

1 Introduction

1.1 The Supported Accommodation Assistance Program

The Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) was established in 1985 to consolidate a number of Commonwealth, State and Territory government programs assisting people who are homeless, including women and children escaping domestic violence.

The current program, governed by the *Supported Accommodation Assistance Act 1994*, specifies that the overall aim of SAAP is to provide transitional supported accommodation and related support services to help homeless people achieve the maximum possible degree of self-reliance and independence.

Some 1,206 non-government, community or local government organisations were funded nationally under the program in 1998-99, 32 of them in the Australian Capital Territory (Table 2.4).¹ Organisations providing SAAP services range from small stand-alone agencies with single outlets to larger auspice bodies with multiple outlets. They provide accommodation and support services to a range of groups: families, single men, single women, young people, and women and children escaping domestic violence.

1.2 Background to the SAAP National Data Collection

A range of data collection practices had existed at the Commonwealth and State and Territory levels before the National Data Collection was developed. The 1993 national evaluation of SAAP highlighted the need for more effective data collection, analysis and reporting to assist in achieving the aims of the program. The evaluation report *Moving Forward* (Lindsay 1993) strongly recommended a new approach to data collection.

Following the evaluation, a senior officials group representing the Commonwealth, State and Territory departments with administrative responsibility for the program was established to develop strategic directions for the period of the new SAAP Agreement. This group, known as the SAAP National Coordination and Development Committee, also emphasised the need for better data to inform policy, planning and service delivery.

A Data and Research Advisory Committee (DRAC) was established as a sub-committee of the Coordination and Development Committee and was asked to develop a comprehensive information strategy for SAAP. The DRAC met for the first time in mid-1994 and comprised members from Commonwealth, State and Territory departments, representatives of community sector organisations and two advisers with expertise in data collection and research. The committee developed a core set of data items for SAAP. In November–December 1994, an initial feasibility study or pilot

¹ This figure represents agencies funded for some part of the reporting period and may not be consistent with the number of agencies funded at the end of the financial year (see Chapter 2).

of the National Data Collection was conducted, involving some 15% of SAAP agencies across Australia.

Following the pilot, further development work was undertaken. In July 1995, expressions of interest were sought from organisations willing to undertake the role of the SAAP National Data Collection Agency (NDCA) for three years. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare's tender was accepted and the Institute commenced work on the project in September 1995. This is the third full year in which the National Data Collection has been conducted.

1.3 SAAP National Data Collection

The National Data Collection consists of distinct components, each of which can be thought of as separate collections. Currently, five components exist: the Client Collection; the Administrative Data Collection; the Unmet Demand Collection; the Casual Client Collection; and Special Issue Collections.

The Client Collection is the main component. It consists of information about all clients receiving support under SAAP of more than one hour's duration. Data are collected by service providers during, or immediately following, contact with clients and are then forwarded to the NDCA after clients' support periods have ended (that is, when a client leaves an accommodation agency or when an occasion of support has ended), and at the end of the reporting period (30 June and 31 December) for ongoing clients. Data collected include basic socio-demographic information and the services required by and provided to each client. The collection enables an examination of client outcomes by eliciting information about each client's situation before and after receiving SAAP services. A full-scale trial of the Client Collection involving all agencies across Australia commenced in March 1996 and the collection proper began on 1 July 1996. The collection has continued, with some refinements to the data items introduced in July each year.

The Administrative Data Collection consists of general information about the agencies providing accommodation and support services to people who are homeless or in crisis. Information about the 32 SAAP agencies located in the Australian Capital Territory is provided to the NDCA by the Territory's Department of Education and Community Services.

The Unmet Demand Collection operates over a two-week period, once a year. It measures the level of unmet demand for SAAP services by collecting information about the number of requests for support or accommodation at SAAP agencies that are not provided, for whatever reason.

The two-week Casual Client Collection is conducted annually in May-June to elicit information about short-term or one-off assistance provided to homeless people.

There is also provision in the National Data Collection for a limited number of special issues surveys. These are conducted to obtain information on a particular matter for a limited period of time and are an adjunct to the Client Collection. The Casual Client Collection was the first of these surveys. The second, the Accompanying Children in SAAP Collection, was conducted in May-June 1998 and is the subject of a separate report to be released mid-2000. A third collection on SAAP clients with no, or very little income, has recently been developed. It is being conducted in May and June 2000.

1.4 Participation in the National Data Collection

To ensure that data collected accurately reflect the work conducted under the auspices of the program, it is important that a high level of participation of funded agencies in the National Data Collection is obtained.

