



Australian Government

Australian Institute of
Health and Welfare

Demand for SAAP accommodation by homeless people 2003–04

Introduction

In 2003–04, 1,300 non-government, community and local government organisations were funded nationally under the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) to provide support and/or accommodation to people who were homeless or at risk of homelessness (AIHW 2005a: Table 2.3). These organisations ranged from small stand-alone agencies with single outlets to larger bodies with multiple outlets. Each agency was focused mainly on supporting a particular client group, such as young people, single men, single women, women escaping domestic violence, families, or a combination of client groups.

Although SAAP agencies support and accommodate large numbers of people every day, they cannot always meet all the requests for SAAP accommodation from existing or potential clients. This bulletin discusses the demand for SAAP accommodation, with a focus on the groups that request accommodation—individuals on their own, individuals with children, couples with children and couples without children—because these groups have different patterns of accommodation use and varying degrees of difficulty in accessing SAAP accommodation. The issue of the availability of accommodation for the different groups and the ability of agencies to meet the demand for accommodation from these groups is highlighted. More information about this topic, a complete glossary and the counting rules governing the data used in this bulletin are contained in the *Demand for SAAP assistance by homeless people 2003–04* report (AIHW 2006). For convenience, a reduced glossary of terms used in this bulletin is provided in Box 1.

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Box 1: Key definitions used in this bulletin

Below is a summary of the key terms used in this bulletin. For a more complete list of terms and counting rules, please refer to the *Demand for SAAP assistance by homeless people 2003–04* report (AIHW 2006).

Accompanying child—a person aged under 18 years who accompanies a client to a SAAP agency during a support period or who requires and/or receives assistance from a SAAP agency as a result of their parent(s) or guardian(s) being a client of the same agency. An accompanying child may or may not require or receive assistance. The term accompanying child is also used to describe a person aged under 18 years who accompanies a parent(s) or guardian(s) to a SAAP agency but whose parent's or guardian's request for accommodation cannot be met.

Client—a person aged 18 years or more, or a person of any age not accompanied by their parent(s) or guardian(s), who:

- receives support or assistance from a SAAP agency which entails generally 1 hour or more of a worker's time, either with that client directly or on behalf of that client, on a given day; or
- is accommodated by a SAAP agency; or
- enters into an ongoing support relationship with a SAAP agency.

Daily request for accommodation turn-away rate—Expressed as the average daily percentage of people who could not be accommodated relative to all people making valid requests for immediate SAAP accommodation. It measures the proportion of people seeking SAAP accommodation who were turned away on an average day during the Demand for Accommodation Collection period and provides an indication of a person's likelihood of obtaining SAAP accommodation.

Demand for accommodation—accommodation requested from a SAAP agency, whether that request was met or not. It includes accommodation that was newly starting, accommodation that was continuing from a previous day as well as unmet requests for accommodation.

Family group—for the purposes of this bulletin a family group is defined as people who present to a SAAP agency as:

- an individual(s) with children; or
- a couple without children; or
- a couple with children.

For the composition of the requesting groups used in this report, please refer to AIHW 2006, Appendix 2.

Immediate accommodation—accommodation required within 24 hours.

Met request for accommodation—a request for accommodation is met if the agency offers supported accommodation to the person or group requesting accommodation and that offer is accepted. All met requests for accommodation are considered to be valid as the accommodation could be provided.

(continued)

Main findings

- The chance of adults and unaccompanied children who requested immediate SAAP accommodation being turned away on an average day during the Demand for Accommodation Collection period was 52% or around 1 in 2 people. In addition, 63% or almost 2 in every 3 children who accompanied a potential client who requested immediate SAAP accommodation were turned away.
- When adults, unaccompanied children and accompanying children were considered together, the aggregate turn-away rate was 56%.
- The ratio of unmet demand to total demand for accommodation (see Box 1) was 3 in 100 people. In other words, 3 out of every 100 people with an expressed demand for SAAP accommodation (including those continuing their accommodation) could not be accommodated on an average day during the Demand for Accommodation Collection period.
- Although accounting for only small proportions of the total number of people seeking immediate SAAP accommodation or already accommodated in SAAP on an average day, family groups—individual(s) with children, couples with children and couples without

Box 1 (continued): Key definitions used in this bulletin

Potential client—a person aged 18 years or more, or a person of any age not accompanied by a parent(s) or guardian(s), who requests supported accommodation from a SAAP agency but who is not provided with that accommodation. People are not considered potential clients if their only unmet requests for accommodation are invalid. A potential client for one SAAP agency may at the same time be a client of another.

Referral—a (formal) referral occurs when a SAAP agency contacts another agency (SAAP or non-SAAP) and that agency accepts the person concerned for an appointment or interview. A referral has not been provided if the person is not accepted for an appointment or interview.

Total demand for accommodation—refers to accommodation requested from a SAAP agency, whether that request was met or not. It includes accommodation that was newly starting, accommodation that was continuing from a previous day as well as unmet requests for accommodation.

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

Unmet request for accommodation—occurs when a person requests, but does not receive, supported accommodation. Unmet requests are categorised as valid or invalid based on criteria outlined in AIHW 2006.

