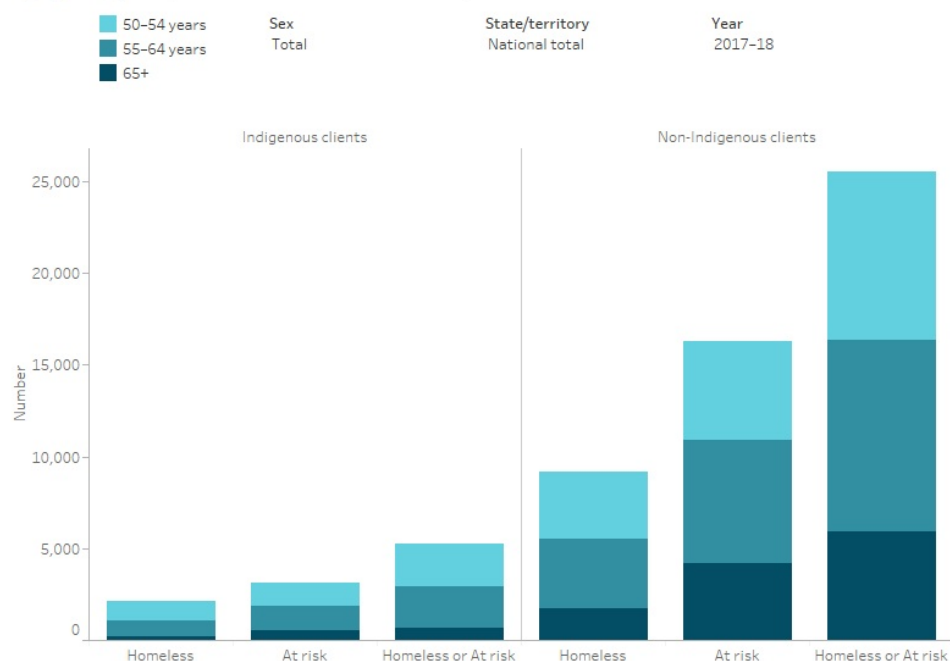
Notes
1. Older clients are defined as any client 50 years or older at 30 June 2018, accessing services between 2013–14 and 2017–18.
2. Clients may access services in more than one state or territory. Therefore the total will be less than the sum of jurisdictions. See explanatory notes for more information.
3. Data for 2013–14 to 2016–17 have been adjusted for non-response. Due to improvements in the rates of agency participation and SLK validity, 2017–18 data are not weighted. The removal of weighting does not constitute a break in time series and weighted data from 2013–14 to 2016–17 are comparable with unweighted data for 2017–18.
Source: Older clients of Specialist Homelessness Services, Supplementary TABLE.4.

Country group of birth

In 2017–18, of the 20,800 homeless or at risk older SHS clients, details about the country group of birth were known for 18,600 clients (2,300 not stated). Around 7 in 10 of these clients were born in Australia (71% or 13,300 clients), with the remaining 3 in 10 (29%) clients born overseas. For those born overseas, the most common country group of birth was Southern and Eastern Europe (almost 1,000 or 5%) followed by North Africa and the Middle East (800 or 4%).

Two new questions were introduced into the SHS collection, commencing 1 July 2019, to improve the identification of culturally and linguistically diverse clients. Main language other than English spoken at home identifies whether the client speaks a language other than English at home. Proficiency in spoken English is only asked of clients who speak a language other than English at home and indicates how well they speak English. This information is expected to provide evidence that supports research into service access for those who are culturally and linguistically diverse (AIHW 2019b).

Housing situation

In 2017–18, more clients born overseas were at risk of homelessness (3,500 clients) than homeless (1,800) on first presentation.

- Of the overseas born clients at risk of homelessness, most were female (2,000 compared with 1,500 males).
- Of the overseas born homeless clients, most were male (1,000 compared with almost 800 females) (Supplementary table 5).

Change over time

From 2013–14 to 2017–18:

- The largest increase in older clients born overseas were those born in North Africa and the Middle East; increasing by around 400 clients to just over 800 clients (1.1% percentage point increase).

Living arrangements

The majority of older SHS clients who presented to agencies alone (12,100 or 59%) in 2017–18. This has consistently been the case over the five years from 2013–14 (ranging from 59% to 60%). The next most common living arrangements were other family (2,400 or 12%) and couple without child/ren (2,300 or 11%). Other family includes groups with related individuals, including siblings and families of more than two generations (not including lone person, one parent with child(ren), couple with child(ren) and couple without child(ren)). (Note: these data are based on older clients where homelessness status was known and excludes clients whose living arrangement was not stated.)

Housing situation

There were differences in the living arrangements of older clients presenting to SHS agencies as either homeless or at risk, and for male and female clients. In 2017–18 (Figure 9):

- A greater proportion of homeless older clients presented alone (69% or 4,800) compared with the proportion of at risk clients (54% or 7,400).
- Homeless male clients (3,100 or 77%) were more likely to present living alone than females (1,600 or 58%).
- Female clients were more likely than male clients to present living with other family members.
  - For homeless older clients, around 1 in 5 females lived with other family members (520 or 19%) compared with 1 in 20 males (240 or 6%).
  - For those at risk, there were also more female clients (1,200 or 15%) than male clients living with other family members (430 or 8%).

From 2013–14 to 2017–18, there was an increase in older females presenting to SHS agencies homeless who were living with other family members; increasing by almost 3 percentage points, from 16% to 19% of homeless females (from 270 clients to over 500 clients).

Figure 9: Older SHS clients, by living arrangement, sex, and homelessness status, 2013–14 to 2017–18
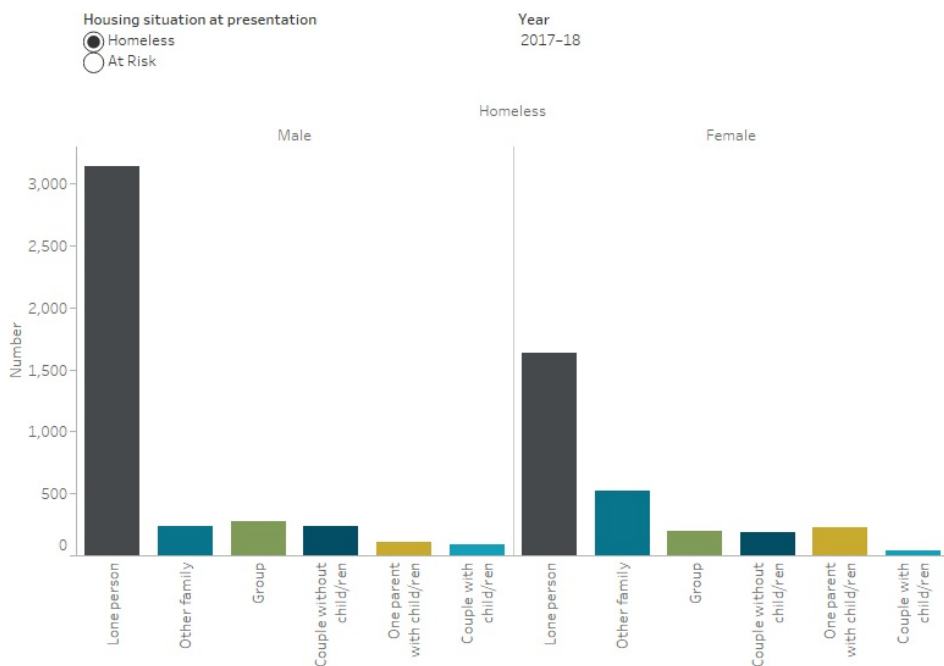
Notes
1. Older clients are defined as any client 55 years or older at 30 June 2018, accessing services between 2013–14 and 2017–18.
2. Data for 2013–14 to 2016–17 have been adjusted for non-response. Due to improvements in the rates of agency participation and SLK validity, 2017–18 data are not weighted. The removal of weighting does not constitute a break in time series and weighted data from 2013–14 to 2016–17 are comparable with unweighted data for 2017–18.
3. The living arrangement at the beginning of support. This data item indicates the group of people with whom the client lived prior to support.
Source: Older clients of Specialist Homelessness Services, Supplementary TABLE.6.

Clients, services and outcomes

Main source of income

The financial wellbeing of older people when they seek assistance from an SHS agency can be explored using information about the main source of income at presentation. The following analysis is based on 19,500 older SHS clients with valid income source information, excluding 4,600 clients whose income source was not stated.

In 2017–18, the majority (90% or 17,500 clients) of older SHS clients received a type of government payment as their main source of income. Very few older SHS clients reported earning income from employment (5% or 900) as their main source of income or having no income (3% or under 600).

