

3 Demand for accommodation

Provision of accommodation is one of the core activities of SAAP agencies, and this is reflected in the large percentage of clients who receive this type of assistance. Both existing clients and those not yet receiving ongoing support can have unmet requests for accommodation. Unfortunately, unmet requests for existing clients cannot be considered alongside unmet requests for potential clients. This is because the timing of unmet requests by existing clients is not reported. Consequently, the demand for accommodation by existing clients and that by potential clients are discussed separately in this chapter. Broad comparisons of met and unmet demand for accommodation can, however, be made, and in the final section of the chapter, data are presented on unmet accommodation needs during the 2 week collection period of the Unmet Demand Collection, relative to accommodation provided in the same period.

3.1 Demand by clients

In examining the general provision of accommodation throughout the year, it is of interest to see how the needs of those clients specifically requesting accommodation were satisfied. The provision of services requested by clients is discussed in Chapter 6 of the 1999–2000 national annual report (AIHW 2000b:31–2). The following discussion summarises this information.

Only after a client has finished their SAAP support can data be collected on needs that were finally met and those that remained unmet. Of the 157,600 support periods reported in 1999–2000, 140,800 had finished by the end of June 2000 (AIHW 2000b:33). Therefore, when examining how the needs of clients specifically requesting help with accommodation were met, the analysis concentrates on these closed support periods.

Within support periods that finished between 1 July 1999 and 30 June 2000, a total of 86% of services requested by clients were provided directly by SAAP agencies and an additional 6% were referred on to other appropriate agencies (AIHW 2000b:33). In around 80% of closed support periods (112,200) clients had specifically requested assistance with accommodation (AIHW 2000b:33). Because some clients request help with more than one accommodation problem within any support period, during these closed support periods there were 153,900 requests for specific accommodation services. For 80% of these requests relevant accommodation services were provided directly by the SAAP agency in question. In addition, agencies were able to refer clients to other services in a further 9% of cases, although the extent to which these referrals met the needs of the clients is not known (AIHW 2000b:33). However, SAAP agencies could neither provide assistance nor refer clients on for the remaining 11% of requests for assistance with accommodation. These unmet requests related to at least 8,000 support periods (AIHW 2000b:33).

More specifically, 91% of requests for SAAP or CAP accommodation were met and a further 5% were referred on, leaving 4% of requests (4,200) unresolved (AIHW 2000b:33). It appeared somewhat more difficult to provide assistance with obtaining short-term accommodation or independent housing: services were neither provided by the agency nor referred on for 18% (4,900) and 25% (7,900) of requests for these services respectively.

3.2 Demand by potential clients

As discussed in Chapter 1, information on unmet demand for services by people not already a client of the SAAP agency at which they are making the request is available for only a 2 week period in November 1999. In addition, because of seasonal factors and because people can have several unmet requests in a year, the daily and fortnightly figures for potential clients cannot be used as a basis for deriving annual figures. Consequently, the data presented in this section are not directly comparable with the data on existing clients.

Overall, during the fortnight 11–24 November 1999 there were 5,420 valid unmet requests for accommodation and/or support, made by an estimated 4,450 people (Table 3.1). Among these potential clients, 4,090 specifically requested assistance with accommodation. Nearly 3,200 children accompanied just over 1,400 potential clients; 1,570 of them accompanied 700 people seeking immediate accommodation (that is, accommodation required within 24 hours) and a further 1,420 accompanied 640 people with less urgent accommodation needs.¹ Three client groups accounted for just over 60% of all unmet requests: unaccompanied males under 25 years (20%), unaccompanied females under 25 years (16%) and females with children (27%).

In the context of homelessness the level of unmet requests for immediate accommodation is of particular importance. From Table 3.1 it can be seen that the three largest client groups with unmet requests for immediate accommodation were the same as those with the largest numbers of unmet requests overall—females with children, solo males under 25 years and solo females under 25 years (with 590, 570 and 410 people with unmet requests for immediate accommodation, respectively). Expressed as a percentage of their total unmet requests, for these three groups solo males under 25 years had the highest percentage of unmet requests relating to immediate accommodation—65% of their total unmet requests were for accommodation required within 24 hours. For females with children, the corresponding figure was 50%.

¹ Couples have been counted once only.

