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NATIONAL DATA
COLLECTION

ANNUAL REPORT
1998–99

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Preface

This is the third annual report of the SAAP National Data Collection. The first report, containing 1996–97 data, was published in December 1997. The annual reports provide information on people who are homeless or at risk of being homeless. The data have come from the regular ongoing data collection and the annual collections on unmet demand and casual clients.

The data collection has been assisted by the productive and cooperative partnership between the SAAP National Data Collection Agency (NDCA), managed by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, SAAP agencies and the SAAP Data and Research Advisory Committee, comprising government, community and expert representatives. Valuable support and encouragement to the data collection has been provided by the SAAP Coordination and Development Committee, which is responsible for the national direction of the SAAP program.

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

The fact that all agencies in the Australian Capital Territory have provided data in 1998-99 is testimony to their collective commitment to and confidence in the collection. This is consistent with the 100% achieved in 1997-98. The proportion of SAAP clients who have consented to the provision of their personal data to the National Data Collection Agency has decreased however, from 77% in 1997–98 to 74% in 1998-99.

This large and complex project has both a high level of support and 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 those who are homeless or at risk of being so.

Under the direction of the Coordination and Development Committee, a SAAP National Research Program has been established to undertake and fund studies on homeless people and people at risk of homelessness, 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 third annual report and the release of 1998-99 data are one step towards this goal.

Our thanks go to the many people who contributed to the project's success, particularly the staff of the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare who undertook the data collection and prepared the report.

Australian Institute of Health
and Welfare

SAAP Coordination and Development
Committee

Acknowledgments

This report was written and prepared by staff of the SAAP National Data Collection Agency (NDCA) at the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare: Justin Griffin, Rose Karmel, Gloria Jackson, Colin Farlow, Anne Giovanetti, Melinda Hecker, Meg Carroll, Athena Pawlowski, Stirling Lewis, Qasim Shah and Tony Mackinnon. It substantially follows the format of the third series of SAAP NDCA reports.

The contribution of Geri Bryant-Badham, who joined the team for a number of weeks during the drafting and production of these reports is also acknowledged and appreciated. Toni Stepniak and Fiona Holland provided essential data entry services to the project team and are thanked for their work. Furthermore without the efforts of Neil Angel, Paul Halliday, Kay Grzadka and Natalie Sugden, who ensured that the data was processed, this report would not have been possible.

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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 client and service information, and the Australian Capital Territory Department of Community Services, which provided administrative data.

Glossary

Accompanying child	A person aged under 18 years who receives <i>support</i> or <i>supported accommodation</i> from a SAAP agency and whose parent or guardian is a client of the same SAAP agency.
Agency	An organisation or establishment which receives a specified amount of SAAP funds to provide services.
Alpha code	A predetermined combination of letters from a client's name, together with a letter designating the client's gender. A <i>valid alpha code</i> is a legitimate alpha code joined to the client's reported year of birth and encrypted to create a unique client indicator. This is used to combine data from more than one <i>support period</i> without requiring the actual name of the client to be recorded.
Case	A <i>support period</i> provided to a SAAP <i>client</i> . The terms 'case' and 'support period' are used interchangeably in this report.
Casual client	<p>A person who:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• receives assistance from a SAAP agency for less than one hour on a given day; and• does not establish an <i>ongoing support relationship</i> with the SAAP agency. <p>A casual client may receive <i>one-off assistance</i> from a SAAP agency on one or more occasions.</p>
Client	<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">• receives <i>support</i> or assistance from a SAAP <i>agency</i> which entails generally one 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 <i>ongoing support relationship</i> with a SAAP agency.
DRAC	Data and Research Advisory Committee. DRAC is an advisory committee to the National SAAP Coordination and Development Committee.
DV	Domestic violence.

