

SAAP NDCA REPORT SERIES 9

# **Homeless people in SAAP**

**SAAP National Data Collection  
Annual Report  
2003–04**

**Australia**

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare  
Canberra

AIHW cat. no. HOU 126

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# Preface

This is the eighth annual report on the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) National Data Collection. The first report, containing 1996–97 data, was published in December 1997. The reports provide information on people who are homeless and people who are at risk of being homeless.

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

This partnership has been built on shared goals and mutual trust. The key has been agencies' willingness to collect and provide data to the National Data Collection Agency, knowing that any personal information provided by clients is protected by the extremely strict confidentiality provisions of the *Australian Institute of Health and Welfare Act 1987*.

The fact that 93% of agencies in Australia provided data in 2003–04 is testimony to their collective commitment to, and confidence in, the collection. A 94% participation rate was recorded in 2002–03. The proportion of SAAP clients who consented to the provision of their personal data to the National Data Collection Agency increased from 88% in 2002–03 to 90% in 2003–04.

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

Under the Coordination and Development Committee's direction, a SAAP National Research Program has been established to undertake and fund studies on homeless people, often using data from the National Data Collection. Over time, the availability of time-series SAAP data will greatly increase the usefulness of the data. The publication of this eighth annual report and the release of 2003–04 data are one step towards this goal.

Richard Madden

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Development Committee

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

# Abbreviations and symbols

## Abbreviations

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
CAP	Crisis Accommodation Program
DV	Domestic violence
NDC	National Data Collection
NDCA	National Data Collection Agency
SAAP	Supported Accommodation Assistance Program

## Symbols in tables

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

# Glossary

<b>Accompanying child</b>	A person aged under 18 years who accompanies a <i>client</i> to a SAAP <i>agency</i> during a <i>support period</i> or who requires and/or receives assistance from a SAAP <i>agency</i> as a result of their parent or guardian being a client of the same <i>agency</i> . An accompanying child may or may not require or receive assistance.
<b>Accompanying child support period</b>	<p>An <i>accompanying child support period</i> refers to each <i>support period</i> in which the child either accompanies their parent or guardian to a SAAP <i>agency</i> or receives assistance as a result of their parent or guardian's <i>support period</i>.</p> <p>Within an <i>accompanying child support period</i> the child may receive one-off assistance and/or support over a period of time. Since the child may not be supported for the entire duration of their parent's or guardian's <i>support period</i>, it is not possible to assess the length of support for an <i>accompanying child</i>.</p>
<b>Agency</b>	An organisation or establishment that receives a specified amount of SAAP funds to provide services.
<b>Alpha code</b>	A predetermined combination of letters from a <i>client's</i> name, together with a letter designating the <i>client's</i> gender. A 'valid <i>alpha code</i> ' is a legitimate <i>alpha code</i> (that is, one containing only letters from the alphabet and ending in either M or F) joined to the <i>client's</i> reported year of birth and encrypted to create a unique <i>client</i> indicator, or statistical linkage key.
<b>Case</b>	A <i>support period</i> provided to a SAAP <i>client</i> . The terms <i>case</i> and <i>support period</i> are used interchangeably in this report.
<b>Client</b>	<p>A person aged 18 years or older, or a person of any age not accompanied by a parent or guardian, who:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• receives <i>support</i> or assistance from a SAAP <i>agency</i> which entails generally 1 hour or more of a worker's time, either with that <i>client</i> directly or on behalf of that <i>client</i>, on a given day; or</li><li>• is accommodated by a SAAP <i>agency</i>; or</li><li>• enters into an <i>ongoing support relationship</i> with a SAAP <i>agency</i>.</li></ul>
<b>Closed accompanying child support period</b>	An <i>accompanying child support period</i> associated with a <i>closed support period</i> .
<b>Closed support period</b>	A <i>support period</i> that had finished on or before the end of the reporting period – 30 June.
<b>English proficiency group 1 countries</b>	Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, South Africa, the United Kingdom and the United States of America.
<b>English proficiency group 2–4 countries</b>	Countries, excluding Australia, that are not included in <i>English proficiency group 1</i> .