Table 3.1: SAAP estimated valid unmet requests and potential clients, by main type of support requested and client group, Australia, 11–24 November 1999 (number)

Client group	Estimated valid unmet requests, main support requested				Estimated potential clients, main support requested			
	Accommodation		Other support	Total	Accommodation		Other support	Total
	Required within 24 hours	Other			Required within 24 hours	Other		
Male alone, under 25	690	320	40	1,060	570	260	50	880
Male alone, 25+	330	110	70	510	250	110	70	430
Male alone, age unknown	80	10	10	90	70	10	—	80
Female alone, under 25	470	350	50	870	410	260	50	710
Female alone, 25+	200	80	50	330	170	70	50	290
Female alone, age unknown	80	20	10	110	70	20	10	90
Couple without children	140	90	10	240	110	70	10	200
Male with children	50	40	10	90	40	30	10	80
Female with children	760	620	80	1,460	590	510	80	1,180
Couple with children	200	200	20	420	150	150	20	310
Other/unknown	140	100	20	250	110	80	20	210
Total	3,130	1,920	370	5,420	2,520	1,570	360	4,450

Notes

1. Cases excluded due to missing data: 0.
2. 'Estimated potential clients' gives estimated numbers of people who requested support or accommodation from SAAP agencies on at least one occasion in the fortnight but who were not provided with that assistance. People who refuse an offer of assistance are excluded. Adjustments have been made to allow for missing information. See Appendix 2 for a description of the adjustment procedures used. Due to data limitations potential clients may be counted twice if they make more than one type of request.
3. 'Valid unmet requests' excludes those made at an agency of an inappropriate target group, those where the requested service (for example, accommodation) is not provided by the agency, or those where proffered assistance is refused. An adjustment for missing information on validity of request has been made (see Appendix 2).
4. 'Other/unknown' client group includes those cases where the assisted unit was reported as 'other', where it was not reported at all, or where the gender of the assisted person was unknown (where relevant).
5. 'Other' main support requested includes cases where the required assistance was either reported as 'SAAP support only' or as 'other'.

Source: SAAP Unmet Demand Collection

3.3 Meeting the daily demand

Whether there is sufficient SAAP accommodation to meet demand can be examined by looking at demand on a daily basis. Table 3.2 presents data on accommodation provided to clients and unmet requests for immediate accommodation for each day in the fortnight covered in the Unmet Demand Collection. To facilitate the comparison of met and unmet requests for accommodation, only data from agencies that participated in both the Client Collection and the Unmet Demand Collection are presented on a daily basis (see Tables A2.1 and A2.2 for participation rates). However, across all agencies, an average of 6,848 clients were in SAAP accommodation on any day, with an average of 233 clients starting

accommodation and 240 ending accommodation each day during the fortnight (Table 3.2).² As a result, an average of just under 4% of clients (that is, 240 out of 6,848) leave SAAP accommodation on any one day.