Client Collection

Overall, the participation rate for the Client Collection has been very satisfactory. Not all agencies are 'in scope' of the Client Collection—some provide one-off or casual assistance only and so do not complete client forms. Others are funded to support and assist the functions of other SAAP agencies. They do not provide services directly to homeless people. There were two 'out of scope' agencies in the Australian Capital Territory during 1998–99. As for the previous reporting period, all in-scope agencies participated in the collection (Table 1.1 and Table 7.7).

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

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

In the Australian Capital Territory, consent was obtained in nearly three-quarters (74%) of support periods (Table 1.1). Consent rates varied slightly according to agencies' target group. Consent rates ranged from a high of 77% of support periods at young people's agencies, down to 72% of support periods at single men's and cross target, multiple and general agencies. Looking at the main service delivery models used in the Territory, crisis or short-term accommodation agencies, medium- to long-term agencies and multiple model agencies had consent rates of 82%, 78% and 79% respectively.

Nearly all support periods with consent also had valid alpha codes; that is, they had valid consent. While consent was obtained in 74% of support periods, valid consent was provided in 72% of cases.

Adjusting for non-participation and non-consent in the Client Collection

The simplest way of adjusting for non-participation and non-consent is to scale up estimates at the total level. This assumes that, on average, the demographic characteristics and circumstances of people are the same irrespective of whether or not consent was obtained in a support period. This was the adjustment technique adopted for estimating the total number of clients in previous series of this report. There may, however, be some differences between the profiles of support periods with and without consent. Consequently, distributions based only on support periods with consent may be different to those that would have been obtained if consent had been provided in 100% of cases (see Appendix 2). The varying consent rates by primary target group and service delivery model (see Table 1.1) suggest that there are differences between support periods with and without consent. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare has therefore developed an adjustment scheme, which allows for differences between support periods with consent and those without. It also adjusts estimates to allow for agency non-participation, for clients who give valid consent for some support periods but not for others (referred to as mixed consent), and for clients who do not give consent in any of their periods of support. The scheme is outlined below.

There is no strictly objective method that can be applied to the data from the Client Collection to adjust estimates for incomplete response. Karmel (1999:22, 25) describes the statistical assumptions underlying the adjustment scheme developed by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. It has the following features.

- The collection is divided into specified groups, or strata. Within these strata it is assumed that support periods with valid consent (that is, with consent and a valid alpha code), represent support periods without valid consent. This means that the characteristics of support periods within each stratum are assumed not to depend on whether or not valid consent was obtained. These strata are defined in terms of characteristics available for all support periods in participating agencies.
- Within each State and Territory, it is assumed that, on average, participating and non-participating agencies provide a similar volume and profile of support.
- Some clients have mixed consent. Assumptions about the extent and nature of mixed consent are made to estimate the number of clients and the average number of support periods per client. Adjustments are made for clients with mixed consent within sub-groups.² They are derived using simulation techniques and by-product data from the Client Collection.
- For support periods two weights for adjusting estimates are derived:
 - a *non-participation weight*. A range of information is available for all support periods in participating agencies. Estimates using these data are adjusted only for agency non-participation.
 - a *full non-participation non-consent weight*. For estimates using data that require consent, weights that adjust for both agency non-participation and client non-consent are used.

It is possible for these two weighting schemes to give slightly different estimates for the same item. Since estimates derived using the non-participation weights are based on a much larger sample of support periods than those using the full non-participation non-consent weights, the former (where available) are preferred because of their greater accuracy.

- For clients, only one weight is derived since valid consent is required to derive these estimates.
- A non-participation weight is derived for each support period in participating agencies, and a full non-participation non-consent weight is derived for each support period with valid consent. A client weight is derived for each client with at least one support period with valid consent. Estimates of totals are then found by summing the relevant weights for each support period or client with the characteristics of interest.
- In estimates of numbers of clients, inaccuracies caused by identical linkage keys for a small number of clients and changing linkage key information for the same client are not considered in the adjustment scheme.

Table 7.8 in this report provides estimates of clients and support periods derived from this new adjustment methodology for the three full years the collection has been conducted. To allow comparisons with previously published data, the estimates given in the 1996–97 and 1997–98 reports are also given.

² The method used to adjust for mixed client consent was refined for 1998–99. For 1998–99, as described in Karmel 1999, the number of support periods without consent that were for clients that consented at some stage is derived within fine sub-groups. However, the number of clients with mixed consent that these support periods related to, is derived by gender only. Estimates for 1996–97 and 1997–98 in Chapter 7 are based on the procedures presented in Karmel 1999.

