

6 | The dynamics of homelessness



6.1 Introduction

People experiencing homelessness have a diverse range of circumstances and needs, but they are all among Australia's most socially and economically disadvantaged. Despite Australia's current period of economic prosperity, homelessness continues to be a major social problem, and affects a considerable proportion of the population. According to accepted estimates, around 100,000 Australians are homeless. The rate of homelessness ranges from 1 in 253 people in the Australian Capital Territory to 1 in 35 people in the Northern Territory (Chamberlain & MacKenzie 2003:5). These figures are derived from the 2001 Census of Population and Housing. The equivalent estimates from the 2006 Census will not be available until 2008. In terms of the major program response to homelessness, in 2005–06, at least 1 in every 126 Australians received assistance from the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) because they were homeless or at imminent risk of homelessness (AIHW 2007a:13).

Recent evidence suggests that the traditional stereotype of homelessness mainly affecting older men with drug and alcohol problems remains a widely held perception among the Australian public (Melsom 2007). The reality, however, is that homelessness is also experienced by significant proportions of families, women, children and young people for a range of reasons, including domestic violence, poverty or financial crisis, family and relationship breakdown, or due to a lack of affordable housing. In response to the heterogeneity of the homeless population and complexity of need within it, there has been an increased effort to develop service responses that are appropriate for different segments of the homeless population, such as women escaping domestic violence, families, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in rural and remote Australia, children and young people.

Responding to homelessness is a complex endeavour, and governments at all levels and non-government organisations currently emphasise the need for using integrated approaches in their responses to homelessness. In particular, since the introduction of the Australian Government's National Homelessness Strategy in 1999, efforts have increased to develop stronger and more effective cross-program relationships (FaCSIA 2007a). This includes linkages between SAAP and other health and welfare services.

Resolving homelessness is not limited to addressing a lack of adequate shelter. In SAAP, a wide range of non-accommodation support services may be utilised according to the particular needs of clients. In addition to the provision of crisis accommodation, SAAP agencies may also help their clients obtain or maintain tenancies in transitional housing, public or community housing, or the private rental market. Various projects have also been developed that aim to utilise linkages between crisis services such as SAAP and mental health and other health services, drug and alcohol programs, income support, employment programs and family and relationship counselling. These developments in homelessness assistance are encapsulated in the three key strategic priorities of the new SAAP Multilateral Agreement, SAAP V (2005–2010):

- pre-crisis intervention
- post-crisis transition
- better linkages to allied support services for people with multiple and/or complex support needs (FaCSIA 2006).

One example of an innovative approach to cross-program service delivery is YP⁴, a 3-year trial offering homeless young people a single point of contact for employment, housing, educational and personal support. Due for completion in 2008, the trial involves four non-government organisations working in partnership, and combines funding and other resources from the National Homelessness Strategy, SAAP, Community Jobs Program, Personal Support Program, Job Network, and the Job Placement, Employment and Training Program, among others (Hanover 2007). One of the key aims of the National Homelessness Strategy in supporting these types of projects is to identify best practice models that can be promoted and replicated to enhance existing homelessness policies and programs, and to build the capacity of the non-government sector to improve linkages and networks (FaCSIA 2007b).

Cross-program responses to homelessness are also evident in the Council of Australian Government's (COAG) National Action Plan on Mental Health 2006–2011, which includes various measures to reduce the prevalence of mental health problems in the homeless population. Research suggests that mental health and substance use problems are more prevalent in the homeless population than in the general population (Lunn 2007; St Vincent's Mental Health Service & Craze Lateral Solutions 2006; Teesson et al. 2000). It has also been suggested that there is a clear link between homelessness and mental illness and problematic substance use, with many of these problems actually developing after a person becomes homeless. SAAP data on clients with mental health and substance use problems are detailed in this chapter.

SAAP service delivery is structured differently for different segments of the homeless population. Initiatives notwithstanding, differences in the operational practices of SAAP agencies according to target groups may affect who, out of the total homeless population, is more likely to gain access to SAAP services and the type of support they are likely to receive when they do. These differences in access and services for different client groups is a particular focus of this chapter.

The stronger emphasis on the delivery of cross-program responses to homelessness has begun to influence the way in which data and information are collected and reported. This is also in line with the continued emphasis on the need for a person-centred perspective to measure the outcomes of government-funded policies and programs. Substantial progress has been made towards the development of methods to link data both within and across programs. In the SAAP National Data Collection, the introduction of a new statistical linkage key that is consistent with that used in other community services and health data collections will enable the reporting of de-identified statistical information that relates to the person rather than the program. This is an important step in providing the kind of statistical information necessary to inform whole-of-government and inter-jurisdictional agendas in homelessness policy.

Chapter outline

This chapter explores the relationships between the number of people experiencing homelessness, different experiences of homelessness and homelessness assistance, drawing largely from the SAAP National Data Collection. Section 6.2 examines how

structural differences influence service delivery to different groups of people experiencing homelessness. Structural constraints in service delivery are further explored in Section 6.3 through an examination of homeless people who are unsuccessful in their attempts to be accommodated in SAAP. It also considers those people who, for various reasons, are excluded or evicted from SAAP agencies. Section 6.4 turns to the larger issue of the relationship between people seeking SAAP accommodation and the total homeless population, by examining data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics' (ABS) Census of Population and Housing and the consequent point-in-time estimate of the homeless population derived by the Counting the Homeless project. In Section 6.5, the categories of the homeless population defined in Counting the Homeless are applied to the ongoing SAAP National Data Collection to illustrate the temporal characteristics of homelessness.

