

9 Services for people experiencing homelessness

9.1 Introduction

Homelessness has been part of Australia's social environment since the arrival of the First Fleet. Young homeless boys, for example, were transferred from the inner city to ships anchored in the harbour as early as the 1820s. A comprehensive literature review of the history of homelessness in Australia since this time has been compiled by Coleman (2000). Over this period, the traditional notions of homelessness have changed considerably, as have the populations of homeless people.

In the post-war period in Australia, homelessness was most often associated with older, alcoholic men living on 'skid row'. The causes were generally identified as chronic alcoholism and estrangement or disaffiliation from mainstream society (MacKenzie & Chamberlain 2003). Rather than a process, it was thought of as a permanent way of life brought about by the personal circumstances of the homeless.

Since the 1960s and 1970s, there has been an increase in the topicality of, and public awareness about, homelessness. This led to the release, in the 1980s, of the Burdekin Report on youth homelessness (HREOC 1989), which gave rise to headlines such as 'homeless children dying' (Chamberlain & Johnson 2003). As a result, the homeless population was acknowledged to be more diverse than previously thought, with more women, young people and families recognised as experiencing homelessness.

In 1973, the *Homeless Person's Assistance Act 1973* was passed and put into practice the following year as the Homeless Persons' Assistance Program, and government-funded services for the homeless rapidly expanded. Such policy responses were based on, and continue to be informed by, considerations about the causes of homelessness.

The increase in homelessness over the last 20 years has coincided with stubborn levels of unemployment, often long term, and increasing underemployment and casualisation of the workforce. At the same time, there has been a decrease in affordable housing, an increase in family breakdown, a continuing deinstitutionalisation of mental health patients, and an increase in the availability of hard drugs (MacKenzie & Chamberlain 2003). Locating the reasons for homelessness at this structural level is a departure from explanations that focus on the individual, such as identifying the cause as alcoholism or 'fecklessness'.

It is generally agreed, however, that the causes of homelessness cannot be solely attributed to either structural or individualistic (agency) factors. Chamberlain and Johnson (2003), after reviewing the literature on causation in the social sciences, suggest that structural and individualistic factors are intimately related, with neither existing

independently of the other. It is 'the interrelation of agency and structure that causes some people and not others to become homeless in any given set of circumstances' (Neale 1997 cited in Chamberlain & Johnson 2003:10).

Structural factors affecting homelessness include adverse housing and labour markets, poverty, discrimination and family restructuring. Individual risk factors can include poverty, unemployment, sexual or physical abuse, family disputes and breakdowns, a background of care, experience of prison, substance abuse, school exclusion, and/or poor physical or mental health. There are also specific events that often act as triggers for homelessness, which can include leaving home after family conflict, eviction, widowhood, leaving care or prison, a sharp deterioration in mental health or an increase in substance misuse (Robinson 2001).

A consideration of such factors allows policy makers and researchers to chart the processes that lead into and out of homelessness and to identify possibilities for successful interventions. This in turn assists governments to address the structural contributions to homelessness.

This chapter begins (Section 9.2) with an overview of the developing definitions of homelessness. It also profiles some of the complexities involved in defining homelessness, with a special focus on Indigenous Australians and those who live in public spaces, giving a contextual background for the provision of services to homeless people. Section 9.3 provides current data on the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP), including time-series information on the growth of the program and on state and territory profiles. It covers the characteristics of homeless people using SAAP, where these people stayed before SAAP, the reasons they gave for seeking assistance, the services provided to them, and information on those people who were unsuccessful in becoming SAAP clients. The section also presents information, available for the first time, on the characteristics of people who may be being excluded from SAAP services. Some important development issues in SAAP data collection are then discussed.

Sections 9.4 and 9.5 profile a range of Commonwealth and state and territory government initiatives specifically targeting the homeless population and aimed at prevention and early intervention, as well as crisis management. The chapter concludes with a summary section (9.6).

9.2 Developing definitions of homelessness

Post-World War II literature on homelessness can be categorised into four 'waves' according to the different kinds of definitions on which it was based (Coleman 2000). First wave definitions of homelessness focused on older, single white males. Second wave definitions expanded the definition to recognise the complexity and diversity of homelessness, and were advocacy-based, emphasising the lived experience of homelessness.

In response, third wave definitions attempted to delimit the extent of homelessness. Service delivery definitions formed part of this third wave and generally focused on defining a homeless population for whom services would be provided. Coleman argued that this definition obscured those homeless who had become adapted to homelessness.

One pre-eminent example of a service delivery definition is provided by the *SAAP Act 1994* (Section 4). This definition has been suggested as the 'official' Australian definition of homelessness (Chamberlain & Johnson 2001; FaCS 1999:19). The Act defines a person as homeless if, and only if, he or she has 'inadequate access to safe and secure housing' (FaCS 1999:19). This is often paraphrased as 'considered not to have access to safe, secure and adequate housing'.

The Act then goes on to refer to what this might mean, citing housing situations that may damage health; threaten safety; marginalise a person from both personal amenities and the economic and social support a home normally offers; where the affordability, safety, security or adequacy of housing is threatened; or where there is no security of tenure. A person is also considered homeless under the Act if living in SAAP or other emergency accommodation.

Coleman proposed that the most recent literature, the fourth wave, has re-evaluated these earlier, narrower definitions and renewed debate about our understandings of homelessness. One such fourth wave definition that has received wide coverage and has been adopted by a number of authors is a cultural definition of homelessness. It was initially proposed by Chamberlain and Mackenzie (1992) and was used by Chamberlain (1999) in his work on the 1996 Census.

Cultural definitions of homelessness propose that it should be defined by reference to the community standards for housing of the place and time in which the definition is to be used. The minimum community standards embedded in the present-day housing practices of Australia, it has been argued, encompass having 'a room to sleep in, a room to live in, kitchen and bathroom facilities of [your] own, and an element of security of tenure' (Chamberlain & Johnson 2001:39). By this argument, people with lower housing standards than these would be considered homeless.

Chamberlain and Johnson also argue that, according to the same community standards, there are some segments of the population who cannot expect to achieve this level of housing conditions, including older people in nursing homes, students in halls of residence, and those living in seminaries and in prisons. People in these situations, then, should not be counted as homeless as a result of not experiencing the usual minimum community housing standards.

Using this cultural definition, Chamberlain and Johnson (2001:39) divided homelessness into three subgroups: people with no conventional accommodation (termed the primary homeless), people moving between temporary accommodation (the secondary homeless), and people living in boarding houses on a long-term basis (the tertiary homeless). In the 1996 Census, these subgroups were targeted by new questions identifying people who were 'sleeping rough' in improvised homes or tents or on benches, in parks, and so on (the primary homeless) and people with no usual address staying temporarily with friends or relatives (the secondary homeless). People

staying in boarding houses (who were presumed to be the only housed sector of the community living in conditions not meeting the identified minimum community housing standards) were identified as the tertiary homeless. Also included in the Census count were individuals using SAAP services (Table 9.1).

Other researchers, while basically accepting a three-tiered approach to defining homelessness, have given greater weight to security of tenure or a lack of other options when considering whom to consider the tertiary homeless. The Final Report from the Technical Forum on the Estimation of Homelessness in Australia (Strategic Partners Pty Ltd 2001), for example, referred to lack of security of tenure and to accommodation which is unsafe or harmful to health in their interpretation of tertiary homeless. The Western Australian Homelessness Taskforce (WA State Homelessness Taskforce 2002) took this one step further by adding a reference to situations where there are no other options and there is insecurity of tenure. Both include people living in *some* boarding houses, as well as *some* caravan parks, rooming houses or special accommodation houses as the tertiary homeless.

The Final Report (Strategic Partners Pty Ltd 2001:11) also agreed to add a preamble to Chamberlain and MacKenzie's amended categories, to 'provide a context to, and describe, the living situations of homeless people'. This starts with 'homelessness is one extreme of a spectrum of disadvantage in terms of access to safe, affordable and secure housing. Homelessness has an implication of lack of options or choice', then continues by citing the SAAP Act definition before categorising homelessness into three tiers (Box 9.1). This package of preamble and amended categories was chosen by the Western Australian taskforce, among others, to provide a basis for their investigation into homelessness in that state.

More recently, MacKenzie and Chamberlain (2003) have developed their understanding of homelessness by creating a 'typology' of homelessness careers. The typology attempts to abstract the salient features of homelessness, and emphasises the major processes whereby people become homeless—the how rather than the why of homelessness.

Table 9.1: The whereabouts of homeless people on Census night, by state/territory, 1996 (per cent)

	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Australia
Boarding house	29	26	23	16	19	16	6	9	22
SAAP accommodation	11	19	9	11	22	19	40	2	12
Friends/relatives	47	48	49	53	48	53	54	18	46
No conventional accommodation	13	7	19	20	11	12	—	71	20
<i>Total</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>
Total homeless (number)	29,608	17,840	25,649	12,252	6,837	2,014	1,198	9,906	105,304
<i>Per 10,000 population</i>	<i>49.4</i>	<i>41.0</i>	<i>77.3</i>	<i>71.5</i>	<i>48.1</i>	<i>43.9</i>	<i>40.3</i>	<i>532.1</i>	

Source: Chamberlain 1999.

Box 9.1: Homelessness: a definition

Primary homelessness or sleeping rough

People without conventional accommodation, such as people living on the streets, in parks, squatting in derelict buildings or using cars or railway carriages and makeshift dwellings.

Secondary homelessness or stop gap accommodation

People who move frequently from one form of transitional shelter to another. It covers: people using emergency accommodation (such as hostels for the homeless or night shelters); young people staying in youth refuges; women and children escaping domestic violence (staying in women's refuges); people residing temporarily with other families, acquaintances and friends (because they have no accommodation of their own).

Tertiary homelessness or insecure tenure/marginally housed

People whose living arrangements do not provide them with security of tenure as provided by a lease, or who are living in accommodation which is unsafe or harmful to their health. Such accommodation might include some boarding houses, caravan parks, rooming houses or special accommodation houses (Strategic Partners Pty Ltd 2001).

This typology, they claim, says as much about exit points from homelessness as it does about pathways into chronic homelessness, while the career paths allow identification of points of intervention, and draw attention to the notion that 'at risk' should be understood in different ways for different groups. The authors argue that three fundamental paths into chronic homelessness can be identified.

These three career paths are, first, youth becoming homeless because of family conflict and continuing into adult homelessness; second, homelessness arising from family violence, especially domestic violence; and, third, homelessness arising from a housing crisis, where poverty and accumulated debt underpin the slide into homelessness. In this typology the first two paths may be initiated by episodic periods of homelessness or housing uncertainty, but the last is generally an 'unambiguous predicament'.

This work follows on from earlier considerations about the effect of temporal dynamics on homelessness. Neil and Fopp, for instance (quoted in FaCS 1999:20), suggested that such temporal dynamics could be captured by a three-level characterisation: homeless for a short time, episodically homeless, and homeless for long periods of time. Chamberlain and Johnson (2000), in their earlier work on homelessness careers, had also suggested a three-level characterisation: at risk of homelessness (describing people when they are experiencing a crisis that places their housing at risk), temporary homelessness (describing people who experience a period of homelessness, followed by re-establishing a home), and chronic or ongoing homelessness.

An alternative depiction of the effects of temporal dynamics is captured by the notion of 'iterative homelessness' (Robinson 2003), which describes the passage of homeless people through several forms of inadequate housing. The usefulness of this notion derives from the insight that the occurrence of repeated movements between inadequate housing is as important a consideration as the forms of inadequate housing.

Outstanding issues in defining homelessness

Chamberlain required a definition of homelessness that facilitated an estimation of the number of homeless people on Census night, 1996. Note that the discussion here is based on the definition and methodology employed in the 1996 Census data. While some 2001 Census data on housing are available at the time of writing, the derived homelessness data, unfortunately, are not.

Chamberlain's approach was to define three groups of the homeless, based on their access to, or use of, 'conventional' accommodation, and to target these groups with specific questions, some included in the Census for the first time for this specific purpose. This approach led to the first widely accepted counting of the homeless, but there are a number of unresolved difficulties to defining and enumerating the homeless population in Australia.

Chamberlain and Johnson claimed that there was no subjectivity in this definition. Further, they claimed that subjectivity was both undesirable and unworkable in *any* definition—'it is intuitively absurd to claim that people living in the same accommodation can either be "housed" or "homeless", depending on their point of view' (Chamberlain & Johnson 2001:48). Even so, some subjectivity is not entirely absent from Chamberlain's implementation of his definition.

A case in point is the classification of boarding houses. The Census distinguished between persons who were resident in private and non-private dwellings. Non-private dwellings had 19 categories of both communal and transitory accommodation, including 'hotel, motel' and 'boarding houses, private hotel'. In trying to apply his definition in a practical way, Chamberlain had some difficulties with these classifications.

For example, when accommodation for workers in remote communities was classified by the Australian Bureau of Statistics as a boarding house, Chamberlain was unwilling to let the classification stand. These and other such dwellings were reclassified, based on a consideration of tenants' work status and income. Similar considerations also led to some hotels being reclassified as boarding houses. In addition, not all the tenants in the remaining dwellings classified as boarding houses were counted as homeless, with owners, staff and guests with another usual address removed from the count.

Further, through the identification of (most) tenants of (most) boarding houses as the sole tertiary homeless, Chamberlain privileged the easily enumerated 'rooms and amenities' aspect of his own suggested community standards over 'security of tenure', which is arguably more nebulous. We have already seen that the Western Australia Homelessness Taskforce and the Technical Forum on the Estimation of Homelessness in Australia both included considerations on security of tenure in their adopted definitions. This led them to conclude that only some boarding house residents, along with some caravan residents among others, should be considered as being homeless.

There are also difficulties with Chamberlain's definition of the primary homeless and its application in the 1996 Census. The primary homeless, according to Chamberlain, are those with no conventional dwellings, where 'conventional' is measured against Australia's current community standards for housing. Chamberlain grouped together people identified by the Census as sleeping out, living in tents or caravans outside of

caravan parks or living in improvised dwellings as belonging to this category. The primary homeless, then, included people living in sheds, in 'humpies', squatting in derelict buildings, sleeping on the streets, in parks or under bridges, or using cars, railway carriages or other 'improvised' dwellings.

This 'one size fits all' definition of the primary homeless obscures a number of complex definitional and service delivery issues. Perhaps the first point to be made here is the diversity of accommodation arrangements that this category encompasses, ranging from the traditional picture of someone 'sleeping rough' on a park bench to someone with significantly better housing standards, such as living in a shed with amenities.

Chamberlain claimed that it is 'likely' or 'probable' that the majority of people identified as having no conventional accommodation were living in improvised dwellings, rather than actually sleeping out, although no figures on these proportions are available. The jurisdiction with the greatest proportion of people identified as not living in conventional accommodation was the Northern Territory (71%). Western Australia and Queensland (20% and 19%, respectively) had the next highest proportions (see Table 9.1). An Indigenous/non-Indigenous breakdown, by jurisdiction, of those people identified as not living in conventional accommodation (Table 9.2) shows that these three jurisdictions also had the largest proportions of Indigenous people in this category (89%, 54% and 38%, respectively). Note that this table is derived from 90% of cases, so the total number of primary homeless is slightly less than that in Table 9.1.

While it is not known how many of the Indigenous people identified as not living in conventional housing are living on Aboriginal land, it is known that in the 1996 Census improvised dwellings for Indigenous households essentially related to remote areas (ATSIC 2002). It seems highly probable, then, that the high numbers of the Indigenous primary homeless, especially in the Northern Territory, Western Australia and Queensland, are heavily influenced by the number of Indigenous people living in 'humpies' and other improvised dwellings in remote Indigenous communities.