<b>Homeless person</b>	<p>A person who does not have access to safe, secure and adequate housing. A person is considered not to have access to safe, secure and adequate housing if the only housing to which they have access:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• damages, or is likely to damage, their health; or</li> <li>• threatens their safety; or</li> <li>• marginalises them through failing to provide access to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- adequate personal amenities, or</li> <li>- the economic and social supports that a home normally affords; or</li> </ul> </li> <li>• places them in circumstances which threaten or adversely affect the adequacy, safety, security and affordability of that housing; or</li> <li>• has no security of tenure – that is, they have no legal right to continued occupation of their home.</li> </ul> <p>A person is also considered homeless if he or she is living in accommodation provided by a SAAP <i>agency</i> or some other form of emergency accommodation.</p>
<b>Occasion of support</b>	<p>See <i>support period</i>.</p>
<b>Ongoing support relationship</b>	<p>A relationship between a SAAP <i>agency</i> and a person whereby some assistance has been provided to that person and it is agreed that future contact will occur between the person and the <i>agency</i> for the purpose of providing additional assistance.</p> <p>An invitation to return to the <i>agency</i> if the need arises does not constitute an <i>ongoing support relationship</i>.</p> <p>This definition is used to help establish whether a person is considered a <i>client</i> for the purposes of the National Data Collection.</p>
<b>Record</b>	<p>A unit of analysis. In any particular situation, it can refer to a <i>client</i>, an <i>occasion of support</i>, and so on.</p>
<b>Recurrent allocations</b>	<p>Amounts of money specifically allocated during the reporting period by a state or territory department either:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to SAAP <i>agencies</i> to fund salaries and associated on-costs, and ongoing operating costs; or</li> <li>• for use by each state or territory for such purposes as training, research, evaluation, administration, and asset replacement or purchase.</li> </ul>
<b>Referral</b>	<p>For the purposes of the National Data Collection, a referral involves a formal process – not simply the provision of information. A (formal) <i>referral</i> occurs when a SAAP <i>agency</i> contacts another organisation and that organisation accepts the person concerned for an appointment or interview. A <i>referral</i> has not been provided if the person is not accepted for an appointment or interview.</p>

<b>Support</b>	Assistance, other than <i>supported accommodation</i> , provided to a client as part of an <i>ongoing support relationship</i> between a SAAP agency and the <i>client</i> . For the purposes of the National Data Collection, <i>support</i> also includes contact with, or work on behalf of, a <i>client</i> for generally more than 1 hour on a given day. <i>Support</i> may be provided to the <i>client</i> individually or in group sessions.
<b>Support period</b>	<p>A <i>support period</i> commences when a <i>client</i> begins to receive <i>support</i> and/or <i>supported accommodation</i> from a SAAP agency. The <i>support period</i> is considered to finish when:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the <i>client</i> ends the relationship with the <i>agency</i>; or</li> <li>• the <i>agency</i> ends the relationship with the <i>client</i>.</li> </ul> <p>If it is not clear whether the <i>agency</i> or the <i>client</i> has ended the relationship, the <i>support period</i> is assumed to have ended if no assistance has been provided to the <i>client</i> for a period of 1 month. In such a case, the date the <i>support period</i> ended is 1 month after the last contact with the <i>client</i>.</p>
<b>Supported accommodation</b>	Accommodation paid for or provided directly by a SAAP agency. The accommodation may be provided at the <i>agency</i> or may be purchased using SAAP funds – at a motel, for example.
<b>Unmet need</b>	An unmet need occurs when a <i>client</i> expresses a need for a particular support service, or either directly or indirectly acknowledges a need for a particular support service during their <i>support period</i> , and that service is not provided or referred.
<b>Young client (or young person)</b>	A <i>client</i> aged under 25 years at the commencement of <i>support</i> .

# Summary

This report provides an overview of assistance given to clients and their children by the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP). The SAAP National Data Collection Agency at the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) prepared the report, using data from the Client Collection and the Administrative Data Collection.

The AIHW has developed a scheme that adjusts for incomplete coverage in the Client Collection. It adjusts estimates to allow for agency non-participation, for clients who do not consent to provide complete information for support periods, for clients who give valid consent for some support periods but not for others, and for clients who do not give consent in any of their periods of support. It should be noted, however, that, although estimates are adjusted for agency non-participation and client non-consent, no allowance has been made for agencies that provide forms for some but not all of their support periods. The Institute has also developed a scheme that adjusts for incomplete coverage of accompanying children.