Section 6.6 examines the prevalence of mental health and problematic substance use among the various client groups in SAAP. Data on the housing circumstances of clients, including those with mental health and problematic substance use issues, are presented in Section 6.7. Selected SAAP data from 1996–97 to 2005–06 are presented in Section 6.8. Section 6.9 contains an overview of major policy initiatives that have been developed since *Australia's welfare 2005*, and data developments related to SAAP are outlined in Section 6.10.

6.2 The major program response to homelessness

There are many Australian Government and state and territory government responses to homelessness, of which SAAP is by far the largest. SAAP is designed to deliver services to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness (see Box 6.1). SAAP-funded agencies exist in every state and territory, in metropolitan, rural and remote areas, and, while every agency caters to those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, each agency varies in the services it provides and can largely decide its own policies and procedures for delivering those services. The range of services that might be provided range from supported accommodation to services designed to prevent clients becoming homeless, such as financial help or family reconciliation. They may also include non-accommodation services for those who are marginally housed, such as showers, laundry facilities, meals and access to health professionals such as general practitioners, psychiatrists, psychologists or podiatrists.

Before SAAP was established, various programs catered to particular groups of the homeless, such as young people, women escaping domestic violence, or single men. These independent programs were brought together with the launch of SAAP in 1985, a joint Commonwealth and state and territory government initiative. Since then, the program has continued to

Box 6.1: The SAAP Act: definition of homelessness

According to the *Supported Accommodation Assistance Act 1994*, a homeless person is a person who does not have access to safe, secure and adequate housing. A person is considered not to have access to safe, secure and adequate housing if the only housing to which they have access damages, or is likely to damage, their health; threatens their safety; marginalises them through failing to provide access to adequate personal amenities, or the economic and social supports that a home normally affords; places them in circumstances which threaten or adversely affect the adequacy, safety, security and affordability of that housing; or has no security of tenure—that is, they have no legal right to continued occupation of their home. A person is also considered homeless if he or she is living in accommodation provided by a SAAP agency or some other form of emergency accommodation.

evolve, and the establishment of particular SAAP agencies has in large part been the outcome of submission-based funding patterns influenced by various state-level policy directives, as each state and territory administers the agencies within their jurisdiction. The number of funded services has grown from around 500 in 1985 to 1,300 in 2005–06 (AIHW 2003a:401, 2007a:7).

Across Australia, SAAP agencies collect data on the services provided to clients and their accompanying children using the definitional framework provided by the National Data Collection (see Box 6.2 for the key definitions used in this chapter). SAAP agencies supported an estimated 161,200 people during 2005–06, of whom around 106,500 were SAAP clients and 54,700 were accompanying children (AIHW 2007a:13). In 2005–06, the 106,500 SAAP clients were provided with 180,000 support periods. The greater number of

Box 6.2: Key definitions used in the SAAP National Data Collection

An **accommodation period** is the period during which a client was in SAAP-supported accommodation. A client may not be accommodated at any time within a support period, or they may have one or more accommodation periods within a support period. The dates on which each accommodation period began and ended during the support period are collected for clients but not for accompanying children. However, it can be reasonably assumed that an accompanying child will have the same accommodation period start and end dates as their parent(s) or guardian(s) in the majority of cases.

An **accompanying child** is a person aged under 18 years who has a parent or guardian who is a SAAP client, and who accompanies that client to a SAAP agency any time during that client's support period, and/or receives assistance directly as a consequence of a parent or guardian's support period.

A **client** is a person who is homeless or at imminent risk of homelessness and who is accommodated by a SAAP agency, or enters into an ongoing support relationship with a SAAP agency, or receives support or assistance from a SAAP agency which entails generally 1 hour or more of a worker's time, either with that client directly or on behalf of that client, on a given day. This includes people who are aged 18 years or older and people of any age not accompanied by a parent or guardian.

A **closed support period** is a support period that had finished on or before the end of the reporting period. In this chapter, this means on or before 30 June 2006.

For the purposes of the National Data Collection, a **referral** involves a formal process, not simply the provision of information. A (formal) referral occurs when a SAAP agency contacts another organisation and that organisation accepts the person concerned for an appointment or interview. A referral has not been provided if the person is not accepted for an appointment or interview.

A **support period** is the period of time that a client receives support and/ or supported accommodation from a SAAP agency. A support period commences when a client begins to receive support and/or supported accommodation from a SAAP agency. The support period is considered to finish when the client ends the relationship with the agency, or the agency ends the relationship with the client.

Supported accommodation consists of accommodation paid for or provided directly by a SAAP agency. The accommodation may be provided at the agency or may be purchased using SAAP funds—at a motel, for example.

Source: AIHW 2005b.