Unmet demand to total demand for accommodation ratio—expressed as the average daily ratio of people who could not be accommodated relative to all people who requested SAAP accommodation that day or who were continuing their accommodation from a previous day. It provides a measure of the overall ability of SAAP to meet the expressed demand for accommodation on an average day during the Demand for Accommodation Collection period.

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children—had more difficulty obtaining SAAP accommodation than people who presented on their own or with a group of unrelated people without children (individual(s) without children). Family groups had both higher levels of unmet need for accommodation reported in the Client Collection and higher daily request turn-away rates and higher unmet demand to total demand for accommodation ratios reported on an average day during the Demand for Accommodation Collection period.

- People who made a valid unmet request (potential clients) for immediate SAAP accommodation were more likely to be female, born in Australia, and not of an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background.
- Potential clients (see Box 1) were more likely to be aged between 20 and 44 years. The majority of children who accompanied potential clients were aged under 12 years.
- Over a third of the average number of all people (potential clients and accompanying children) who made a valid unmet request for accommodation during the Demand for Accommodation Collection period were accompanying children. For this reason, when potential clients and accompanying children are considered together, a high proportion of the people who were turned away sometime during the day were under 20 years of age.
- When accommodation could not be provided, referrals for accommodation were more likely to be made for family groups than for individual(s) without children. However, they were not made in all cases.
- Once in SAAP accommodation, family groups tended to stay longer.
- The data suggest that there is a need for more accommodation for family groups to meet their current level of expressed demand for accommodation. Further investigation needs to be carried out to determine where and how many extra accommodation places are required.

SAAP in the context of homelessness

The overall aim of SAAP is to provide transitional supported accommodation and related support services to help people who are homeless or at imminent risk of homelessness achieve the maximum possible degree of self-reliance and independence. SAAP is an important part of Australia's overall response to homelessness and represents a broader social safety net designed to assist people in crisis in the community. With the exception of SAAP, Crisis Accommodation Program (CAP), HOME (Household Organisational Management Expenses) Advice Program and Reconnect, there are very few national programs directed specifically at homeless people. As the major government safety net for people who are homeless, SAAP accommodation is often the last resort for people who find themselves without, or at risk of being without, safe, secure or adequate housing.

It is important to note that the estimates provided on people accessing and turned away from SAAP accommodation do not represent the total homeless population. One estimate of Australia's homeless population is produced by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), which estimated that 99,900 people were homeless on Census night 2001 (ABS 2003). Included in this estimate are around 14,250 people who were accommodated in SAAP agencies.

Given the substantial difference between the total number of homeless people estimated by the Census and the number of people accommodated by SAAP, a large proportion of the homeless population do not receive SAAP accommodation. The relatively small number of people with unmet requests for SAAP accommodation also indicates that many homeless people do not request SAAP accommodation. There is, therefore, a level of 'hidden' demand for SAAP accommodation which could include people who do not know how to access SAAP agencies, may not be located near a SAAP agency, or may have given up attempting to receive support from a SAAP agency. It may also be the case, however, that many people counted as homeless by the Census do not consider themselves to be homeless or that their requirements from a government program are different from the services offered by SAAP (e.g. improved living conditions). This may be the case, for example, for people who are living in boarding houses. For a more detailed discussion of the different definitions and estimates of homelessness, see Chapter 7 in *Australia's Welfare 2005* (AIHW 2005b).

Accommodation provided to SAAP clients and accompanying children

In 2003–04 data on the services provided, referred and unmet for SAAP clients were collected in the SAAP Client Collection. SAAP clients are people over the age of 18, or people of any age who are not accompanied by a parent or guardian to a SAAP agency and who receive substantial SAAP support. In 2003–04, there were 100,200 SAAP clients (AIHW 2006: Table 2.2). These clients received support that lasted for more than 1 hour, or had an ongoing relationship with a SAAP service provider, on 187,200 occasions (support periods). Around half of these (92,900) involved accommodation whereas the other half involved only support services.

For people who became SAAP clients in 2003–04, SAAP or CAP accommodation was provided in 91% of the 92,400 closed support periods (support periods that finished on or before 30 June 2004) where it was requested (Table 1). Note that clients might request accommodation for themselves or their accompanying children more than once in a single support period but the number of times this occurs is not recorded in the Client Collection, only that a request was made at some time during the support period. The same is true for provision.

Some of the clients supported by SAAP had children accompanying them. Including data collected on both the high-volume and general client forms (see AIHW 2005a: Appendix 3), there were 73,200 accompanying child support periods in 2003–04, of which 53% involved a parent or guardian who was accommodated (AIHW 2006: Table 2.2). However, information on the types of support provided directly to children is not collected on the high-volume collection form. On the general client collection form, there were 26,800 closed support periods for accompanying children in which SAAP or CAP accommodation was requested for children and it was provided in 96% of cases (Table 2).

In some cases SAAP agencies might not be able to meet all the client's requests directly. In these instances referrals to appropriate organisations might be arranged. As with service provision, a referral may have been arranged for a particular service more than once but the number of times this occurs is not recorded. Note that there is no information about client outcomes from referrals. In the context of the SAAP National Data Collection (NDC),

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a referral means that an agency (SAAP or non-SAAP) has accepted the client for an appointment or interview. However, providing a client with a referral does not guarantee that the client's needs will then be met. Requests for accommodation were referred on when they could not be provided directly in 6% of closed support periods for clients and in 3% of closed support periods for accompanying children.