For older SHS clients, the most common government payments reported as a main source of income were Disability Support Pension (6,400 or 33% of the 19,500 older clients) followed by Age Pension (5,200 or 27%) and Newstart Allowance (4,400 or 23%) in 2017–18. Of the older clients aged 55-64, 33% reported Newstart allowance as their main source of income. The vast majority of those reporting Newstart Allowance as their main source of income were aged 55–64 (95%).

Of the 19,500 older SHS clients with income information, more females (9,000 clients or 46%) received government payments as their main source of income than males (8,500 or 43%). Disability Support Pension was the most common government payment type recorded as the main source of income.

Change over time

From 2013–14 to 2017–18:

- The proportion of older clients receiving a government payment as their main source of income at presentation to a SHS agency remained stable at 90% from 2013–14 to 2017–18.
- More male (6,100) than female clients (5,900) received a type of government payment as their main source of income in 2013–14. This changed in 2015-16, when more female (7,700) than male clients (7,600) received a type of government pension and this trend has continued to 2017–18.
- The largest increase was the number of older people reporting Newstart Allowance as their main source of income; increasing by a total of 2,100 clients (up from 2,300 clients in 2013–14 to 4,400 in 2017–18).
- The proportion of older clients receiving Disability Support Pension as their main source of income has declined over time, from 35% to 33%. This was largely driven by a declining proportion of male SHS clients receiving this pension (19% to 17%).

Labour force participation

Labour market conditions and unemployment have been linked with homelessness and the risk of homelessness (Johnson et al. 2016). In 2017–18, of the 20,800 older homeless and at risk SHS clients there were 19,500 with a known labour force status at the beginning of support. Over half (11,400 clients or 59%) of these older clients were not in the labour force with a further 6,800 clients (35%) unemployed and 1,200 (6%) employed (Figure 10). Note: this excludes clients whose labour force participation was not stated.

Females were more likely to be employed than males (8% compared with 5%). In contrast, males were more likely to be unemployed (39% compared with 31% for females).

Housing situation

There were differences in the labour force status of older SHS clients presenting to agencies as homeless compared with those at risk of homelessness. In 2017–18:

- Of those older clients who were homeless, 55% were not in the labour force, 41% were unemployed and 4% were employed.
- Of those who were at risk of homelessness, 61% were not in the labour force, 32% were unemployed and 8% were employed.
- Of clients experiencing homelessness, more male clients (45%) were unemployed compared with female clients (36%); more female clients (60%) were not in the labour force compared with male clients (52%) (Supplementary table 7).

Age profile

Across all older age groups, there were more SHS clients not in the labour force, followed by unemployed then employed. In 2017–18, clients aged 55-64 (6,200 clients) were most likely not in the labour force, followed by 5,500 clients who were unemployed and 1,100 employed.

In 2017–18, homeless male clients were most commonly not in the labour force (2,100 clients or 52%). For homeless females, clients not in the labour force were also the most common (1,600 or 60%), again with most aged 55-64 (1,000 or 37%).

Change over time

From 2013–14 to 2017–18:

- The proportion of older homeless or at risk SHS clients presenting who were not in the labour force decreased from 67% to 59%, meaning that in 2017-18, a greater proportion of older clients were working or looking for work.
- There was a 9 percentage point increase in the proportion of clients who presented as unemployed (from 27% to 35%). This trend can be seen in particular, for at risk clients aged 55-64 who were unemployed (increased from 18% to 24% of clients at risk).

Figure 10: Older SHS clients, by labour force status at first presentation, sex, and age group, 2013–14 to 2017–18
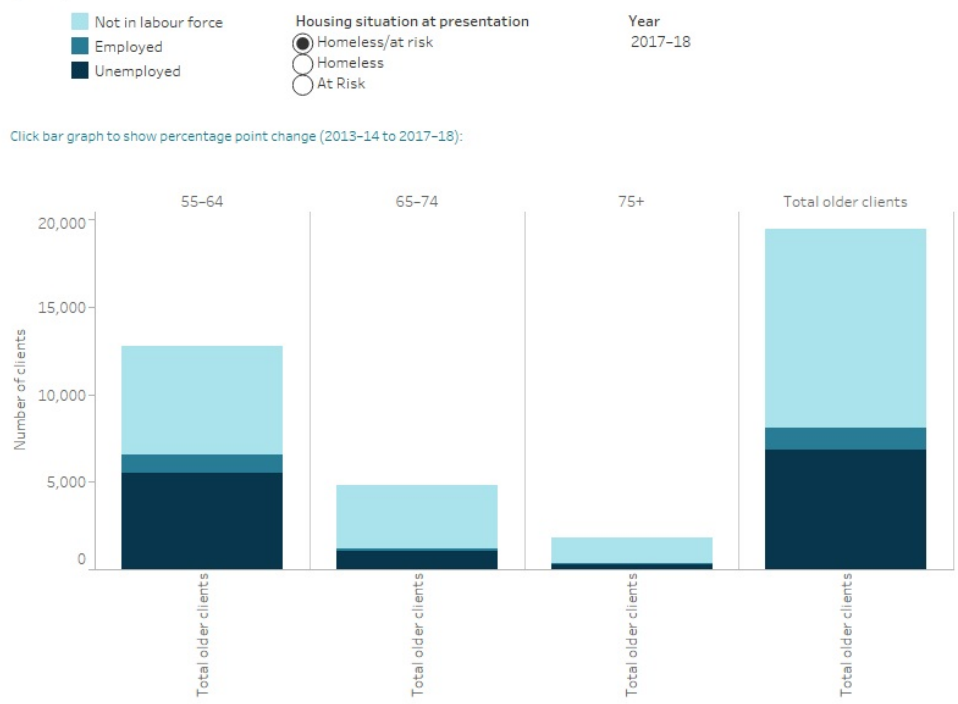
Notes
1. Older clients are defined as any client 55 years or older at 30 June 2018, accessing services between 2013–14 and 2017–18.
2. Data for 2013–14 to 2016–17 have been adjusted for non-response. Due to improvements in the rates of agency participation and SLK validity, 2017–18 data are not weighted. The removal of weighting does not constitute a break in time series and weighted data from 2013–14 to 2016–17 are comparable with unweighted data for 2017–18.
3. Excludes clients where Labour force status first reported is not applicable or not stated.
Source: Older clients of Specialist Homelessness Services, Supplementary TABLE.7.

References

AIHW 2019a. Specialist Homelessness Services Annual report 2017-18. Cat. no. HOU 299. Canberra: AIHW.

AIHW 2019b. Specialist Homelessness Services Collection manual—July 2019. Cat. no. HOU 313. Canberra: AIHW.

Johnson G, Wood G, Scutella R and Tseng Y 2016. Better understanding entries and exits from homelessness. Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) Research & policy bulletin issue no. 208. Melbourne: AHURI.

Clients, services and outcomes

Main reasons for seeking assistance

There are many reasons older SHS clients may seek assistance from SHS agencies. In 2017–18, the main reasons older SHS clients sought assistance included:

- accommodation (59% of homeless and 32% of at risk clients),
- financial, including employment (17% of homeless and 31% of at risk clients),
- interpersonal relationships (12% of homeless and 21% of at risk clients),
- health (5% of both homeless and at risk clients) and
- other reasons (8% of homeless and 12% of at risk clients) (Figure 11).

In 2017–18, 8,400 clients sought assistance for accommodation; of these, 4,100 clients were experiencing homelessness at the start of support and 4,400 were at risk of homelessness.

The most common accommodation related main reason for older homeless SHS clients seeking assistance in 2017–18 was housing crisis (2,200 clients) followed by inadequate or inappropriate dwelling conditions (1,400).

Financial reasons were another common driver for seeking assistance in 2017–18, with 4,200 clients at risk of homelessness and 1,200 homeless clients noting it as a main reason for seeking SHS support. For those at risk, financial difficulties (2,800 clients) and housing affordability and stress (1,300) were the most common main financial reasons.

A considerable number of older female clients reported family and domestic violence as the main reason for seeking SHS assistance (2,500 clients) in 2017–18. It was the most common main reason for female clients at risk of homelessness seeking assistance (2,100 or 25% of females at risk of homelessness), but less so for female clients experiencing homelessness (400 or 15% of females experiencing homelessness).

Change over time

From 2013–14 to 2017–18:

- There was an increase in the proportion of homeless clients reporting housing crisis as the main reason for seeking assistance; up from 23% in 2013–14 to 31% in 2017–18.
- The number of male clients at risk of homelessness who sought assistance for financial difficulties increased from 1,100 clients to 1,300.
- The number of female clients at risk of homelessness reporting family and domestic violence as the main reason for seeking assistance has increased from 1,600 clients to 2,100 over the period.
- The proportion of homeless male clients seeking assistance for accommodation related reasons increased from 54% (1,600 clients) in 2013–14 to 61% (2,500 clients) in 2017–18 (Supplementary table 9).