This national report is accompanied by state and territory supplements. State and territory data appear in this national report; however, more detailed tables are included in the supplements. A further report, *Demand for SAAP Assistance by Homeless People 2002–03* (AIHW 2004b) that included coverage of the unmet needs of clients, unmet demand for accommodation and casual client information was published in October 2004.

## Funding

Funding for the 1,300 SAAP agencies operating across Australia during 2003–04 was provided jointly by the Australian Government, and the state and territory governments. For the 2003–04 financial year, the total recurrent allocation under SAAP was \$321.4m (Table 2.1). Included in this amount are recurrent allocations of \$17.6 m provided by four jurisdictions that were in addition to the funding agreements between the Australian Government and each state and territory government. Recurrent funding to agencies was \$308.7m; in real terms, this was 26% more than the funding provided in 1996–97 (Table 9.1).

## Level of support

It is estimated that 1 in every 130 Australians received substantial SAAP support at some time during 2003–04. More specifically, SAAP agencies supported an estimated 152,900 people during 2003–04. Of these, 100,200 were adults or unaccompanied children (clients) and 52,700 were accompanying children (Tables 3.1 and 3.2).

Clients were provided with 187,200 occasions of support during 2003–04 (Table 3.1). The average number of support periods per client was 1.9. On average there were between 20,600 and 22,500 support periods active on any day during 2003–04 (Table 3.3).

There were 73,200 accompanying child support periods in 2003–04, with accompanying children averaging 1.3 support periods each. On average, there were approximately 12,600 accompanying child support periods active each day during 2003–04.

## Age, gender, and cultural and linguistic diversity

There were more female clients (58%) than male clients (42%). The average age of female clients was 31 years and the average for male clients was 34 years (Table 4.1). Most SAAP

clients (74%) were born in Australia (Table 4.5). However, Indigenous clients were over-represented as SAAP clients relative to their population size: 2% of Australians aged 10 years or over were estimated to be Indigenous Australians in June 2003, but Indigenous Australians made up 17% of SAAP clients in 2003–04 (Table 4.7).

Repeat use of SAAP services was less likely among female clients than male clients: males averaged 2.1 support periods each whereas females averaged 1.7 (Table 4.3). There were also some differences in repeat usage within age groups: males aged 45–64 years had the highest average number of support periods (2.3), and males and females aged under 15 years and females aged over 45 years had the lowest average of 1.6 support periods per client. On average, Australian-born non-Indigenous clients had more support periods each (1.9) than other clients (Table 4.7).

Overall, for every 10,000 people aged 10 and over, there were 58 SAAP clients (Table 4.3). The highest prevalence of SAAP use was among people aged 18–19 years, for whom there were 139 SAAP clients for every 10,000 in the general population. The next highest rates of use were by 15–17 year-olds and 20–24 year-olds, for whom there were 114 and 110 SAAP clients, respectively, for every 10,000 people in these age groups.

The proportion of people accessing SAAP services also varied by gender. Females were more likely to use SAAP services than males: there were 67 female clients for every 10,000 females aged 10 and over in the general population and 48 male clients per 10,000 males. The highest rate of use was by 18–19-year-old females among whom there were 174 clients per 10,000 females; in this age group there were 107 male clients per 10,000 males.

Of accompanying children, 88% were 12 years of age or under and 9% were aged 13–15 years (Table 4.2). The remaining 3% of children were aged 16–17. Accompanying children were divided evenly between girls and boys, and 95% were born in Australia (Table 4.6).

Most of the 52,500 accompanying children had only 1 accompanying child support period during 2003–04 (84%), but 11% had 2 periods of support. There was an average of 1.3 accompanying child support periods per accompanying child (Table 4.4). For every 10,000 people aged 0–17 years in the general population, 106 children accompanied their parent(s) or guardian(s) to a SAAP agency. The highest rate of use was for 0–4-year-olds, with 186 children per 10,000 children in this age group accompanying a SAAP client, followed by 5–12-year-olds (104 per 10,000).