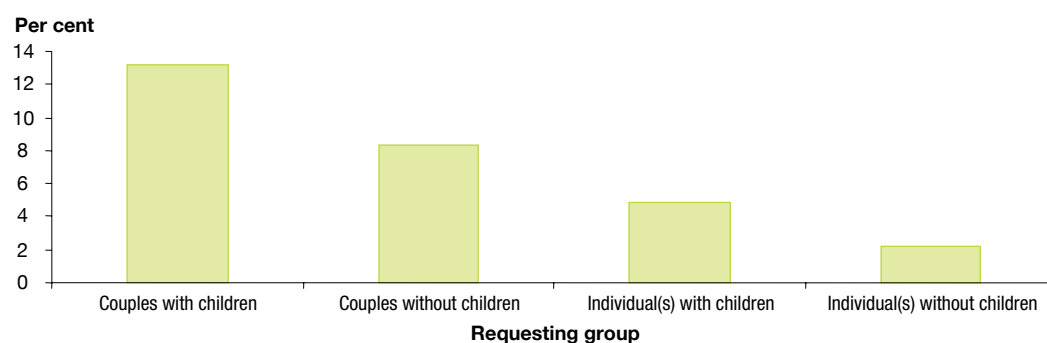
For some requested services, however, it might not be possible to either provide the accommodation or refer the client on, resulting in unmet needs. Requests for SAAP or CAP accommodation from clients could not be met in 3% of closed support periods in which accommodation was requested. Note that these clients with unmet requests for SAAP accommodation were receiving other support services that generally required at least 1 hour of an agency worker's time on a given day, or that were provided on an ongoing basis over a period of time. Requests for SAAP or CAP accommodation could not be met in 1% of cases for accompanying children.

Requesting group

When examining the provision of accommodation according to requesting group, it becomes apparent that although individual(s) without children had a higher number of closed support periods with unmet need for SAAP/CAP accommodation than family groups—couples with children, couples without children and individual(s) with children—family groups had higher proportions of unmet need for SAAP or CAP accommodation (derived from Table 1). In particular, while accounting for the smallest proportions of closed support periods, couples with children had requests for SAAP or CAP accommodation remaining unmet in 13% of closed their support periods, whereas couples without children had requests unmet in 8% (Figure 1). This compares with 5% for individual(s) with children and 2% for individual(s) without children.

There were more closed support periods in which SAAP or CAP accommodation was requested for children who accompanied a single person or persons who were not a couple (individual(s) with children), but children who accompanied a couple had a higher proportion of closed support periods in which a request for SAAP or CAP accommodation could be neither provided nor referred on. Children accompanying a couple had an unmet need for accommodation in 3% of their closed support periods, compared with 1% for children who accompanied an individual(s).

Figure 1: Unmet requests for SAAP or CAP accommodation by requesting group, Australia, 2003–04 (per cent closed support periods)



Source: Table 1.

People turned away without receiving SAAP accommodation

As already mentioned, some clients and accompanying children have unmet requests for accommodation during their support. These requests for accommodation, in addition to those made by people who do not receive any accommodation from SAAP at all, are counted during the 2-week Demand for Accommodation Collection¹. In 2003–04, data on unmet requests for accommodation was collected between 26 November and 2 December 2003 and between 5 and 11 May 2004. These request were divided into valid and invalid requests and assigned to an estimated number of individuals (potential clients or accompanying children—see Box 1 and AIHW 2006: Appendix 2). They were also categorised on the basis of when the accommodation was required. Immediate accommodation—that is accommodation required within 24 hours—is considered to be of particular importance in the context of homelessness.

This section presents two measures of unmet demand: (1) the daily request for accommodation turn-away rate and (2) the unmet to total demand for accommodation ratio (see Box 1). These are reported separately for potential clients who were not accommodated by the end of the day and for the children who accompanied them, by requesting group. An indication of the rate and ratio when adults, unaccompanied children and accompanying children are combined is also presented. However, the daily request for accommodation turn-away rate for accompanying children, the unmet to total demand for accommodation ratio for accompanying children, and the combined adult and accompanying children measures are indicative only because accommodation dates are not collected for accompanying children. For the purposes of calculating the measures, it is assumed that accompanying children are accommodated at the same time and for the same duration as their parent(s) or guardian(s). Finally, the demographic characteristics of people with a valid unmet request for immediate accommodation are presented.

The pattern of valid unmet requests for immediate SAAP accommodation recorded during the Demand for Accommodation collection period was similar to that for unmet need for accommodation for SAAP clients reported in the Client Collection. That is, people who presented to a SAAP agency on their own or with unrelated people without accompanying children were much more likely to be accommodated than people who presented in family groups. There are several possible explanations for this, including:

- it is easier to accommodate a single person than a family group (fewer beds or rooms are often required)
- different client groups have differing requirements for and patterns of use of accommodation
- insufficient accommodation is available that is suitable for families
- different agencies have different operational practices—more resources may be spent providing intensive support at some agencies, meaning there are fewer beds available
- the historical view of the homeless does not include families.