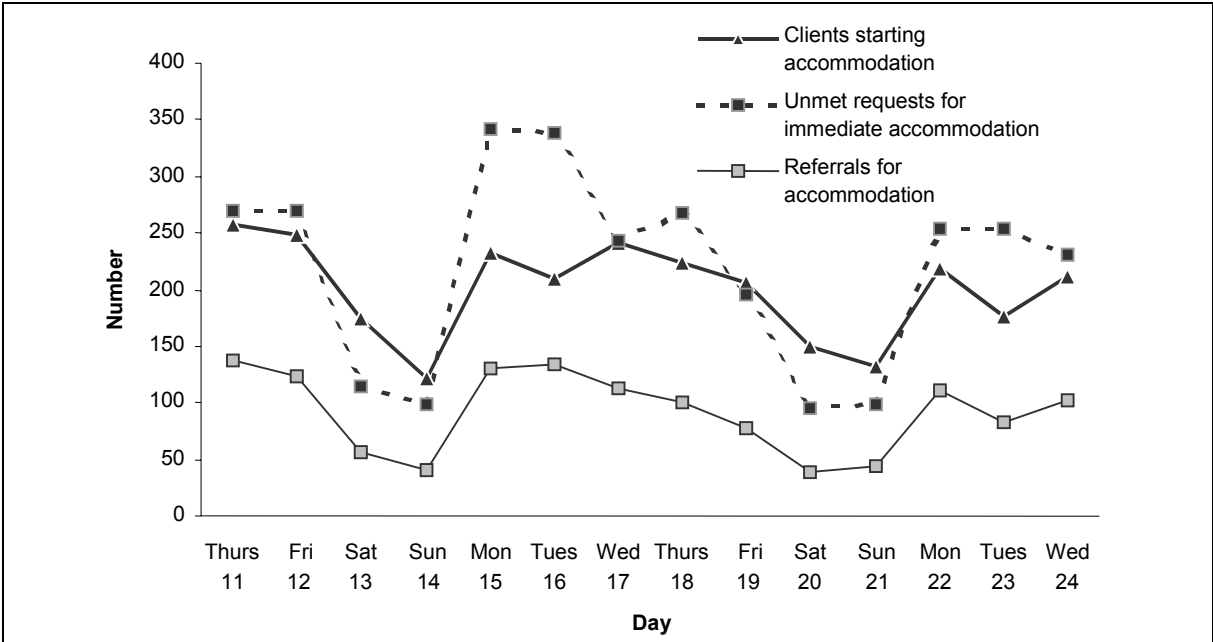
In the remainder of this chapter only agencies that participated in both the Client Collection and the Unmet Demand Collection are included in the analysis. These accounted for 70% of all agencies that should have participated in the Unmet Demand Collection. Among these, on average, 200 clients started their accommodation each day, compared with a daily average of 219 valid unmet requests for immediate accommodation and an average of 92 referrals for accommodation each day (Table 3.2). The small number of referrals compared with unmet requests may indicate that SAAP agencies are having difficulty arranging referrals for potential clients. Moreover, it should be noted that the referral may not be for immediate accommodation. The figures also suggest that, at most, 46% of newly accommodated clients (that is, the 92 referrals resulting from unmet requests for immediate accommodation out of the 200 newly accommodated clients) were accommodated as a result of that day's referrals. (The expression 'at most' is used because some of the referrals may not have been for immediate accommodation and not all of the referrals were necessarily to SAAP agencies—some may have been referrals to alternative accommodation options such as the Transitional Housing Management properties in Victoria.) The remainder of newly accommodated clients may have come from a variety of sources; for example, supported clients being newly accommodated, clients of one SAAP agency being referred to another for accommodation (see Section 2.2), potential clients taking up referrals arranged on a previous day, people referred by special referral centres, and people approaching a SAAP agency directly for the first time.

In general, the fortnightly patterns of clients starting accommodation, of valid unmet requests for immediate accommodation, and of referrals resulting from these unmet requests are very similar (Figure 3.1). Interestingly, as Figure 3.1 shows, weekends saw the smallest numbers of clients beginning their stay, the smallest number of unmet requests for accommodation, and the smallest number of referrals for accommodation—with these last two dropping to around half their weekday averages. The numbers of clients continuing their accommodation for another day also displays a weekly pattern. In contrast, however, these numbers increased at weekends, rising on Saturday and again on Sunday before dropping on Monday (Table 3.2).

The drop in the number of newly accommodated clients on weekends is consistent with the rise in clients continuing their accommodation, assuming that accommodation is difficult to obtain. However, the fall in unmet requests for immediate accommodation is surprising, since an increased scarcity of accommodation resulting from people staying on in their accommodation would be expected to lead to a rise in unmet requests. Apart from the weekends, the number of valid unmet requests for immediate accommodation was usually higher than the number of clients starting accommodation on that day. A weekend effect in requests for accommodation was also observed in a detailed case study of unmet demand in six agencies in Melbourne in 1999 (Table A1.1, Thomson Goodall Associates Pty Ltd 1999), so the results presented here do not seem to be a direct product of data-collection procedures or of agency operating practices such as reduced staffing at weekends. However, these can still not be ruled out as influencing factors.

² These figures may still be an underestimation because not all agencies that should have participated in the Client Collection did so. In 1999-00, 93% of in-scope SAAP agencies participated in this collection (Table A2.1).

The number of clients accommodated on any particular day fluctuated only by 2% during the fortnight, ranging from 5,683 to 5,798, with a daily average of 5,738. On average, 200 clients began their accommodation each day, 208 finished, and the remainder (an average of 5,538) were continuing their accommodation. During the 2 week collection period the maximum number of clients beginning their accommodation on any day was 258, on Thursday 11 November. This date also had the maximum number of clients finishing their accommodation—327. In contrast, the maximum number of valid unmet requests for immediate accommodation on any day during the collection period was 341, on Monday 15 November.



