



## Specialist homelessness services: drug and alcohol related issues

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### Citation

#### AIHW

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The Specialist Homelessness Services Collection (SHSC) describes all clients who receive services from specialist homelessness agencies and the assistance they receive, including clients with an alcohol and other drug issue.

In 2016-17, there were almost 241,000 SHS clients aged 10 years or over, and of these 11% (27,295) were clients with a current alcohol and other drug issue.

This proportion has remained relatively stable since the SHSC commenced in 2011-12.

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## Content

The Specialist Homelessness Services Collection (SHSC) describes all clients who receive services from specialist homelessness agencies and the assistance they receive, including clients with an alcohol and other drug issue. A client is identified as having a current alcohol and other drug issue in the SHSC if they provide any of the following information:

- Their formal referral source to the specialist homelessness agency was a ‘drug and alcohol service’.
- They reported ‘problematic drug or substance use’ or ‘problematic alcohol use’ as a reason for seeking assistance.
- At some stage during their support period, a need was identified, a service provided or they were referred for ‘drug/alcohol counselling’.
- They reported they had been in a rehabilitation facility in the last 12 months or, if in the week before presenting at a service, the client’s residence or dwelling was ‘rehabilitation’.

In addition to supporting clients who are homeless, a key aim of specialist homelessness services is to prevent homelessness from occurring among those who find themselves at risk of becoming homeless. Services provided by Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) agencies include accommodation and associated support services.

### Data notes

Weighted SHSC data are presented for all years and are adjusted to account for agency non-response and data error in the statistical linkage key (SLK) which is used, among other things, to determine the number of clients serviced. Further information (including weighting methodology) on the SHSC and reports from the collection are available here.

### SHS clients

In 2016-17, there were almost 241,000 SHS clients aged 10 years or over, and of these 11% (27,295) were clients with a current alcohol and other drug issue. This proportion has remained relatively stable since the SHSC commenced in 2011-12 (Table SHSC 1).

**Table SHSC 1: SHS clients with a current drug and alcohol issue, 2011-12 to 2016-17**

Reporting year	Number of clients with an AOD issue(a)	Proportion of all clients(a)
2016-17	27,295	11%
2015-16	26,505	11%
2014-15	24,225	11%
2013-14	23,253	11%
2012-13	22,543	11%
2011-12	23,016	12%

(a) Clients aged 10 years and over.

*Note:* Data are weighted for all years for comparability.

*Source:* AIHW analyses of SHSC, 2016-17.

For clients with a current alcohol and other drug issue, in 2016-17:

- just over half (52%) were aged 20-39 (Table SHSC 1)
- just over half (54%) were male—much higher than for clients without a current alcohol and other drug issue (36%) (Table SHSC 1)
- more than one-quarter (28%) were Indigenous Australians, compared with one-fifth (20%) for clients without a current alcohol and other drug issue (Table SHSC 1)
- the most common living arrangement was ‘lone person’ (55%)— much higher than for clients without a current alcohol and other drug issue (32%).
- while one-third (33%) had no formal referral, the most frequently recorded source of formal referral to SHS agencies where specific information was provided was a specialist homelessness agency/outreach worker (16%), followed by referrals from drug and alcohol services (5%)
- more than half (59%) reported an episode of homelessness in the 12 months before presenting, compared to 35% of those clients without a current alcohol and other drug issue.

These results have remained relatively consistent over time, although there were increases in the proportion of clients reporting episodes of homelessness in the 12 months before presenting for service—for both clients with and without a current alcohol and other drug issue. The proportion of clients with a current alcohol and other drug issue reporting an episode of homelessness in the previous 12 months was stable from 2011-12 to 2013-14—between 50 and 51% of clients with a current alcohol and other drug issue—however, this increased to around 58% in 2014-15, 2015-16 and 2016-17.

**Table SHSC 2: SHS clients with and without a current drug and alcohol issue, demographic characteristics, 2016-17**

Client demographics	Per cent with a current issue	Per cent without a current issue
<b>Age</b>		
10-19	14.4	20.6
20-29	24.6	22.8
30-39	27.5	22.0
40-49	22.2	18.3
50-59	8.8	9.8
60+	2.5	6.4
<b>Sex</b>		
Male	54.2	35.9
Female	45.8	64.1
<b>Indigenous status</b>		
Indigenous	27.8	19.9
Non-Indigenous	69.0	70.2
Not stated	3.2	10.0
<b>Total (number)</b>	<b>27,295</b>	<b>213,654</b>

Source: AIHW analyses of SHSC, 2016-17.