¹ Note that people who do not receive SAAP accommodation may still receive other non-accommodation support services.

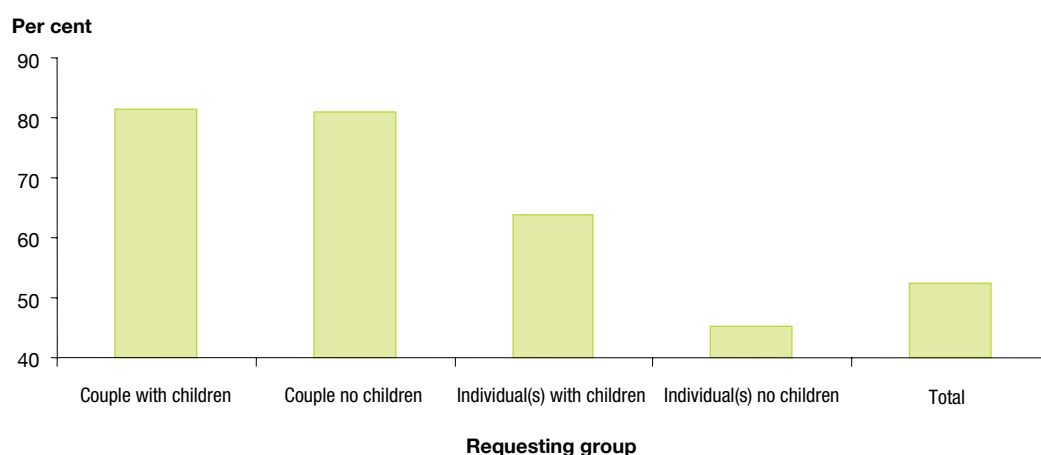
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Turn-away rate for adults and unaccompanied children

Nationally, on an average day during the Demand for Accommodation Collection period, more people who made a valid request for immediate accommodation were turned away than were newly accommodated by SAAP agencies. Around 48% of potential clients who made a request for immediate accommodation received accommodation from a SAAP agency either on their first attempt or in a subsequent request for accommodation, leaving 52% who could not be accommodated by the end of the day (Table 3). That is, 205 potential clients who requested immediate SAAP accommodation on an average day out of the 392 adults and unaccompanied children who made a request for immediate SAAP accommodation on that day were turned away.

The turn-away rate for the different groups who requested immediate accommodation suggests that, overall, SAAP is more able to provide accommodation for individual(s) who presented without children; these people had the lowest daily turn-away rate nationally (45% or 120 out of 266 people) (Figure 2). This is in spite of the fact that individual(s) without children made up the largest proportion of people seeking immediate SAAP accommodation and the largest proportion of people already accommodated in SAAP on an average day (68% and 64% respectively) (derived from Table 3). This group was also the only group more likely to be accommodated than not on an average day, with 55% of adults and unaccompanied children who made requests being accommodated by the end of the day. All other requesting groups, although smaller in number, were more likely to not find accommodation in SAAP, with 81% of couples with children (or 13 people out of the 16 people seeking immediate SAAP accommodation in this group), 81% of couples without children (or 10 out of 12 people) and 64% of individual(s) with children (or 62 out of 97 people) being turned away each day. In other words, only around 1 in 5 people who presented as a couple with children or as a couple without children, and slightly less than 1 in 3 people who presented as an individual(s) with children were able to find accommodation on an average day compared with around 1 in 2 people who presented as an individual(s) without children.

Figure 2: Daily request for accommodation turn-away rate for adults or unaccompanied children who requested immediate SAAP accommodation, by requesting group, Australia, 26 November–2 December 2003 and 5–11 May 2004 (per cent daily average)



Source: Table3.

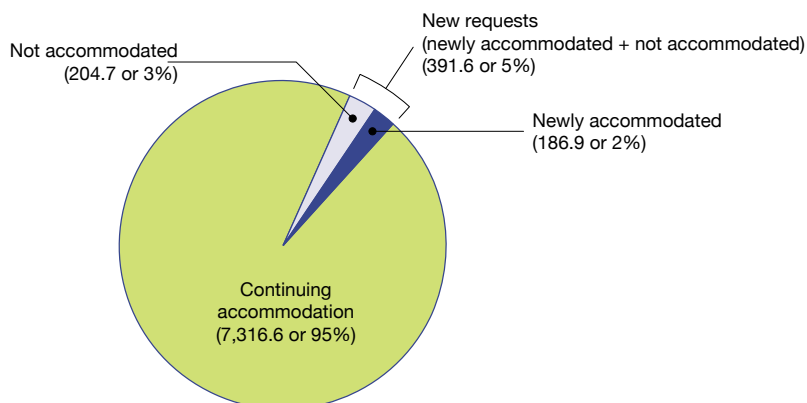
Ratio of unmet demand to total demand for accommodation for adults and unaccompanied children

The daily request for accommodation turn-away rate measures how many people seeking SAAP accommodation were turned away on an average day during the Demand for Accommodation Collection period, and provides an indication of a person's likelihood of obtaining SAAP accommodation. However, SAAP accommodates large numbers of clients and accompanying children on any given day, including clients and accompanying children who were continuing their accommodation from a previous day. For this reason, simply examining the turn-away rate without acknowledging the number of people already in SAAP accommodation provides an incomplete picture of the performance of SAAP. It is therefore important to consider the level of unmet demand for SAAP accommodation in relation to the number of people already accommodated in SAAP (see Figure 3).

