

**S A A P      N D C A      R E P O R T**  
**S E R I E S 4**

**SAAP**  
**NATIONAL DATA COLLECTION**

**ANNUAL REPORT**  
**1998-99**

**NEW SOUTH WALES**

**AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE OF**  
**HEALTH AND WELFARE**  
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# Preface

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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 96% of agencies in New South Wales have provided data in 1998–99 is testimony to their collective commitment to and confidence in the collection. This is a small improvement on the 95% 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 dropped slightly, 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.

Australian Institute of Health  
and Welfare

SAAP Coordination and  
Development  
Committee



# Acknowledgments

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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 New South Wales Department of Community Services, which provided administrative data.



# Glossary

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<b>Accompanying child</b>	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.
<b>Agency</b>	An organisation or establishment which receives a specified amount of SAAP funds to provide services.
<b>Alpha code</b>	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.
<b>Case</b>	A <i>support period</i> provided to a SAAP <i>client</i> . The terms 'case' and 'support period' are used interchangeably in this report.
<b>Casual client</b>	<p>A person who:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• receives assistance from a SAAP agency for less than one hour on a given day; and</li><li>• does not establish an <i>ongoing support relationship</i> with the SAAP agency.</li></ul> <p>A casual client may receive <i>one-off assistance</i> from a SAAP agency on one or more occasions.</p>
<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 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</li><li>• is accommodated by a SAAP agency; or</li><li>• enters into an <i>ongoing support relationship</i> with a SAAP agency.</li></ul>

<b>DRAC</b>	Data and Research Advisory Committee. DRAC is an advisory committee to the National SAAP Coordination and Development Committee.
<b>DV</b>	Domestic violence.
<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 the person has access:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• damages, or is likely to damage, the person's health; or</li> <li>• threatens the person's safety; or</li> <li>• marginalises the person 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 the person 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, the person has 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 agency or some other form of emergency accommodation.</p>
<b>NDCA</b>	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.
<b>NILF</b>	Not in the labour force.
<b>Occasion of support</b>	See <i>support period</i> .
<b>One-off assistance</b>	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> .

<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 agency for the purpose of providing additional assistance.</p> <p>Future contact can be assumed if:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a definite appointment has been made with the person to work through particular problems or issues; or</li> <li>• an agreement has been reached with the person to work through particular problems or issues even if a specific appointment has not been made.</li> </ul> <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>
<b>Record</b>	<p>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.</p>
<b>Referral</b>	<p>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.</p>
<b>SAAP</b>	<p>Supported Accommodation Assistance Program.</p>
<b>Support</b>	<p>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.</p>

**Support period** An occasion of support provided to a SAAP *client*. A support period commences when a client begins to receive support from a SAAP *agency*. The support period is considered to finish when:

- the client ends the relationship with the agency; or
- the agency ends the relationship with the client.

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.

**Supported accommodation** Accommodation paid for or provided directly by a SAAP *agency*. 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—*support* or *supported accommodation*. That is, the person wishes to become a *client* of a SAAP *agency* but is not accepted, or the person does not accept the agency's offer of support or supported accommodation.

Reasons for not meeting such requests for assistance may include:

- 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.

A person whose request for support or supported accommodation cannot be fulfilled may be given *one-off assistance*, such as information or a *referral*. Such a person would be a *casual client*, but not a *client*, of the agency.

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

# Executive summary

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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 that elicits information about one-off assistance provided to homeless people (conducted 20 May–2 June 1999).

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

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 384 SAAP agencies operating across the State as of 30 June 1999 was provided jointly by the Commonwealth and New South Wales governments. In the 1998–99 financial year, the total recurrent allocation under SAAP in New South Wales was \$81,528,143.

Agencies in New South Wales were well distributed between the State's 16 regions. However, the distribution of agencies according to their service delivery model was quite different across regions (Table 2.1).

The main models of service delivery were crisis or short-term accommodation (38%), medium- to long-term accommodation (29%) and multiple service delivery models (20%) (Table 2.1).

## SAAP clients

Estimates based on data received from SAAP agencies indicate that approximately 27,300 clients were provided with support or supported accommodation through SAAP in New South Wales 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 (56%) than female clients (44%) (Table 3.1). Clients aged 15-19 years were the single largest age grouping, accounting for 17% of all clients. One-third (33%) of clients were aged under 25 years. The average age of clients was 30 years for female clients and 34 years for male clients.