Table 9.2: Indigenous and non-Indigenous people with no conventional accommodation on Census night, by state/territory, 1996 (per cent)

	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	NT	Australia
Indigenous	7	1	38	54	27	4	89	50
Non-Indigenous	93	99	62	46	73	96	11	50
<i>Total</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>
Total (number)	3,685	1,202	4,707	2,341	698	230	6,710	19,579

Notes

1. Percentages are derived from information on 90 per cent of cases.
2. The Australian Capital Territory is excluded because the number of persons was less than 10.

Source: Chamberlain 1999.

Some changes were made in the 2001 Census that will have an impact on the number of Indigenous Australians who are now considered homeless. With these changes, the count of Indigenous dwellings in remote areas which are categorised as 'improvised' has decreased significantly, while the count of these dwellings in urban areas has increased, as has the number of Indigenous improvised dwellings consisting of just a single person (ATSIC 2002). However, the underlying issue of what it means to be homeless for Indigenous Australians remains.

Another methodological issue which received attention in the 2001 Census is the problem of counting people who are actually 'sleeping rough'. This undertaking is very reliant on local knowledge, and the 1996 figures almost certainly underestimated the numbers of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous homeless in this situation. For example, Memmott and Fantin (2001, cited in Memmott, Long & Chambers 2003) claimed that there were as many as 227 people living an itinerant lifestyle in the Darwin and Palmerston area. The Census counted only 50 such people in the wider Darwin area, and Chamberlain (1999) acknowledged that the 1996 count of this segment of the homeless population was conservative.

Further, of the more than 21,000 people nationwide identified as the primary homeless on Census night 1996 (see Table 9.1), 95% reported that they were at their usual address and over three-quarters had been in the same housing circumstances a year before Census night (Chamberlain 1999). This raises the broader issue of the service delivery implications for those segments of the population who are labelled as the primary homeless.

Both these questions—the definition of homelessness for Indigenous Australians and the service delivery implications for all those labelled as the primary homeless—deserve some more examination in order to better understand the milieu in which services for the homeless are delivered.

Indigenous homelessness

In a seminal report, Keys and Young put forward a number of definitions which emphasised the multi-layered and multidimensional nature of Indigenous homelessness. These incorporated 'spiritual homelessness', with its historical background of dispossession, as well as aspects of Indigenous family dynamics. Underpinning these is the understanding that 'home' can have a different meaning for Indigenous Australians. Paraphrasing an Indigenous SAAP worker, it 'is about a sense of belonging ... four walls and a roof don't make a home' (Keys & Young 1998:27).

It is difficult to reconcile this view with Chamberlain's definition of homelessness. Memmott in fact has argued that the objectivity sought by cultural definitions such as Chamberlain's is undermined by the existence of very different cultural contexts within Australian society, each of which may maintain their own values and meanings related to housing' (Memmott et al. 2003:iii).

It seems that this is well illustrated in the Indigenous context. Indeed, a number of Indigenous people living with no walled and roofed dwelling strongly argue that they are both 'placed' and 'homed' and call themselves 'parkies', 'goomers', 'long grassers' or 'river campers' (Dillon and Savage, 1994, cited in Memmott 2002:11).

Memcott himself suggests not using the term 'homeless' in an Indigenous context. Instead, he identifies a segment of the Indigenous population as 'public place dwellers'. He characterises these as 'those who do not pay for accommodation, have a visible profile (socialising, sheltering, drinking, arguing and fighting in public), have low incomes of which a substantial part is often spent on alcohol, have generally few possessions (minimal clothes and bedding), and usually conform to a "beat" of places where they camp and socialise in particular public or semi-public areas' (Memcott et al. 2003:i).

For Memcott these people can have a variety of housing circumstances, from sleeping rough to living in houses, albeit in problematic circumstances. There does, however, seem to be a suggested commonality in the characteristic of camping and socialising in public or semi-public areas. He proposes five categories of such public place dwellers: those living in public places; those occasionally spending time in public places; spiritual forms of homelessness; crowding, where it causes considerable stress to families and communities; and individuals escaping unsafe or unstable family circumstances. The authors further subdivide those living in public places into those who intend to eventually return home and those who live a 'permanent public place dwelling lifestyle' (Memcott et al. 2003:27).

Goldie (2002) argues that the most common response to such public place dwellers, which applies to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, is the legal regulation of public spaces. This may happen at the local level by council by-laws and night patrols, as well as by state and territory legislation. This legal regulation is commonly implemented by civil ordinances, municipal by-laws or other assorted laws against vagrancy, loitering, begging, noise nuisance, drinking in a public place, sleeping in cars or parks at night, or 'move on' regulations.

A snapshot of the concerns of Indigenous public place dwellers is provided by the 'Long Grassers' of the Darwin/Palmerston area, named after a type of grass that grows locally. As has been said, the number of Long Grassers is probably in the hundreds and the Darwin City Council's response to such homelessness is typical of many other local council responses. As an example, the City Council's by-law 103 makes sleeping in a public space any time between sunset and sunrise an offence, while under by-law 100 it is an offence to stash bags, bedding, cooking gear or other goods in public spaces.

Goldie (2002) reports that over 70% of the people fined under by-law 103 between 1 February 2001 and 31 January 2002 were Indigenous, in an area where Indigenous people comprise only 9% of the population. Not surprisingly, then, an issue of major concern identified by the Long Grassers (Memcott, Paul and Fantin, Shaneen, cited in Goldie 2002:279) is the extent to which their daily activities are criminalised by the fact of being carried out in a public setting.

The service delivery needs of the Long Grassers are complex and far ranging. Immediate concerns about the criminalisation of their behaviours are being addressed by a challenge to the validity of by-law 103, currently before the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission. Another response addresses community concerns about their health and wellbeing as well as about the impact of some people's anti-social behaviour.

Box 9.2: 'Itinerants' Project, Darwin/Palmerston

The project began in 1999, when community groups met to discuss the 'itinerant' issues. In 2000, the Darwin office of ATSIC and the Northern Territory Government commenced a jointly funded Policy Research Project to consider the issues surrounding Indigenous 'itinerants' in the Darwin/Palmerston area.

The project developed an Action Plan, which was endorsed by the Northern Territory Government in March 2002. In its totality it reflects the multiple and complex needs of public place dwelling Indigenous people. The rationale behind the Project is to 'encourage "itinerants" in Darwin and Palmerston to find pathways away from the destructive cycle of alcohol and substance abuse, which characterises the lifestyle of many of the client group, towards either a return to home or a more productive lifestyle with appropriate accommodation in town' (Project Coordinator, pers. comm.).

This plan not only incorporates accommodation, patrolling, education and alcohol responses, but also responses to regional issues specific to remote communities. The accommodation component involves a range of strategies, from basic camping facilities, to managed and supported accommodation options, through to conventional housing.

The Northern Territory Government committed \$500,000 to initiatives in year one of the project (2002) and 50 different organisations and agencies are involved in the four main working parties. The project incorporates cultural protocols developed by the Larrakia, the traditional owners of the region, which call on mutual understanding and respect between visitors and the Larrakia nation.

This approach, the 'Itinerants' Project (Box 9.2), is proactive, rather than punitive, and incorporates strategies for improving the health and safety of the Long Grassers and ensuring the protection of their rights to urban areas, while at the same time addressing the negative impact of some of the groups' behaviour on themselves, their relatives and acquaintances, and on the wider community. It also illustrates how a holistic and whole-of-government approach to Indigenous homelessness can incorporate respect for Traditional Law through the use of cultural protocols.

Dwelling in public places

According to Coleman (2000), public spaces have become places of significance to people experiencing homelessness, and may come to be equated with 'home'. Her recent study in Fortitude Valley, Brisbane, reported that homeless people 'slept, ate, washed, had sex, drank, smoked and injected drugs, listened to music, carried out business, played cards, met friends, begged, maintained and cleaned their spaces, and gathered for early morning coffee and sandwiches' in public spaces (Coleman 2002:8). Even for people who are marginally housed, public spaces are often the only spaces they have in which they can exercise some degree of control—meet with friends, have a drink, or escape the sometimes chaotic conditions they are accommodated in.

Coleman also argues that, for those people dwelling in public spaces, the most important concern is having no control over, or legitimacy in, the places they call home. This aligns with the concerns of the Long Grassers, reported above, about the extent to

which their activities are criminalised when carried out in a public space. As Goldie (2002) has pointed out, activities that would probably not be noticed when carried out in a dwelling, such as sleeping, being partially or wholly naked, having sex, becoming intoxicated and noisy, or taking drugs, create ire and induce a legal response when carried out in a public space.

This lack of control or legitimacy is reflected in the extent of the complaints about public place dwellers from 'mainstream' communities, commonly concerning the above-mentioned 'anti-social' behaviour, and in the responses to such complaints. Coleman, however, places the source of conflict between members of mainstream and homeless communities in a broader context than ire over anti-social behaviour. Access to public space 'is increasingly based on the ability to pay for that access. Public space is leased to private business. Private security guards patrol public space. The standard for behaviour is whether it interferes with businesses or not' (Coleman 2002:9). Increasingly, she argues, it is the market citizen, or consumer, who is recognised as the legitimate user of public space as public space itself becomes a commodity.

Coleman's analysis locates the problems that public place dwellers face as arising from our consumer society. Whether one agrees with this analysis or not, it is clear that the rapid redevelopment of inner suburbs in urban areas means that previously derelict locations and key inner city locations throughout Australia have become disputed territory for the homeless. Public amenities such as toilets are also becoming increasingly rare, and benches have been removed or are designed to inhibit lying down. In some railway stations, a ticket must be bought before the warmth or facilities of the station can be enjoyed (Lipman 2002).

Whatever the preferred framework for analysing the conflict arising from homelessness in public places, there is general agreement that it is at the local level where government decisions have the most day by day impact. Homeless people routinely utilise parks, toilets, and other public infrastructure, much of which is the responsibility of local councils. Further, local council policies, such as those touching on town planning, health regulations and community development activities, among others, also necessarily impact on homeless people. Successful interventions at this level often include elements of assertive and persistent outreach, incorporating streetwork, assessment, and referral and advocacy (Twardowski 2002).

The difficulties of such interventions at the local council level are well illustrated in Brisbane. Here, as elsewhere in Australia, the redevelopment of the inner suburbs has had a detrimental effect on the homeless of the area, including the Indigenous people for whom particular localities have been long-term meeting places (Eastgate 2001). This redevelopment has led to a loss of affordable inner city dwellings, and the corresponding increased pressure on public spaces has led to complaints by some local residents, businesses and public space users, generally concerning noise, drunkenness or mess and litter.

The great challenge posed by public place dwellers is 'whether we can accommodate [them]—not just in houses, warm beds and secure rooms. It is whether we can accommodate them in our communities, in the way we design and use public space—and of course in our hearts' (Coleman 2002:9). Brisbane Council is attempting to meet

this challenge by its commitment to responding to public homelessness in a reasonable, practical and inclusive manner, and to treat homeless people as legitimate members of the community, not just as a problem to be solved (Eastgate 2001).

An initial trial based on these values, while ultimately unfruitful, provides an excellent case study in the challenges posed by public place dwellers and the difficulties governments face in designing interventions to address those challenges (Box 9.3). It should be said that a follow-up initiative was designed by Brisbane Council, this time at Kurilpa Point, a low-profile Indigenous gathering place located in the midst of an industrial precinct, without the family use or real estate value of New Farm Park. Here, in response to complaints about rubbish (often possessions), the council has established storage facilities, in a trial that this time shows greater promise of success.

This section has touched upon the challenges posed by the presence of the homeless, itinerants and the marginally housed in public spaces, and on local initiatives to find alternative and satisfactory responses to these challenges. It is, however, the Commonwealth and state/territory governments that hold legislative responsibility for funding the services assisting homeless people. The next section presents Australia's flagship program for assisting people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness: the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP).

Box 9.3: New Farm Park public space initiative, Brisbane

The local council, in partnership with a community agency, set aside a designated space in New Farm Park for members of Brisbane's Indigenous community, long-term users of the park. A park shelter was established, along with port-a-loos, a shower and a barbeque, all surrounded by a shade cloth and perimeter fence. The community agency liaised with the users of the park to establish a set of operating rules, and facilitated park users' access to support services.

Some level of success was achieved in all three aims of the trial: to improve safety and living conditions for Indigenous park users, to reduce the impact of their presence on other users, and to raise awareness of homelessness issues. The ultimate failure of the trial was put down to over-intensive media coverage of the initiative and to a concerted lobbying by some local residents and businesses as well as the political Opposition. This led both to unwelcome intrusions from hostile visitors, and to an increase in numbers using the park, not all of whom felt bound by the original operating rules with consequent occasional disruptions. This last point highlights a common dilemma in the construction of such designated spaces, namely, that their very presence can promote an itinerant lifestyle and increase the number of people drawn to use that public space.

The Brisbane City Council eventually discontinued this trial (Eastgate 2001).

9.3 Supported Accommodation Assistance Program

Since SAAP was established in 1985, it has been refined through periodic reviews and three extensive national evaluations. Jointly administered under the Commonwealth and state and territory community services portfolios, it has been widely recognised as a world-class program. Nevertheless, it is constantly reviewed to keep up with advances in best practice. It is not only an important part of Australia's overall response to homelessness, but also an integral part of Australia's broader social safety net (FaCS 1999).

Pre-SAAP, a range of independent programs existed for the homeless and for women escaping domestic violence. These sectors had quite different histories. The historical roots of single men's shelters, for example, stretch back to at least the early 1900s, when the major cities had shelters providing generally overcrowded temporary accommodation. In contrast, refuge models were developed in the 1970s to support young people and for women escaping domestic violence, and at the time were considered highly innovative. These independent programs were reviewed in 1983 and SAAP was launched in 1985, when eight separate programs were brought together under a joint Commonwealth and state/territory program, with new funds provided to enable growth in service provision.

Table 9.3: SAAP funding, 1996–97 to 2001–02 (current and constant 2001–02 dollars)

Reporting period	Total recurrent funding	Funding to agencies	Funding per support period	Funding per client
Current \$				
1996–97	219,771,000	200,539,000	1,280	2,410
1997–98	223,661,000	212,768,000	1,300	2,260
1998–99	229,889,000	220,328,000	1,350	2,430
1999–00	245,511,000	231,717,000	1,470	2,570
2000–01	268,537,000	251,367,000	1,470	2,700
2001–02	285,039,000	268,960,000	1,520	2,810
Constant 2001–02 \$				
1996–97	251,587,000	229,571,000	1,470	2,760
1997–98	251,833,000	239,568,000	1,460	2,550
1998–99	253,840,000	243,284,000	1,490	2,680
1999–00	261,539,000	246,845,000	1,570	2,740
2000–01	276,056,000	258,405,000	1,510	2,780
2001–02	285,039,000	268,960,000	1,520	2,810

Notes

1. Funding per support period and per client are based on recurrent allocations to agencies.
2. 'Total recurrent funding' for 1999–00, 2000–01 and 2001–02 includes relatively small amounts provided through the PADV Program (see AIHW2002a:Table 10.1, footnote 2).
3. 'Funding to agencies' in 2001–02 includes \$7,842,000 provided by the Victorian funding department which was in addition to the SAAP funding agreement between that state and the Commonwealth. The states and territories generally provide additional funds for supporting SAAP activities which are not part of the SAAP agreement. Additional funds provided by other states and territories were not reported and are not shown here.
4. Support period figures have been weighted to adjust for agency non-participation.
5. Client figures have been weighted to adjust for agency non-participation and client non-consent.