It is interesting to note that people requesting accommodation on a daily basis made up only 5% (392) of the total average daily expressed demand for accommodation (7,708) (Figure 3). These numbers indicate that on a national basis SAAP agencies are operating to capacity, with the demand for SAAP accommodation unable to be completely met. Measuring the additional capacity required to accommodate the expressed demand for SAAP accommodation is discussed in the final section of this bulletin.

As can be seen, SAAP accommodates large numbers of people on a daily basis. However, it is unable to accommodate all the people who request immediate accommodation. When the number of people who could not be accommodated is considered in relation to the total expressed demand for immediate SAAP accommodation (people who requested SAAP accommodation that day and people who were continuing their accommodation from a previous day), 3 in every 100 adults or unaccompanied children could not be accommodated on an average daily basis (Figure 4). This is termed the unmet demand to total demand for accommodation ratio (see Box 1). This measure does not, however, provide a measure of the additional capacity required in SAAP to meet the total expressed demand for SAAP accommodation (see the section 'How many more beds are needed?').

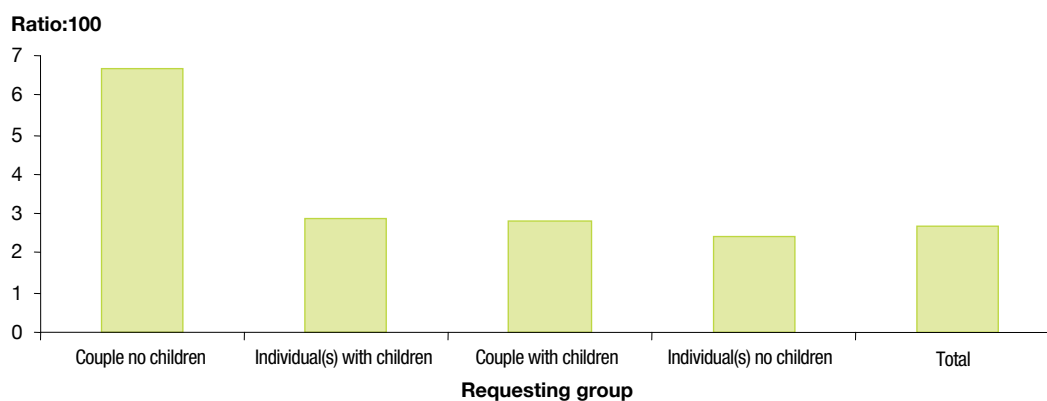
Figure 3: Expressed demand for immediate SAAP accommodation for adults and unaccompanied children, Australia, 2003–04 (daily average number and per cent of total expressed demand for accommodation)



Source: Derived from Table 3.

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Figure 4: Unmet demand to total demand for accommodation ratio for adults or unaccompanied children who requested immediate SAAP accommodation, by requesting group, Australia, 26 November–2 December 2003 and 5–11 May 2004 (daily average)



Source: Table 3.

As with the daily request turn-away rate, individual(s) who presented without children also had the lowest unmet demand to total demand for accommodation ratio (2 in every 100 adults or unaccompanied children who requested or were continuing their accommodation could not be accommodated) (Figure 4). However, there were some key differences to the daily request turn-away rates. Although family groups still reported higher ratios than individual(s) without children, couples without children had the highest unmet demand to total demand for accommodation ratio (7 in 100), followed by individual(s) with children and couples with children (3 in 100 each). This suggests that there is less capacity available in SAAP to accommodate new clients who present in a family group, particularly couples.

The higher ratios for couples and people with children are influenced by the relatively high proportion of these groups who were continuing their accommodation from a previous day (between 98% and 99% of the average total daily accommodation provided for these groups was for people continuing their accommodation) (derived from Table 3). Family groups also tended to stay longer once they obtained SAAP accommodation (see the section 'Patterns of accommodation use'). Therefore, the turn over of beds was slightly less for family groups than for individual(s) without children.

Turn-away rate for accompanying children

For accompanying children, the national daily turn-away rate from SAAP accommodation was 63%, indicating that accompanying children were more often turned away than accommodated when their parent(s) or guardian(s) made a valid request for immediate accommodation (Table 4). Their rate indicates that their chance of receiving accommodation was around 1 in every 3 accompanying children. By requesting group, children who accompanied a couple were more likely to be turned away on an average day after their parent(s) or guardian(s) requested immediate accommodation than children who accompanied an individual(s)—74% of children (or around 3 in every 4) who accompanied this requesting group were turned away, compared with 62% (or around 2 in every 3) of accompanying children who presented with an individual(s).