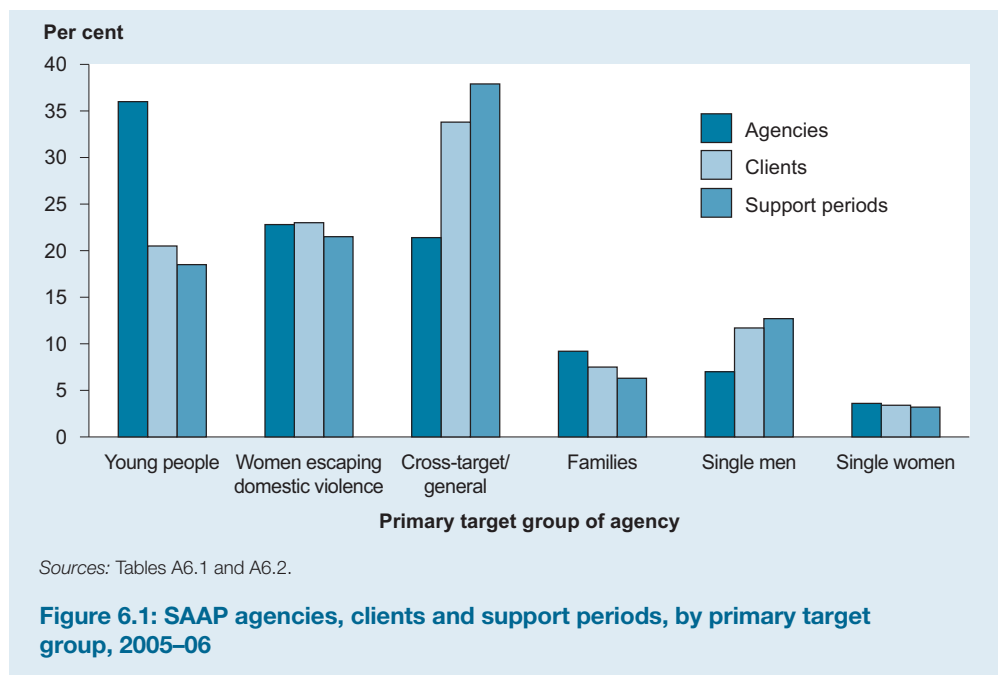
support periods than clients indicates that some clients accessed SAAP services more than once during the year.

The 54,700 accompanying children were provided with around 81,700 support periods. Overall, 1 in every 88 Australian children aged 0–17 years accompanied a parent or guardian to a SAAP agency in 2005–06, with 0–4 year olds having the highest rate of SAAP use—around 1 in every 57 children in this age group (AIHW 2007a:28; see also Section 2.6).

Primary target groups in SAAP

The primary target group of an agency is reported in the SAAP National Data Collection by their state or territory funding department. Many SAAP agencies are funded to target quite specific client groups, such as young people, single men or single women, women and children escaping domestic violence, or families, although other agencies have cross-target or more general client groups. Agencies targeting young people, the largest primary target group, totalled 36% of all agencies in 2005–06, with the next largest group of agencies catering for women and children escaping domestic violence (23%), followed by cross-target or generalist agencies (21%). Agencies targeting families accounted for 9% of all agencies at the national level (Figure 6.1).

Different jurisdictions, however, can depart quite markedly from this national pattern (Table A6.1). In Tasmania in 2005–06, for example, 60% of agencies were generalist and 29% targeted young people, in the Northern Territory 32% were generalist, 27% targeted women and children escaping domestic violence and 22% were for young people, while in Western Australia the majority of agencies targeted either women and children escaping domestic violence or young people (30% of agencies each) while 24% were generalist. The mix of agencies available to homeless people in any one location strongly influences who can access SAAP. It is also one indicator of who are considered the most vulnerable and in need of a homelessness service in any given jurisdiction.

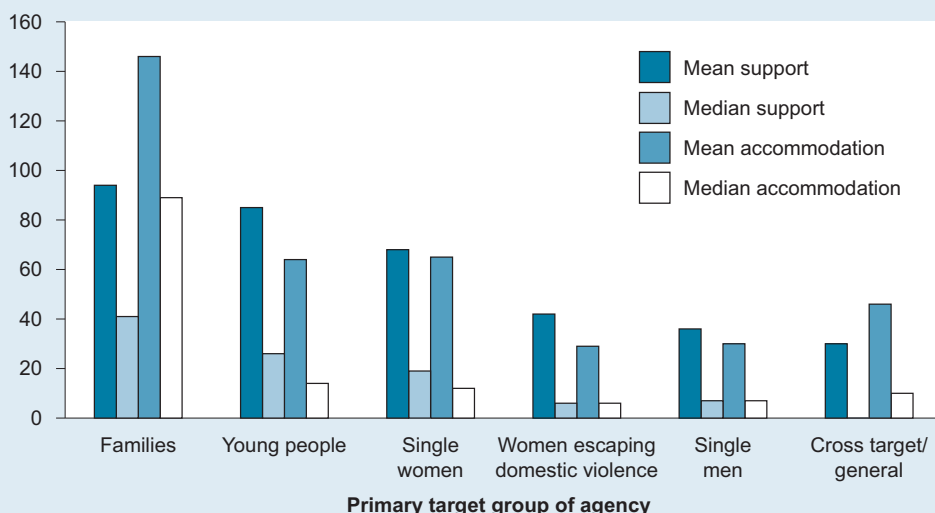


Both historical factors and the differing needs of various client groups have influenced the operational procedures of the various SAAP sectors, often leading to the primary target group sectors having quite distinct methods of operation. Agencies targeting young people, for example, are very often small services and may have legal requirements to provide around-the-clock care, while many agencies that target single men are often much larger operations with high client turnovers and less intensive client contact. As a consequence, the average number of clients and the proportion of support periods provided can vary significantly between the sectors (Figure 6.1), leading to differences in the level of support generally available to their clients, notwithstanding the intensity of those clients' needs.