The *1996 Census of Population and Housing* (ABS 1998) indicates that Indigenous Australians make up less than 2% of the New South Wales population, and people living in the State who were born in non-English-speaking countries constitute 16% of the total population. However, these proportions were somewhat different among SAAP clients in New South Wales: Indigenous Australians constituted 13%, and people from non-English-speaking backgrounds 11% of SAAP clients (Table 3.2). People from other English-speaking backgrounds made up the remaining 76% of SAAP clients.

Of the 27,300 clients supported by SAAP agencies during 1998-99, 21,900 (80%) received supported accommodation (Table 3.3). The majority of accommodated clients (91%) received crisis or short-term accommodation and 12% received medium- to long-term accommodation.

## SAAP support periods

Participating agencies reported 52,900 occasions of support in New South Wales in 1998-99 (Table 4.1). Single men's agencies provided more support periods (43%) than agencies targeting any other group. Agencies targeting young people and women escaping domestic violence also reported a significant proportion of cases (19% and 18% respectively). This pattern of service provision varied at the regional level.

The amount of assistance provided varies from day to day. For example, it is estimated on 15 September 1998 there were 4,000 support periods for clients, while on 15 June 1999 SAAP agencies were involved with 3,600 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).

The proportion of support periods that were for Indigenous Australian or for people of non-English-speaking backgrounds varied across regions (Table 4.6). For example, the percentage of support periods that were for Indigenous Australians was as high as 75% in the Orana-Far West region and as low as 2% in the North Sydney area.

Clients accessed services through self-referral or were told about agencies by friends or family in 48% of all support periods (Table 4.10). In 19% of cases, clients were referred to services by another SAAP agency or other non-government agencies.

Women gave domestic violence and family or relationship breakdown as the main reason for seeking assistance in 34% and 13% of cases respectively (Table 4.11). Men most frequently reported financial difficulty (19%), substance abuse (17%) and family or relationship breakdown (12%) as their main reasons for seeking help.

Over one-third of clients (36%) reported that the duration of their current period of homelessness was two weeks or less and clients received support while they were at imminent risk of homelessness in a further 23% of support periods (Table 4.13). A

significant proportion of support periods (15%) was provided to clients who had been homeless for more than one year.

In the majority of cases (85%), clients were receiving government payments before receiving support from SAAP agencies (Table 4.14). Clients in 9% of cases reported having no income immediately before receiving support. This figure was much higher for young people—89% of cases where clients were aged under 15 years and 27% of cases involving clients aged 15–19 years.

Clients in 5% of cases reported being in full-time or part-time employment before receiving support and in an additional 3% of cases, clients reported that they were employed on a casual basis (Table 4.15). In 55% of cases, clients were not in the labour force and in 37% of cases they were unemployed and looking for work.

Before receiving support, 10% of clients were studying at a primary or secondary school and 4% were studying at a tertiary level or engaged in employment training (Table 4.16).

Prior to receiving support at SAAP agencies, the main forms of accommodation for clients were in private rental (26% of support periods), SAAP or Crisis Accommodation Program (CAP) funded accommodation (28%) and public housing (7%) (Table 4.19). Clients reported that they had no shelter at all and had been living in a car, tent, park, squat or on the streets before seeking assistance in 22% of cases.

The most frequently reported needs of SAAP clients were for SAAP/CAP accommodation (reported in 83% of support periods), laundry or shower facilities (75%) and meals (71%) (Table 4.22). Clients also often required assistance with information (47%), transport (30%) and the retrieval, storage or removal of personal belongings (30%). This pattern varied considerably across target groups and age groups (Tables 4.22 and 4.23).

## **SAAP services and unmet demand**

SAAP/CAP accommodation was provided in more support periods (83%) than any other category of support (Table 5.1). Laundry or shower facilities (75%) and meals (70%) were also provided in the majority of cases. The provision of information (47%) and retrieval or storage of personal belongings (29%) was also common.

Two-thirds (67%) of support periods in New South Wales were for a duration of seven days or less, with the largest proportion (40%) lasting between one and three days. There were relatively few support periods lasting longer than 13 weeks (6%) (Table 5.11).

Among support periods in which accommodation was provided by crisis or short-term accommodation agencies, 68% had accommodation periods of one week or less (Table 5.22). Conversely, the majority (81%) of support periods in which accommodation was provided by medium- to long-term accommodation agencies involved accommodation periods of over four weeks.