Ratio of unmet demand to total demand for accommodation for accompanying children

The unmet demand to total demand for accommodation ratio for accompanying children was 3 in 100. Conversely to the daily request turn-away rate, relatively more accommodation was required for children who did not accompany a couple than for children accompanying couples, with ratios of 3 in 100 and 2 in 100, respectively.

Total people turned away

Nationally, when adults, unaccompanied children and accompanying children are combined and used to calculate the daily turn-away rate, the proportion turned away was 56% of daily requests (derived from Tables 3 and 4). This means that the likelihood of finding accommodation is a little worse than 1 in every 2 people on an average day. By requesting group, couples with no children were the group that was most likely to be turned away (81% or around 4 in every 5 people).

Ratio of unmet demand to total demand for accommodation for all people

Nationally, when adults, unaccompanied children and accompanying children were combined and used to calculate an aggregate ratio of unmet demand to total demand for accommodation, the ratio remained much the same at 3 in 100 (derived from Tables 3 and 4). There was also little variation according to requesting group with the rates almost remaining steady. Again, couples with no children was the group that had the highest ratio of 7 in 100.

Demographic characteristics of people who made a valid unmet request for accommodation

Although the accommodation turn-away rate and ratio cannot at present be analysed by demographic characteristics such as age, gender, country of birth and Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) status, an indication of the characteristics of people who were turned away can be gained from the analysis of potential clients and the children that accompany them (see Box 1 for definitions). The number of potential clients does not correspond directly to the number of people turned away because some potential clients received accommodation later in the day. Furthermore, caution should be exercised when interpreting the number of potential clients by ATSI status and country of birth because of the high proportions of missing and unknown data in these categories (37% and 30% respectively) (derived from Table 10).

In 2003–04, people who made a valid unmet request for immediate SAAP accommodation were more likely to be female (55% of potential clients, 53% of accompanying children, and 54% of all people—derived from Tables 6, 7 and 8), born in Australia (93% of males, 93% of females and 93% of all people), and not of an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background (80% of males, 72% of females and 76% of all people) (derived from Tables 9 and 10 excluding data with unknown ATSI status or country of birth).

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When examining the age profile of people who made a valid unmet request for immediate SAAP accommodation, adults and unaccompanied children were more likely to be aged 20–44 years (53% of male potential clients, 52% of female potential clients and 53% of all potential clients) (Tables 6, 7 and 8). The majority of children who accompanied a potential client(s) were aged under 12 years (72% of male accompanying children, 69% of female accompanying children and 70% of all accompanying children).

Over a third of the average number of people who were turned away at some time during the day in the Demand for Accommodation Collection period were accompanying children (37% of males, 35% of females and 36% of all people) (derived from Tables 6, 7 and 8). For this reason, when potential clients and accompanying children are considered together, over half of the people who had a valid unmet request for accommodation were under 20 years of age (55% of males, 55% of females and 55% of all people) (Tables 6, 7 and 8).

By requesting group

The majority of adults and unaccompanied children who made a valid unmet request for accommodation presented as an individual(s) without children, but when potential clients and accompanying children are considered together, half of the people who made a valid unmet request for accommodation presented as an individual(s) with children (a daily average of 177 out of 351 people or 50%) (Table 8). This was influenced by the relatively high number of female potential clients in this group.

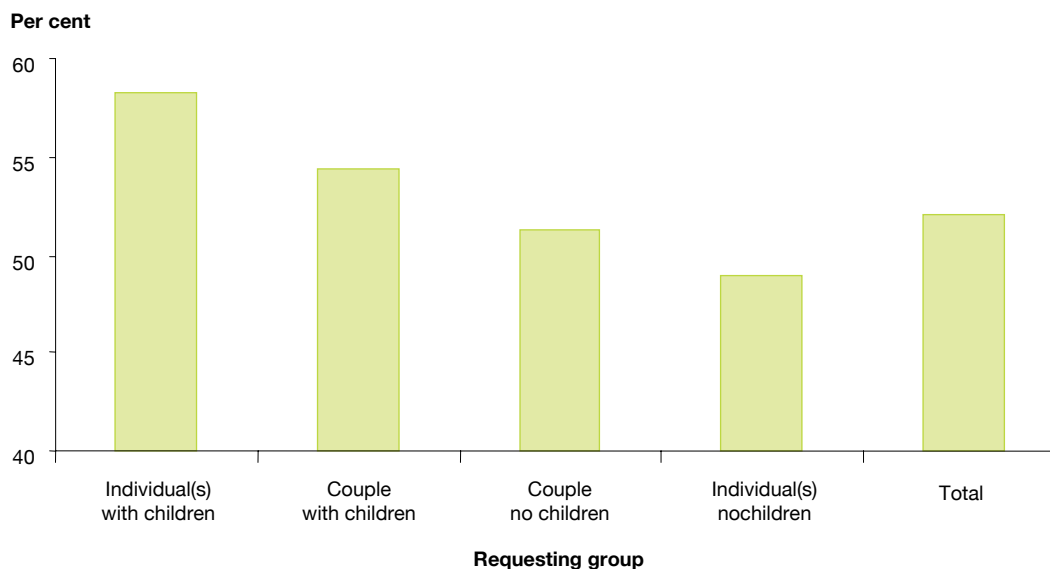
In general, there were only small differences in the demographics according to requesting group. However, high proportions of both males and females who presented as an individual(s) with children were of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin (both around 24%). Couples who presented with children also had a relatively high proportion of people of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin, particularly for males (18% of males and 15% of females). This compares with between 8% and 9% for males and between 13% and 16% for females in the other two requesting groups.