Homeless person	<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 the person has access:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • damages, or is likely to damage, the person's health; or • threatens the person's safety; or • marginalises the person through failing to provide access to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – adequate personal amenities; or – the economic and social supports that a home normally affords; or • places the person in circumstances which threaten or adversely affect the adequacy, safety, security and affordability of that housing; or • has no security of tenure; that is, the person has no legal right to continued occupation of their home. <p>A person is also considered homeless if he or she is living in accommodation provided by a SAAP agency or some other form of emergency accommodation.</p>
NDCA	National Data Collection Agency. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare performs the role of this agency under contract with the Commonwealth Department of Health and Family Services.
NILF	Not in the labour force.
Occasion of support	See <i>support period</i> .
One-off assistance	Assistance provided to a person who is not a <i>client</i> . It might include the provision of a meal, a shower, transport, money, clothing, telephone advice, information or a <i>referral</i> .
Ongoing support relationship	<p>A relationship between a SAAP <i>agency</i> and a person whereby some assistance has been provided to that person and it is agreed that future contact will occur between the person and the agency for the purpose of providing additional assistance.</p> <p>Future contact can be assumed if:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a definite appointment has been made with the person to work through particular problems or issues; or • an agreement has been reached with the person to work through particular problems or issues even if a specific appointment has not been made. <p>An invitation to return to the agency if the need arises does not constitute an ongoing support relationship. Rather, it should simply be seen as an offer to enter into a new <i>support period</i> or to provide assistance at some future time.</p> <p>This definition is used to establish whether a person is considered a <i>client</i> for the purposes of the National Data Collection.</p>
Record	A unit of analysis. In any particular situation, it may refer to a <i>client</i> , an <i>occasion of support</i> , an instance of <i>unmet demand</i> , a request for <i>one-off assistance</i> , etc.

Referral	For the purposes of the National Data Collection, a formal referral process—not simply the provision of information. A (formal) referral occurs when a SAAP <i>agency</i> contacts another agency 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.
SAAP	Supported Accommodation Assistance Program.
Support	Assistance, other than <i>supported accommodation</i> , provided to a <i>client</i> as part of an <i>ongoing support relationship</i> between a SAAP <i>agency</i> and the client. For the purposes of the National Data Collection, support also includes contact with, or work on behalf of, a client for generally more than one hour on a given day. Support may be provided to the client individually or in group sessions. A person whose request for support or supported accommodation is not met may receive <i>one-off assistance</i> but, by definition, cannot receive support.
Support period	An occasion of support provided to a SAAP <i>client</i> . A support period commences when a client begins to receive support from a SAAP <i>agency</i> . The support period is considered to finish when: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the client ends the relationship with the agency; or • the agency ends the relationship with the client. <p>If it is not clear whether the agency or the client has ended the relationship, the support period is assumed to have ended if no assistance has been provided to the client for a period of one month. In such a case, the date the support period ended is one month after the last contact with the client.</p>
Supported accommodation	Accommodation paid for or provided directly by a SAAP <i>agency</i> . The accommodation may be provided at the agency, or may be purchased using SAAP funds—at a motel, for example.
Symbols	
..	When used in table, means not applicable.
—	When used in table, means nil or rounded to zero (including null cells).
Unmet demand	Unmet demand occurs when a person requests—but does not receive— <i>support</i> or <i>supported accommodation</i> . That is, the person wishes to become a <i>client</i> of a SAAP <i>agency</i> but is not accepted, or the person does not accept the agency’s offer of support or supported accommodation. <p>Reasons for not meeting such requests for assistance may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • insufficient capacity at the agency; • the person not being within the agency’s target group; • the agency not having appropriate facilities to cater for special needs; and • the agency being unable to offer the specific services requested by the person. <p>A person whose request for support or supported accommodation cannot be fulfilled may be given <i>one-off assistance</i>, such as information or a <i>referral</i>. Such a person would be a <i>casual client</i>, but not a <i>client</i>, of the agency.</p>

Young client (or young person) A client aged under 25 years at the commencement of support.

Executive summary

This report presents the findings from the analysis of four components of the 1998-99 SAAP National Data Collection:

- the Client Collection, between 1 July 1998 and 30 June 1999, which consists of information about all clients receiving support through the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP);
- the Administrative Data Collection, which consists of general information about SAAP agencies;
- the Unmet Demand Collection, which measures unmet demand for SAAP services (conducted 12–25 November 1998); and
- the Casual Client Collection, a special issue survey which elicits information about one-off assistance provided to homeless people (conducted 20 May–4 June 1999).

The report was prepared by the SAAP National Data Collection Agency at the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare has developed an adjustment scheme which allows for incomplete coverage in the Client Collection. It adjusts estimates to allow for agency non-participation, for client refusal 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. For the first time, the data provided in this report have been weighted to take account of these factors. The client support period data in this report are therefore not comparable to those published in previous annual reports. Chapter 7 provides comparable client and support period data for the three full years of the National Data Collection. Data from the other Collections have not been adjusted for incomplete coverage.