Figure 11: Older SHS clients, by main reason for seeking assistance, sex, and homeless status, 2013–14 to 2017–18
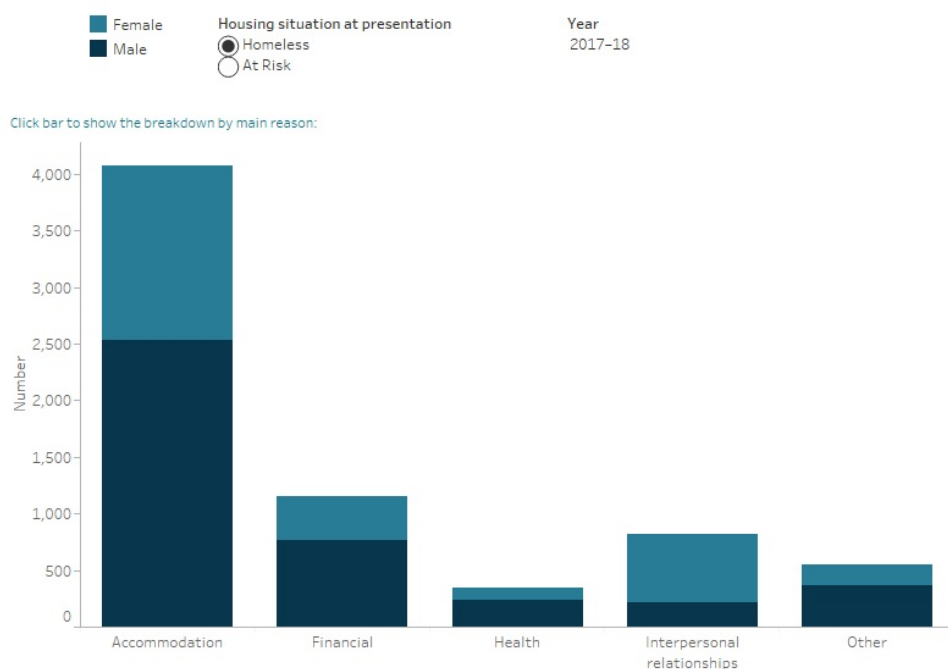
Female
Male

Housing situation at presentation
◉ Homeless
◯ At Risk

Year
2017–18

Notes
1. Older clients are defined as any client 55 years or older at 30 June 2018, accessing services between 2013–14 and 2017–18.
2. Clients may access services in more than one state or territory. Therefore the total will be less than the sum of jurisdictions.
3. Data for 2013–14 to 2016–17 have been adjusted for non-response. Due to improvements in the rates of agency participation and SLK validity, 2017–18 data are not weighted. The removal of weighting does not constitute a break in time series and weighted data from 2013–14 to 2016–17 are comparable with unweighted data for 2017–18.
4. The client's main reason for seeking assistance at the beginning of support: Where more than one reason for seeking assistance has been provided, the client chooses the main reason.
Source: Older clients of Specialist Homelessness Services, Supplementary TABLE.9.

Services needed and provided

Services available to clients are extensive and range from housing/accommodation (such as short term or emergency accommodation) and general assistance (such as financial information) to specialised services (such as health/medical services). Clients' needs for services are collected from both the client's and the agency worker's perspective. In addition to the need for services, information is recorded about whether the service was provided or whether a referral was made. Clients may have multiple support periods and report multiple needs on each occasion, and receive multiple services during each support period.

In 2017–18, older SHS clients most commonly needed general services (22,600 clients or 94%). Of the general services:

- The most common service provided to clients was advice and information (17,400 clients); provided to 98% of those with this need.
- Advocacy and liaison services were also commonly needed (11,900 clients) as well as material aid and brokerage (7,400 clients).
- Almost 4,900 females (35% of female clients) identified a need for assistance for domestic/family violence and 76% (3,700 clients) were provided with this type of assistance (Figure 12).

Need for accommodation

In 2017–18, 11,100 older clients (or 46% of all clients) identified a need for accommodation provision. Of these clients needing accommodation, 3,900 (35%) were provided with this assistance (Supplementary table 10).

A higher proportion of males identified a need for accommodation (56% of all male clients) than females (39%). For both older males and females, long-term housing was the most needed service, but the service least often provided. A tenth (10%) of older male SHS clients and 8% of females with a need for long-term housing received it. More clients were referred to another agency for long-term housing (26% of males and 32% of females with this need). Around 38% of clients were either provided with or referred to another agency for long-term housing (36% of males and 40% of females).

Figure 12: Older SHS clients, by need for services and assistance, service provision status, and sex, 2017–18

Service use patterns: five year total view

Clients of SHS may receive multiple support periods in a single financial year, or may receive more than one support period over a number of years. Analysing older SHS clients data over a longer time period than a single financial year provides important insights into patterns of service use among these clients.

In this section of the report, SHS client data for the total period 2013-14 to 2017-18 was analysed. Clients aged 55 or older (on 30 June 2018) who received SHS services during this period were included. Therefore, some clients included may have been under 55 when they had their first or only support period prior to the 30 June 2018 cut-off.

The analyses presented are based on four groups, that is:

- 1 year only group—a client received support in one financial year period only.
- 2 consecutive years group—a client received support in two consecutive years only, for example, 2014-15 and 2015-16.
- 2 non-consecutive years group—a client receive support in two non-consecutive years only, for example 2015-16 and 2017-18.
- 3, 4 or 5 years group—a client received support in any three, four or all five financial years.

These service use intensity groups have been examined in combination with additional client characteristics to explore the patterns of service use of older SHS clients. Service use intensity has also been explored for clients reporting selected vulnerabilities (see Box 1) (family and domestic violence, mental health issues, problematic drug and/or alcohol use as well as for clients with disability (see Box 2).

There are methodological differences in this longitudinal data and the annual data provided in the report, and therefore comparisons are not valid. See Explanatory notes in data tables for further information.

Box 1: Assessing vulnerabilities—'ever' flags

In this analysis, vulnerability is determined by whether a client *ever* reported experiencing family and domestic violence, a mental health issue and/or problematic drug and/or alcohol use. In terms of the SHSC, an 'ever' flag is generated if a particular reason, need or service is ever reported.

'Ever' reported family and domestic violence

Clients are counted as experiencing family and domestic violence if during any support period within the study period they nominated 'family and domestic violence' as a reason for seeking assistance, or if during any support period they required and/or were either provided with or referred for family and domestic violence assistance.

'Ever' reported a mental health issue

Clients are identified as having a current mental health issue if they provided any of the following information:

- at the beginning of a support period they were receiving assistance for mental health issues
- the referral source to SHS was a mental health service
- they reported mental health issues as a reason for seeking assistance
- their dwelling type prior to presenting to an agency for assistance was a psychiatric hospital or unit they had been in a psychiatric hospital or unit in the past 12 months
- at some stage during their support period a need for mental health services was identified.

'Ever' reported problematic drug and/or alcohol use

Clients are identified as having problematic drug and/or alcohol use if they provided any of the following information at the beginning of support or in any support period during the reporting period:

- their dwelling type was rehabilitation
- formal referral source to SHS was a drug and alcohol service
- during support they required drug/alcohol counselling
- they had been in a rehabilitation facility/institution in the last 12 months
- they had reported 'problematic drug or substance abuse' or 'problematic alcohol use' as a reason for seeking assistance or main reason for seeking assistance (AIHW 2019).

Box 2: Measuring disability

The measure of disability in the SHS collection identifies those who always or sometimes need help or supervision with one or more core activities (self-care, mobility and communication) due to a long-term health condition or disability. This subgroup of those living with a disability includes older clients with severe or profound core activity limitation. The analysis of the availability and appropriateness of homelessness services for this group of clients contributes to information about older people with disability across a range of government services (AIHW 2019).

Service use patterns: five year total view

A total of 86,400 unique SHS clients aged 55 and older received at least one service during the total period 2013–14 to 2017–18 (Figure 13). Over 6 in 10 were aged 55–64 (54,300 or 63% clients); there were fewer clients aged 65–74 (22,700 or 26%) and aged 75 and over (9,500 or 11%) (Supplementary table 11). Note: the age of clients presented throughout this section are based on the client age as at 30 June 2018. Overall, the 86,400 SHS clients received a median of 28 days of support and an average of 24 nights of accommodation per client.

While there were more female SHS clients (49,100 or 57%) than male clients (37,300 or 43%) over this period, male clients were more intense service users (Figure 13). Older male SHS clients had a higher median number of days of support (34 days per client) compared with female clients (23 days). Also, males received over half (58%) of the total nights of accommodation provided to older SHS clients (Supplementary table 11).