Source: Table 3.2

Figure 3.1: Daily numbers of clients starting accommodation, unmet requests for immediate accommodation and referrals provided, Australia, 11-24 November 1999

The foregoing analysis indicates that SAAP agencies are operating at or near capacity with respect to accommodation. The low daily turnover rate for accommodation and the relatively low referral rate for those requiring immediate accommodation suggest that finding accommodation in a SAAP agency may be difficult. However, the number of people seeking SAAP accommodation suggests that a small increase in capacity could have a major impact on the level of unmet demand for accommodation—this is assuming that all those who need SAAP accommodation are currently approaching SAAP agencies. A survey of daily spare accommodation capacity in SAAP agencies would help to establish whether accommodation agencies are generally operating at capacity or whether there is a problem in locating any spare capacity on a particular day. Such a survey, however, would not be able to determine the extent of any hidden need caused by people not seeking assistance when they require it.

That the number of valid unmet requests for immediate accommodation is not considerably larger than the number of people seeking such accommodation suggests that those seeking

SAAP accommodation do not make repeated attempts if they fail initially (Table 3.1). In fact, Table 3.1 suggests that fewer than one-quarter of potential clients seeking immediate accommodation ($3,130/2,520 = 1.24$) make more than one attempt to be accommodated at appropriate SAAP agencies. The difficulty of obtaining a referral once a person has not been successful—each day on average only 92 referrals for accommodation were arranged for 219 unmet requests for immediate accommodation—may be telling many potential clients that SAAP accommodation is difficult to get and that trying at another agency is unlikely to prove successful on that day. They might, however, try again on subsequent days.

Table 3.2: Accommodation provided for SAAP clients and estimated valid unmet requests for immediate accommodation: daily demand, Australia, 11–24 November 1999 (number)

	Accommodated clients ^(a)				Estimated valid unmet requests for immediate accommodation	
	Newly accomm.	Accomm. ending	Continuing accomm.	Total	Requests	Referrals for accomm.
Agencies participating in both the Client and Unmet Demand Collections						
Thursday 11 November	258	327	5,471	5,729	270	137
Friday 12 November	249	249	5,477	5,726	269	124
Saturday 13 November	174	140	5,587	5,761	115	57
Sunday 14 November	121	138	5,620	5,741	98	41
Monday 15 November	233	213	5,529	5,762	341	131
Tuesday 16 November	210	240	5,516	5,726	338	134
Wednesday 17 November	241	168	5,557	5,798	244	113
Thursday 18 November	223	250	5,554	5,777	267	100
Friday 19 November	207	259	5,516	5,723	196	77
Saturday 20 November	149	137	5,588	5,737	95	38
Sunday 21 November	132	126	5,611	5,743	99	44
Monday 22 November	218	234	5,504	5,722	254	111
Tuesday 23 November	177	194	5,528	5,705	254	82
Wednesday 24 November	211	239	5,472	5,683	230	102
Daily average	200	208	5,538	5,738	219	92
All agencies participating in the Client Collection						
Daily average	233	240	6,615	6,848	n.a.	n.a.

(a) Figures are based on support periods with accommodation. It can be reasonably assumed that a client will not have more than one period of accommodation on the same day.

Notes

1. Unmet Demand Collection cases excluded due to missing data: 0.
2. Client Collection cases excluded due to missing data: 618.
3. The accommodation status of a client on a particular day is based on the reported periods of accommodation within a support period.
4. Clients may start and end accommodation on the same date.
5. Referrals for accommodation may not be for immediate accommodation.
6. 'Valid unmet requests' excludes those made at an agency of an inappropriate target group, or if the requested service (for example, accommodation) is not provided by the agency, or where proffered assistance is refused. An adjustment for missing information on validity of request has been made (see Appendix 2).
7. 'Immediate accommodation' is that which is required within 24 hours. An adjustment for missing information on when accommodation was needed has been made (see Appendix 2).
8. Some agencies that participated in the Client Collection did not participate in the Unmet Demand Collection (see Tables A2.1 and A2.2). To facilitate comparison, only agencies that participated in both the Client Collection and the Unmet Demand Collection contribute to the individual daily figures in this table. Consequently the figures understate the level of activity in SAAP agencies.

Sources: SAAP Client Collection and Unmet Demand Collection