PART A: Current period analysis

SAAP agencies

Funding for the 32 SAAP agencies operating in the Australian Capital Territory as at 30 June 1999 was provided jointly by the Commonwealth and Australian Capital Territory governments. In the 1998–99 financial year, the total recurrent allocation under SAAP in the Australian Capital Territory was \$7,069,544.

The main models of service delivery were medium- to long-term accommodation (42%) and crisis or short-term accommodation (31%). A further 9% of agencies operated multiple service delivery models and 9% of agencies provided day support (Table 2.1).

SAAP clients

Estimates based on data received from SAAP agencies indicate that approximately 2,100 clients were provided with supported accommodation through SAAP in the Australian Capital Territory in 1998–99 (Table 3.1). This figure excludes accompanying children and relates only to those clients who received assistance of generally more than one hour's duration.

SAAP agencies provided support to more male clients (52%) than female clients (48%) (Table 3.1). Clients aged 15–19 years were the single largest age grouping, accounting for 26% of all clients. The average age of clients was 29 years for female clients, and 32 years for male clients.

The *1996 Census of Population and Housing* (ABS 1998) indicates that Indigenous Australians make up 1% of the Australian Capital Territory population, and people living there who were born in non-English-speaking countries constitute 14% of the total Territory population. These proportions were somewhat different among SAAP clients in the Australian Capital Territory: Indigenous Australians made up 8% of SAAP clients, and people from non-English-speaking backgrounds made up 12% (Table 3.2). People from other English-speaking backgrounds constituted the remaining 80% of SAAP clients.

Of the 2,100 clients supported by SAAP agencies during 1998–99, 1,800 (86%) received supported accommodation (Table 3.3). The majority of accommodated clients (79%) received crisis or short-term accommodation and 26% received medium- to long-term accommodation.

SAAP support periods

Participating agencies reported 3,050 occasions of support in the Australian Capital Territory in 1998–99 (Table 4.1). Agencies with an 'other' target group (this includes single men's and cross target, multiple target and general agencies) provided 58% of all support periods. Agencies targeting young people provided 24% and agencies targeting women escaping domestic violence provided a further 14%.

The amount of assistance provided varies from day to day. For example, it is estimated that on 15 September 1998 there were 400 support periods for clients, while on 15 May 1999 SAAP agencies were involved with 500 support periods (Table 4.2). These figures exclude accompanying children. The majority of SAAP clients (88%) did not have accompanying children when they received support or were accommodated by agencies (Table 4.4).

Clients accessed services through self-referral or were told of services by family or friends in 48% of all support periods (Table 4.10). In 22% of cases, clients were referred to services by another SAAP agency or other non-government agencies.

Women gave domestic violence (30%) and family or relationship breakdown (15%) as the main reasons for seeking assistance (Table 4.11). Men most frequently reported usual accommodation unavailable (18%), relationship or family breakdown (14%), and recent arrival to area with no means of support (13%) as their main reasons for seeking help.

Clients in 36% of cases reported that the duration of their current period of homelessness was two weeks or less (Table 4.13). A further 22% were homeless for between four and 26 weeks whilst 12% of clients were reported as being at imminent risk of homelessness. A significant proportion of support periods (16%) were provided to clients who had been homeless for over one year.

In the majority of cases (78%), clients were receiving government payments before receiving support from SAAP agencies (Table 4.14). Many clients (in 14% of cases) reported having no income immediately before receiving support. This figure was

much higher (92%) where clients were aged under 15 years. It was 34% for clients aged 15–19 years.

Clients in 7% of cases indicated that they were employed in either full-time or part-time work before receiving support, while an additional 5% were employed on a casual basis (Table 4.15). Clients in 47% of cases were not in the labour force before receiving support and 42% were unemployed and looking for work. Clients in 12% of cases were studying at primary or secondary school before support and 7% were studying at post-secondary level or engaged in employment training (Table 4.16).

Prior to receiving support at SAAP agencies, the main forms of accommodation were in private rental (29% of support periods), SAAP or Crisis Accommodation Program (CAP) funded accommodation (26%) and public housing (11%) (Table 4.19). In 5% of cases, clients reported that they had no shelter at all and had been living in a car, tent, park, squat or on the streets.