Agencies targeting young people comprised 36% of agencies nationally, but accounted for just 21% of all clients and provided 19% of all support periods, indicating the more intensive nature of the support provided by these agencies. In contrast, 21% of all agencies were generalist but these accounted for 34% of all clients and 38% of all support periods. Likewise, while only 7% of services targeted single men, they accounted for 12% of all clients and 13% of all support periods (Figure 6.1).

A related indicator of the differences between the SAAP target groups is provided by the average lengths of support and accommodation within the various target groups (Figure 6.2). It should be noted that a support period may or may not include a period of SAAP accommodation. A SAAP support period includes a range of support services, possibly including accommodation; the term 'accommodation period' refers specifically to the length of time spent in accommodation. Figure 6.2 presents both the mean and the median lengths of support periods in the various sectors, as well as the mean and median lengths of time for which clients were accommodated in SAAP. The accommodation periods exclude those that started and ended on the same day.

Agencies targeting families generally provide their clients with both longer support and longer accommodation periods. The mean length of support in this target group was 94 days and the mean length of accommodation was 146 days. This target group also



Source: Table A6.2.

Figure 6.2: Mean and median lengths of support and accommodation, by primary target group, 2005–06

had the smallest disparities between the means and medians of the lengths of support and accommodation. The median length of support was 41 days and the median length of accommodation was 89 days, indicating greater consistency in the extended level of support and accommodation offered to clients of family agencies than clients in other target groups. Such consistency in service provision could be influenced by organisational differences between the target groups, as well as reflecting possible differences in the levels of need or housing exit options for the clients of these agencies.

In contrast, cross-target or generalist agencies, which provided the majority of SAAP support periods in 2005–06, had the shortest average length of support (30 days), with the median length of support being less than 1 day. This means that at least half of all support periods of the clients visiting these agencies were for less than 1 day. Agencies targeting women and children escaping domestic violence and those targeting single men provided the shortest average length of accommodation (29 and 30 days, respectively). The median lengths of support and accommodation in these sectors were 6 and 7 days, respectively.

From Figure 6.1 it can be seen that there were large differences across the SAAP sectors in the number of agencies funded nationally, the number of clients accessing each sector and the number of support periods for those clients. The largest proportion of agencies in the SAAP sector targeted young people, but the largest number of clients and support periods were provided by generalist agencies. Figure 6.2 shows that the sectors also differed greatly in the average lengths of support and accommodation provided by agencies to their clients. The three SAAP sectors with the shortest mean and median lengths of both support and accommodation were those targeting women escaping domestic violence, single men and cross-target agencies.

These sector differences may limit access for particular SAAP client groups. The support period distribution of client groups in each of the sectors is shown in Table 6.1, to examine whether the differences between the SAAP sectors have the potential to affect particular client groups more than others.

Given that cross-target agencies provided the largest proportion of support periods of any target group (Figure 6.1), it is not surprising that for most client groups this was the sector that provided the largest proportion of their support periods. The three client groups who differed from this pattern were the younger women and men (aged under 25 years) who presented at a SAAP agency on their own, who had the majority of their support periods (60%) provided by young people's agencies, and women with children, with 54% of support periods provided by domestic violence agencies (Table 6.1). These three client groups were also able to access a range of other SAAP target groups.

Older men (those aged 25–44 years and 45 years or over) in general accessed just two primary target group sectors in SAAP, those agencies targeting single men and cross-target agencies. The majority of support periods for both the older male age groups (around 57% in both groups) were provided by cross-target agencies and another 40% were in agencies for single men. That is, over 97% of support periods for both of these groups were in two of the sectors providing the shortest lengths of support and accommodation.

Although no other client group had such restricted SAAP experience, women presenting without children in the older age groups (25–44 years and 45 years or over) also went to generalist agencies for the majority of their support periods (46% and 47%, respectively). However, these older women were able to access more diverse SAAP sectors. As well as visiting domestic violence agencies (in 40% of support periods), these two client groups also accessed agencies targeting single women in around 10% of their support periods.

Table 6.1: SAAP support periods: client group by primary target group of agency, 2005–06 (per cent)

Client group (years)	Young people	Single men only	Single women only	Families	Women escaping DV	Cross-target/multiple/general	Total	
							Per cent	Number
Male alone, under 25	59.6	13.5	—	1.1	0.5	25.3	100.0	19,700
Male alone, 25–44	1.1	40.0	0.1	1.2	0.5	57.0	100.0	32,300
Male alone, 45 or over	0.7	40.3	0.1	1.0	0.3	57.7	100.0	14,800
Female alone, under 25	59.5	0.2	3.8	1.7	14.0	20.8	100.0	22,400
Female alone, 25–44	1.3	0.8	10.3	2.0	39.7	45.9	100.0	21,600
Female alone, 45 or over	0.9	0.7	9.1	2.2	40.0	47.1	100.0	9,700
Couple no children	22.6	2.2	1.1	9.5	4.9	59.8	100.0	4,900
Couple with children	14.4	0.7	0.7	38.4	4.0	41.8	100.0	7,000
Male with children	7.1	2.5	0.8	34.0	2.2	53.4	100.0	2,400
Female with children	8.2	0.3	3.5	13.6	54.4	20.0	100.0	38,800
Other	24.3	2.1	3.4	11.1	8.7	50.4	100.0	800
Total (per cent)	18.1	12.7	3.2	6.4	21.6	38.1	100.0	..
Total (number)	31,600	22,100	5,500	11,100	37,600	66,400	..	174,400

Notes

1. Number excluded due to errors and omissions (weighted): 5,595 support periods.
2. Figures have been weighted to adjust for agency non-participation and client non-consent.