## Service use

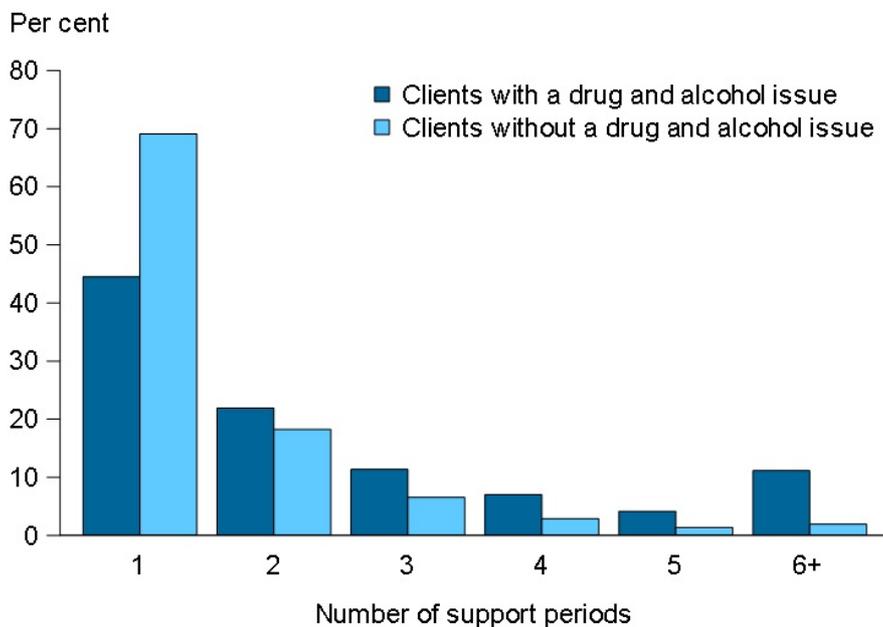
For clients with a current alcohol and other drug issue, in 2016-17:

- almost one-quarter (28%) recorded 'housing crisis' as their main reason for seeking assistance, followed by 'domestic and family violence' (12%) and 'inadequate or inappropriate dwelling conditions' (11%)—9% reported their alcohol, or drug or substance use as their main reason for seeking assistance.
- while 24% received services relating to drug and alcohol counselling (either provided directly by the agency, or where a referral was arranged), such services accounted for only 2% of all services provided.
- in total almost 280,000 services were provided or a referral was arranged—just over 7 out of 10 (73%) of these services related to general support and assistance (e.g. advice and information not directly related to housing/accommodation services)
- Clients with a current drug and alcohol issue required longer support periods on average, just over half (52%) received 90 days of support or fewer and over 1 in 4 (28%) clients received over 180 days of support. By comparison, clients without a current alcohol and other drug use had fewer days of support—58% of clients received 45 days or less of support and nearly 1 in 8 (13%) received over 180 days of support.
- Clients with a current drug and alcohol issue required more support periods, over three-quarters (77%) received between 1 and 3 support periods and 11% received 6 or more support periods. In contrast, the vast majority (94%) of clients without a current alcohol and other drug use received between 1 and 3 support periods, and only 2% received 6 or more support periods (Figure SHSC 1).

## Note

1. The number of clients reporting 'housing crisis' has changed substantially from 16% in 2013-14. This change was influenced by changes to client management systems (CMS) in the collection for the 2014-15 reporting period. In 2016-17, wording providing a specific example of housing crisis was removed from the section relating to reason for seeking assistance in the CMS. In 2016-17, changes also occurred in the way agencies were required to report 'main reason' and 'reasons for seeking assistance'.
2. Comparisons over time should be made with caution as the reporting of housing crisis, financial difficulties and housing affordability stress may be inconsistent between agencies. These changes in agency reporting were evident in the data from all states and territories.

**Figure SHSC 1: SHS clients with and without a current drug and alcohol issue, number of support periods, 2016-17**



Source: AIHW analyses of SHSC, 2016-17.

For clients with a current alcohol and other drug issue in the following housing situations at the beginning of support: 'no shelter or living in improvised dwellings', 'living in a house, townhouse or flat as a 'couch surfer' with no tenure':

- around 1 in 3 (36%) were still in the same housing situation at the end of their closed support period
- Just over one-fifth (23%) were housed in either public or community housing, or private housing (10% and 13% respectively) and nearly one-sixth (16%) were housed in short-term accommodation at the end of their closed support period
- 5% were in an institutional setting (e.g. hospital, disability support, adult correctional facility, youth justice detention centre, immigration detention centre) at the end of their closed support period.

The picture was slightly different for those clients without a current alcohol and other drug issue who had no shelter or tenure at the beginning of their homelessness support period:

- A larger proportion (45%) were still without shelter or tenure at the end of their support
- A larger proportion (29%) were housed in either public or community housing or private housing (10% and 19% respectively) and 11% were housed in short-term accommodation at the end of their support
- A smaller proportion (1%) were in an institutional setting at the end of their support period.

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### Resources

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[Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health organisations: alcohol and other drug treatment services](#)

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### Related topics

- [Homelessness services](#)
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