Elsewhere in this report, estimates obtained using data from the Client Collection have been adjusted using the scheme outlined above. Notes to the tables indicate which weights have been used; that is whether a non-participation weight or a full non-participation non-consent weight. Methods for adjusting the other collections in the National Data Collection for non-response have not yet been developed, so unadjusted figures are presented.

High volume agencies

It should also be noted that at 30 June 1999 one participating SAAP agency was classified as a solely 'high-volume' agency. High-volume agencies complete a data collection form designed specifically for their use which contains only a subset of Client Collection data items. Only eight high-volume forms were returned during the reporting period. These records are excluded from tables which present data items not included on the high-volume form.

Unmet Demand Collection

The participation rate for the Unmet Demand Collection was lower than the rate for the Client Collection—in the Australian Capital Territory, 87% of agencies returned forms following the two-week collection period, 12–25 November 1998 (Table 1.2). This was an improvement on the previous year, when the rate was 81%.

Participation rates varied across target groups. Both family agencies participated in the collection, while nine of the ten agencies targeting women escaping domestic violence participated (Table 1.2). Participation rates were lowest among young people's agencies (83%). The small number of agencies in some categories contributed to a fluctuation in participation rates across service delivery models. All ten crisis or short-term accommodation agencies participated, as did 85% of the medium- to long-term accommodation agencies.

It is not known whether agencies that did not participate received requests they could not meet. Consequently, it is possible that findings from this collection may understate the true extent of unmet demand.

Casual Client Collection

The participation rate for the Casual Client Collection in the Australian Capital Territory was lower than the previous year, with 71% of agencies returning forms following the two-week collection period, 20 May to 2 June 1999 (Table 1.3). In the 1998 collection, the rate was 84%.

Variations occurred across target groups and service delivery models (Table 1.3). The two agencies targeting families both participated. Youth agencies and agencies targeting women escaping domestic violence recorded participation rates of 75% and 60% respectively. Some 69% of medium- to long-term accommodation agencies and 60% of crisis or short-term accommodation agencies took part in this collection. All other agencies except one day support agency participated.

1.5 Interpretation of analyses

As well as noting the above discussion about participation rates, accurate interpretation of the analyses presented here requires an understanding of the particular concepts and terms used in the National Data Collection.

To assist the reader, a glossary of terms has been included at the beginning of this report. In addition, readers are encouraged to consult the NDCA data interpretation manual and the NDCA collectors' manual—both contain important information that can aid in the use and interpretation of the data presented here. A data dictionary for

the National Data Collection is included as part of the *SAAP Data and Research Resource Folder* which can be obtained from the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services.

Additionally, important information about the measurement of concepts and the counting rules used in the analysis in this report is presented in Appendix 1.

1.6 Variation from Series 3 reports

Analyses presented in this report may not be comparable with those presented in the Series 3 reports (1997–98). The following changes have been incorporated into this report:

- The number and profile of agencies has changed due to the amalgamation or splitting of agencies, the opening of new agencies or the reclassification of service delivery model or target group. These changes are determined by State and Territory departments.
- Unless indicated otherwise, estimates derived from the Client Collection have been adjusted for agency non-participation and, where necessary, client non-consent (see explanation above). In previous annual reports unadjusted data have been presented, except for estimates of the number of SAAP clients where a simple weighting system (for non-consent only) was used.
- In general, numbers from the Client and Casual Client Collections have been rounded to the nearest 50. Numbers of potential clients from the Unmet Demand Collection have been rounded to the nearest 10, while estimates of casual client contacts by potential clients have been rounded to the nearest 50.
- Estimates of clients within regions by ethnicity and by average number of accompanying children per support period (Tables 3.2 and 3.4 in Series 3) are no longer published in Chapter 3. Rather, corresponding estimates of support periods within regions are given in Chapter 4.
- Chapter 7 now reports on three years' data. Consequently, the presentation of the tables has changed.
- The Unmet Demand Collection included two new questions (Questions 6 and 8—see Appendix 5), which have been included in the analysis of unmet demand in Chapter 5.
- The calculation of unmet demand has been refined to ensure consistent calculation across years. The method of calculating “Potential clients unable to be supported” is described in Appendix 1. The revised calculations for November 1997 and November 1998 are included in Appendix 4.
- Following consultation with government and community stakeholders, the discussion associated with individual tables has been reduced in Chapters 2 to 6 and Appendix 3.
- Appendix 4 presents revised versions of tables included in the previous year's report.
- For the first time, copies of forms used in the 1998–99 collection are included in the report (see Appendix 5).

1.7 Structure and content of the report

Data in this report relate to the financial year ending 30 June 1999. Although most tables include information about both completed and ongoing support periods, analysis of duration of support and accommodation, and data items relating to client

circumstances after support are necessarily limited to completed support periods only.