## **Client groups and reasons for seeking assistance**

Nationally, males aged 25 years and over presenting alone at SAAP agencies accounted for the largest proportion of all support periods (31%), followed by 22% for female clients with children (Table 5.1). Overall, 6% of support periods were for couples with or without children, and males with children accounted for just 2% of all support periods.

The most common main reasons clients gave for seeking assistance were domestic violence (in 20% of support periods), financial difficulty (14%), usual accommodation was unavailable (11%), eviction or the ending of previous accommodation (10%), and relationship or family breakdown (9%) (Figure 5.2). Reasons varied considerably according to the composition of the assisted client group: for example, unaccompanied males aged 25 years and over most commonly cited financial difficulty (21%) or that their usual accommodation was unavailable (12%) as their main reason for seeking assistance. For unaccompanied females aged 25 years and over, the most common main reason was domestic violence (39%).

## **Length of support and accommodation**

Of the 187,200 support periods in 2003–04, around 168,300 finished before 30 June 2004 (Chapter 6). Of these closed support periods, 40% lasted for 1 day or less, and a further 16% lasted from 2 to 7 days (Table 6.1). A significant proportion (16%) of closed support periods lasted from 1 to 3 months. This pattern was not consistent across the states and territories. For example, 52% of closed support periods in Victoria lasted 1 day or less and only 12% were for more than 3 months. In contrast, in the Australian Capital Territory only 10% of closed support periods were for 1 day or less, and 25% lasted longer than 3 months. Tasmania had the longest median length of support, at 31 days, and Victoria the shortest, at 1 day.

Of the 168,300 closed support periods, 76,200 involved a period of accommodation at a SAAP agency (Table 6.3). Around 5,900 of these involved total accommodation of less than 1 day and 70,300 included accommodation of 1 day or longer. In 19% of these latter support periods, the accommodation was for 1 day only and in 30% it was for 2 to 7 days; in 11%, accommodation lasted for over 3 months. Males with children and couples with children were accommodated for longer than other clients (median length of accommodation of 41 days and 70 days, respectively, compared with a median of 8 days for all client groups).

## **Support provided to clients and accompanying children**

The services commonly provided to clients varied markedly according to the person or group being assisted, because of their varying needs. However, the three broad types of support services most often provided during 2003–04 were general support and advocacy (in 74% of all support periods), housing and accommodation services (65%), and basic support services (60%) (Table 6.4). SAAP or CAP (Crisis Accommodation Program) accommodation was the main form of housing or accommodation assistance, being provided in 51% of support periods.

The two broad types of services most commonly provided to accompanying children were accommodation and basic support services (including meals, transport and hygiene-related facilities) – provided in 72% and 69% of closed accompanying child support periods, respectively (Table 6.5).

## **Meeting the needs of clients and accompanying children**

After a client has finished receiving support, it is possible to review which needs were or were not met during that support period. On average, clients requested approximately 6 different types of services during a support period (derived from Table 7.3). SAAP agencies directly provided services for 90% of requests during 2003–04. In addition to this, agencies were able to refer clients to other organisations for a further 6% of requests. Consequently, 879,300 (or 96%) of the 914,700 expressed needs were met at least to some extent.

Direct provision of requested services was particularly high for basic support services such as meals and shower facilities (provided in 98% of cases), and general support and advocacy services (95%). Requests for housing or accommodation were met in 83% of cases. Agencies were least successful in meeting requests for specialist services (provided in 73% of cases): 8% of such needs were neither provided for nor referred to other organisations, and a further 19% were referred.

Overall, there were 35,400 requests for services, or 4%, that were not provided or referred (Table 7.3). Housing and accommodation services accounted for the largest proportion of these unmet needs (31%), followed by specialist services (18%) and general support and

advocacy (17%) (Table 7.5). Unaccompanied males aged 25 or over had the highest number of closed support periods with unmet needs throughout the year, at 4,000 support periods, followed by females with children (3,600).

Agencies reported that accompanying children required some 151,300 distinct service types in 35,700 closed accompanying child support periods. On average, accompanying children received four different types of services in each closed accompanying child support period where services were requested (derived from Table 7.4, Part b).