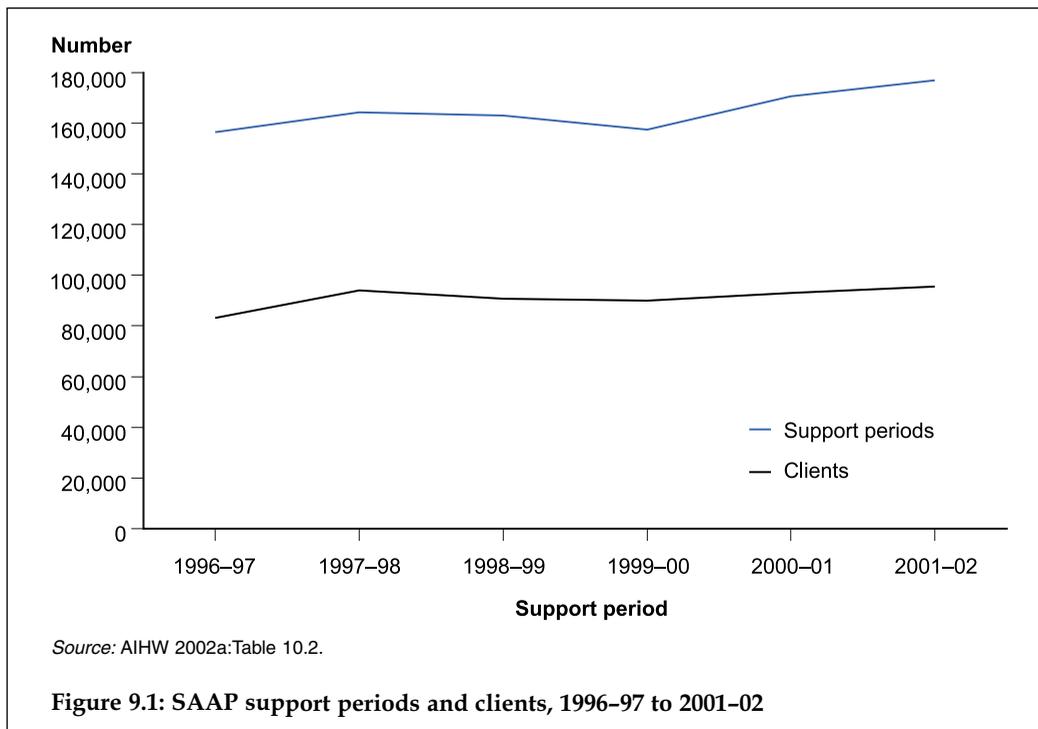
Source: AIHW 2002a.

A national data collection was launched in 1996 to describe the usage and nature of the services provided to SAAP clients and their accompanying children. Over the course of the National Data Collection, recurrent funding for SAAP has risen by 30%, from \$219.8 million in 1996–97 to \$285.0 million in 2001–02 (Table 9.3). Adjusting for inflation, this funding has increased in real terms by 13%.

Of the total recurrent funding, a small percentage is allocated for purposes such as administration, training, research and evaluation, with the remainder going to SAAP agencies. Recurrent funding to SAAP agencies, adjusted for inflation, has increased by 17% in real terms over the 6 years. Funding per client also saw an increase, from \$2,760 per client in 1996–97 to \$2,810 in 2001–02, expressed in real terms.

The diverse nature of client needs is reflected in the considerable variety of services that SAAP agencies provide. These may include the provision of supported accommodation and/or various services such as meals, counselling, advocacy, or living skills development. A client will normally receive a wide range of such services in any support period.

Trends in the number of clients provided with SAAP services and trends in support periods showed a similar pattern over the 6 years, although the number of support periods rose more strongly over the last 2 years (Figure 9.1). In 1996–97, an estimated 83,200 clients were provided with support; the figure rose to 94,100 in 1997–98 and then fell to 90,000 by 1999–00. In 2000–01 the number of clients increased again to 93,000. The highest number of clients of any of the 6 years was recorded in 2001–02, with 95,600 clients provided with SAAP services.



SAAP IV, the current and fourth 5-year agreement of the program, commenced in July 2000. Research on high-need clients and on Indigenous homelessness, and a review of unmet demand, are among the considerations that have informed the revised policy and framework of SAAP IV.

The current allocation of funds to programs across the states and territories is largely based on the levels of funding of homelessness services at the commencement of the first SAAP agreement in 1985, on the limitations placed on the distribution of Commonwealth 'Movement to Award' funding, and on the ability of state and territory Governments to match subsequent Commonwealth indexation and growth funding. Commonwealth growth funding under SAAP has been allocated on a per capita basis, with positive adjustments for smaller jurisdictions.

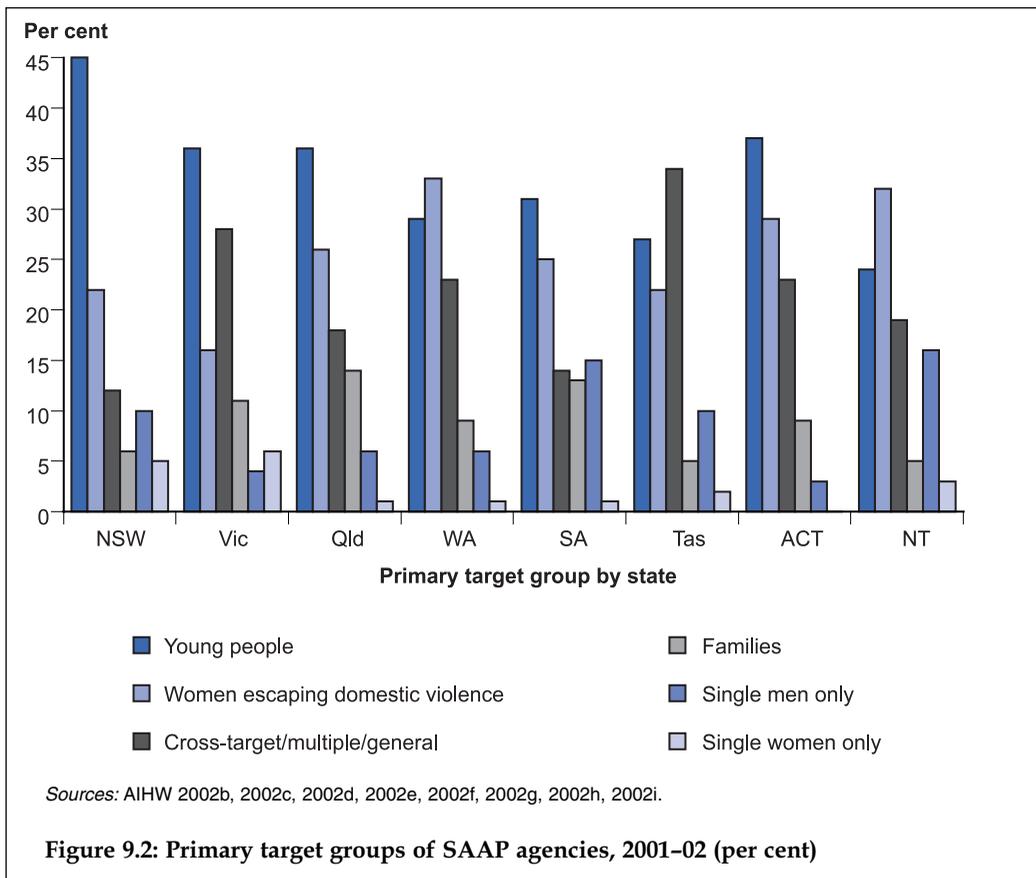
Profile of SAAP in the states and territories

Population size is the base determinant for SAAP funding allocation, although the four smallest jurisdictions receive relatively more funding than the larger ones (see Figure 9.3). The development of particular services since SAAP's inception has largely been an outcome of submission-based funding patterns, and the program has continued to evolve around specific target and interest groups. The mix of SAAP services is further influenced by state-level planning divergences. The 500 services funded at the commencement of the program have now grown in number to nearly 1,300.

As a result of these somewhat ad hoc factors, different states and territories have very diverse mixes of SAAP agencies (Figure 9.2). Many of these agencies target quite highly specific client groups such as single men, single women, women and children escaping domestic violence, young people within particular age ranges, and families, although there are other SAAP agencies with a broader or more general client group focus. These different sectors often have quite different operational procedures, although a commonality does exist in the prevalence of congregate care models of service provision, where clients share communal living arrangements.

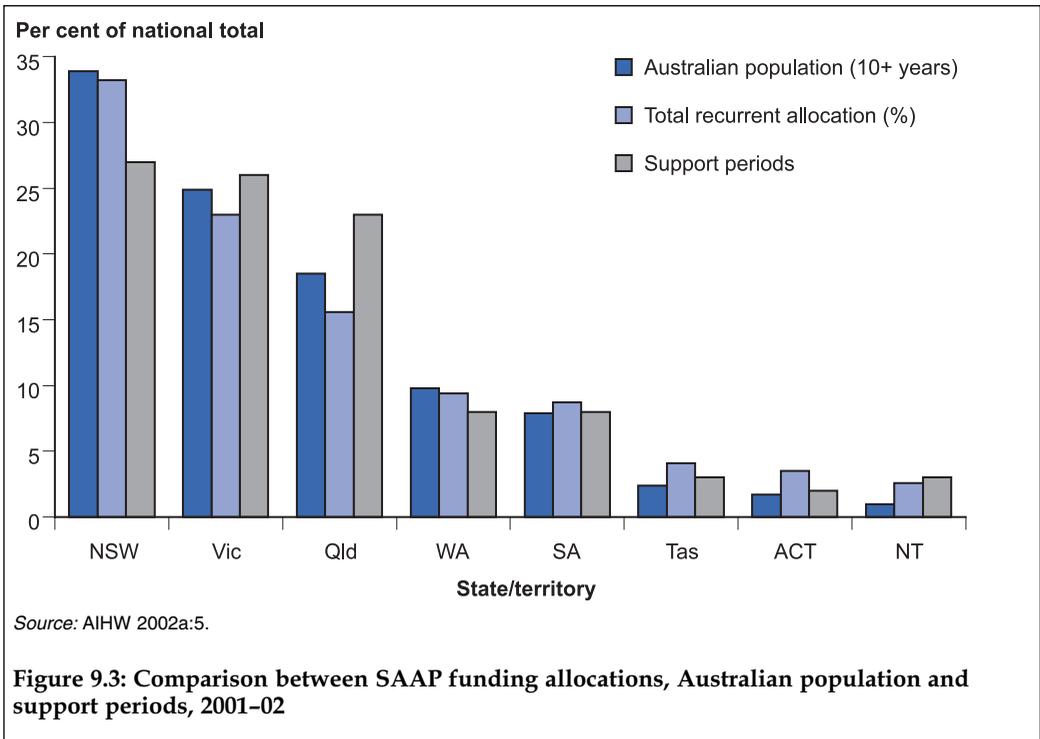
Figure 9.2 shows that, in five of the eight states and territories, the majority of agencies target young people. These services cater for young people under 25 years within various nominated age ranges. Most agencies in Western Australia and the Northern Territory target women escaping domestic violence, while in Tasmania the majority are general, multiple or cross-target agencies.

This illustrates the differences that exist between jurisdictions on how SAAP funds are allocated. In Tasmania, for example, refuges with a broader client target group (cross-target, multiple target or general refuges) receive over a third of that state's recurrent allocation, while in New South Wales such services receive around 12% of the funding. Again, in the Northern Territory, 16% of recurrent funding is allocated to single men's refuges, while in the Australian Capital Territory such services are allocated 3% of the funding (AIHW 2002b, 2002c, 2002g).



Across the nation in 2001-02, agencies targeting young people (37% of agencies) received the largest proportion (35%) of recurrent SAAP funding, with agencies targeting women escaping domestic violence (23% of all agencies) receiving the next largest allocation (29%). The majority of SAAP services (55%) are based in capital cities, with 7% based in other metropolitan centres, 31% in large and small rural centres and the remaining 7% in remote areas (AIHW 2002a:Table2.2).

It is more difficult to compare support periods across states and territories because of the very different operational procedures employed by different sectors of SAAP services. For example, some single men’s shelters, and some other high-volume agencies, have recurring clients who are regularly accommodated overnight but leave the service the next day. If each of these overnight accommodation periods is counted as a support period, as is often the case when the client is not assured of a bed the next night, then a single client can have many support periods over a relatively short period of time. This is evidenced by the sharp rise since the last *Australia’s Welfare* (AIHW 2001) in the proportion of support periods for Queensland, which is largely due to a single, high-volume agency joining the collection and employing such reporting practices.



A fuller understanding of the count of support periods is given by comparing the mean and median lengths of closed support periods across the jurisdictions (Table 9.4). This shows that in Queensland more than half of the closed support periods were for 1 day or less (a closed support period is one that finished before the end of the reporting year), by far the shortest median length of support. Queensland, along with the Northern Territory, also had the shortest average (mean) length of closed support periods, at 23 days.

Of interest too is the number of clients supported by SAAP in 2001-02 (Table 9.4). As population numbers and characteristics vary across the states and territories, per 10,000 population figures allow a meaningful comparison of the extent of SAAP coverage across Australia. It should be noted here that the rates used in the rest of this chapter are not indicative of the per capita size of the homeless population (see Table 9.1 for those estimates), but rather are indicative of the number of people accessing SAAP.

With 191 clients for every 10,000 people aged 10 years and over (age-adjusted), the Northern Territory well over three times the national average of 56 clients for every 10,000 population, age-adjusted. The next highest level of people accessing SAAP was in Tasmania (91), while New South Wales had the lowest level (46 clients per 10,000).

Table 9.4: SAAP clients, and mean and median length of support periods, 2001–02

	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Australia
Clients	26,400	29,200	18,400	9,000	8,800	3,700	1,900	3,100	95,600
Clients per 10,000 population (10+ years)	46	69	59	54	67	91	69	191	56
Mean length (days) of closed support periods	42	63	23	32	64	56	76	23	44
Median length (days) of closed support periods	5	13	1	3	9	20	15	4	4

Notes

1. Number excluded due to errors and omissions (weighted): 0 clients and 1,348 closed support periods.
2. Number of clients within a state or territory relates to clients who ever received assistance from a SAAP agency in that state or territory. Since a client may have support periods in more than one state or territory, state and territory figures do not sum to the national figure.
3. 'Clients per 10,000 population 10+ years' shows how many people out of every 10,000 aged 10 years and over in the general population became clients of SAAP. The rate is estimated by comparing the number of SAAP clients aged 10 years and over with the estimated resident population aged 10 years and over at 30 June just prior to the reporting period. Age-standardised estimates have been derived to allow for different age distributions in the various jurisdictions. The Australian estimated resident population at 30 June 2001 (final estimates) has been used as the reference population.
4. Figures have been weighted to adjust for agency non-participation.

Source: SAAP Client Collection; ABS 2001a.

SAAP agencies provided services to 95,600 clients nationally during 2001–02. These SAAP clients, as parents and guardians, may have had children with them. Such children are not included in the client count as they are counted separately as accompanying children. In 2001–02, there was an estimated 50,700 of these accompanying children (AIHW 2002a:54). This is the first year this figure is available, and for the first time a single estimate of the total number of people in SAAP services can be made available. During 2001–02, it is estimated that a total of around 146,300 people, which includes adults and children, accessed SAAP services.

Nationally, the rate of SAAP use stayed fairly stable over the six years between 1997 and 2002 (Table 9.5). The highest rate of use was in 1997–98, when 59 people out of every 10,000 aged 10 years and over (age-standardised) became SAAP clients. The lowest rate across the period was in 1999–00: 55 people per 10,000.