Sources: SAAP Client and Administrative Data Collections.

These data show how access to the various SAAP sectors can depend on which client group a client falls into. Taken together with the significant differences in the lengths of support and accommodation generally provided by those sectors, and the large variation of SAAP sectors across jurisdictions, the implication is that structural considerations strongly influence the SAAP experiences of various client groups. Older single men are a good example of this.

What becomes clear from this discussion is that, while individual factors, such as the depth and complexity of client needs, will have an influence on the types of services provided, the SAAP experiences of various client groups are also constrained by differences between the standard service provision of those SAAP sectors they are able to access. The fact that services provided do not necessarily reflect the services needed, due to the historical development of services and social perceptions of vulnerability, will be returned to later in Section 6.6, which discusses clients with mental health and problematic substance use issues.

Female Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander SAAP clients, especially those living in remote areas, have a unique pattern of SAAP use. Data on the length of accommodation in SAAP for women with children from different cultural backgrounds are shown in Table 6.2. This table shows that 37% of these closed support periods with accommodation in 2005–06 were for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women with children.

Indigenous women with children had shorter lengths of SAAP accommodation than women with children in other cultural groups. For all non-Indigenous groups of women with children, the most common length of stay in SAAP accommodation was either 4–13 weeks or greater than 13 weeks, with at least 19% of such closed support periods falling into these groups (Table 6.2). For Indigenous females with children, however, the most

common length of stay was between 2 and 7 days (in 36% of closed support periods), and the next most common was for 1 day or less (in 26%).

Further, for Indigenous women with children this disparity increased dramatically with remoteness. Indigenous women with children accessing SAAP services in Very Remote areas are most likely to have a SAAP bed for 1 day or less (in 45% of closed support periods) or for between 2 and 7 days (42%). Those in Remote areas are most likely to have a SAAP bed for between 2 and 7 days (in 45% of closed support periods) rather than for 1 day or less (31%).

Table 6.2: SAAP closed support periods for females with children in which they were accommodated: length of SAAP accommodation by cultural and linguistic diversity, 2005–06 (per cent)

Cultural and linguistic diversity	1 day or less	2–7 days	>1–2 weeks	>2–4 weeks	>4–13 weeks	>13 weeks	Total		
							Per cent	Number	
Indigenous Australians	25.7	36.2	9.7	8.8	11.3	8.5	100.0	36.7	4,900
Remote area ^(a)	30.9	45.3	9.9	5.5	5.7	2.7	100.0	..	900
Very Remote area ^(a)	45.0	42.4	6.6	2.8	2.3	0.8	100.0	..	800
Australian-born non-Indigenous	12.9	19.8	10.7	12.0	21.2	23.4	100.0	47.5	6,300
Overseas-born, mainly English-speaking countries ^(b)	12.6	23.6	10.8	8.4	25.7	19.0	100.0	4.0	500
Overseas-born, mainly non-English speaking-countries ^(c)	12.3	18.0	9.7	11.9	23.7	24.4	100.0	11.8	1,600
Total (row per cent)	17.5	25.8	10.2	10.7	18.0	17.9	100.0	100.0	..
Total (number)	2,300	3,400	1,400	1,400	2,400	2,400	13,300

(a) Unweighted data. Figures could not be weighted to adjust for agency non-participation and client non-consent at the remoteness level. The remoteness of SAAP agencies has been assigned using the Australian Standard Geographical Classification Remoteness Structure (ABS 2001). SAAP agencies are categorised based on the postcode supplied by the relevant state or territory community services department. Please note that this postcode forms part of the mailing address of the agency and may not match the actual location of the agency.

(b) Mainly English-speaking countries: Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, South Africa, the United Kingdom, the United States of America and Zimbabwe.

(c) Mainly non-English-speaking countries: countries, excluding Australia, that are not listed as mainly English speaking.

Notes

1. Number excluded due to errors and omissions (weighted): 1,034 support periods.

2. Figures have been weighted to adjust for agency non-participation and client non-consent.

Source: SAAP Client Collection.

This supports other evidence that SAAP services in these areas are used as ‘safe houses’, providing a temporary haven as needed. A recent report, *Family violence among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples*, states that for Indigenous female clients in SAAP escaping domestic violence, the average number of support periods per client increased with remoteness, from 1.4 support periods per client in Major Cities to 2.1 in Very Remote areas (AIHW: Al-Yaman et al. 2006:77).

It is evident from the data presented above that structural elements can influence service delivery to particular sections of the homeless population, with access to the various SAAP primary target group sectors sometimes dependent on the client group that a client belongs to. This in turn can influence different client groups’ experiences of SAAP, due in part to the significant differences in the lengths of support and accommodation provided by various SAAP sectors. Clearly, sector differences can also be mediated by location and cultural factors, as in the case of SAAP service delivery in remote areas.