Just over 94% of the services requested for accompanying children were able to be provided directly (Table 7.4). In addition to this, agencies were able to refer accompanying children for another 4% of the services they required, resulting in 98% of requested services being met to some extent and leaving just under 2% of required services that were neither provided nor referred to other organisations.

Basic support services were the group of services most often provided directly by the agency (in 98% of instances where these types of services were requested), followed by accommodation (96%), and general support and advocacy (95%). Specialist services were the least likely to be provided directly by agencies (81%) but the most likely to be referred (in 16% of requests for this service type).

Accompanying children had some needs remaining unmet after support in 1,500 closed accompanying child support periods – with around 2,600 unmet needs distributed across all service types (Tables 7.4 and 7.6). The most common unmet need involved counselling (27% of unmet needs), with basic support services and school liaison or child care contributing 21% and 18%, respectively, to the total unmet needs (Table 7.6). General support or advocacy and accommodation contributed 14% and 11%, respectively, to children's unmet needs. Specialist services made up the lowest proportion of unmet needs for accompanying children (9% of unmet needs).

## **Circumstances of clients before and after support**

Across all closed support periods, clients' source of income did not vary much from before to after support (Table 8.1). However, among clients who specifically requested assistance with obtaining or maintaining a government pension or benefit, the proportion of closed support periods in which clients had no income and were not awaiting a government payment fell from 17% before support to 6% after support.

Across all closed support periods, the most common accommodation types immediately before support were SAAP or other emergency housing (16%), private rental (16%) and public or community housing (13%) (Table 8.2). After support, the most common types of client accommodation were private rental (18%), public or community housing (17%) and SAAP or other emergency housing (17%).

For clients who specifically requested assistance to obtain or maintain independent housing, there were more marked changes for several accommodation types. In particular, accommodation in public or community housing more than doubled, rising from 8% of closed support periods before support to 20% after (Table 8.2). In addition, accommodation in privately rented dwellings increased from 18% before support to 27% after support.

How long a client was accommodated in SAAP or CAP accommodation had an effect on the type of accommodation clients moved into following support. Clients who were accommodated for longer periods in SAAP or CAP accommodation were more likely to move into independent forms of housing. Following 13 weeks of accommodation, clients more often exited into public or community housing after support than into other types of

accommodation. Conversely, the proportions living in a car, park, tent, street or squat after support generally decreased as the length of SAAP or CAP accommodation provided to the client increased.

The most common living situations for clients before receiving SAAP support were living alone or with their spouse or partner either with or without children (both in around 23% of closed support periods each), and living short-term with relatives or friends (16%) (Table 8.4). After support, it was most common for clients to be living alone (in 28% of closed support periods); or alone with their children (19%).

Overall, there was little difference in the profile of clients' employment status before and after receiving support. However, for clients who specifically requested employment assistance, the proportion of closed support periods in which they were employed in some capacity more than doubled from around 9% before support to 19% after support.

### **Support from 1996–97 to 2003–04**

The number of support periods has fluctuated throughout the 8 years of the National Data Collection. In 1996–97 there were an estimated 156,500 support periods (Table 9.2). This increased to 164,300 in 1997–98, but dropped back over the next 2 years, returning almost to the 1996–97 level in 1999–00 (Figure 9.1). In 2000–01 there was a rise to 170,700 support periods. The number of support periods increased further in 2002–03 to 176,300 and then to 187,200 in 2003–04.

The number of clients provided with SAAP services showed a similar pattern to support periods. The highest number of clients was recorded in 2003–04 and the lowest in 1996–97 (Table 9.2). The prevalence of SAAP use in the community for the past 5 years was highest in 2003–04, with 58 SAAP clients for every 10,000 people aged 10 years and over, and lowest in 1996–97, with 55 SAAP clients per 10,000 people aged 10 years and over (Table 9.4).

There are indications that the way support is being delivered in Australia has changed over the past 5 years. In particular, there was a decrease in the percentage of closed support periods in which support plans have been used. The decrease was steady from 61% in 1999–00 to 59% in 2002–03; however, in 2003–04 there was a sharp decrease to 51%. The variation reported in 2003–04 is mainly due to the participation of a large agency that provided short periods of support that didn't have support plans in place.