The most frequently reported need of SAAP clients was for housing and accommodation services—reported in 87% of support periods (Table 4.22). SAAP/CAP accommodation was needed in 85% of cases and clients required assistance to obtain independent housing in 35% of cases. Laundry or shower facilities (77%), advice or information (75%) and recreation (58%) were also frequently required. Health and medical services were the most frequently identified specialist need of clients, reported in 25% of cases. This pattern varied considerably across target groups and also differed between age groups (Tables 4.22 and 4.23).

SAAP services and unmet demand

SAAP/CAP accommodation was provided in more support periods (84%) than any other category of support (Table 5.1). Laundry or shower facilities (76%), advice or information (75%) and recreation (58%) were also frequently provided. In 24% of support periods clients received assistance with independent housing and in 15% of support periods, clients received assistance with short-term accommodation.

Almost half of support periods in the Australian Capital Territory lasted a week or less (47%), with the largest proportion of support periods (29%) lasting between one and three days (Table 5.11).

Among support periods in which accommodation was provided by crisis or short-term accommodation agencies, 58% had accommodation periods of one week or less (Table 5.22). Over one-third (34% of cases) of cases received this accommodation for one day or less. In 25% of cases involving medium- to long-term accommodation clients stayed between four and 13 weeks and a further 24% stayed between 26 and 52 weeks.

When support services cannot be provided directly by a SAAP agency, clients may be referred to other (often more specialised) agencies. Across the Territory, at least 3,200 referrals were made on behalf of SAAP clients during the year (Table 5.23). More referrals were made for health or medical services (17% of all support periods), assistance to obtain independent housing (16%) and assistance to obtain short-term accommodation (12%) than for any other purposes (Table 5.26). Agencies' referral patterns differed according to their target group and service delivery model (Tables 5.23–25). Referrals for each type of support may have been made on more than one occasion. However, in each support period, only one referral for each support type is enumerated in the National Data Collection; therefore, the total number of referrals may be higher.

The vast majority of needs identified by existing SAAP clients (92%) were met through direct service provision, through referrals or a combination of both (Table 5.29). Most (74%) were met directly by agencies providing services to clients and 11% were met through a combination of direct service provision and referrals.

Proportionately, requests for specialist services (21%) were more frequently unmet (Table 5.30). However, in absolute terms, the number of unmet needs for general support, advocacy and information, and housing and accommodation were also considerable.

Among accompanying children, 88% of identified needs were met—53% through direct service provision only (Table 5.33). Some 13% were met through referrals and 22% were met through a combination of direct services and referrals.

The number of *valid* unmet requests recorded during the November 1998 two-week Unmet Demand Collection was 150. (See *unmet requests for support or accommodation* in Appendix 1 for a definition of valid requests.) If this were replicated throughout the year, an estimated 3,820 unmet requests for support or supported accommodation would have occurred during 1998–99. It must be emphasised that this figure does not represent actual people, as a person can make requests on more than one occasion and to more than one SAAP agency. Research into estimates of unmet demand has shown that it is not valid to present *annual* estimates of the number of *people* who wanted to become SAAP clients but who could not. However, it is estimated that 110 people made valid, but unmet, requests for support or accommodation across the Australian Capital Territory in the period 12–25 November 1998 (AIHW 2000:163). This was somewhat higher than the comparable figure in 1997–98 (70).

Some 46% of potential clients sought crisis or short-term accommodation and 54% requested medium- to long-term accommodation (Table 5.37). A much larger proportion of the potential client population were women (70%) than men (30%) (Table 5.39).

Analysis of the reasons why potential clients could not be supported is limited here to the first ‘appropriate’ request (that is, requests that were made at agencies with the relevant target group and service model, excluding those in which individuals refused an offer of assistance) made by each individual.

Overall, the reason most frequently recorded by agencies for not meeting requests was that no accommodation was available (76% of all unmet requests) (Table 5.42). Facilities for other special needs not available was recorded as the main reason for non-assistance in 2% of cases.