The states and territories showed more variation in the rate of SAAP use. Even allowing for its relatively young age profile, the Northern Territory had by far the highest rate every year, ranging between 167 and 183 clients for every 10,000 people aged 10 plus (age-adjusted). This was around three times the national average in all years. New South Wales was the only state with rates below the national average every year, although Western Australia had below average rates every year except 2001–02.

Table 9.5: Number of SAAP clients per 10,000 population, 1997–98 to 2001–02

	1997–98	1998–99	1999–00	2000–01	2001–02
NSW	54	50	47	46	47
Vic	71	73	70	68	69
Qld	56	51	52	58	58
WA	52	49	52	59	53
SA	70	60	61	61	70
Tas	97	90	90	91	97
ACT	79	72	74	72	63
NT	179	183	170	167	169
Total number	59	56	55	56	56

Notes

1. Number excluded due to errors and omissions (weighted): 0.
2. Since a client may be supported by agencies in more than one state or territory, national numbers of clients per 10,000 population are not the simple mean of the state and territory figures.
3. 'Clients per 10,000 population aged 10+' shows how many people out of every 10,000 aged 10 and over in the general population become clients of SAAP. The rate is estimated by comparing the number of SAAP clients aged 10 and over with the estimated resident population aged 10 and over at 30 June just prior to the reporting period. Age-standardised estimates have been derived to allow for different age distributions in the various jurisdictions. The Australian estimated resident population at 30 June 2001 (final estimates) has been used as the reference population.
4. Figures have been weighted to adjust for agency non-participation and client non-consent.

Sources: SAAP Administrative Data and Client Collections; ABS 2001a.

Across Australia, the number of support periods per client averaged 1.8 during 2001–02, slightly higher than in previous years (Table 9.6). The largest increase in average number of support periods per client between any two reporting periods was in Queensland between 1999–00 and 2000–01. This increase, from 1.85 to 2.31, was due to the inclusion in the Client Collection of a high-volume agency in that state, as reported earlier.

Clients accessing SAAP agencies in New South Wales and the two territories had relatively high repeat-use rates in all years, averaging two or more support periods per client in nearly every year except 2001–02. Only New South Wales and Queensland averaged more than two support periods per client in 2001–02, although New South Wales has shown a slight but steady decrease in the average number client since the collection began. High repeat-use rates are sometimes negatively referred to as 'churning', suggesting that clients benefit little during repeat SAAP stays. However, for many clients, such as those with high needs, re-engagement with SAAP services over time can be a positive experience.

Table 9.6: Average number of SAAP support periods per client, 1997–98 to 2001–02

	1997–98	1998–99	1999–00	2000–01	2001–02
NSW	2.15	2.15	2.07	2.02	2.00
Vic	1.65	1.76	1.74	1.73	1.73
Qld	1.83	1.81	1.85	2.31	2.44
WA	1.74	1.77	1.73	1.85	1.88
SA	1.93	1.97	1.88	1.84	1.79
Tas	1.71	1.86	1.89	1.76	1.74
ACT	2.39	2.22	2.33	2.18	1.87
NT	2.04	2.14	1.92	2.13	1.94
Australia	1.72	1.77	1.73	1.80	1.82

Notes

1. Number excluded due to errors and omissions (weighted): 0.
2. Clients may have support periods at agencies in more than one state or territory. Consequently, the number of clients multiplied by the average number of support periods for clients that ever visited a particular state or territory is greater than the number of support periods provided within that state or territory. This has changed since the 1999–00 annual report (AIHW 2000), in which clients were tabulated according to the state or territory of the agency they first visited in the financial year.
3. Since a client may have support periods in more than one state or territory, national numbers of support periods per client is not the simple mean of the state and territory figures.
4. Figures have been weighted to adjust for agency non-participation and client non-consent.

Sources: SAAP Administrative Data and Client Collections.

Characteristics of SAAP clients

Figure 9.4 shows the age and gender distribution of SAAP clients in Australia during 2001–02, presented in 5-year age groupings. For every age group 45 years and over, there were more male SAAP clients than female, while in all age groups less than 45 years there were more females than males. The majority of clients (86%) were less than 45 years of age. The largest group of clients for both males and females was the 15–19 year olds, with 19% of all clients being in this age group. The next largest group was the 20–24 year olds (16% of clients). In contrast, less than 5% of all clients were over the age of 54.

More females (53,300) than males (41,700) accessed SAAP services. Almost 2% of young Australian women aged 18–19 years received some form of assistance from the program during 2000–01. Young women aged 15–17 years and 20–24 years were also frequent users of SAAP services, with just under one and a half per cent in each age group being assisted. The average age of female clients was 30 years, while for men it was 33 years (AIHW 2002a:16–17).

Eighty-five per cent of SAAP clients were born in Australia (Table 9.7); this includes the 17% of SAAP clients who identified as Indigenous Australians. Overall, Indigenous Australians were over-represented as SAAP clients relative to their population size: less than 2% of Australians aged 10 years and over identified as Indigenous (see Note 3 in Table 9.7).

Just under 5% of SAAP clients were born overseas in countries where English is the main language spoken (Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, South Africa, the United Kingdom and the United States). Just over 10% were born in countries where English is not the main language spoken, which includes all other countries excluding Australia.

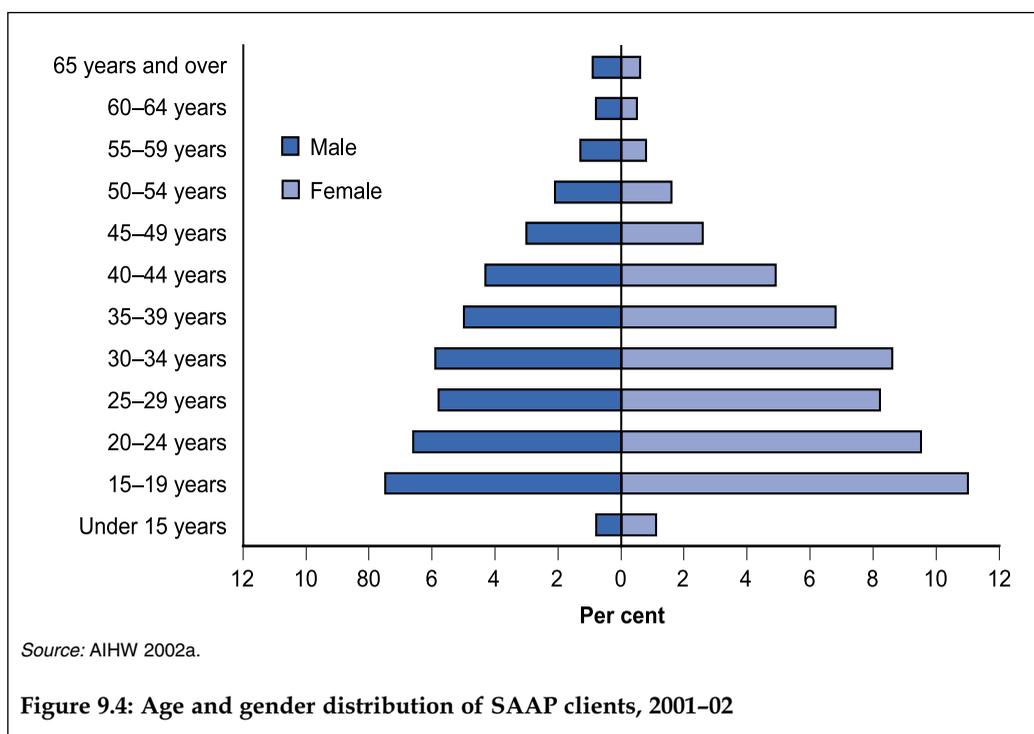


Table 9.7: Cultural and linguistic diversity of SAAP clients, 2001-02 (per cent)

	Male	Female	Total	Australian population 10+		
				Number	Per cent	Number
Indigenous Australians	11.9	20.4	16.7	15,400	1.9	314,456
Australian-born non-Indigenous people	74.0	63.3	68.0	62,900	72.1	12,095,081
People born overseas, English proficiency group 1	5.7	4.1	4.8	4,500	10.1	1,701,641
People born overseas, English proficiency groups 2-4	8.3	12.1	10.4	9,700	15.9	2,668,041
<i>Total</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	..	<i>100.0</i>	..
Total (row %)	43.8	56.2	100.0
Total (number)	40,600	52,000	..	92,500	..	16,779,219

Notes

1. Number excluded due to errors and omissions (weighted): 3,072 clients.
2. English proficiency groups are based on country of birth—see Glossary.
3. 'Australian population 10+' refers to the estimated resident population aged 10 years and over at 30 June 2001 (final estimates). The figures for Indigenous Australians are from experimental estimates based on the 1996 Census produced by the ABS. The number of 'Australian-born non-Indigenous people' is derived from the Australian-born population minus the number of Indigenous Australians.
4. Figures have been weighted to adjust for agency non-participation and client non-consent.

Sources: SAAP Client Collection; ABS 1998, 2001b.

There was some variation between male and female clients in terms of cultural and linguistic diversity. A higher proportion of female clients than male clients identified as Indigenous Australians (20%, compared with 12%). There was also a higher proportion of female clients than male clients among people born overseas where English was not the main language spoken (12%, compared with 8%). Among Australian-born non-Indigenous clients, however, who comprised 68% of all SAAP clients, there were relatively more males than females (74%, compared with 63%).

Where people stayed before assistance

Nationally in 2001-02, SAAP or other emergency accommodation was the most common type of housing immediately before support (in 20% of closed support periods), reflecting the proportion of homeless people who have consecutive periods of support before moving on from SAAP. Private rental was the next most common housing type before entering SAAP (16%), followed by boarding in a private home and living rent-free (14% and 13%, respectively) (Table 9.8).

Table 9.8: SAAP closed support periods: type of accommodation immediately before SAAP support, 2001-02 (per cent)

	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Total	Number
SAAP or other emergency housing	23.3	16.0	23.3	17.9	19.9	17.6	29.2	10.6	19.7	20,200
Living rent-free in house/flat	13.5	15.2	12.7	8.7	11.6	14.1	21.4	13.8	13.4	13,700
Private rental	15.3	17.9	17.7	11.6	12.3	20.1	8.2	8.6	15.7	16,000
Public or community housing	8.2	8.4	7.1	18.6	12.3	9.5	7.5	30.7	10.4	10,600
Rooming house/hostel/hotel/caravan	7.1	8.8	9.0	7.3	6.8	6.1	2.6	9.0	7.9	8,000
Boarding in a private home	11.0	15.5	14.1	14.1	17.0	13.5	10.2	6.5	13.5	13,800
Own home	3.0	5.2	3.3	3.3	5.5	2.8	1.6	1.7	3.8	3,900
Living in a car/tent/park/street/squat	10.3	8.2	8.7	11.0	8.0	10.1	8.3	12.7	9.4	9,600
Institutional	7.2	3.4	3.2	5.5	5.5	5.0	8.9	4.1	5.0	5,100
Other	1.0	1.4	0.8	1.9	1.1	1.1	2.1	2.5	1.3	1,300
<i>Total</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>..</i>
<i>Total (number with valid data)</i>	<i>26,600</i>	<i>30,100</i>	<i>16,600</i>	<i>11,300</i>	<i>7,200</i>	<i>4,600</i>	<i>2,200</i>	<i>3,700</i>	<i>..</i>	<i>102,300</i>
Number with missing data	4,400	4,900	2,300	2,000	700	500	100	400	..	15,300
Total (number)	31,000	34,900	18,900	13,300	7,900	5,100	2,300	4,100	..	117,500

Notes

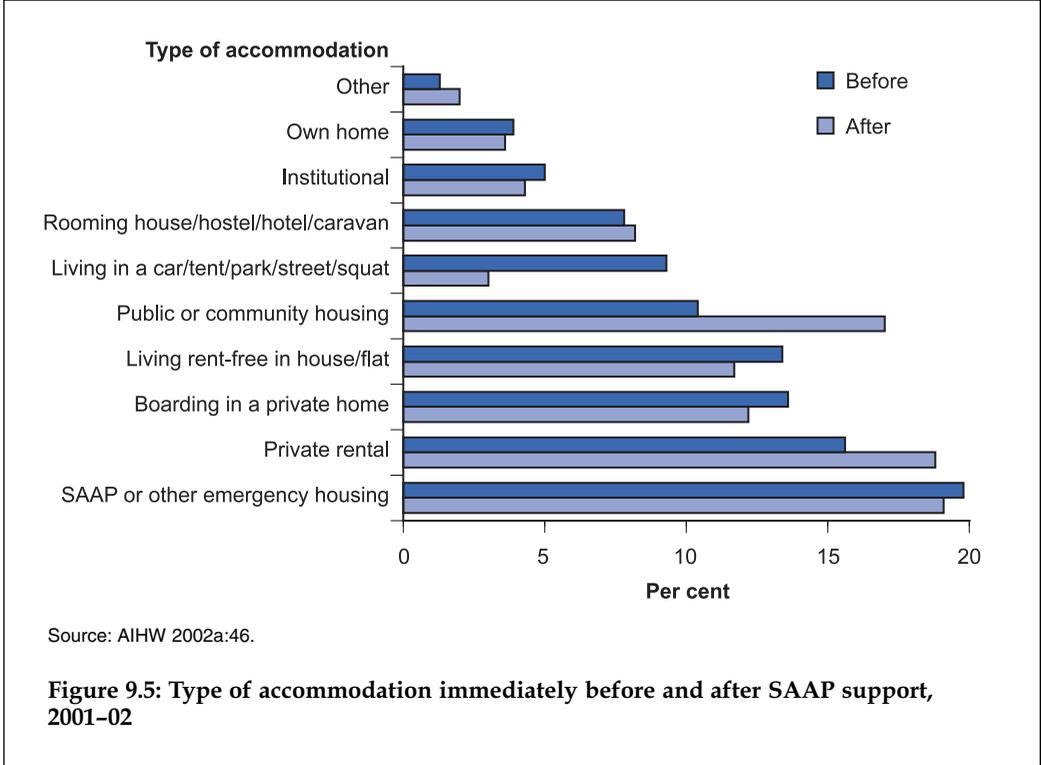
1. Table excludes high-volume records because not all items were included on the high-volume form.
2. Figures have been weighted to adjust for agency non-participation and client non-consent.

Source: SAAP Client Collection.

The jurisdictions differ from this overall profile of where clients were staying immediately before support (Table 9.8). Clients in the Northern Territory had come from SAAP or other emergency accommodation in only 11% of closed support periods. It was more likely for these clients to have previously been in public or community housing (31%). In the Northern Territory, there is a large amount of Indigenous community housing in remote areas. In Western Australia, SAAP clients were just as likely to have come from public or community housing as from SAAP or other emergency accommodation (in 19% versus 18% of closed support periods).

Clients in both Tasmania and Victoria were just as likely to have come from private rental accommodation (20% and 18%, respectively), compared to SAAP or other emergency accommodation (18% and 16%, respectively). In contrast, in the Australian Capital Territory, most clients had been previously housed in SAAP or other emergency accommodation (almost 30%). The Australian Capital Territory also had clients previously living rent-free in 21% of closed support periods, and the highest percentage of support periods where clients were previously living in an institution (9%).

It is interesting to note that the state and territory numbers of people living in a car, tent, park, street or squat before accessing a SAAP service showed relatively small variation, ranging from a low of 8% of closed support periods in Victoria, South Australia and the Australian Capital Territory to a high of 13% in the Northern Territory.