Referrals for accommodation

In order to inform the discussion regarding the ability of SAAP to deal with the demand for SAAP accommodation, it is necessary to examine whether attempts were made to secure accommodation at another source when people were turned away. As it is not possible to determine whether a referral for accommodation was made for all or part of a requesting group in the Demand for Accommodation Collection, the discussion of referrals is based on the number of valid unmet requests for immediate SAAP accommodation (see Box 1) rather than the number of people who made those requests.

When considered as a proportion of the valid unmet requests for immediate accommodation made on an average day by each group, referrals for accommodation were more often made for family groups (Figure 5). Individual(s) with children had a referral for accommodation arranged in 58% of their valid unmet requests for immediate accommodation and couples with children had a referral for accommodation arranged in 54% of their valid unmet requests for immediate accommodation. This was followed by couples without children (51%) and individual(s) without children (49%).

Figure 5: Referrals for accommodation made in valid unmet requests for immediate SAAP accommodation, by requesting group, Australia, 26 November–2 December 2003 and 5–11 May 2004 (daily average per cent)



Source: Table 11.

Although a higher proportion of referrals were made for family groups than for individuals to secure alternative accommodation when it could not be provided by SAAP, the proportions are still not high and, as mentioned, there is no guarantee that a referral will result in accommodation being provided. Further, data on the reasons that groups were turned away sometime during an average day show that the majority of valid unmet requests for accommodation occurred because there was insufficient accommodation available at the agency (63%) (AIHW 2006: Table 6.1). This was particularly true for family groups, with couples who presented with children having their request for accommodation not met because there was insufficient accommodation available in 72% of cases, couples who presented without children in 69% and people who presented with children in 68%. These proportions were higher than those reported for individual(s) who presented without children (58%).

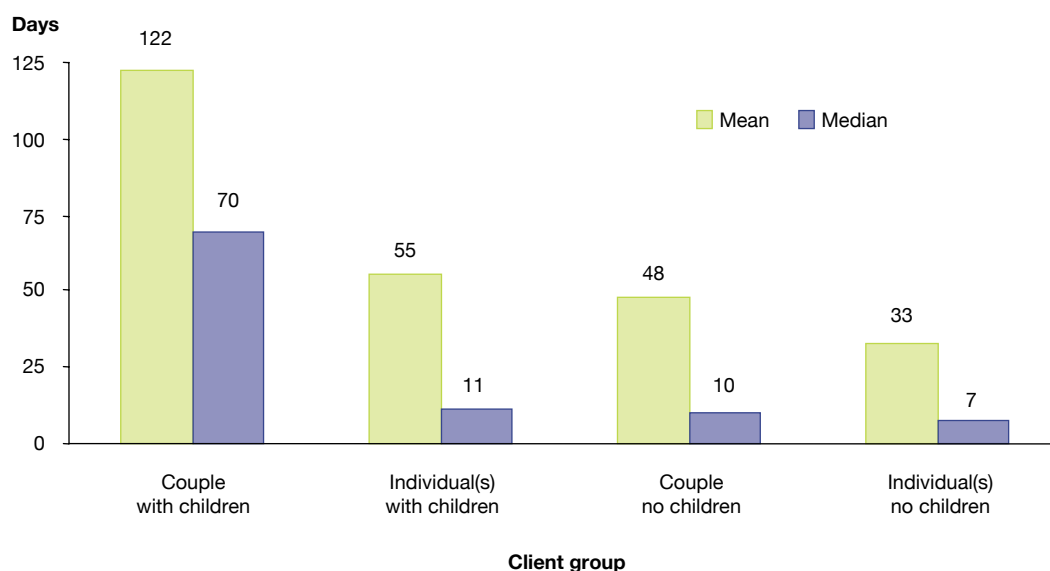
Patterns of accommodation use

The data presented so far on the demand for immediate SAAP accommodation indicate that there is a significant lack of accommodation available for family groups, particularly couples without children. One reason that it may be more difficult for family groups to find accommodation in SAAP is that once they are accommodated, these groups tend to stay longer than individual(s) who present without children. Whether this is because they require more intensive support that can be provided only while they are in SAAP accommodation or because it is difficult to find alternative accommodation for family groups cannot be definitively answered from the data.

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Couples with children had the longest average length of accommodation (122 days), followed by individual(s) with children (55 days), and couples without children (48 days). Individual(s) who presented without children had the lowest average length of stay (33 days) (Figure 6). This combined with the high unmet demand to total demand for accommodation ratio presented earlier, particularly for couples without children, suggests that much of the accommodation that is available for family groups is already taken up each day.

Figure 6: SAAP closed support periods: mean and median length of accommodation by client group, Australia, 2003–04 (number of days)



Notes

1. Cases excluded due to missing data: 7,206.
2. Excludes accommodation starting and ending on the same day.
3. Figures have been weighted to adjust for agency non-participation.