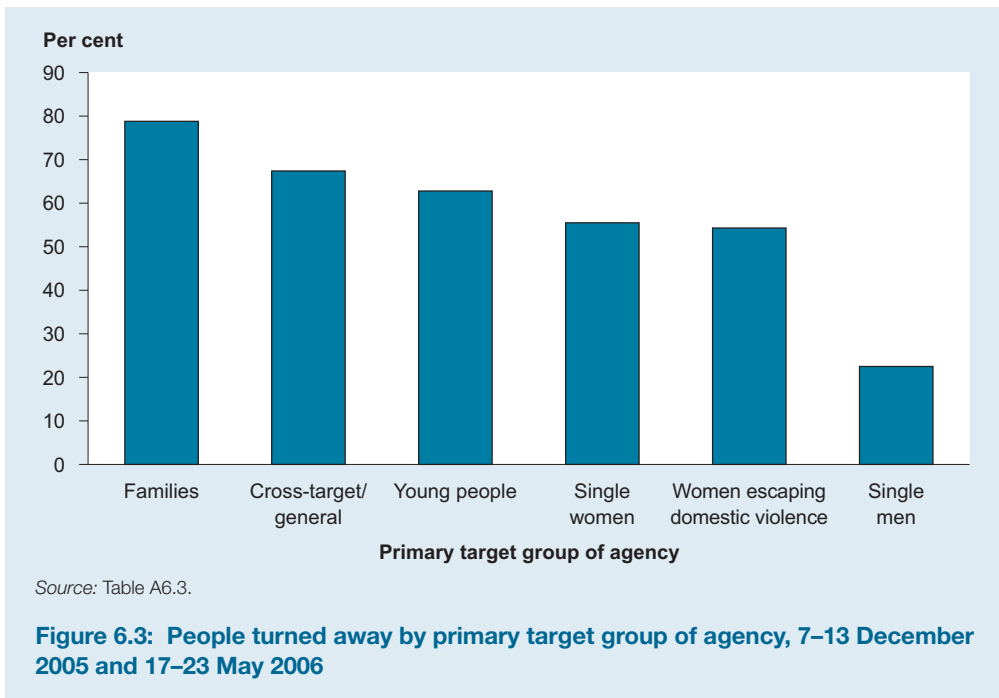
6.3 Who is turned away from SAAP accommodation?

This section begins by examining who is seeking accommodation in SAAP and who is turned away because of lack of resources. Data are from two SAAP data collections: the Client Collection and Demand for Accommodation Collection. The Demand for Accommodation Collection covers 2 separate weeks each year, and is used in conjunction with the ongoing Client Collection to estimate the number of people who are turned away from SAAP accommodation. Some data from the New South Wales Ombudsman's inquiry (2004) will also be presented, which confirms that people with mental health and problematic substance use issues, in particular, may be excluded from even accessing SAAP services. Considered together, these data give an indication of the difficulties faced by various client groups in obtaining access to SAAP accommodation.

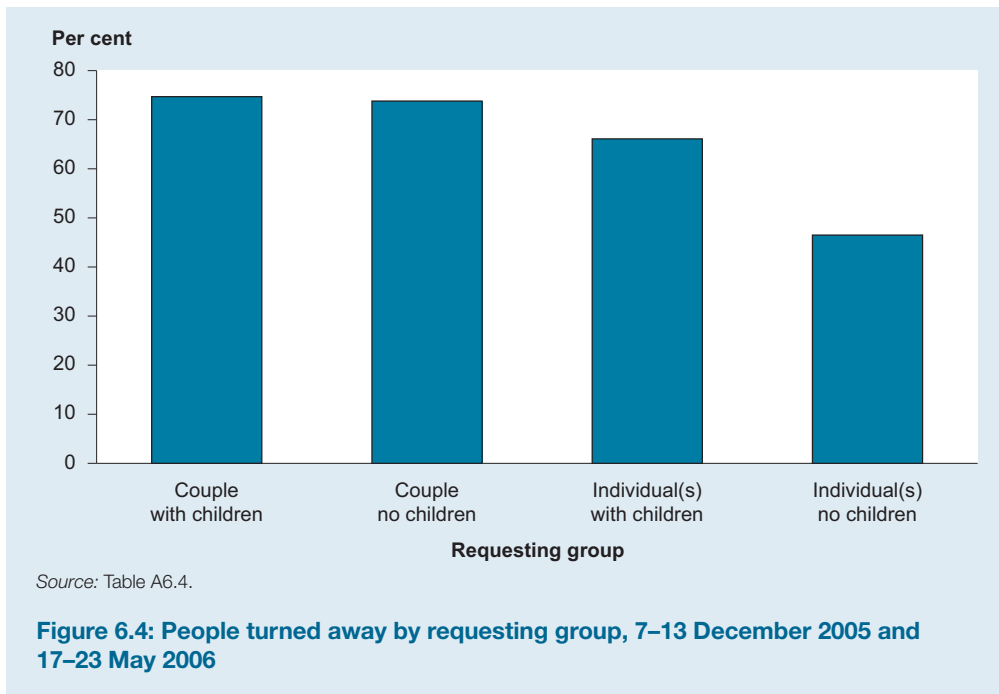
While SAAP agencies accommodate many individuals on a daily basis, there are still instances when an agency cannot provide the accommodation requested by people in crisis. These turn-away rates reflect the proportion of people who could not be accommodated after they made a valid request for immediate accommodation at a SAAP agency during the Demand for Accommodation Collection period. The turn away-rates show that, overall, SAAP agencies, particularly agencies targeting families, are operating at capacity.

Nationally, all agency target groups had to turn people away from accommodation, but agencies targeting families had the highest turn-away rate (79%) (Figure 6.3). Cross-target agencies also reported a high turn-away rate (67%). These are agencies that generally accept a wide range of clients, including family groups. Agencies that primarily targeted single men reported the lowest average daily turn-away rate (23%).