Figure 13: Older SHS clients, by service access, sex, and age group, throughout 2013–14 and 2017–18
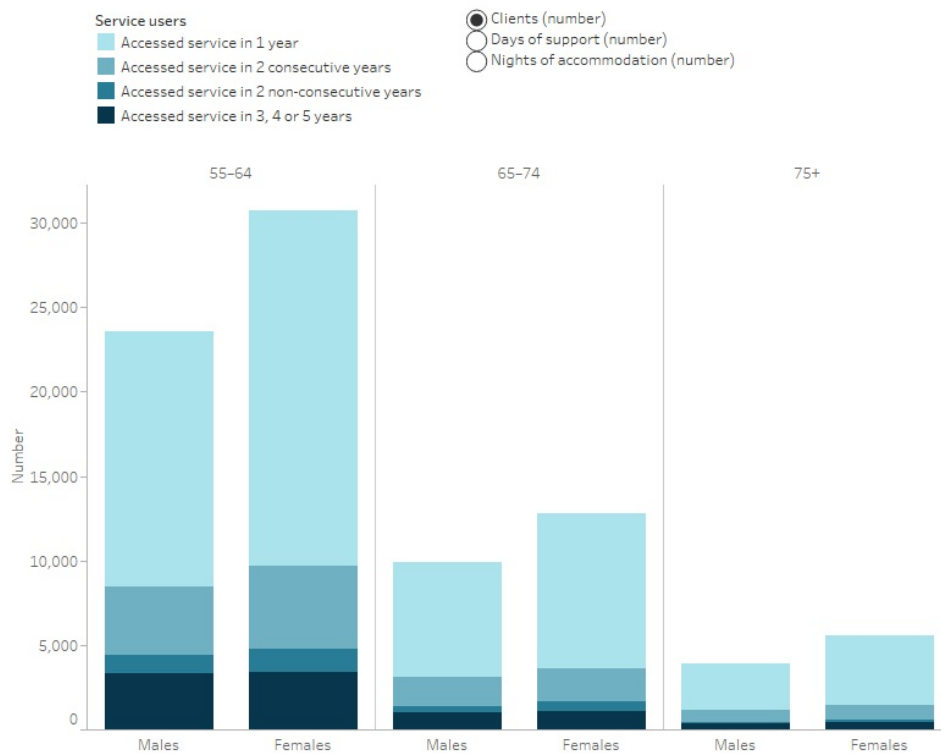
Notes
1. Age groups are cohort client ages at 30 June 2018.
2. Non-overlapping days and accommodation nights were used to calculate support days and accommodation nights.
Source: Older clients of Specialist Homelessness Services, Supplementary TABLE.11.

Of the 86,400 older SHS clients accessing services during 2013–14 to 2017–18, the largest number accessed services in Victoria (43,100 clients) followed by New South Wales (18,100) (Figure 14). Clients in the Northern Territory had the highest average number of nights of accommodation (61 nights) and days of support (228 days) (Supplementary table 12).

Figure 14: Older SHS clients, by service use, sex, and states and territories, throughout 2013–14 and 2017–18
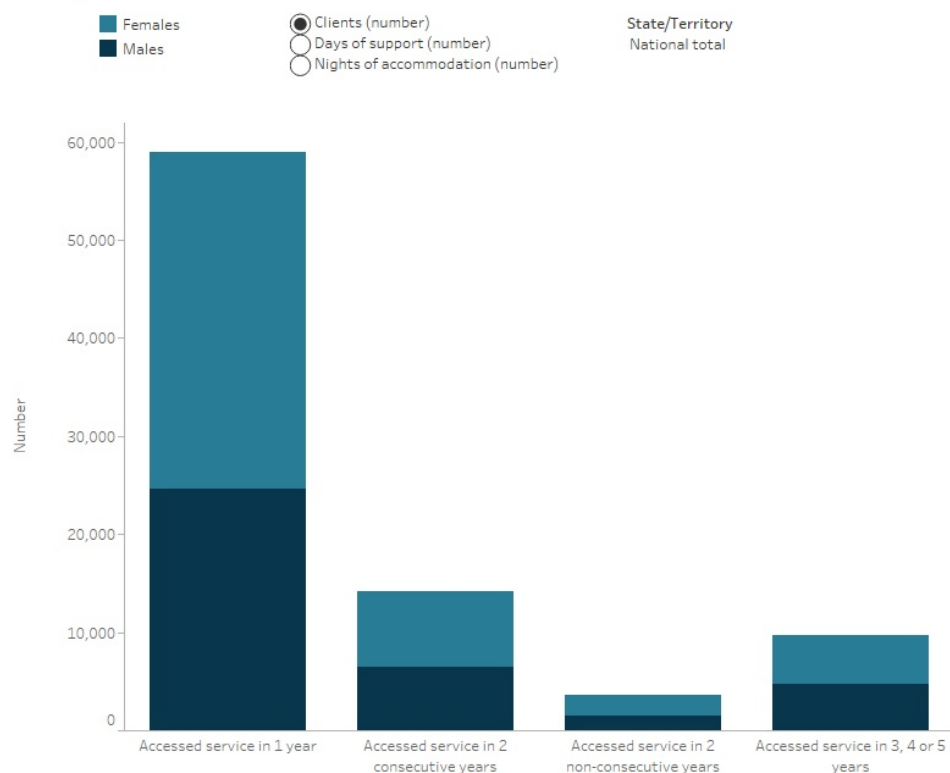
Notes
1. Older clients are defined as any client 55 years or older at 30 June 2018 accessing services between 2013–14 and 2017–18.
2. Clients had at least one support period in the state or territory. Totals will not sum to national totals.
Source: Older clients of Specialist Homelessness Services, Supplementary TABLE.12.

Nearly half (47% or 40,600 clients) of older SHS clients receiving SHS support during 2013–14 to 2017–18 did not report a vulnerability (Figure 15). Almost 1 in 5 (19%) clients reported *ever* experiencing family and domestic violence *only* and a further 1 in 5 reported mental health issues *only* (18%). Few older SHS clients reported all 3 vulnerabilities (2%) (Supplementary table 13).

The vulnerability profiles differed among the service use groups. The proportion of clients reporting no vulnerability decreased with increasing years during which clients received services. That is, around half (52%) of those receiving support in a single year had no vulnerabilities, compared with 42% of those receiving support in 2 consecutive years, 37% of those in the 2 non-consecutive years group, and 27% of those in the 3, 4 or 5 years group.

Figure 15: Older SHS clients, by vulnerability group, service use and sex, throughout 2013–14 and 2017–18

Years of support access
All year groups

- ● Males and females
- ○ Males
- ○ Females

- ● Clients (number)
- ○ Days of support (number)
- ○ Nights of accommodation (number)

Notes
1. Older clients are defined as any client 55 years or older at 30 June 2018, accessing services between 2013–14 and 2017–18.
2. Client vulnerability groups are family and domestic violence (FDV), mental health issue (MH), and problematic drug and/or alcohol use (drug/alcohol).
3. Client vulnerability groups are mutually exclusive.
Source: Older clients of Specialist Homelessness Services, Supplementary TABLE.13.

Around 8% of the 86,400 older SHS clients who received services during 2013-14 and 2017-18 reported that they always or sometimes needed assistance with self–care, mobility and communication (Figure 16). A similar number of females (3,300 or 51%) and males (3,200 or 49%) received services (Supplementary table 14).

Figure 16: Older SHS clients with disability, by service use, and sex, throughout 2013–14 and 2017–18
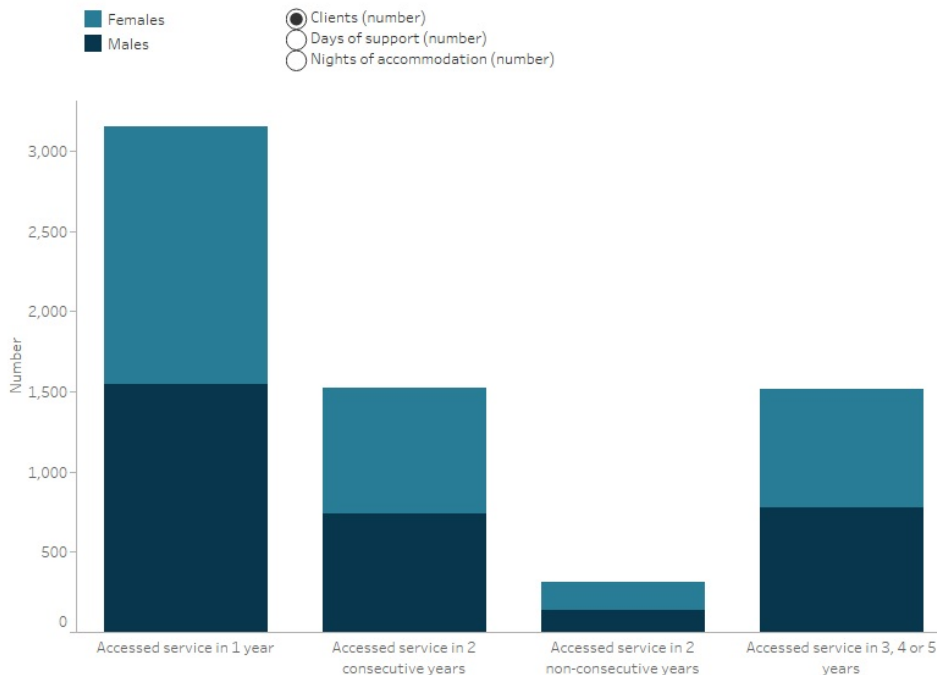
- Females
- Males