Following this introductory chapter, analyses for the reporting period are provided in Part A and some longitudinal analyses are provided in Part B. Part C comprises information used to calculate performance indicators established by the DRAC. Frequency distributions for all variables and regional tables are available in electronic format on request.

Part A has been divided into five chapters. Details of the number and distribution of SAAP agencies, and resources allocated under SAAP, are provided in Chapter 2. The characteristics of individual SAAP clients are examined in Chapter 3 and analyses of support periods (occasions of support) are presented in Chapter 4. The services provided to clients by agencies and unmet demand for services are examined in Chapter 5 and the circumstances of SAAP clients after support are reported in the final chapter of Part A (Chapter 6). Chapters in Parts A and B contain a descriptive account of major findings, as well as the graphical presentation of data. Detailed tables follow the discussion in each chapter.

There are five appendices in this report. Appendix 1 details the counting rules used in analyses contained in the report. Appendix 2 provides more details on consent rates and data on how the new weighting system affects major descriptive variables such as gender, ethnicity and age. Information about the circumstances after support of certain subgroups of SAAP clients is presented in Appendix 3, and Appendix 4 contains revisions to data contained in the previous series' reports. Copies of the forms used in the collection are shown in Appendix 5.

Occasionally it is necessary for data to be grouped to protect confidentiality. In this report, at least two in-scope agencies are required in each target group or service delivery model category. For example, if only one single men's agency exists in the Territory its information would be grouped with another target group. The groupings used are indicated in affected tables. This practice has been adopted to prevent the identification of the agency concerned and, potentially, of their clients.

1.8 Detailed tables

Table 1.1: SAAP Client Collection, participation rates and forms returned with informed consent and valid alpha codes, primary target group and service delivery model, Australian Capital Territory, 1998–99

	Agencies	Participation rate (%)	Forms returned		
			Total	Consent (%)	Valid alpha code (%)
Primary target group					
Young people	12	100.0	735	76.6	75.1
Families	2	100.0	117	76.1	76.1
Women escaping domestic violence	10	100.0	418	75.8	73.2
Cross target/multiple/general/single men	6	100.0	1,758	71.7	70.5
Service delivery model					
Crisis/short-term accommodation	10	100.0	1,228	81.8	79.6
Medium/long-term accommodation	13	100.0	379	78.4	77.8
Day Support	2	100.0	76	84.2	81.6
Multiple	3	100.0	1,053	79.3	78.3
Agency support/ outreach support/ other	2	100.0	292	9.6	9.2
Australian Capital Territory	30	100.0	3,028	73.6	72.2

Notes

1. Based on forms returned from agencies 'in scope' for the Client Collection during 1998–99.
2. Agencies refers to the number of agencies that should have been participating in the reference period.
3. Valid alpha code here refers to all forms with a valid alpha code that were completed with consent (see glossary).

Source: SAAP NDCA Administrative Data and Client Collections

Table 1.2: SAAP Unmet Demand Collection, participation rates and forms returned, primary target group and service delivery model, Australian Capital Territory, 12–25 November 1998

	Agencies	Participation rate (%)	Forms returned
Primary target group			
Young people	12	83.3	72
Families	2	100.0	35
Women escaping domestic violence	10	90.0	56
Cross target/multiple/general/ single men	7	85.7	33
Service delivery model			
Crisis/short-term accommodation	10	100.0	88
Medium/long-term accommodation	13	84.6	72
Day Support	3	33.3	0
Multiple	3	100.0	32
Agency support/ outreach support/ other	2	100.0	4
Australian Capital Territory	31	87.1	196

Note: Agencies refers to the number of agencies that should have been participating in the reference period.

Source: SAAP NDCA Administrative Data and Unmet Demand Collections

Table 1.3: SAAP Casual Client Collection, participation rates and forms returned, primary target group and service delivery model, Australian Capital Territory, 20 May–2 June 1999

	Agencies	Participation rate (%)	Records returned
Primary target group			
Young people	12	75.0	78
Families	2	100.0	25
Women escaping domestic violence	10	60.0	47
Cross target/multiple/general/ single men	7	71.4	173
Service delivery model			
Crisis/short-term accommodation	10	60.0	87
Medium/long-term accommodation	13	69.2	75
Day Support	3	66.7	94
Multiple	3	100.0	51
Agency support/ outreach support/ other	2	100.0	16
Australian Capital Territory	31	71.0	323

Note: Agencies refers to the number of agencies that should have been participating in the reference period.

Source: SAAP NDCA Administrative Data and Casual Client Collections