It is important to note that people who do not receive the requested support or accommodation often receive some level of one-off assistance. It is estimated that over 5,100 instances of one-off assistance were provided to people making unsuccessful requests for ongoing support or accommodation in 1998–99 (Table 5.52). This one-off assistance was primarily in the form of information (73%) and referrals for accommodation (52%). In a small proportion of cases (11%) recorded during the Unmet Demand Collection period, the people seeking support or accommodation received no assistance at all.

In addition to the level of one-off assistance provided to people seeking ongoing support or accommodation, it is estimated that over 16,400 instances of one-off assistance were provided in 1998–99 to over 8,400 families or individuals who did not seek to become SAAP clients (Table 5.57). Information was the most common form of one-off assistance provided to these casual clients—in 69% of cases. Emotional support (35%) and referrals (25%) were other frequently provided forms of one-off assistance. Differences in the provision of one-off assistance across regions and between target groups and service delivery models were evident (Tables 5.57–5.59).

Circumstances of SAAP clients after support

SAAP clients in the Australian Capital Territory who did not have an income previously had obtained one by the end of their support in 4% of cases, and clients in 10% of cases had no income both before and after receiving support (Table 6.1). An

improvement in income status over the support period was more likely to occur when the support period was longer (Table 6.7).

At the conclusion of 60% of support periods, clients were living in housing that could be characterised as 'independent' (Table 6.9). (See Appendix 1 for details of how independent and dependent housing have been defined.) In comparison, clients had been living in independent housing before support in 62% of all support periods (see Chapter 4—Table 4.19). After receiving support, clients in 19% of cases lived in private rental accommodation and in public housing in 17% of cases. In 41% of cases, clients were not living in independent housing, including 21% of support periods in which clients were housed in SAAP accommodation.

Following 2% of support periods, previously unemployed clients had obtained full-time or part-time work and, in an additional 5% of cases, clients were working on a casual basis (Table 6.18). The proportion of cases in which clients found work varied across regions and also according to agencies' service delivery model and primary target group (Tables 6.17–6.19). Only a small minority of support periods involved clients who were students or trainees before receiving assistance (see Chapter 4). Of clients who were students before receiving support, 68% were still studying immediately after receiving support (Table 6.27).

Clients who were not students before receiving support, undertook studies or employment training after receiving assistance in 4% of cases (Table 6.35). The comparable figure was higher for clients aged less than 15 years (10%). Clients who were not students before support undertook studies or employment training in a higher proportion of cases where support was provided for longer periods (Table 6.37).

PART B: Longitudinal analysis

Client re-entry into SAAP

The majority of clients (55%) accessed the program only once; 22% were supported on two separate occasions; 9% received three support periods; and 7% of clients returned to SAAP at least six times during the year (Table 7.5).

Comparison of reporting periods

Three financial years are compared—1996–97, 1997–98 and 1998–99. To facilitate making comparisons, data for each of these periods have been adjusted to account for agency non-participation and client non-consent. In the Australian Capital Territory agency participation returned to 100% in 1998–99 after falling from full participation in 1996–97 to 97% in 1997–98 (Table 7.7). The proportion of forms returned with consent and a valid alpha code fell from 75% in 1996–97 to 71% in 1997–98, rising slightly to 72% in 1998–99.

During the 1998–99 financial year 3,050 support periods were provided, less than the 3,350 estimated for the previous financial year and the 3,250 support periods of 1996–97 (Table 7.8). The number of clients provided with assistance over the three years showed a similar pattern, rising from 2,200 in 1996–97 to 2,250 in 1997–98, and falling to 2,100 in 1998–99. The number of accompanying children visits fell slightly from 900 in 1996–97 to 850 in 1997–98, decreasing further in 1998–99 to 700 (Table 7.12).

Generally, there were only small variations in the demographic characteristics of the client population and service usage patterns between 1996–97 and 1998–99. One of the more significant changes was an increase in the proportion of clients aged 15 to 19

years and a commensurate fall in the proportion of clients aged 20 to 24 years (Table 7.10). In 1996–97, 20% of clients were aged 15 to 19 years and a further 20% were aged 20 to 24 years. By 1998–99, 25% of clients were aged 15 to 19 while only 16% were aged 20 to 24.

Across the Australian Capital Territory, the estimated numbers of people who made unsuccessful requests for SAAP support or accommodation during the two-week Unmet Demand Collection were noticeably different for the 1997 and 1998 surveys—70 in the period 13–26 November 1997 compared with 110 in the period 12–25 November 1998.