Figure 6.3 suggests that the SAAP service system nationally is better able to meet valid requests for immediate accommodation for individuals than for family groups. Figure 6.4 supports this suggestion, showing that family groups—couples with children (75%), couples without children (74%) and individual(s) with children (66%)—had more difficulty obtaining SAAP



accommodation than people requesting accommodation on their own without children (47%). In fact, not only did family groups have a higher turn-away rate during the Demand for Accommodation Collection period, they also had higher levels of unmet need for accommodation reported annually in the Client Collection (AIHW 2007d).



It is only possible to generate turn-away rates for people who request accommodation that will begin within 24 hours. Figure 6.5 shows the proportion of people in different groups who made requests for accommodation to begin within 24 hours and those where it was to begin after 24 hours. Family groups requested accommodation within 24 hours less often than people presenting alone, which means that a smaller proportion of requests made by family groups contributed to the turn-away rates presented above, and suggests that people with children are more likely than people without children to attempt to make forward plans for accessing SAAP services. From the examination of accommodation length in Section 6.2, we know that once accommodated in an agency targeting families, clients do not move on as quickly as other client groups. This may further reduce the chances of these potential clients gaining accommodation when they need it.

Figure 6.6 presents the daily demand for accommodation in SAAP, bringing together the numbers, on a given day, for people entering SAAP, people leaving SAAP and people being turned away from SAAP. This shows that on any given day in the period there was little variation between the entries and the exits, indicating that generally each bed was taken up when it became vacant and that SAAP was operating at capacity.

It also suggests that the proportion of people being turned away followed roughly the same pattern as the throughput: the more beds there were available, the more people there were who turned up looking for accommodation (and then were turned away). In other words, the demand for beds appears to follow the supply of beds, rather than vice versa. This conjecture is supported by the ‘weekend effect’ visible in the graph. When fewer beds are available—less throughput—less people approach SAAP services and get turned away.

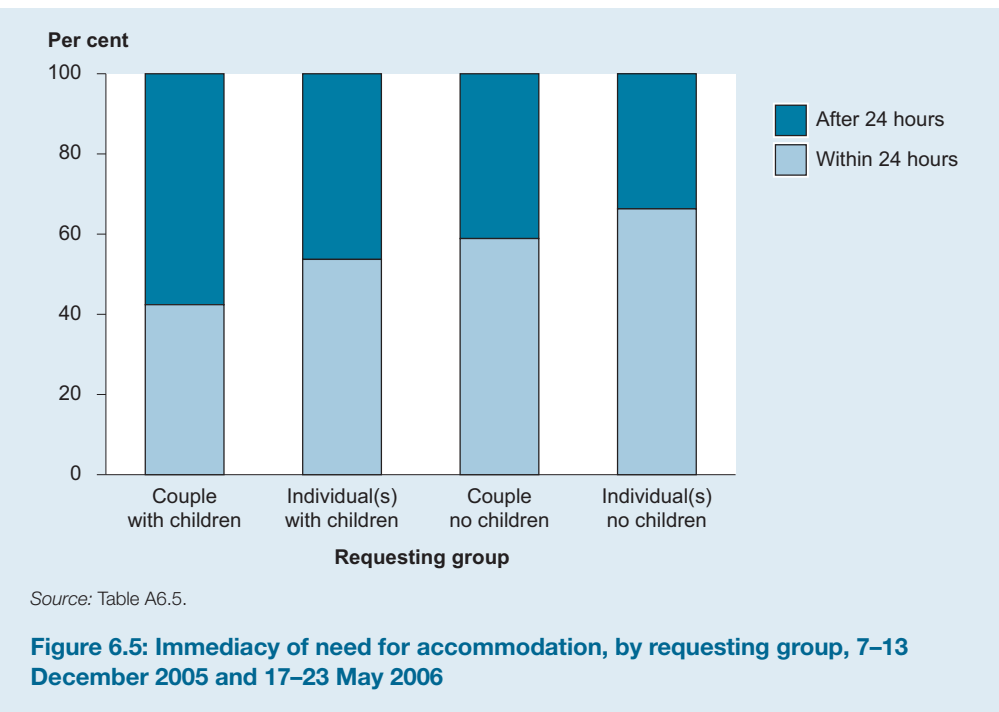


Figure 6.5: Immediacy of need for accommodation, by requesting group, 7–13 December 2005 and 17–23 May 2006