On first glance, this seems somewhat surprising because the number of people with no conventional accommodation, as estimated by the 1996 Census (see Table 9.1), shows much larger variation across the jurisdictions. The Census figure, of course, included both those 'sleeping rough' as per the SAAP definition, and people living in improvised dwellings. However, as the earlier discussion pointed out, the state/territory differences in the Census were heavily influenced by the inclusion of Indigenous people living in remote communities in improvised dwellings, and this probably accounts for much of the Census variation. The SAAP figures, though, do support the Census figures showing that people sleeping rough, as a proportion of population, are over-represented in the Northern Territory, although better estimations of the actual degree of this over-representation are still to be derived.

Figure 9.5 shows a comparison of accommodation before and after support periods, on a national level. The biggest shift was in the use of public housing. Clients were more likely to be accommodated in public housing after support than before (in 17% after compared with 10% before).

There was also a noticeable decrease in clients living in a car, tent, park, street or squat (3% after compared with 9% before). SAAP or other emergency accommodation and private rental were still the most common types of housing after support, although there was a notable increase in private rental from 16% to 19%. As there is a significant amount of missing data relating to clients' circumstances after support, these figures should be approached with some caution.

Why people sought assistance

The SAAP Client Collection collects information on, among other things, the main reasons why clients seek assistance, although it only does so from general SAAP agencies. High-volume agencies, which generally have a higher client turnover, use a shortened form that does not collect this information. There are also SAAP agencies that provide casual assistance, such as meals, information and showers, and which only participate in the Casual Client Collection.

Of the 1,286 agencies funded in 2001-02, 52 did not participate in any data collection and a further 24 contributed only to the Casual Client Collection. Of the remaining 1,210 agencies participating in the Client Collection, 41 used only high-volume forms and 7 used both high-volume and general forms. The information, then, on why clients sought assistance is derived from 96% of the agencies participating in the Client Collection, which between them accounted for 76% of all support periods. The high-volume agencies (4% of agencies in the collection) accounted for 24% of support periods in the same period, reflecting the fact that such agencies generally have a much higher client load than general agencies.

This is of particular interest because of the higher prevalence of older single men in high-volume agencies. Just under three-quarters of all high-volume agencies either target single men or are general agencies, and single men 25 years and over accounted for 83% and 50%, respectively, of all support periods at these agencies in 2001-02 (Table 9.9). This client group is far more likely than any other to seek assistance for substance abuse (AIHW 2002a:27), which means the importance of substance abuse as a reason for seeking assistance is understated throughout this section.

Table 9.9: SAAP support periods: client group, by primary target group of agencies, 2001–02 (per cent)

Client group	Agency target group						Total	Number
	Young people	Single men only	Single women only	Families	Women escaping DV	Cross-target/multiple/general		
Male alone, under 25	38.6	13.9	0.8	2.4	0.4	7.9	13.0	22,500
Male alone, 25+	2.0	82.7	0.8	5.8	0.6	50.2	32.5	56,300
Female alone, under 25	41.5	0.4	18.4	3.8	7.7	5.1	12.3	21,200
Female alone, 25+	1.8	1.5	55.9	6.7	33.5	15.7	14.7	25,500
Couple, no children	3.1	0.4	0.4	5.3	0.3	4.7	2.6	4,500
Couple with children	2.0	0.2	0.8	23.5	0.5	3.7	3.0	5,100
Male with children	0.6	0.3	—	6.0	0.1	1.5	1.0	1,700
Female with children	8.7	0.4	21.9	44.9	56.3	10.4	20.1	34,900
Other	1.7	0.2	0.9	1.6	0.7	0.8	0.9	1,600
<i>Total</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>..</i>
Total (row %)	19.8	17.7	2.2	5.0	21.4	34.0	100.0	..
Total (number)	34,300	30,600	3,900	8,600	37,100	58,900	..	173,400

Notes

1. Number excluded due to errors and omissions (weighted): 3,522.
2. Figures have been weighted to adjust for client non-consent and agency non-participation.

Source: SAAP Client and Administrative Data Collections.

The most prevalent main reason nationally in 2001–02 for clients seeking assistance was domestic violence, in 22% of support periods (Table 9.10). The next most common main reasons were eviction or previous accommodation ended (12%), usual accommodation unavailable and relationship or family breakdown (both in 10% of support periods).

Over the years of the collection, domestic violence has consistently been the most prevalent reported main reason clients sought assistance, with little change in the reported percentages since 1996–97. One reason which has shown a steady increase over the years is usual accommodation unavailable, rising steadily from 4% of support periods in 1997–98 to 10% in 2001–02.

There has also been a slight but fairly consistent decline over time in the percentage of support periods where people sought assistance because of relationship or family breakdown (down from 14% in 1996–97 to 10% in 2001–02). There has been a decrease, too, in people needing assistance because of financial difficulty, falling from 13% of support periods in 1996–97 to 9% in 2001–02.

Table 9.10: SAAP support periods: main reason for seeking assistance, 1996–97 to 2001–02 (per cent)

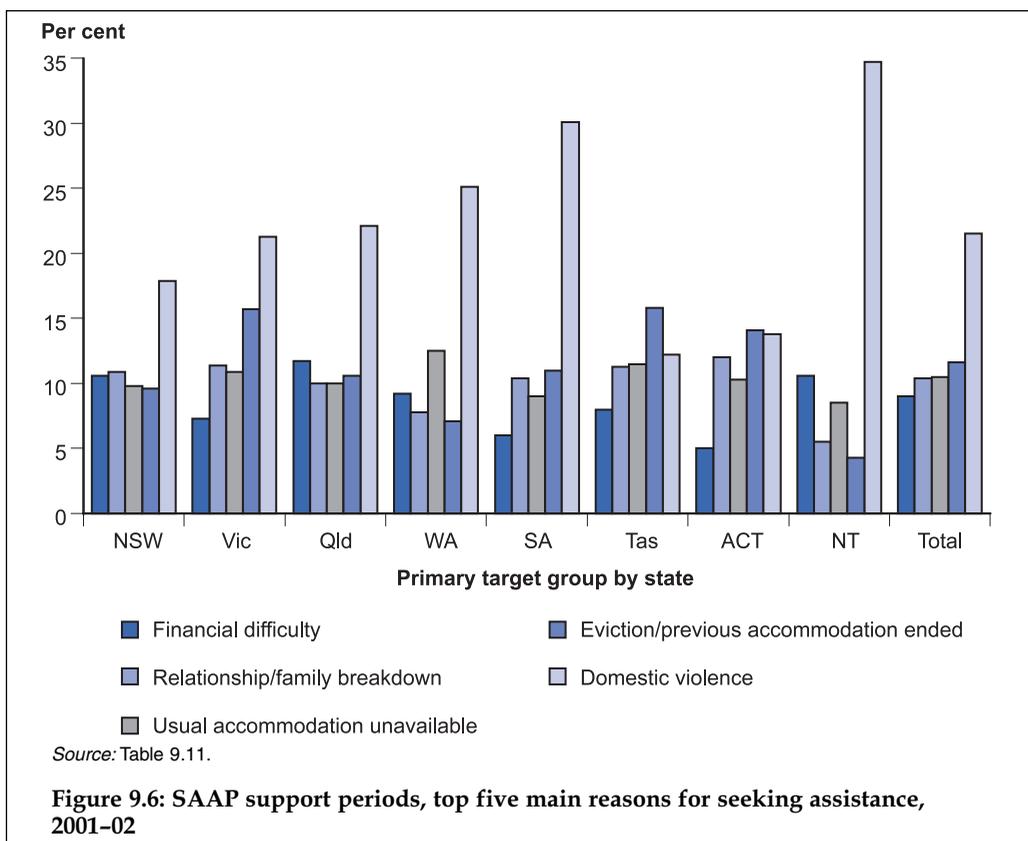
	1996–97	1997–98	1998–99	1999–00	2000–01	2001–02
Long-term homeless	4.8	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Usual accommodation unavailable	n.a.	3.7	5.1	8.0	9.2	10.4
Time out from family/other situation	3.8	4.1	4.4	4.8	5.0	5.1
Relationship/family breakdown	14.1	11.9	11.8	11.8	10.4	10.4
Interpersonal conflict	3.8	3.2	3.6	3.0	2.8	2.6
Physical/emotional abuse	3.6	3.5	3.2	3.2	3.6	3.0
Domestic violence	22.0	23.7	23.7	23.2	23.0	21.6
Sexual abuse	1.2	1.0	0.9	0.6	0.5	0.7
Financial difficulty	12.9	13.4	12.4	10.5	9.5	9.0
Gambling	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	0.2	0.3
Eviction	5.3	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Eviction/previous accommodation ended	n.a.	10.0	10.4	10.1	10.7	11.6
Drug/alcohol/substance abuse	5.4	6.3	6.1	6.0	5.5	5.5
Emergency accommodation ended	1.7	1.4	1.3	1.3	1.6	1.8
Recently left institution	1.7	1.5	1.5	1.6	1.6	1.7
Psychiatric illness	1.7	1.5	1.4	1.6	1.5	1.7
Recent arrival to area with no means of support	3.5	4.8	5.2	5.3	5.4	5.7
Itinerant	4.5	4.1	3.8	3.6	3.1	2.9
At imminent risk but not homeless	2.8	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Other	6.1	5.7	5.2	5.1	6.4	6.0
Total (%)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total (number)	54,481	73,447	110,000	110,500	119,000	125,000

Notes

1. Number excluded due to errors and omissions (weighted): 1,313 (96–97); 926 (97–98); 895 (98–99); 1,336 (99–00); 4,203 (00–01); 8,796 (01–02).
2. Table excludes high-volume records because not all items were included on the high-volume form.
3. Figures have been weighted to adjust for agency non-participation and client non-consent.

Source: SAAP Client Collections.

Figure 9.6 illustrates the top five Australia-wide main reasons in 2001–02, showing the diversity between states and territories in why clients sought assistance. Domestic violence, for example, was the most prevalent main reason in 35% of support periods in the Northern Territory, but in only 12% in Tasmania. Such figures were no doubt influenced to some extent by the mix of services in each jurisdiction. Agencies targeting women escaping domestic violence, for example, received the largest proportion of the Northern Territory’s recurrent funding (see Figure 9.2), as was also the case in Western Australia. In Tasmania, in contrast, the largest proportion of recurrent funding went to general, multiple or cross-target agencies.



Again, in the Northern Territory, 16% of recurrent funding was allocated to single men’s agencies, while in the Australian Capital Territory the figure was 3% (see Figure 9.2). Further, single older males have the highest prevalence among all client groups citing financial difficulty as a main reason for seeking assistance (AIHW 2002a:27). Because of the relatively high percentage of funding allocated to men’s refuges in the Northern Territory, it is perhaps not surprising then to find financial difficulty as a main reason in 11% of support periods in the Northern Territory and in 5% of support periods in the Australian Capital Territory.

In Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory (Table 9.11), eviction or previous accommodation ended just exceeded domestic violence (in 16% and 14% of support periods, respectively) as the most prevalent main reason for seeking assistance in 2001-02. In Queensland and the Northern Territory financial difficulty was the second most prevalent main reason (12% and 11%, respectively).

Further, recent arrival with no means of support was as one of the top five main reasons for seeking assistance in both the Northern Territory and Tasmania (in 9% of support periods for both). In the Northern Territory, this was the third most common main reason. In Western Australia, drug and alcohol or substance abuse was as the third most common main reason (10%). All these figures, as was noted earlier, understate the actual prevalence of substance abuse in homelessness.

Table 9.11: SAAP support periods: main reason for seeking assistance, 2001–02 (per cent)

	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Total	Number
Usual accommodation unavailable	9.8	10.9	10.0	12.5	9.0	11.5	10.3	8.5	10.5	13,300
Time out from family/other situation	4.8	3.8	6.9	5.9	5.5	4.8	6.8	7.8	5.1	6,500
Relationship/family breakdown	10.9	11.4	10.0	7.8	10.4	11.3	12.0	5.5	10.4	13,200
Interpersonal conflict	2.2	2.5	3.2	2.9	3.0	4.3	2.8	2.2	2.7	3,400
Physical/emotional abuse	2.4	2.3	3.6	3.9	3.8	3.2	2.8	6.6	3.0	3,800
Domestic violence	17.9	21.3	22.1	25.1	30.1	12.2	13.8	34.7	21.5	27,300
Sexual abuse	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.4	1.5	3.6	0.7	0.5	0.7	900
Financial difficulty	10.6	7.3	11.7	9.2	6.0	8.0	5.0	10.6	9.0	11,500
Gambling	0.7	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.2	0.3	0.3	0.2	0.3	400
Eviction/previous accommodation ended	9.6	15.7	10.6	7.1	11.0	15.8	14.1	4.3	11.6	14,700
Drug/alcohol/substance abuse	9.3	3.3	3.4	9.8	2.7	4.3	4.1	2.4	5.6	7,100
Emergency accommodation ended	1.3	2.6	0.9	2.2	1.3	2.2	2.5	1.1	1.8	2,300
Recently left institution	1.8	1.6	1.3	1.6	2.5	1.8	2.3	0.8	1.7	2,100
Psychiatric illness	2.4	1.5	1.7	1.0	1.5	2.1	2.0	0.4	1.7	2,200
Recent arrival to area with no means of support	5.9	3.6	8.2	5.3	5.1	8.6	7.2	8.6	5.6	7,200
Itinerant	2.7	3.4	2.5	3.0	3.1	2.5	3.4	1.6	2.9	3,700
Other	7.3	8.2	3.4	2.2	3.4	3.5	9.8	4.2	5.9	7,600
<i>Total</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>..</i>
Total (number)	34,000	38,900	18,500	14,000	9,400	5,500	2,600	4,200	..	127,100

Notes

1. Number excluded due to errors and omissions (weighted): 6,773.
2. Table excludes high-volume records because not all items were included on the high-volume form.
3. Figures have been weighted to adjust for agency non-participation and client non-consent.

Source: SAAP Client Collection.

Services provided to SAAP clients

A SAAP client may be provided with many diverse services in any one support period. These might include different types of accommodation, financial assistance, a range of counselling, court support, drug rehabilitation, meals, showers or a variety of other services. Information is collected by the Client Collection on 34 different types of services that might be provided to clients, which can be grouped under six headings (see Table 9.12, Note 2 for the constituent services).

Across Australia, the three types of services most often provided in 2001–02 were housing and accommodation (in 76% of all support periods), general support or advocacy (74%) and meals and other basic support services (67%) (Table 9.12). Specialist services, as might be expected, were the least likely to be provided (30%). No services were provided directly to clients in 2% of support periods, but agencies may have arranged referrals for clients in these cases.

These three types of support were also the most often provided in the states and territories, except for South Australia where counselling was more likely to be provided than meals and other basic support services (in 60% and 51% of all support periods, respectively). Housing and accommodation was the most commonly provided service in four of the jurisdictions: New South Wales, Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory. However, in the Australian Capital Territory and Tasmania, general support and advocacy were just as likely to be provided as housing and accommodation (89% for both in the Australian Capital Territory and 68% in Tasmania). General support and advocacy was the most commonly provided service in Victoria (77%).

The pattern of service use differed between client groups (Table 9.13). Unaccompanied males aged 25 years or over were proportionately more often provided with accommodation services than other clients (in 87% of their support periods), while couples without children received these services relatively less frequently (68%). Couples, either with or without children, and males with children were more likely than others to receive financial or employment services, while women, with or without children, were relatively more often provided with counselling services.