- ● Clients (number)
- ○ Days of support (number)
- ○ Nights of accommodation (number)

Notes
1. Older clients are defined as any client 55 years or older at 30 June 2018, accessing services between 2013–14 and 2017–18.
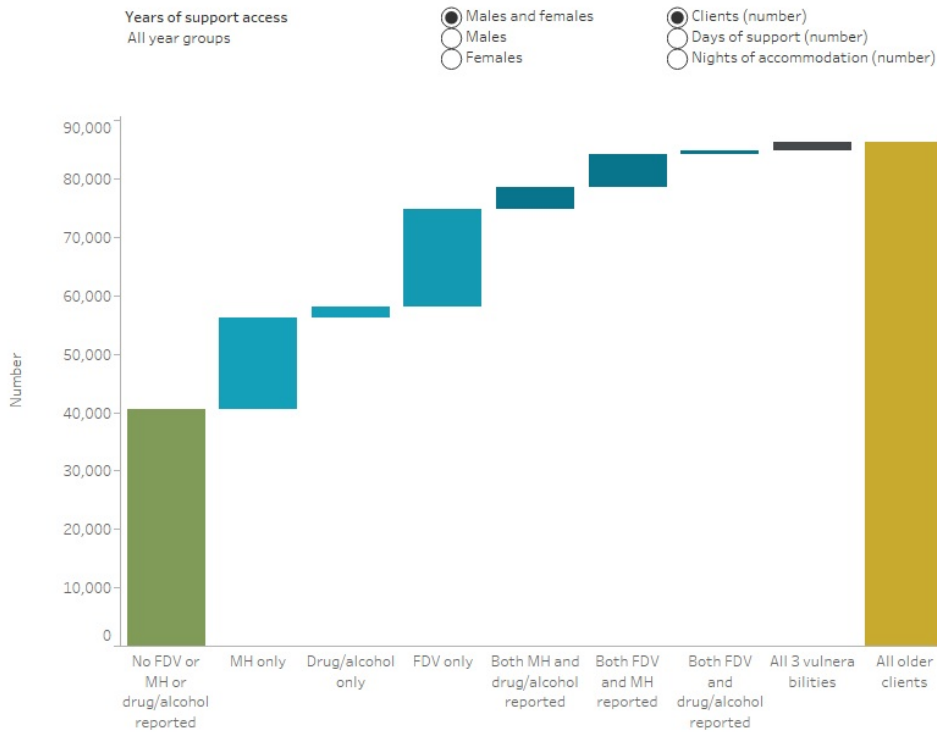2. Clients with a disability are those who were ever recorded as 'always/sometimes' needing help and/or supervision with self-care, mobility, or communication.
3. Disability status was unable to be determined for 4,480 (12%) male clients and 11,229 (23 %) female clients, making up 15,709 (18 %) total older clients.
4. Non-overlapping support days and accommodation nights were used to calculate total, median and average support days and accommodation nights.
Source: Older clients of Specialist Homelessness Services, Supplementary TABLE.14.

Service use patterns: five year total view

Of the 86,400 older clients accessing services from SHS agencies between 2013–14 and 2017–18, the majority (68% or around 59,000 clients) received services in a single year only (Figure 13). More females (34,400 or 58% clients) accessed services in 1 year than males (24,600 or 42%), however, male service intensity was higher than females. Males received a median of 14 days of support and an average of 8 nights of accommodation per client compared with females (9 days and 4 nights) (Supplementary table 11).

Figures for this client group can be found in the section 'All clients between 2013–14 to 2017–18'.

Age profile

Of older SHS clients receiving services in a single year between 2013–14 and 2017–18:

- Most were aged 55–64 (61%); with 27% of the clients aged 65–74 and 12% aged 75 and over.
- For each of the 3 age groups (55–64, 65–74 and 75 and over), around 3 in 5 were female.

State/territory

Of the 59,000 clients accessing services in a single year between 2013–14 and 2017–18, the largest number of clients accessed services in Victoria (29,500) followed by New South Wales (12,200) and Queensland (7,000) (Figure 14). Males accessed a higher average number of nights of accommodation than females across all states and territories with the exception of the Australian Capital Territory where males received 8 nights compared with females who received 11 nights of accommodation per client.

Of older SHS clients receiving services in a single year between 2013–14 and 2017–18, clients in:

- The Australian Capital Territory received the highest median number of days of support per client (50 days) compared with Western Australia, which had the lowest (3).
- The Northern Territory had the highest average number of nights of accommodation (19 nights) per client followed by Queensland (11).

Vulnerability

For the 59,000 older clients who assessed services in 1 year only between 2013–14 and 2017–18, over half did not report experiencing a vulnerability (52% or 30,800). The most common vulnerability experienced was family and domestic violence *only*, reported by 1 in 5 clients (22% or around 13,000) (Figure 15). Considering differences between male and female clients in this group:

- More males (68% or 16,600 clients) than females (41% or 14,200) reported no vulnerability.
- Females (35%) were more likely to report family and domestic violence *only* than males (3%). Their service use was less than others experiencing vulnerabilities, with an average of 1 support period and an average of 2 nights of accommodation.
- Around 1 in 5 (19% of males) males reported mental health issues *only*, compared with 13% of females.

Males who reported experiencing 3 vulnerabilities were more intense users of services than females with all 3 vulnerabilities. Males received a median of 52 days of support and an average of 23 nights of accommodation per client compared with females (42 days and 20 nights) (Supplementary table 13).

Disability

Of the 6,500 total older clients who reported that they always or sometimes needed assistance with self-care, mobility and communication, around half (49%) accessed services in 1 year only between 2013–14 and 2017–18 (Figure 16). The proportion of people with disability in this group, was higher than for the other groups. There were similar proportions of male (49%) and female (51%) clients with disability, and they mostly received similar levels of support (Supplementary table 14).

Service use patterns: five year total view

Of the 86,400 older clients accessing SHS services between 2013–14 and 2017–18, just over 14,100 (16%) received services in 2 consecutive years (Figure 13). These clients received a median of 116 days of support and an average of 35 nights of accommodation.

More females (54%) than males (46%) accessed services in 2 consecutive years, though the service intensity for males was higher. Males received a median of 121 days of support and an average of 43 nights of accommodation compared with females who received 111 days of support and 29 nights of accommodation.

Figures for this client group can be found in the section 'All clients between 2013–14 to 2017–18'.

Age profile

Of older SHS clients receiving services in 2 consecutive years between 2013–14 and 2017–18, most were aged 55–64 (63%); a further 26% were aged 65–74 and 11% were aged 75 and over.

Clients aged 75 years and over received a higher average number of nights of accommodation (40 nights) than the other age groups; 30 nights for those aged 65–74 and 36 nights for those aged 55–64.

State/territory

Just under half (46%) of older SHS clients who accessed services in 2 consecutive years between 2013–14 and 2017–18 did so in Victoria, followed by New South Wales (23%) and Queensland (13%) (Figure 14). Of older SHS clients receiving services in 2 consecutive years:

- Clients accessing services in the Australian Capital Territory received the highest median number of days of support per client (251 days) followed by the Northern Territory (237).
- Clients in the Northern Territory had the highest average number of nights of accommodation (87 nights per client) compared with South Australia which had the lowest (19).

Vulnerability

Of the 14,100 older clients who accessed services in 2 consecutive years, 58% reported experiencing one or more vulnerabilities (mental health issues, family and domestic violence and/or problematic drug/alcohol use) and 42% did not report any (Figure 15). Almost 1 in 4 (23%) older clients reported mental health issues *only* and 14% reported family and domestic violence *only*. A smaller proportion (2%) of clients *ever* reported experiencing all 3 vulnerabilities.

Of this client group, there were differences for males and females, including:

- 51% of males and 34% of females reported experiencing no vulnerabilities.
- 1 in 4 (24%) female clients reported family and domestic violence *only* compared with 2% of males.
- Males (27%) were more likely to report mental health issues *only* than females (20%) (Supplementary table 13).