Source: SAAP Client Collection.

What types of agencies are people turned away from?

By looking at the turn-away rate according to the primary target group of the agency that people are approaching and the groups of people who were unable to be accommodated after requesting accommodation from these agencies, an indication of the need for more accommodation in particular target groups can be estimated. This does not, however, equate to the additional capacity required (see the section 'How many more beds are needed?').


Nationally, all agencies had to turn people away from accommodation, but agencies that were primarily targeted at families had the highest turn-away rate according to primary target group (81%) (Table 5). Although this type of agency did not turn away the greatest number of people compared with other target groups, they were unable to accommodate a large proportion of family groups who requested immediate accommodation.

When examining the primary target group of the agencies approached by adults and unaccompanied children who were not accommodated according to requesting group, it can be seen that the majority of couples with children who were not accommodated approached agencies primarily targeted at families (48%) (Table 12). Couples with children had one of the highest daily turn-away rates of the requesting groups (81%) (Table 3). In addition, 27% of individual(s) with children who were not accommodated approached family agencies (Table 12). The data suggest that there is a need to provide more accommodation at family targeted agencies. However, these are national figures and where the accommodation is needed most requires data at a finer level to determine the geographical areas of greatest need. Note also that estimating the additional capacity required is problematic at present (see the section ‘How many more beds are needed?’).

Cross-target agencies also reported a high turn-away rate. These are agencies that generally accept a wide range of clients. This type of agency turned people away in 65% of daily requests (Table 5). Again it was family groups, particularly couples, who had the most difficulty finding accommodation at this type of agency—65% of couples without children and 34% of couples with children who were not accommodated by the end of the day approached cross-target agencies (Table 12). Interestingly, 73% of all valid requests for immediate accommodation at cross-target agencies were made by individual(s) without children who were the group that had the lowest daily turn-away rate according to the primary target group of the agency (AIHW unpublished data and Table 3). This suggests that cross-target agencies are more able to cater for individuals on their own than for family groups.

Agencies that primarily targeted women escaping domestic violence had the second lowest average daily turn-away rate (44%) and were one of the only two agency types that were more likely to be able accommodate people than not on an average day (Table 5). A large proportion of the people who approached this type of agency during the Demand for Accommodation Collection period were individual(s) with children (63% of all valid requests for immediate accommodation, AIHW unpublished data). This could explain the slightly lower rate of individual(s) with children who were turned away compared with the other family groups (Table 3). However, these agencies were still not able to accommodate all of the individual(s) with children who requested immediate accommodation (35% of this group who were not accommodated approached agencies targeted at women and children escaping domestic violence) (Table 12).

Agencies that primarily targeted single men accommodated a large number of clients on an average day during the Demand for Accommodation Collection period (1,533) (Table 13). However, they also reported the lowest turn-away rate (27% or a little less than 1 in every 4) (Table 5). Of all the valid requests for immediate accommodation at this type of agency, 98% were made by individual(s) without children (AIHW unpublished data) which explains the low turn-away rate for this requesting group. In addition, low proportions of each requesting group who were not accommodated approached this type of agency (18% of individual(s) with no children, 1% of individual(s) with children, 2% of couples with no children, and 3% of couples with children who were not accommodated by the end of the day) (Table 12). This suggests that the SAAP service system nationally is better able to meet requests



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for accommodation for individuals than for family groups. Some possible reasons for this were presented earlier (see the section 'People turned away without receiving SAAP accommodation'). Furthermore, the dynamics in the relationship between the supply and demand for SAAP accommodation are not well understood (e.g. hidden need) and require further investigation.

How many more beds are needed?

There are varying ideas as to what capacity is and how to measure it in relation to SAAP accommodation (please refer to AIHW 2006 for more detail). Using the current Demand for Accommodation Collection, it is difficult to estimate how many more beds, facilities, staff or funds are required to match the current level of demand for SAAP accommodation. Although there is a relationship between the number of agencies available in each primary target group and the number of people who can be accommodated by agencies in each group, as the size and structure of agencies vary, comparing the proportions of each agency target group does not necessarily indicate the capacity of agencies to provide accommodation. For example, although agencies primarily targeted at single men accommodated the second largest number of clients on an average night during the Demand for Accommodation Collection period (1,533), they had the second lowest number of agencies that were required to participate in the Client Collection (95) (Table 13 and AIHW 2006: Table A2.1). For this reason, the number of available SAAP beds in each primary target group would be a better indication, but this information is difficult to collect and the NDC does not currently have reliable information on bed capacity, nor on whether agencies are set up to provide accommodation.

Another approach way to estimate capacity would be to consider how long a given group generally stays in SAAP accommodation once they are accommodated (as accommodation patterns do vary) in conjunction with how many people are accommodated in SAAP each day and how many are turned away. However, the NDC currently does not differentiate how many of the requests on a given day are new requests. It is possible that, for some groups, predominantly the same people are requesting accommodation each day. If this is the case, then the amount of extra accommodation required would be less than if everybody turning up each day was a new potential client. More work would be required on a survey questionnaire to ascertain whether a capacity measure would be possible to develop.