Table 9.12: SAAP support periods: broad types of services provided to clients, 2001–02 (per cent)

	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Total
Housing/accommodation	84.3	57.4	86.2	85.6	65.8	67.6	89.2	89.3	76.2
Financial/employment	28.9	43.1	54.0	37.0	32.3	36.9	56.9	44.0	40.5
Counselling	37.0	48.8	59.5	48.4	60.2	55.4	76.5	50.4	49.7
General support/advocacy	70.4	77.3	77.2	59.1	82.1	68.0	89.2	72.7	74.0
Specialist services	23.0	20.0	51.8	34.3	19.1	10.9	45.1	39.8	30.1
Meals and other basic services	80.8	42.0	79.4	74.1	51.2	57.6	87.8	87.4	67.2
No services provided directly	0.9	3.8	1.2	1.2	1.7	2.9	0.6	0.3	1.8
Total (number)	46,410	43,338	40,612	14,254	14,120	5,652	2,626	4,758	171,770

Notes

1. Number excluded due to errors and omissions (weighted): 0 closed support periods.
2. Clients were able to receive multiple services so percentages do not total 100. The 34 individual service types have been grouped into six major classifications as follows:
 - Housing/accommodation—SAAP or CAP accommodation (including THMs), assistance to obtain/maintain short-term accommodation, and assistance to obtain/maintain independent housing.
 - Financial/employment—employment and training assistance, assistance to obtain/maintain a benefit or pension or other government allowance, financial assistance or material aid, and financial counselling and support.
 - Counselling—incest or sexual assault counselling and support, domestic violence counselling and support, family or relationship counselling and support, emotional support and other counselling, and assistance with problem gambling.
 - General support/advocacy—living skills or personal development assistance, assistance with legal issues or court support, advice or information, retrieval, storage or removal of personal belongings, advocacy or liaison on behalf of clients, assistance with immigration issues, and brokerage services.
 - Specialist services—psychological services, psychiatric services, pregnancy support, family planning support, drug or alcohol support or intervention, physical disability services, intellectual disability services, culturally appropriate support, interpreter services, and health or medical services.
 - Meals and other basic services—meals, laundry or shower facilities, recreation, transport, and other support not elsewhere specified.
3. Figures have been weighted to adjust for agency non-participation.

Source: SAAP Client Collection.

Table 9.13: SAAP support periods: services provided to clients, by client group, 2001–02 (per cent)

	Male alone <25	Male alone 25+	Female alone <25	Female alone 25+	Couple no children	Couple with children	Male with children	Female with children	Other	Total
Housing/ accommodation	77.7	87.1	69.7	69.9	67.7	71.1	69.0	70.3	65.3	76.6
Financial/ employment	39.6	38.9	39.5	43.7	52.0	50.9	46.5	43.1	36.3	41.3
Counselling	39.7	36.7	57.5	66.2	40.2	43.8	43.3	70.5	49.8	51.2
General support/ advocacy	76.1	72.0	77.2	75.6	73.8	75.8	75.7	79.2	67.1	75.3
Specialist services	24.1	35.7	27.2	39.4	24.9	17.9	14.1	28.3	27.8	31.1
Meals and other basic services	68.7	82.7	62.2	68.0	44.2	37.5	39.8	56.7	47.3	67.9
No services provided directly	2.4	1.1	2.5	1.4	3.5	3.6	3.9	1.6	3.3	1.8
Total (number)	22,000	55,700	20,700	24,900	4,400	5,000	1,700	34,000	1,500	169,900

Notes

1. Number excluded due to errors and omissions (weighted): 7,018.
2. For constituent services included in these broad service groupings, see Note 2 of the previous table.
3. Clients were able to receive multiple services, so percentages do not total 100.
4. Figures have been weighted to adjust for agency non-participation and client non-consent.

Source: SAAP Client Collection.

Unaccompanied people aged 25 years or more received both basic and specialist services relatively frequently. Unaccompanied women over 25 were more likely than any other client group to be provided with specialist services (in 39% of their support periods), while unaccompanied males over 25 were more likely than any other client group to receive meals and other basic support services (83%).

Unmet demand for accommodation

As mentioned earlier, population size has been the major determinant of the allocation of SAAP funds across the states and territories, while within the jurisdictions it is historical factors and submission-based funding outcomes that have largely driven the mix of established services. Neither of these factors necessarily correlates strongly with the level of existing need for SAAP services. The 1996 Census indicates, for example, that the level of homelessness may vary across jurisdictions, although the actual extent of this variation needs clarification. These data also do not inform us about the impact that climatic, geographic and social factors can have at a regional level.

Furthermore, as shown in Table 9.1, the total 1996 homelessness figures reported by Chamberlain were influenced by the count of individuals using SAAP services in each of the jurisdictions. The two different components of this total homelessness count, derived from the Census itself and the SAAP component, can both be regarded as indicators of homeless populations for whom services may be needed and, in the case of SAAP, provided.

The Census, within the limitations outlined in previous sections, suggests potential needs for services, although exactly which services may be needed in any given situation is not well or not completely understood. Some of this need for services, or at least for housing services, can be quantified through a count of people who present at SAAP agencies seeking accommodation. The National Data Collection Agency attempts to measure requests for accommodation, as well as the capacity at which SAAP services are operating, through the Demand for Accommodation Collection, running for 2 separate weeks during the year. Because of seasonal factors, and because people can have several unmet requests in a year, extrapolating from these data to annual figures is not possible.

There is a range of methodological difficulties inherent in this collection, one of which is determining the extent of under-counting. Factors contributing to under-counting include the extent of hidden need, which can be caused by people not seeking accommodation when they require it, or seeking accommodation at non-SAAP agencies or using housing departments' short-term brokerage services. Under-counting can also depend on the extent of SAAP agencies' (non)compliance in the collection, and none of these factors can be fully measured with any confidence.

There is also a variety of reasons for a request for accommodation being unmet. Perhaps there are no beds available, or the type of accommodation requested is not provided, or there are staffing issues. All these, and similar, reasons lead to an unmet request for accommodation being considered *valid*.

Table 9.14: Valid unmet requests for SAAP accommodation: main reason why requests for accommodation were not met, 22–28 August 2001 and 8–14 May 2002 (per cent requests by groups)

	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Total	Number
Insufficient accomm. available	80.3	87.7	84.3	79.8	87.8	87.3	93.6	67.3	84.4	6,770
Type of accommodation requested is not provided	5.0	5.8	5.8	3.5	5.1	4.2	2.1	14.0	5.3	424
Insufficient staff to provide support	3.2	2.4	3.2	0.6	—	1.3	0.6	0.9	2.4	191
Facilities for disability, cultural and other special needs not available	3.1	0.8	2.1	2.3	1.3	5.5	0.9	15.0	2.1	171
Other	8.4	3.3	4.7	13.7	5.9	1.7	2.7	2.8	5.8	464
<i>Total</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>..</i>								
Total (row %)	25.0	30.2	22.8	7.7	5.9	2.9	4.1	1.3	100.0	..
Total (number)	2,007	2,423	1,825	620	474	236	328	107	..	8,020

Notes

1. Cases excluded due to missing data: 0.
2. Adjustments have been made for missing data.
3. Figures are unweighted.
4. In a small number of cases, requests for SAAP accommodation were unmet due to the age of a male child (applicable to domestic violence agencies only). To ensure confidentiality, these cases are not presented separately but are included in the 'other' category.

Source: SAAP Unmet Demand Collection and Administrative Data Collection.

Generally, the reason is that no beds are available. This was the case across Australia for 84% of valid unmet requests for accommodation in 2001–02 (Table 9.14). This reason for turning away potential clients accounted for a high of 94% of all valid unmet requests in the Australian Capital Territory, and a low of 67% in the Northern Territory. In contrast, the Northern Territory had the highest rates for unmet requests because the type of accommodation requested was not provided (14%) and because special facilities were unavailable (15%). Overall, 80% of all unmet requests (or 8,020) were considered to be valid in 2000–02.

On the other hand, a request can be unmet, for example, when a person is too young, too old, or the wrong gender for the agency they approach – that is, they are outside the target group set by the agency. Or a person may be offered accommodation but, for whatever reason, they refuse that offer. These two cases represent the majority of situations where an unmet request is considered invalid. Overall 20% of unmet requests for accommodation (or 1,958) were considered *invalid* in 2001–02 (Table 9.15). In an average of 67% of these invalid requests, the person or group seeking accommodation approached an agency catering to a different target group.

In Tasmania, 75% of all (invalid) requests were unmet for this reason, compared with only 47% in South Australia. South Australia also had the highest level of potential clients who refused an offer of accommodation, with 47% of (invalid) requests being unmet for this reason. In the Northern Territory, 35% of (invalid) requests went unmet because of people refusing an offer of accommodation, while Queensland had the lowest level of such refusals (20%). No data are available on why potential clients refuse offers of accommodation.

Table 9.15: Invalid unmet requests for SAAP accommodation: main reason why requests for accommodation were not met, 22–28 August 2001 and 8–14 May 2002 (per cent requests by groups)

	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Total	Number
Agency inappropriate —wrong target group	70.0	62.8	72.9	66.7	47.1	75.4	62.3	63.0	67.2	1,316
Agency inappropriate —non-accommodation	0.8	13.6	7.2	0.5	5.9	—	4.3	1.9	5.1	99
Potential client refused accommodation	29.2	23.7	19.9	32.8	47.1	24.6	33.3	35.2	27.7	543
<i>Total</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>..</i>								
Total (row %)	32.8	19.2	22.1	10.4	6.1	3.1	3.5	2.8	100.0	..
Total (number)	643	376	432	204	119	61	69	54	..	1,958

Notes

1. Cases excluded due to missing data: 0.
2. Adjustments have been made for missing data.
3. Figures are unweighted.

Source: SAAP Unmet Demand Collection and Administrative Data Collection.

Table 9.16 shows the average daily demographic profile of potential clients and their accompanying children (i.e. all people with valid unmet requests for accommodation). People with (valid) unmet requests for accommodation in 2001–02 were more likely to be females than males in all jurisdictions except the Australian Capital Territory, where there was an equal proportion of requests from males and females. The Northern Territory had the highest proportion of females making requests (65%), and is also the state with the highest proportion of agencies targeting women, including single women and those escaping domestic violence (see Figure 9.2).

Table 9.16: Characteristics of adults and accompanying children requiring but not receiving SAAP accommodation, 22–28 August 2001 and 8–14 May 2002 (average daily percentage)

	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Total	Number
Gender										
Male	45.5	47.6	45.0	46.2	42.9	40.5	50.0	34.6	45.7	357.7
Female	54.5	52.4	55.0	53.8	57.1	59.5	50.0	65.4	54.3	424.4
<i>Total</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>781.8</i>								
Age										
Under 12 years	24.9	23.3	36.7	31.8	36.8	17.9	34.8	27.2	29.3	228.9
12–14 years	6.9	3.6	5.9	5.1	2.8	4.8	3.6	3.1	5.1	39.7
15–17 years	14.7	11.9	12.2	15.1	10.3	7.9	9.3	12.3	12.6	98.5
18–19 years	5.3	8.6	5.0	5.0	8.2	4.8	5.0	9.9	6.3	49.6
20–24 years	10.2	17.3	10.2	11.1	12.4	14.7	10.0	6.8	12.4	96.9
25–44 years	21.8	27.6	23.3	20.7	19.7	28.2	21.8	25.9	23.7	185.6
45–64 years	5.9	3.4	2.6	2.1	2.7	2.4	1.4	5.6	3.6	27.8
65 years and over	0.5	0.4	0.2	0.2	—	—	0.5	0.6	0.5	2.5
Unknown	9.7	3.9	3.9	8.8	7.0	19.4	13.6	8.6	6.7	52.4
<i>Total</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>781.8</i>								
Birthplace										
Australia	72.6	72.8	84.1	71.7	85.4	67.4	75.5	88.0	76.8	570.7
Other English-speaking countries	2.8	3.2	1.9	1.5	0.9	—	0.5	1.2	2.2	16.5
Non-English-speaking countries	6.9	13.4	2.0	5.4	1.2	0.8	3.9	1.2	6.4	47.6
Unknown	17.7	10.6	12.0	21.4	12.5	31.8	20.2	9.6	14.5	107.9
<i>Total</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>742.8</i>								
Indigenous status										
Indigenous	14.2	3.6	15.3	31.3	24.1	1.4	18.6	60.4	15.0	93.6
Not Indigenous	57.4	71.8	58.5	38.7	56.3	34.3	53.7	32.0	58.1	362.6
Unknown	28.4	24.6	26.1	30.0	19.6	64.3	27.7	7.7	26.8	167.4
<i>Total</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>623.7</i>								

Notes

1. Data on age and gender were missing for an estimated 167.3 people per day out of 949.1.
2. Data on birthplace were missing for an estimated 206.3 people per day out of 949.1.
3. Data on Indigenous status were missing for an estimated 325.4 people per day out of 949.1.

Source: SAAP Unmet Demand Collection.

The jurisdictions also showed some variations in the usual age of people unable to be accommodated. In Tasmania, around 18% of these people were aged under 12 years, while in both Queensland and South Australia 37% were in this age group. Victoria and Tasmania were the only states where people with valid unmet requests were more likely to be in the 25–44 age group (28% for both) than in under-12s.

The majority of valid unmet requests for accommodation in all jurisdictions were from people born in Australia. Tasmania showed a lower proportion of such people (67%) than any other jurisdiction, but also had the highest proportion of people whose birthplace was unknown (32%). Victoria had the highest proportion of people born in non-English-speaking countries who were unable to be accommodated (13%). The Northern Territory had both the largest proportion born in Australia (88%) and the smallest proportion for whom the birthplace was unknown (10%). Because of the high level of missing data for birthplace, all these figures must be interpreted with caution.

Although Table 9.16 also provides data on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders with unmet requests for SAAP accommodation, caution needs to be taken in any interpretation because of the large proportions of people of unknown status and the very high level of missing information. Indigenous status was unknown for 27% of all people with unmet requests, and in Tasmania this figure rose to 64%. The Northern Territory had the smallest proportion for whom Indigenous status was unknown (8%), and the largest proportion of unmet requests from Indigenous people (60%). It is interesting to note that Indigenous Australians comprise 17% of all SAAP clients (see Table 9.7) but only 15% of people turned away from SAAP, and this latter figure includes accompanying children as well as adults.

There are two turnaway rates, designed to give a measure of whether there is sufficient SAAP accommodation to meet demand (Table 9.17). These rates do not include accompanying children and are only calculated for people seeking immediate accommodation. The first turnaway rate shows the average daily number of people who could not be accommodated, expressed as a percentage of all people making requests for SAAP accommodation—both those successfully seeking accommodation and those who were unsuccessful, on an average day during the collection period.

This turnaway rate shows that, of those seeking immediate accommodation, an average of over 55% were turned away. In the Australian Capital Territory, 40% could not be accommodated, while in Victoria and the Northern Territory over 72% were turned away.

The second turnaway rate shows the average daily number of people who could not be accommodated, expressed as a percentage of all people who (successfully and unsuccessfully) requested accommodation on a particular day plus those already accommodated in SAAP agencies.

This turnaway rate indicates that on any one day during the collection, people with unmet requests for accommodation comprise only a small percentage (4% overall) of the total number of people involved in SAAP. This rate varies from a high of 7% in the Australian Capital Territory to a low of 2% in South Australia.