When support services cannot be provided directly by a SAAP agency, clients may be referred to other (often more specialised) agencies. Across the State, at least 26,100 referrals were made on behalf of SAAP clients during the year (Table 5.24). More referrals were made for health or medical services (8%) and assistance to obtain independent housing (6%) than for other purposes. Agencies' referral patterns differed according to their service delivery model, target group and region (Tables 5.23-5.25). 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 large majority (89%) of needs identified by existing SAAP clients were met either through direct provision or referral (Table 5.29). Some 79% of the 306,650 needs identified during the year were met by agencies directly providing services to clients. An additional 5% were met through referrals and 6% were met through a combination of direct services and referrals. Eleven per cent of needs identified by clients were not met. Needs for specialist services accounted for one-third (32%) of unmet needs. Drug or alcohol support or rehabilitation constituted 17% of unmet requests, the highest of any particular support type (Table 5.30).

Among accompanying children, 93% of identified needs were met—72% of needs of children were met by agencies directly providing services; 9% were met through referrals; and 12% were met through a combination of direct services and referrals (Table 5.33).

The number of *valid* unmet requests for assistance recorded during the Unmet Demand Collection was 1,360. (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 35,280 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 1,270 people made valid, but unmet, requests for support or accommodation across New South Wales in the period 12–25 November 1998 (AIHW 2000:163) This was much the same as the comparable figure in 1997 (1,260).

The majority of potential clients sought crisis or short-term accommodation (67%) (Table 5.37). A further 29% sought medium- to long-term accommodation and 1% requested support without accommodation. There were more women (57%) among the potential client population than men (43%) (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 for assistance was that insufficient accommodation was available (76% of all unmet requests) (Table 5.42). Insufficient staff was recorded as the main reason for non-assistance in 3% 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 90,100 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 (67%) and referrals for accommodation (42%). In 18% of cases 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 249,000 instances of one-off assistance were provided in 1998–99 to over 126,200 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—in 69% of cases. Emotional support (33%) and formal referrals to other organisations on behalf of casual clients (34%) were other frequently provided forms of one-off assistance. Patterns in the provision of one-off assistance differed across regions and variations were also evident according to agencies’ target group and service delivery model (Tables 5.57–5.59).

## **Circumstances of SAAP clients after support**

SAAP clients in New South Wales who did not have an income previously had obtained one by the end of their support period in 4% of cases and clients in 9% 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 71% 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 45% of all support periods (see Chapter 4—Table 4.19). After receiving support, 41% of clients were living in private rental accommodation and 13% lived in public housing. In 29% of cases clients were not living in independent housing, including 17% of support periods in which clients were housed in SAAP crisis and short term, or medium- to long term accommodation.

Following 4% of support periods, previously unemployed clients had obtained either full-time or part-time work and, in an additional 2% of cases, they were working on a casual basis (Table 6.18). The proportion of cases in which clients found work varied among regions and also according to agencies' service delivery model and primary target group (Tables 6.17–19).

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, 76% 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 2% of cases (Table 6.32). For clients aged less than 15 years the comparable figure was higher (14%) (Table 6.35). 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 (59%) accessed the program only once; 19% were supported on two separate occasions; 9% received three support periods; and just 6% 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. There was a slight increase recorded in agency participation rates across the three reporting periods (Table 7.7). New South Wales agency participation increased from 94% in 1996–97 to 95% in 1997–98 and 96% in 1998–99. The proportion of forms returned with consent and a valid alpha code rose from 72% in 1996–97 to 75% in 1997–98 but dropped back to 71% in 1998–99.

During the 1998–99 financial year 55,400 support periods were provided, slightly more than the 54,950 estimated for the previous financial year but less than the 57,950 support periods for 1996–97 (Table 7.8). The number of clients provided with assistance in the three years showed a different pattern, rising from 26,650 in 1996–97 to 29,100 in 1997–98, and falling to 27,300 in 1998–99. The number of accompanying children visits rose from 12,700 in 1996–97 to 15,000 in 1997–98, decreasing in 1998–99 to 13,350 (Table 7.12).

There was only slight variation 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 a drop in the proportion of support periods in which accommodation lasted for 1 day or less—from 50% of support periods with accommodation in 1996–97 to 41% in 1997–98 and 39% in 1998–99 (Table 7.15).

However, across the three periods, there was a noticeable increase in the proportion of support periods in which a support plan was in place—up from 49% of support periods in 1996–97 to 57% in 1998–99 (Table 7.16).

Across New South Wales, the estimated numbers of people who made unsuccessful requests for SAAP support or accommodation during the two-week Unmet Demand Collection were almost identical for the 1997 and 1998 surveys—1,260 in the period 13–26 November 1997 compared with 1,270 in the period 12–25 November 1998 (AIHW, 2000:163).