Of older SHS clients receiving services in 2 consecutive years between 2013–14 and 2017–18:

- Clients reporting all 3 vulnerabilities reported the highest average number of support periods (3.9 per client), followed by those reporting both mental health issues and problematic drug and alcohol use (3.5). By way of comparison, those not reporting vulnerabilities had an average of 2.1 support periods.
- Clients reporting both mental health and drug/alcohol issues had a comparatively high average number of nights of accommodation (69 nights).

Disability

Of the 6,500 total older clients who reported that they always or sometimes needed assistance with self-care, mobility and communication, around 1 in 4 (23%) received services in 2 consecutive years between 2013–14 and 2017–18 (Figure 16). Females made up just over half (52%) of these clients who reported that they always or sometimes needed assistance, with males representing 48%.

Older female SHS clients with disability accessing services in 2 consecutive years had a higher intensity of service use than males. Females received a median of 156 days of support compared with males who received 126 days per client. This is in contrast to the overall pattern of males having greater service use intensity.

Service use patterns: five year total view

Of the 86,400 older clients accessing SHS services between 2013–14 and 2017–18, 3,600 (4%) clients received services in 2 non-consecutive years; the smallest of the service use groups (Figure 13). These clients received a median of 37 days of support and an average of 11 nights of accommodation. There was a higher proportion of females (58%) than males (42%) in this client group, though the service use intensity for males was higher. Males received a median of 41 days of support and an average of 16 nights of accommodation compared with females who received 34 days of support and 7 nights of accommodation.

Figures for this client group can be found in the section 'All clients between 2013–14 to 2017–18'.

Age profile

Of older SHS clients receiving services in 2 non-consecutive years between 2013–14 and 2017–18, most were aged 55–64 (68%); a further 24% were aged 65–74 and 8% were aged 75 and over. The clients aged 55–64 had a higher median number of days of support (38) and average number of nights of accommodation (13) than the other age groups (Figure 13).

State/territory

Most of the 3,600 older SHS clients who accessed services in 2 non-consecutive years between 2013–14 and 2017–18 did so in Victoria (59%), followed by New South Wales (16%) (Figure 14).

Vulnerability

Of the 3,600 older SHS clients who accessed services in 2 non-consecutive years, almost two-thirds (63%) of clients reported experiencing one or more vulnerabilities (mental health issues, family and domestic violence and/or problematic drug/alcohol use) while 37% did not *ever* report any (Figure 15). Mental health issues *only* were reported by 22% of clients and 2% *ever* reported experiencing all 3 vulnerabilities.

Disability

Of the 6,500 total older clients who reported that they always or sometimes needed assistance with self-care, mobility and communication, around 5% received services in 2 non-consecutive years between 2013–14 and 2017–18 (Figure 16). Older SHS clients who received services in 2 non-consecutive years were less likely to have a recorded disability than the other service use intensity groups examined.

Service use patterns: five year total view

Of the 86,400 older clients accessing services from SHS agencies between 2013-14 and 2017-18, 11% (9,700 clients) received services in 3, 4 or 5 years (Figure 13). Unlike the other client groups, there was little difference in the proportion of males (49%) and females (51%) who accessed services in 3, 4 or 5 years, yet consistent with the other groups; male service intensity was higher than females.

Figures for this client group can be found in the section 'All clients between 2013-14 to 2017-18'.

Age profile

Of older SHS clients receiving services in 3, 4 or 5 years between 2013-14 and 2017-18:

- This group had a younger age profile than the other service use intensity groups.
- Most were aged 55-64 (70%); 22% of the clients were aged 65-74 and 8% were aged 75 and over.
- There were similar proportions of female and male clients aged 55-64 and 65-74; the proportion of females was higher than males aged 75 and over (Supplementary table 11).

State/territory

Of the 9,700 clients who received services in 3, 4 or 5 years, half of clients accessed services in Victoria (50%) followed by New South Wales (22%) and Queensland (14%) (Figure 14). Victoria had the highest proportion of females (55% of clients) compared with Tasmania which had the lowest (36%).

Of older SHS clients receiving services in 3, 4 or 5 years between 2013-14 and 2017-18, clients in:

- Tasmania had the highest average number of nights of accommodation (319 nights per client) followed by the Australian Capital Territory (199).
- Tasmania had the largest difference in the average nights of accommodation between males (411 nights) and females (155) (Supplementary table 12).

Vulnerability

Of the 9,700 older clients who received services in 3, 4 or 5 years, the majority (73%) reported experiencing one or more vulnerabilities (mental health issues, family and domestic violence and/or problematic drug/alcohol use), and the remaining (27%) did not. Around 25% reported mental health issues *only*, 13% reported both family and domestic violence and mental health issues and 7% *ever* reported experiencing all 3 vulnerabilities (Figure 15). The vulnerability profile for clients in this cohort was the highest of all 3 cohorts.

There were differences for males and females in this client group, including:

- Almost 1 in 3 (31%) males and 23% of females reported no vulnerabilities.
- A higher proportion of females reported both family and domestic violence and mental health issues (22% of females compared with 3% of males) while males were more likely to report mental health issues *only* (29% of males compared with 22% of females) (Supplementary table 13).

Of older SHS clients receiving services in 3, 4 or 5 years between 2013-14 and 2017-18:

- Males who experienced all 3 vulnerabilities were more intense users of SHS services. They received a median of 395 days of support and an average of 171 nights of accommodation compared with females (336 days and 120 nights).

Disability

Of the 6,500 total older clients who reported that they always or sometimes needed assistance with self-care, mobility and communication, around 1 in 4 (23%) received services in 3, 4 or 5 years between 2013-14 and 2017-18 (Figure 16).

Of older SHS clients with a disability and receiving services in 3, 4 or 5 years between 2013-14 and 2017-18:

- A higher proportion of males (52%) than females (48%) reported that they always or sometimes needed assistance, which is different from other client groups.
- Males received an average of 10 support periods and 122 nights of accommodation compared with females who received an average of 7 support periods and 119 nights per client (Supplementary table 14).

References

AIHW (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare) 2019. Specialist Homelessness Services Annual report 2017-18. Cat. no. HOU 299. Canberra: AIHW.

Where do I go for more information?

See Homelessness services and Housing assistance for more information on this topic.

For more information on older Australians and homelessness and homelessness services, see:

- Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) *Specialist homelessness services annual report 2017–18*
- AIHW *Housing Assistance in Australia 2018*
- AIHW *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people: a focus report on housing and homelessness*
- AIHW *Older Australia at a glance*
- AIHW Australia's welfare *Home ownership and housing tenure*
- AIHW Australia's welfare *Homelessness and homelessness services*
- AIHW Australia's welfare *Housing affordability*
- AIHW Australia's welfare *Housing assistance*

Technical information

Key data quality information: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection, 2017-18

The AIHW plays a role in developing and maintaining national metadata standards. This work contributes to improving the quality and consistency of national health and welfare statistics. The AIHW works closely with governments and non-government organisations to achieve greater adherence to these standards in administrative data collections to promote national consistency and comparability of data and reporting.

One of the main functions of the AIHW is to work with the states and territories to improve the quality of administrative data and to compile, analyse and disseminate national data sets based on data from each jurisdiction.

Data Quality Statements are developed for each data set and made available on the AIHW Metadata Online Registry (METeOR).The 2017-18 Specialist Homelessness Services Collection Data Quality Statement is available from METeOR.

New in 2017-18 are data on clients aged 18 and older who identify as current or former members of the Australian Defence Force. Variability in the implementation of this item means that coverage is incomplete and limited comparisons are possible for 2017-18.

Breaks in time series

Clients subject to care and protection orders: Improvements made in 2015-16 to the method used to identify clients subject to care and protection orders mean that data from 2011-12 to 2014-15 are not comparable with data from 2015-16 onwards.

Source of income—DVA pension or payment: In 2017-18, the response options for source of income were updated and the three response options relating to payments or pensions from the Department of Veterans Affairs (disability pension—DVA, service pension—DVA and war widow(ers) pension—DVA) were replaced with a single response option of 'DVA pension or payment'. As the single 'DVA pension or payment response' option can include more payment types than the three options previously available, data on the 3 DVA pension or payments from 2011-12 to 2016-17 are not comparable with data on 'DVA pension or payment' from 2017-18 onwards.

Data issues that require caution when making comparisons

Disability: Data for clients with disability who require assistance may not be comparable across age groups due to differences in the interpretation of the disability questions; this issue relates mainly to young children.

Presenting unit type: Data for presenting unit type may not be comparable across age groups due to differences in interpretation of presenting units and how they are recorded. This issue mainly concerns young children and presenting unit type 'lone person'.

Housing crisis, financial difficulties and housing affordability: Improvements made during 2014-15 resulted in changes to the way agencies were required to report 'main reason' and 'reasons for seeking assistance'. In addition, wording providing a specific example of housing crisis was removed from the section relating to reason for seeking assistance. Caution should be used when making comparisons over time as the reporting of these items may be inconsistent between agencies. These changes in agency reporting were evident in the data from all states and territories.