Table 9.17: Turnaway rates of adults needing immediate accommodation, 22–28 August 2001 and 8–14 May 2002 (daily average number)

	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Total
People with unsuccessful requests for accommodation ^(a)	80.6	72.1	83.2	29.2	17.3	12.0	15.3	5.8	315.4
People with successful requests for accommodation	83.7	27.6	79.1	28.1	16.0	5.6	5.8	8.6	254.6
<i>Total number of people making requests for accommodation</i>	<i>164.3</i>	<i>99.7</i>	<i>162.3</i>	<i>57.3</i>	<i>33.3</i>	<i>17.6</i>	<i>21.1</i>	<i>14.4</i>	<i>570.0</i>
Turnaway rate (% of total daily requests for accommodation)	49.1	72.3	51.3	50.9	52.0	68.0	40.2	72.6	55.3
<i>Total number of people already accommodated in SAAP</i>	<i>2,473.4</i>	<i>1,876.8</i>	<i>1,260.2</i>	<i>602.4</i>	<i>760.8</i>	<i>180.5</i>	<i>212.2</i>	<i>143.6</i>	<i>7,509.9</i>
Turnaway rate (% of total daily demand for accommodation)	3.2	3.7	6.2	4.6	2.2	6.2	6.7	3.9	4.0

(a) Adults with a valid unmet request for immediate accommodation.

Notes

1. Cases excluded due to missing data: 0.
2. Figures are for accommodation required within 24 hours.
3. Rates include children under 18 who present alone, but do not include accompanying children.

Sources: SAAP Unmet Demand Collection and Client Collection

SAAP services and exclusion practices

Research on ‘high needs’ clients informed the development of SAAP IV, and led to the publication, in 1999, of what has been called the ‘High Needs Report’ (Ecumenical Housing Inc. & Thomson Goodall Assoc. 1999). This report suggested that some people were being excluded from SAAP services, and that the most frequently cited client issues which could create barriers to access were mental illness, substance disorder, alcohol disorder, behavioural disorder and intellectual disability.

Service models based on communal living arrangements, or congregate care, have also been identified as a possible barrier to entry into SAAP services. The Victorian Homelessness Taskforce commented that these were inappropriate for some clients and could even contribute to a worsening of a client’s circumstances. They found, for example, that such living arrangements could increase the risk of drug use, especially among young people (Vic DHS 2002:70).

The Western Australia Homelessness Taskforce also identified congregate care models of operation with strict entry requirements as a barrier to accessing SAAP services. This taskforce reported that both the tightness of the target groups and congregate care living arrangements have resulted in people who are outside the nominated target groups feeling excluded (WA State Homelessness Taskforce 2002:105–6). As Robinson (2001:11) reports, ‘some see them as rough places where dormitories or other communal

spaces have to be shared with potentially threatening strangers, who may have drink and drug problems. For others there are too many rules, for example barring pets, partners or drink.'

Table 9.18: SAAP agencies: characteristics of people excluded by eligibility policies, New South Wales, 2002 (per cent)

	Agency target group						Total	No.
	Young people	Single men only	Single women only	Families	Women escaping DV	Cross/multiple/general		
People with mental illness	57.8	52.0	46.2	56.3	51.7	48.1	53.7	125
People with drug & alcohol disorders	64.4	52.0	30.8	87.5	63.3	51.9	61.0	140
People with an intellectual disability	40.0	24.0	30.8	37.5	30.0	25.9	33.3	75
People with a physical disability	51.1	40.0	38.5	25.0	43.3	18.5	41.6	95
People with health issues	17.8	28.0	15.4	6.3	13.3	7.4	15.6	35
People with male accompanying children	66.7	76.0	38.5	25.0	16.7	33.3	46.3	105
People with female accompanying children	65.6	76.0	30.8	6.3	5.0	22.2	39.8	90
People who have been black-listed	26.7	60.0	15.4	31.3	26.7	25.9	29.9	70
People exhibiting violent behaviour	83.3	88.0	53.8	81.3	76.7	70.4	78.8	180
People with other challenging behaviours	15.6	36.0	15.4	6.3	13.3	11.1	16.0	35
People unable/unwilling to pay	26.7	20.0	30.8	18.8	8.3	11.1	19.0	45
People unable to live independently/semi-independently	23.3	24.0	61.5	62.5	48.3	29.6	35.5	80
People not willing to enter into a case management plan	40.0	8.0	23.1	37.5	16.7	14.8	26.4	60
People in the Juvenile Justice System	10.0	36.0	15.4	25.0	11.7	11.1	14.7	35
People with acquired brain injury	31.1	12.0	7.7	18.8	10.0	14.8	19.5	45
Other	41.1	28.0	23.1	37.6	21.8	14.8	30.3	70
No exclusions made	3.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	5.0	7.4	3.5	10
Not applicable, no policy	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	7.4	0.9	—
Total (row %)	39.0	10.8	5.6	6.9	26.0	11.7	100.0	..
Total (number)	90	25	15	15	60	25	..	230

Notes

1. Number excluded due to errors & omissions: 0.
2. Survey respondents were able to tick more than one option, so percentages do not total 100.
3. Figures have been rounded.

Sources: AIHW, NDCA SAAP Access & Exiting Project Collection.

Regardless of the type of living arrangements, a psychotic, violent or drug-affected client can negatively impact on the wellbeing of other clients and staff, and create a dilemma for SAAP agencies, who have duty of care obligations to all clients, staff and volunteers. Meeting these obligations may require more specialist skills or resources than are available and difficulties can arise in matching the casework requirements of a high-needs client with the needs of existing clients. Inappropriate placement in such situations may lead to generally poor outcomes for everyone.

Recently, New South Wales SAAP service providers were surveyed to identify, in a more evidence-based, quantitative way, the characteristics of people who were most likely to be excluded from SAAP services. The New South Wales Community Services Commission, the independent watchdog for clients of community services in that state, and now part of the Ombudsman's Office, commissioned the survey. The survey forms part of a larger project about eligibility for, access to, and early exiting of people from, SAAP accommodation-based services.

These data are drawn solely from participating agencies in New South Wales, and as such are indicative only, especially given some of the state-level differences already canvassed. Nonetheless, they can provide insight into those sectors of the homeless population who may be excluded from SAAP.

Table 9.18 shows the common characteristics of people explicitly excluded by the policies of SAAP agencies in New South Wales. Overall, 180 of the 230 agencies had policies excluding people exhibiting violent behaviour (79% of agencies), 140 agencies (61%) have policies excluding people with drug and alcohol disorders, and 125 agencies (54%) have policies that exclude people with a mental illness. This table should be read in conjunction with the data on how strictly such policies are enforced. For example, 24% of single men agencies, but only 15% of young people's services, apply their exclusions regardless of the severity of the characteristic (NSW CSC 2002:Table 11). The complete report from the CSC is expected to be available later this year.

Under some circumstances, a homeless person who otherwise fulfils the eligibility criteria of a SAAP agency might still be denied access to that agency—exclusion in practice (Table 9.19). Note that when answering this and the other questions reported on here, agencies were able to choose multiple options.

The most common circumstances in which an otherwise eligible person might be denied access, across all sectors, was when that person did not want to abide by the rules of the service. Sixty-eight per cent of the 230 agencies responding to this question would exclude a homeless person in these circumstances. Sixty per cent of agencies would also deny access to an eligible person whose needs were too high for the service, the second most common circumstance.

Table 9.19: SAAP agencies: reasons for exclusion of people meeting agencies' eligibility criteria, New South Wales 2002 (per cent)

	Agency target group						Total	No.
	Young people	Single men only	Single women only	Families	Women escaping DV	Cross/multiple/general		
Past experience with the person	53.3	60.0	30.8	43.8	33.3	37.0	45.0	105
Person's needs are too high for service	77.8	44.0	53.8	43.8	46.7	55.6	59.7	140
Person not compatible with other clients in the service (house dynamics)	74.4	44.0	30.8	62.5	41.7	51.9	56.7	130
Accommodation not physically accessible	50.0	40.0	69.2	37.5	43.3	29.6	45.0	105
No access to the specialist services required by the person	16.7	8.0	23.1	12.5	16.7	14.8	15.6	35
Person not compatible with shared accommodation	41.1	36.0	15.4	25.0	38.3	29.6	35.9	85
Person not compatible with independent accommodation	28.9	16.0	61.5	37.5	30.0	25.9	29.9	70
Staff numbers/ratio of staff to clients	43.3	16.0	23.1	43.8	16.7	44.4	32.5	75
Too many clients with the same high-level needs	57.8	20.0	46.2	56.3	33.3	37.0	44.2	100
Person not willing to commit to case plan	33.3	16.0	23.1	18.8	15.0	11.1	22.5	50
Person does not want to abide by rules of service	72.2	72.0	53.8	56.3	73.3	55.6	68.4	160
Other	18.9	28.0	38.5	18.8	6.7	14.8	17.4	35
Total (row %)	39.0	10.8	5.6	6.9	26.0	11.7	100.0	..
Total (number)	90	25	15	15	60	25	..	230

Notes

1. Number excluded due to errors & omissions: 0.
2. Survey respondents were able to tick more than one option, so percentages do not total 100.
3. Figures have been rounded.

Sources: AIHW, NDCA SAAP Access & Exiting Project Collection.

What is also evident from this table is that the various SAAP sectors, targeting different sectors of the homeless population, have very different clientele and operational procedures. So, for example, for 72% of the 25 single men's refugees responding to this question, a homeless person not wanting to abide by the rules was a sufficient reason to deny them access. By contrast, this response was given by only 54% of single women only agencies. For single men's services, past experience with the person was a more likely factor in denying access than it was for any other sector, with 60% of these services having this as a circumstance under which they would exclude an otherwise eligible homeless person. For single women only, by contrast, this figure was 31%.

Table 9.20 presents details on the approximate number of people who were turned away from SAAP services in New South Wales during the 6 months prior to September 2002 for reasons other than the service was full. These were people eligible for

assistance but denied access because of some particular personal characteristic. The numbers reported must be taken as approximations only because of variations in the record-keeping methods of agencies, with some only able to make best estimates of the numbers of people denied access in the previous 6 months.

Table 9.20: SAAP agencies: number of people turned away for reasons other than unmet demand, New South Wales, March–September 2002

	Agency target group						Total
	Young people	Single men only	Single women only	Families	Women escaping DV	Cross/multiple/general	
People with mental illness	75	35	—	10	40	130	290
People with drug & alcohol disorders	165	130	5	15	80	70	470
People with an intellectual disability	5	0	—	0	5	0	10
People with a physical disability	5	5	0	0	7	0	15
People with health issues	—	5	—	0	5	0	10
People with male accompanying children	20	5	5	5	10	15	65
People with female accompanying children	50	5	5	0	25	105	195
People who have been black-listed	40	15	0	—	20	50	130
People exhibiting violent behaviour	165	55	5	5	20	30	275
People with other challenging behaviours	115	10	—	—	10	—	140
People unable/unwilling to pay	5	15	0	5	—	0	25
People not willing to enter into a case management plan	40	5	0	5	—	15	65
People unable to live independently/semi-independently	85	5	5	10	5	10	115
People not prepared to access specialist services offered by the service	20	0	—	0	0	5	25
People with criminal convictions	10	0	0	0	—	—	15
People who are temporary visa holders	0	0	0	—	5	0	5
People in the Juvenile Justice System	20	—	0	0	0	—	20
People with acquired brain injury	—	0	0	—	5	—	5
Other	555	40	5	35	105	320	1,065
No exclusions made	0	0	0	0	—	—	5
Unknown	5	0	—	—	5	—	10
Total	1,380	330	30	90	347	750	2,955
Total (row %)	41.1	9.8	4.3	6.7	25.2	12.9	100.0
Total (number of agencies)	65	15	5	10	40	20	165

Notes

1. Number excluded due to errors & omissions: 0.
2. Numbers are approximate only as differences exist in agencies' record-keeping methods and recording accuracy.
3. Survey respondents were able to tick more than one option, so percentages do not total 100.
4. Figures have been rounded.

Sources: AIHW, NDCA SAAP Access & Exiting Project Collection.

By far the largest number of people turned away from all New South Wales agencies, except those catering to single men, is listed under 'other', with around 1,065 people denied access because of uncategorised personal characteristics. Preliminary analysis of these 'other' shows that around 400, or 38%, arose from agencies incorrectly indicating people they had turned away because there were no beds (i.e. genuine unmet demand). A further 151 were people who were turned away because they did not meet the agencies' eligibility criteria.

For single men's agencies, the most common characteristic of people turned away was 'having a drug & alcohol disorder', with approximately 130 people denied access in the previous 6 months on this account. Agencies targeting young people turned away 165 people because of this characteristic over the same period, while agencies targeting women escaping domestic violence turned away around 80 people. For both these types of agencies, this was the most common categorised personal characteristic that led to access being denied. Agencies for young people also turned away around 165 people because they were exhibiting violent behaviour.

The High Needs Report, which informed the development of SAAP IV, identified a lack of skill in assessment processes and inappropriate service models as barriers to accessing SAAP services (Ecumenical Housing Inc. & Thomson Goodall Assoc. 1999:13). The conclusion was that additional work was required to better understand and quantify levels of need, and required responses. The data gathered in the CSC survey, only a portion of which are presented here, are a step in this process and provide some insight into the structure and workings of barriers to access.

At the time of writing, the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services is also in the process of developing a high and complex needs assessment tool for SAAP agencies. This, it is hoped, will enable the development of common assessment approaches across jurisdictions. Parallel initiatives in other program areas include cross-programs needing common data and assessment items, broad-based initial assessment approaches in primary care services, and the development of specialist integrated responses to people whose needs span a range of areas and responsibilities (Thomson Goodall Associates 2002:6).

Future directions in data collection

In July 2000, the SAAP Coordination and Development (CAD) Committee sponsored a review of the National Data Collection to support the new SAAP IV initiatives. The review analysed SAAP stakeholder information requirements and assessed how well the current data collection system met those requirements. It argued for a need to improve the timeliness, relevance and accessibility of program information, while streamlining data collection processes and maximising cost effectiveness. This will also enable information from the SAAP sector, which has an established role in Australia's social and economic system, to be considered within the broader social policy context.

The result of the review was the development of an information management plan, a key objective of which is a change in the paradigm for understanding SAAP information (Community Link Australia 2000). This shift sees a move away from thinking about 'data collection' and towards thinking about 'information management'.

As part of this shift, a web site has been established (FaCS 2003a). This will encourage information management by showcasing quality research and data relevant to SAAP policy and service planning.

In July 2002, CAD announced funding for regional and service-based research grants as a way of continuing to improve SAAP information. A number of agencies have already successfully tendered for research projects, ranging from an examination of caravan parks as SAAP accommodation to looking at best-practice early intervention models for Indigenous services. Also included is research on women clients, accompanying children, repeat SAAP users, squatting, and Indigenous family violence (FaCS 2003a).

CAD is also funding the development and piloting of tools to measure client outcomes in SAAP services. Both this and the previous research grants were established in response to feedback from stakeholders about the need to more fully tell the story of what SAAP does. The Client Outcomes research, especially, recognises that not all changes achieved by SAAP services are captured by the National Data Collection. The project aims to identify outcome measurement tools that are 'appropriate, useful, contribute to service improvement and enable aggregation of information at a program level'. The successful measurement of client outcomes as well as client satisfaction is linked with an ongoing emphasis on developing case-management approaches in SAAP. This is seen as especially relevant for those clients whose needs require a high level and complexity of service provision.

9.4 Other Commonwealth initiatives

A number of Commonwealth initiatives assist the homeless. These include the National Homelessness Strategy, Housing Assistance programs, and the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy, all of which have evolved in tandem with the understanding of the complexities of factors affecting the homeless. These programs and strategies are placed within broader government policies that prioritise funds to those most in need, and the transferring of services to the private and community sector (FaCS 1999 in Jerome et al. 2003).