Children presenting alone: South Australia has a comparatively high number of children reported as presenting alone. This may be due to a difference in how presenting units are recorded in South Australia's client management system. Caution should be used when comparing data for children presenting alone in South Australia with other states and territories.

Case management: Some aspects of case management are recorded differently in South Australia's client management system. Caution should be used when comparing data on case management for South Australia with other states and territories.

Improvements to data items

Mandatory data items: Changes made in 2014-15 resulted in a substantial improvement in data quality for mandatory data items and in particular resulted in a decline in the number of non-response or missing values for these data items. Care should be used when comparing results from 2011-12 to 2013-14 with results from 2014-15 onwards.

Housing situation

Following improvement in the derivation for housing situation used in the SHSC in 2016-17, clients with a tenure status of 'life tenure scheme' are now counted under the housing situation category 'private or other housing (renter, rent-free or owner)' if their dwelling status was 'housing/townhouse/flat'. This change has very little impact on housing situation percentages and hence does not constitute a break in time series.

Age: In 2017-18, age and age-related variables were derived using a more robust calculation method. Caution should be used when comparing results with publications from December 2018 onwards that include 2017-18 data with other publications.

New South Wales homelessness services underwent a period of major transition in 2014-15 that affected continuity of reporting for some service providers. These issues did not affect New South Wales data for 2017-18, 2016-17 or 2015-16. As outlined in the Data Quality Statement caution should be used when making comparisons of 2014-15 data with other years' figures for New South Wales or with data for other states and territories. Other jurisdictional-specific information can be found in the Data Quality Statement.

Further information on the data quality of 2017-18 SHSC data can be found in the Explanatory notes in the national and state and territory Supplementary tables.

Imputation and weighting

Due to improvements in agency response and SLK validity rates, data for 2017-18 were not weighted. As the aim of the imputation strategy was to account for low rates of agency response and SLK validity in previous years, unweighted data for 2017-18 onwards are directly comparable with weighted data for 2011-12 to 2016-17. The removal of weighting does not constitute a break in time series.

The annual SHS report and accompanying products uses financial year data, and for 2011-12 to 2016-17, these data are weighted. However, other AIHW publications that analyse the pathways of individual clients over time, including publications using SHS data linked with data from other collections, do not use weighted data.

Comparisons between years of counts of clients and support periods should use weighted data for 2011-12 to 2016-17 and unweighted data from 2017-18 onwards. These counts can be obtained from the annual report and accompanying data products.

Data derivations

Homelessness status and other housing categories

All clients of specialist homelessness services are considered to be either homeless or at risk of homelessness. Homelessness and at-risk status is determined by the specific criteria described below. Clients who did not provide sufficient information to make this assessment are excluded.

These categories are designed to, as far as is possible, align with the ABS statistical definition of homelessness (ABS 2018a). However, there are some key areas where alignment may not occur. The ABS definition includes people living in severely crowded dwellings and as no specific question on crowding is included in the SHSC, this group cannot be separately identified.

Also, the ABS exclude certain groups of people from the homeless count where they appear to have accommodation alternatives or where there is a clear choice about the type of accommodation (for example, people who are travelling, people returning from overseas, certain owner builder or hobby farmers, and students living in halls of residence). However, if people in these circumstances become clients of specialist homelessness agencies, they are included here as either homeless or at risk of homelessness, depending on their housing situation as reported.

Clients are considered to be homeless if they are living in any of the following circumstances:

- No shelter or improvised dwelling: includes where dwelling type is no dwelling/street/park/in the open, motor vehicle, improvised building/dwelling, caravan, cabin, boat or tent; or tenure type is renting or living rent-free in a caravan park.
- Short-term temporary accommodation: dwelling type is boarding/rooming house, emergency accommodation, hotel/motel/bed and breakfast; or tenure type is renting or living rent-free in boarding/rooming house, renting or living rent-free in emergency accommodation, or renting or living rent-free in transitional housing.
- House, townhouse or flat (couch surfing or with no tenure): dwelling type is House/townhouse/flat, and tenure type is no tenure or conditions of occupancy is couch surfing.

Clients are considered to be at risk if they are living in any of the following circumstances:

- Public or community housing (renter or rent free): dwelling type is house/townhouse/flat and tenure type is renter or rent-free in public housing, or renter or rent-free in community housing.
- Private or other housing (renter, rent-free or owner): dwelling type is house/townhouse/flat and tenure type is renter or rent free in private housing, life tenure scheme, owner—shared equity or rent/buy scheme, owner—being purchased/with mortgage, owner—fully owned, or other renter or rent free.
- Institutional settings: dwelling type is hospital, psychiatric hospital/unit, disability support, rehabilitation, boarding school/residential college, adult correctional facility, youth/juvenile justice correctional centre, aged care facility or immigration detention centre.

Support periods

The period of time a client receives services from a specialist homelessness agency is referred to as a support period. A support period starts on the day the client first receives a service and ends when:

- the relationship between the client and the agency ends
- the client has reached their maximum amount of support the agency can offer
- a client has not received any services from the agency for a whole calendar month and there is no ongoing relationship.

The end of the support period is the day the client last received services from the agency.

Calculating total length of accommodation (and total length of support)

To calculate accommodation and support length, every night (for length of accommodation) or day (for length of support) the client received support or accommodation in 2017–18 is added together. This means that the total number of days/nights presented for clients does not necessarily represent a consecutive number of days/nights the client received support/accommodation. For example, a client who received accommodation for 7 nights may have had 2 separate periods of accommodation: 1 for 5 nights and another for 2 nights.

Agency remoteness area

Agencies have been classified according to their remoteness area (RA) as defined by the Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS) Remoteness Structure (ABS 2018). The latest available version of the RA indicator (from the 2016 Census) has been developed by the ABS. The Remoteness Areas divide Australia into five classes of remoteness on the basis of relative access to services. Access to services is measured using the Accessibility and Remoteness Index of Australia (ARIA+), developed by the Hugo Centre for Migration and Population Research at the University of Adelaide ARIA+ is derived by measuring the road distance from a point to the nearest Urban Centres and Localities in five separate population ranges.

Using this classification, agencies participating in the SHSC were assigned to an RA based on their recorded state, suburb, postcode and/or Local Government Area (LGA) values. Where available, a combination of these fields was used to assign RA for a given agency to improve accuracy.

Client geography

Clients have been assigned to a region based on where they lived in the week before presenting to a SHS agency. Regions are defined by the 2016 Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS), developed by the ABS (ABS 2016).

Clients are assigned to only one region, based on the location details (locality, postcode and state/territory) provided in the first support period in the reference year. The first support period is defined as the support period with the earliest start date in the financial year.

Where there are multiple support periods that meet this criteria (i.e. share the same start date):

- then the support period with latest end date will be used
- else a support period will be randomly selected (i.e. where support periods have the same start and end dates).

In 2017–18, approximately 12% of clients could not be assigned to a statistical area 2 (SA2) region due to missing or incomplete address information.

Identifying and meeting service needs

Identifying clients' needs for a service

The SHSC collects information on the needs of clients during their period of support from a specialist homelessness agency. Needs may be identified by the client and/or the service provider. Although this information is collected at the beginning of a support period, updated at the end of each month a client is supported and again at the end of each support period, each individual need is only recorded once in any collection month. For these analyses, a client need for a service is recorded if the client needed that service at any time in 2017–18. For example, a client is recorded as needing short-term accommodation if they were recorded as needing short-term accommodation in any collection month of 2017–18, regardless of the number of months over which this need was recorded, or the number of times during 2017–18 they presented with this need.

Meeting clients' service needs

There are several aspects to analysing the extent to which clients' needs for assistance are met. The first is to analyse the services provided to a client directly by the specialist homelessness agency. Where agencies are unable to provide services directly to clients or unable to fully meet the need they often refer the client to other organisations (either other specialist homelessness agencies or other organisations) that can provide those services. This information is also collected in the SHSC and is considered an important form of assistance that agencies provide, although it is not possible to know if these referrals resulted in the provision of services.

All information on services that are provided, whether referred or not, are recorded in the same way as service needs. That is, a service is recorded as provided if the client was provided that type of assistance at any time in 2017–18.

In some circumstances, an agency will not be able to either provide required services directly to clients, or refer them to another organisation—this is considered to be an unmet need. Further information about unmet needs can be found in the Unmet demand section of the report.

Indigenous clients

A client is considered as Indigenous if, in any support period in 2017–18, they identified as being of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander origin.

In the SHSC, information on Indigenous status is only provided with explicit client consent to report this information. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander was not reported for 10% of clients in 2017–18.

Clients born overseas

A client is identified as overseas-born, if in the majority of support periods in 2017–18, they identified that their country of birth was a country other than Australia.