The National Homelessness Strategy is directed specifically at preventing and reducing homelessness, and has four themes: prevention, early intervention, working together, and crisis transition and support. It builds on the Reconnect program, established by the Prime Ministerial Youth Homelessness Taskforce, to help reconnect young homeless people, and those at risk of homelessness, with their families and communities. It also builds on the Partnerships against Domestic Violence (PADV) program, launched in 1997 at a National Domestic Violence Summit.

National Homelessness Strategy

There are two broad strands to the National Homelessness Strategy (NHS), which was announced in May 2000 (FaCS 2003c). First, there are specific initiatives directed at building a knowledge base on homelessness. These include the Commonwealth Advisory Committee on Homelessness, the NHS Demonstration Projects, Partnerships against Domestic Violence and the Family Homelessness Prevention Pilots.

Second, the NHS operates in conjunction with various Commonwealth programs that provide services to the homeless and those at risk of homelessness. Information and learning derived from the demonstration projects and other research and evaluation, are fed back to ensure that the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS) programs and policies meet the needs of the homeless.

One of the specific initiatives—the Demonstration Projects—has six priority areas:

- improving access for homeless people to the Job Network and Centrelink
- supporting families in housing stress
- developing a strategic direction to prevent Indigenous homelessness
- developing information and education tools for young people
- developing strategies to prevent people exiting institutional care from becoming homeless
- developing strategies to prevent young people who have been in care from becoming homeless.

A range of NHS Demonstration Projects target the youth sector (Box 9.4).

Box 9.4: NHS Youth Demonstration Projects

***Waarvah Pierson Services (Qld):** This project is targeting young people at risk of homelessness who have high truancy rates or contact with the Juvenile Justice System or care and protection system. The project will develop culturally appropriate homelessness prevention information through 12 months action research providing cultural field activities, support, community links and cultural networks.*

***Preventing Centrelink Breaches (Australian Federation of Homelessness Organisations):** This project aims to reduce the number of young people being breached by Centrelink, to assist young people to understand the way income support services operate and the requirements they are expected to meet.*

***Schools Research Project (NFO CM Research):** This project conducted research on information and education tools for 14–18 year olds about issues that may increase the risk of young people experiencing homelessness.*

***Rooms for Rent—a CD (St Vincent de Paul):** This project, conducted by St Vincent de Paul in New South Wales, produced and distributed 4,000 copies of a CD that provides information on share house living to SAAP agencies, Job Placement and Employment Training providers, schools, youth services, and individual young people.*

***Roofs for Youth (Youth Affairs Council Western Australia):** The Youth Affairs Council worked with real estate agents to develop strategies aiming to increase 16–21 year old independent young people's access to, and retention of, private rental properties.*

***Young Offenders Support Program:** This project aimed to prevent youth homelessness by helping young people to make the transition from juvenile detention to family/community life by supporting them in addressing barriers that prevent their securing and maintaining stable housing.*

Partnerships against Domestic Violence program (PADV)

In the 1999–00 Budget, the Commonwealth provided a further \$25 million over 4 years to continue Phase 2 of the PADV program (PM&C 2001). This funding, which took the Partnerships up to June 2003, had four fronts where action was being pursued. These included community education, work with perpetrators of domestic violence, Indigenous family violence and children at risk.

Phase 2 also saw the establishment of the Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse. This provides a central point for the collection and dissemination of all Australian domestic and family violence policy, practice and research information, as well information on international efforts in these areas.

Family Homelessness Prevention Pilot (FHPP)

The FHPP was announced in the 2001 Federal Budget, with a commitment over a 3-year period of \$5 million under the NHS (FaCS 2002). The program aims to pilot prevention and early intervention strategies for families at risk of homelessness. Eight services have been funded, from regions in each state and territory, for a period of approximately 2 years.

Centrelink and community agencies are working together to deliver and coordinate a diverse range of services for families who are identified as being at risk of homelessness. In addition, local Centrelink social workers will offer priority assistance to FHPP clients. The services are located at Belconnen (ACT), Wyong (NSW), Beenleigh (Qld), Salisbury—an Indigenous-specific service (SA), Mandurah (WA), Darwin/Palmerston (NT), Dandenong (Vic) and Launceston (Tas), and began operation in the second half of 2002.

Youth homelessness

Two Commonwealth programs specifically target homeless young people: Reconnect, and Job Placement and Employment Training (JPET). These multifaceted programs help young people start on pathways back to their families, their communities, education and employment. Early intervention programs such as the National Agenda for Early Childhood, the National Plan for Foster Care and the Family Relationships Services program are also, in part, youth homelessness prevention programs, providing better care and support for younger children and building more resilient families.

Reconnect

Reconnect is a community-based early intervention program for young people aged 12–18 years who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, and their families. The objective of the program is to improve the level of engagement of these young people with family, work, education, training and the community.

As at July 2003, there were 98 Reconnect services across Australia, including several remote Indigenous-specific services. When fully implemented, up to 100 Reconnect services will be operating, with approximately 7,000 young people and 5,000 parents being assisted per year.

Between December 1999, when Reconnect was established, and July 2003, support was provided to 25,5000 young people and/or their families. The Reconnect data indicate that, overall, around 73.4% of the clients who had consented to the collection of data had reported improvement in their situation at the end of the Reconnect support period (FaCS, pers. comm.).

An evaluation of the program is nearing completion and to date has found that Reconnect is emerging as a particularly effective program in relation to the government's policy objectives aimed at strengthening families and communities. In particular, the evaluation indicates that Reconnect is:

- demonstrating significant improvement in the relationships between young people and their families, helping to re-establish a sense of closeness and to reduce conflict;
- targeting its interventions effectively to prevent early home leaving, so that a significant number of young people return home after Reconnect intervention and/or have their living situations stabilised;
- positively impacting on young people's engagement with education and employment; and
- demonstrating effectiveness in building broader community capacity for early intervention in youth homelessness.

The evaluation has found that demand for Reconnect services is increasing and that services have sought to deal with this through strategies such as increased collaboration with other services or the provision of group programs. However, some Reconnect services have reported that they have had to tighten their eligibility criteria, leading to fears of a loss of responsiveness and flexibility. This will be explored further in the second round evaluation. The evaluation has also reported that there are currently some limitations in the data collection system that make it difficult to assess the extent to which Reconnect services are reaching families from culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

The final report on the program's evaluation is scheduled for release in September 2003. On the strength of the findings to date, the Reconnect program has been extended for a further 4 years to June 2007.

Job Placement and Employment Training (JPET)

The JPET program, administered by FaCS, aims to assist young people aged between 15 and 21 years who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. The objective is to enable young people to overcome personal and social barriers to engaging more fully in the life of their communities, and thereby achieve greater social and economic participation.

This objective is to be achieved through:

- provision of assistance that is contextually and culturally relevant;
- utilisation of service providers that are well integrated into local communities;

- flexible program delivery, especially to young people experiencing particular barriers to participation such as refugees, young people leaving care or juvenile justice and those who are geographically isolated;
- immediacy of access to assistance and support; and
- provision of holistic approaches to service delivery.

The program was established in 1996. In 2001–02, 136 agencies were funded, delivering services to 15,595 young people, within a program budget of \$17.4 million. The program helped 5,600 young people enter employment and 4,373 with accommodation (FaCS 2003b). The funding for 2003–04 has been increased to \$19.4 million.

The 2002 JPET tendering process was placed on hold in November 2002 following receipt of a significant amount of complaints from the sector, and subsequently discontinued in January 2003 in response to the findings of an independent review. In order to ensure program stability and continued access to services for JPET clients, the 135 existing JPET agencies were offered, and accepted, an extension of their funding until 30 June 2004. FaCS is currently developing a new needs analysis and selection process involving extensive consultation with the sector.

9.5 Some state and territory initiatives

South Australia

The South Australian Department of Human Services has developed a Service Coordinated Framework for Vulnerable Adults in the Inner City. Services funded under the framework include an assertive outreach team to assist homeless people in inner Adelaide who have mental health and substance abuse issues. Also funded under this initiative were a redevelopment of the Single Men's Crisis Accommodation and the establishment of a residential facility for women and men who require short-term stabilisation to assist in addressing problematic substance use.

Other initiatives underway in South Australia include:

- five early intervention pilot programs in two country and three suburban locations to prevent the eviction of families from their accommodation;
- a program aimed at young homeless people who have been sexually abused, with services including counselling for clients, and consulting and training for other SAAP services to assist them work with clients who have disclosed sexual abuse; and
- the funding of an Aboriginal component. In addition Karpendi, a service for homeless Aboriginal women which has a strong focus on childcare, health, social and recreational programs, was established.

Western Australia

In July 2001, the Western Australian Government established a taskforce to develop a homelessness strategy for the state. This taskforce reported in January 2002 (WA State Homelessness Taskforce 2002) after consultation with Indigenous, regional,

metropolitan, government, non-government and community representatives. In May 2002, the government produced its response to the report (WA DHW 2002), to be followed by quarterly reports on the implementation of the homelessness strategy.

Victoria

In 2002, the Victorian Government introduced a comprehensive framework, the Victorian Homelessness Strategy, to deal with the homeless (Vic DHS 2002). This was developed in conjunction with the Women's Safety Strategy, the Victorian Youth Strategy, the Family and Domestic Violence Crisis Protection Framework, and the Victorian Housing Strategy, as well as with active contributions by the homeless. The report outlines the strategic directions for service delivery, including improving client focus and outcomes, prevention strategies and driving change in the homelessness sector.

Queensland

The state of Queensland is currently in the process of developing a homelessness strategy and has recognised the importance of improving responses to homelessness. Concurrently, Queensland commenced the development of a Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Homelessness Policy, devising strategies to respond to homelessness and public place dwelling in Cairns, Townsville and Mount Isa (Memmott et al. 2003).

Tasmania

Tasmania has recently implemented a Common Assessment Tool to enable clients to experience consistent assessment processes regardless of where they enter the SAAP system. This was part of a restructure of SAAP services aimed at leading to greater coordination and improved client outcomes, especially for clients who require complex service responses. As part of this restructure, specialised non-clinical staff with expertise in homelessness, mental health disorders, and alcohol and drug misuse have been appointed (SAAP National Coordination and Development Committee 2003).

Northern Territory

The Northern Territory has adopted a range of initiatives aimed at improving the service system so that it can optimally respond to the changing needs of clients. These include:

- case management and early intervention for accompanying children;
- a referral and assistance service for adult clients to access education and training;
- funding for an early intervention program to allow young pregnant women, or women with their first baby, access to affordable housing and to parenting and educational skills development; and
- the provision of a domestic violence outreach worker and children's case worker for women and children experiencing domestic violence (SAAP National Coordination and Development Committee 2003).

Australian Capital Territory

In June 2002, Australian Capital Territory Council of Social Service published the Final Report on the Needs Analysis of Homelessness in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT DECS 2002). The report aimed to identify and map the whole range of needs of homeless people in the Territory, without attempting to prioritise those needs. A range of recommendations arose from the report, including development of an Indigenous Homelessness Strategy and establishment of a Working Group on Older Persons Homelessness.

New South Wales

In 1999, the New South Wales Government established the 'Partnership Against Homelessness' to coordinate and improve a wide range of housing and support services for homeless people in New South Wales (NSW DoH 2001). The key aims of the Partnership, involving 10 state government agencies, are to help homeless people access services, to coordinate support services, to improve access to crisis accommodation, and to help those in crisis accommodation find and settle into secure, long-term housing. Several projects have been initiated to meet these aims.

At around the same time, planning for the 2000 Sydney Olympics was underway. Advocates for the homeless were aware that during such events the homeless are often forcibly removed from public spaces, and they began lobbying the government to find alternative solutions. The response was a Code of Conduct (Box 9.5) that recognised the right of all people to use public space.

The success of this approach can be measured by the 'pleasure and surprise' at the improved attitudes of the authorities which many homeless people reported (Vinson & Plant 2001). The Code of Conduct provides a case study in how a cooperative approach combined with education tactics can legitimise the access of the homeless to public spaces, even during high-profile events.

Box 9.5: Sydney Olympics Code of Conduct

The Sydney Olympic Games began on 15 September 2000. A Code of Conduct was negotiated by the New South Wales Olympic Coordination Authority prior to the 2000 Games with key government agencies, including the police, housing, community services and the City of Sydney as signatories. Importantly, the code recognised the right of all people to use public space, and provided guidelines to the police, private security employees and others for dealing with the homeless.

This protocol stated that the homeless were to be left alone unless they requested assistance, presented a security risk or were endangering themselves or others. Where assistance was requested, a specialised agency was available to be called in, and more than 200 extra beds were made available to ensure continuity of temporary accommodation service during the Olympics.

9.6 Summary

Community services, including the SAAP program, have an established role in Australia's social and economic system. SAAP is regularly evaluated against best-practice principles and has shown a steady growth since inception in recurrent allocation of funds (13% in real terms) as well as in the number of clients supported and support periods provided.

SAAP agencies provided services to approximately 146,300 people, including children, during 2001–02. Around 35% of clients (i.e. not including accompanying children) were between the ages of 15 and 24 and, overall, more females (53,300) than males (41,700) received services, although in the age groups over 45 years this finding was reversed.

Eighty-five per cent of SAAP clients were born in Australia, which includes the 17% of clients who identified as Indigenous. Overall, Indigenous Australians were over-represented as SAAP clients relative to their population size: less than 2% of Australians aged 10 years and over identify as Indigenous. Accommodation was the most common type of service provided to SAAP clients (in 76% of all support periods), followed by general support and advocacy (in 74%), with a lot of variation between client groups in the types of services received.

Insufficient accommodation was cited as the most common reason agencies turned away people looking for accommodation. For the first time, the exclusion practices of agencies can be reported, although these data are indicative only as just one state was investigated. It was found that many agencies had policies excluding people who had exhibited violent behaviour, those with substance abuse problems, or those with a mental illness. This may be influenced by duty of care obligations and by concerns that inappropriate placements can lead to poor outcomes all round, as well as by a lack of specialist care resources.

Both the Commonwealth and state and territory governments have a number of initiatives underway to improve service provision, especially to those homeless people whose needs require a high level and complexity of service provision. Intersectoral and collaborative approaches are being implemented at a number of levels by both government and non-government organisations, and homelessness taskforces have been, or are being, established by both the Commonwealth and some of the states and territories. Meanwhile, the SAAP program continues to improve the services provided to those in crisis or with inadequate access to safe and secure housing, with the aim of providing a transition to independence for its clients.

There continues to be ongoing debate concerning whether the use of the SAAP definition restricts the number of people eligible for SAAP assistance, as those who do not want to be housed or returned to the mainstream may be excluded (Coleman 2000). An interesting parallel here, suggested by Memmott, is to 'the expectations of Aboriginal assimilation policies of the 1950s and 1960s' (Memmott et al 2003:16), though this is contentious. In sympathy with this view is the recent literature which stresses the need that homeless people have for social contact and purposive activity (Robinson 2001).

It is possible that historically SAAP has placed too much emphasis on accommodation. However, SAAP data show that many clients are provided with services other than accommodation and there are SAAP agencies providing educational or employment-related activities, building self-esteem and the confidence to re-integrate into the community. There is also evidence of a growth in outreach and support models that do not rely on accommodation.

Coleman (2002) also claimed that the limitations of current definitions are strongly connected to a continual failure to clarify the meaning of 'home'. This has been explored both for Indigenous Australians and for those who call public places home, for whom sleeping rough has ceased to be a crisis event and become an accepted way of life. The legitimacy or otherwise of this choice has been shown to play a major role in the daily lives of such people.

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