In the SHSC, information on country of birth is only provided with explicit client consent to report this information. Country of birth information was not reported for 16% of clients in 2017-18.

Young people presenting alone

Young people are defined as clients aged 15-24 who presented alone in their first support period in the reporting period.

The age of the client is defined as the client's age on the start date of their first support period in the reporting period. For those who were ongoing clients at the beginning of the reporting period, the client's age on the first day of the reporting period is used.

Older people

Older people are defined as clients aged 55 or older.

The age of the client is defined as their age on the start date of their first support period in the reporting period. For those who were ongoing clients at the beginning of the reporting period, the client's age on the first day of the reporting period is used.

Clients who experienced domestic and family violence

SHSC clients were counted as experiencing domestic and family violence if any support period during the reporting period:

- 'domestic and family violence' was reported as a reason they sought assistance, or
- during any support period they required domestic or family violence assistance.

The SHSC reports on clients who are victims of domestic and family violence. Currently perpetrators of domestic and family violence who may also be receiving assistance from a homelessness agency are not able to be identified within the SHSC.

Clients with a current mental health issue

A client was identified as having a current mental health issue if they provided any of the following information:

- They indicated that at the beginning of a support period they were receiving services or assistance for their mental health issues or had in the past 12 months.
- Their formal referral source to the specialist homelessness agency was a mental health service.
- They reported 'mental health issues' as a reason for seeking assistance.
- Their dwelling type either a week before presenting to an agency, or when presenting to an agency, was a psychiatric hospital or unit.
- They had been in a psychiatric hospital or unit in the last 12 months.

At some stage during their support period, a need was identified for psychological services, psychiatric services or mental health services.

This analysis does not include clients aged under 10.

Clients on care and protection orders

A client is identified as being under a care or protection order if they are aged under 18 and have provided any of the following information in any support period (any month within the support period) during the reporting period (either the week before, at the beginning of the support period or during support):

- They reported that they were under a care and protection order (and the care arrangement was known).
- They have reported 'Transition from foster care/child safety residential placements' as a reason for seeking assistance, or main reason for seeking assistance.

Clients with problematic drug and/or alcohol use

A client is identified as having problematic drug and/or alcohol use if they were aged 10 years or older and have provided any of the following information either at the beginning of support or in any support period during the reporting period (either the week before or at beginning of the support period):

- Their dwelling type was recorded as rehabilitation.
- Their formal referral source to the specialist homelessness agency was a drug and alcohol service.
- During their support they required drug/alcohol counselling.
- They have been in a rehabilitation facility/institution in the last 12 months.
- They have reported 'problematic drug or substance abuse' or 'problematic alcohol use' as a reason for seeking assistance or main reason for seeking assistance.

Clients leaving care

Clients are counted as transitioning from care arrangements if, in their first support period during the reporting period, either in the week before or at presentation:

- the dwelling type was: hospital (excluding psychiatric), psychiatric hospital or unit, disability support, rehabilitation or aged care facility, or
- their reason for seeking assistance was transition from foster care/child safety residential placements or transition from other care arrangements.

Clients who were exiting custodial arrangements

Clients are counted as leaving a custodial setting if, in their first support period during the reporting period, either in the week before or at presentation:

- their dwelling type was: adult correctional facility, youth or juvenile justice detention centre or immigration detention centre or
- their reason for seeking assistance was: transition from custodial arrangements or
- their source of formal referral to the agency was: youth or juvenile justice detention centre, or adult correctional facility.

Some of these clients were still in custody at the time they began receiving support.

Children aged under 10 identified as exiting from adult correction facilities or youth/juvenile justice detention centres have been excluded because of concerns about the quality of the data, as children aged under 10 years cannot be charged with a criminal offence in any jurisdiction in Australia. Children aged under 10 transitioning from immigration detention centres have been retained in this group.

New and returning clients

Clients are identified in the SHSC as new clients if, in their first support period during the reporting period, they:

- had not previously been assisted by a specialist homelessness agency, at any time since the collection began in 2011–12.

Clients are identified as returning if, in their first support period during the reporting period, they:

- had previously been assisted by a specialist homelessness agency at any time since the collection began in 2011–12.

This measure provides contextual information about service use patterns.

Unassisted requests for services

Unassisted requests for services provide a measure of the number of instances where a person received no immediate services from a specialist homelessness agency. It is not a measure of the number of people who did not receive services from an agency. Numbers exclude multiple requests from the same person (at any agency) on the same day, but may include requests from the same person (at any agency) on different days.

The data are presented as a daily average of requests for services because the information that is used to create the SLK was not available for 48% of the unmet requests for service in 2017–18. Without a valid SLK, it is not possible to identify whether a person requested the same service more than once from the same agency or from different agencies on different days. Similarly, people who received services at a later date, thus becoming clients, cannot be identified where a valid SLK is not available.

Over recent years, a number of jurisdictions have made changes to services delivery models and in particular toward central intake service delivery models. In practice, these systems often require agency workers to provide assistance of some kind to all presenting individuals. Therefore, caution should be used when comparing data over time and between states and territories, particularly data relating to unassisted requests.

Technical notes

Data Source

This report primarily uses data on older Australians from the AIHW Specialist Homelessness Services Collection (SHSC). Supplemental data from the ABS and other data sources such as the Australian Housing Data Set is presented to provide context.

Annual data and longitudinal SHSC data of older Australians seeking homelessness services have been analysed for the report. The analysis of annual data involved investigating the data from the 2013–14 to 2017–18 SHSC annual snapshots. The longitudinal analysis involved investigating a group of individual clients over time with data aggregated from the 2013–14 to 2017–18 annual snapshots. There are methodological differences in this longitudinal data and the annual data provided in the report, and therefore comparisons are not advised. See Explanatory notes in data tables for further information.

Data presentation

Data presented in the report and in the supplementary tables are mainly based on 'clients', with some data based on 'support periods' or 'client groups' (or 'presenting units'—which identify clients who present together to a specialist homelessness agency, including clients who present alone—and receive a service). Information on clients who are homeless, at risk of homelessness or part of a group of special interest, is mostly client-level data and information on agencies, unmet demand and trends data is predominantly support period data.

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) has strict confidentiality policies which have their basis in section 29 of the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare Act 1987 (AIHW Act) and the Privacy Act 1988 (Privacy Act). Cells in supplementary tables may be suppressed for either confidentiality reasons or where estimates are based on small numbers, resulting in low reliability. Information that results in attribute disclosure, (that is, if as well as being able to identify the entity, other details are revealed), will be suppressed unless agreement from the particular data provider to publish the data has been reached. Information on AIHW's Privacy policy is available on the privacy page.

Population estimates used for rates calculations

All rates in this report, including historical rates, have been calculated using population estimates based on the 2011 Census. All Indigenous rates in this report are calculated using the Indigenous population estimates and projections, based on the 2011 Census.

Population rates

Crude rates are calculated using the Australian Bureau of Statistics estimated resident population (ERP) at the start of the range (for example, rates for 2011–12 were calculated using the ERP at 30 June 2011). Rates for 2017–18 data were calculated using the preliminary ERP at 30 June 2017.

Minor adjustments in rates may occur between publications reflecting revision of the estimated resident population by the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

Age-standardised rates

Population rates were adjusted (standardised) for age to enhance the comparison between populations over time that have different age structures. Specifically, direct standardisation has been used where age-specific rates are applied to a standard population (the ERP as at 30 June 2001, unless otherwise specified). This effectively removes the influence of age structure on the calculated rate and is referred to as the age-standardised rate. In this publication direct age-standardisation has been used to compare Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous Australians (AIHW 2011).

Rate ratio

Rate ratios are mainly used to compare Indigenous and non-Indigenous rates and provide a measure of the level of Indigenous over-representation. A rate ratio is calculated by dividing the client rate for Indigenous Australian by the client rate for non-Indigenous Australians.

Average annual rates of change

The average annual rates of change or growth rates have been calculated as geometric rates:

Average rate of change = $((P_n/P_o)^{(1/n)} - 1) \times 100$

where:

- P_n= value in the later time period
- P_o= value in the earlier time period

n = number of years between the 2 time periods.

Abbreviations & symbols

Information for abbreviation and symbols can be found at the following site under Technical information -

Specialist-homelessness-services-2017-18

Notes

Amendments

In the SHS collection, older persons are generally those aged 55 and over and older and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are aged 50 years and over. In the longitudinal analysis section of the report, any client who used services between 2013–14 and 2017–18 and is 55 or older on 30 June 2018 were included. Therefore, some clients included may have been under 55 when they had their first or only support period prior to the 30 June 2018 cut-off.

Data quality statement

Specialist Homelessness Services Collection 2017–18

Data

Related material

Homelessness services glossary

Housing assistance glossary

Related topics

- Housing assistance