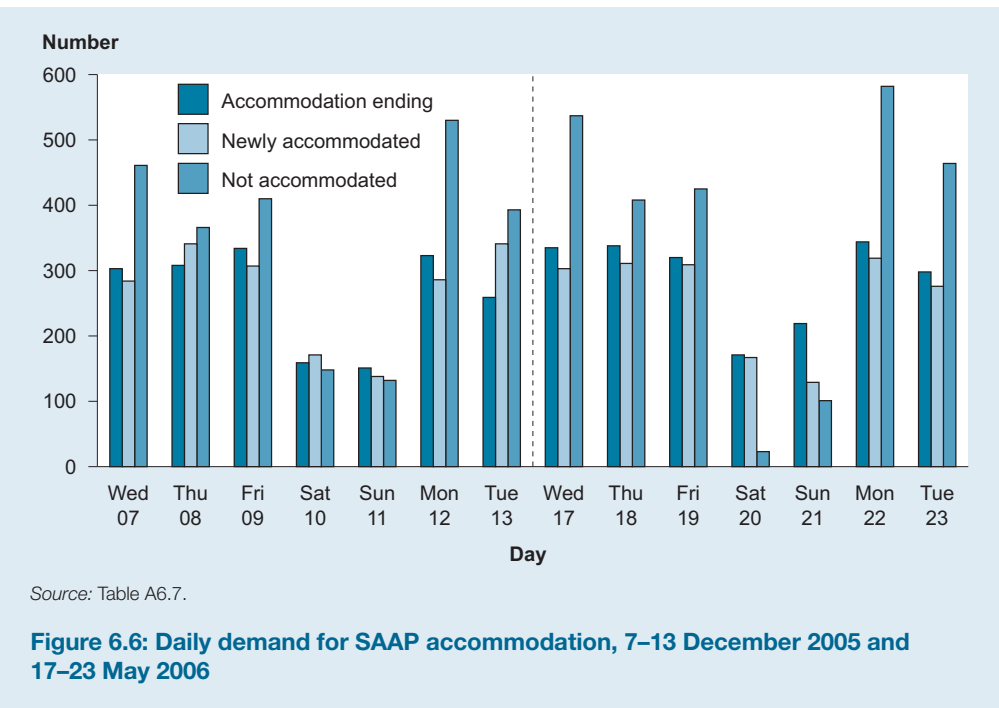


Figure 6.6: Daily demand for SAAP accommodation, 7–13 December 2005 and 17–23 May 2006

After the weekends on Mondays, the throughput reaches the week's high, as does the turn-away rate. It should be noted, however, that this 'weekend effect' could be a result of agency operating practices such as closure or reduced staffing at weekends, but there is no data to support this.

There is another group of people who attempt to get into SAAP agencies and are unsuccessful, but who most likely do not show up in the turn-away rates. These are the people who are excluded from SAAP services. Although there is very little data available on these people, the data that are available clearly shows that it is likely to be people with mental health and substance use problems who have the most difficulty in obtaining a SAAP program response to their needs.

The most comprehensive data source on exclusions from SAAP services is the NSW Ombudsman's (previously the Community Services Commission) inquiry held in New South Wales in 2001–02 (NSW Ombudsman 2004). This represents the only in-depth survey of obstacles to accessing SAAP services. This review of the exclusion policies and procedures of SAAP agencies in New South Wales showed how eligibility policies prevent potential clients from gaining access. It showed that exclusion can operate through practices such as banning, blacklisting, eviction and background checks. Although this was a New South Wales study, these practices are not necessarily limited to New South Wales. Two other studies, one from Queensland, and one from Victoria on homeless young people, had similar results (AIHW 2005a:338; Keys et al. 2005) and it is likely that similar practices exist in other jurisdictions.

The Ombudsman's survey identified three ways in which people may be denied SAAP services:

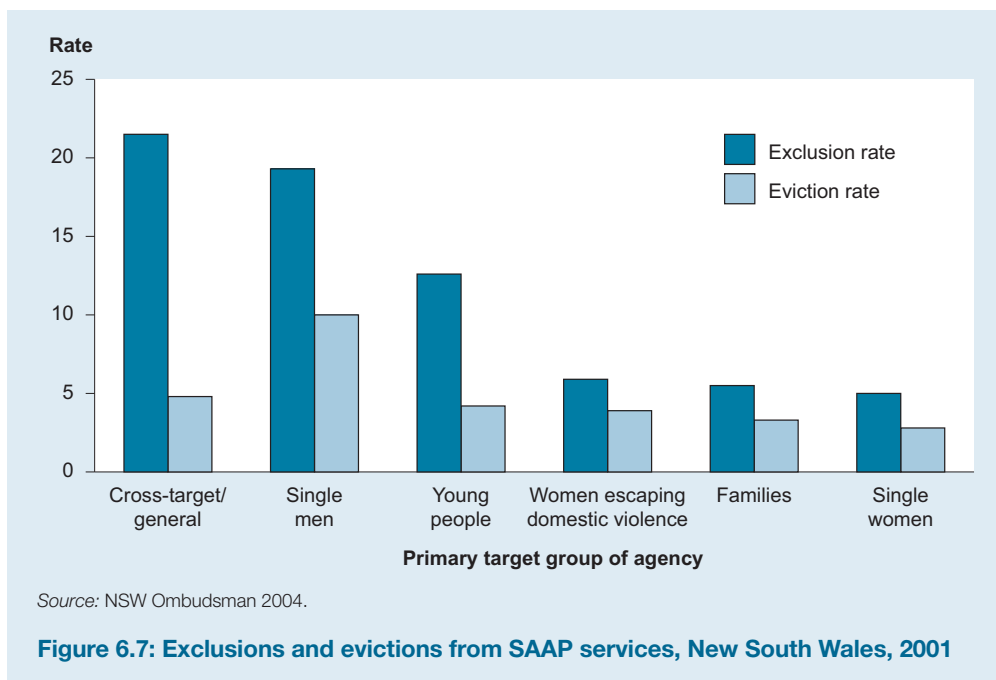
- some agencies may deny access to potential clients for reasons other than no vacancy or capacity of the service to support—exclusions
- some clients may be asked to leave agencies—early exits or evictions
- some clients may be temporarily exited from SAAP agencies—time out.

Agencies estimated that, in the 6 months before the inquiry, there were 2,250 occasions on which people were excluded from 165 agencies. The majority of agencies (57%) turned away between 1 and 20 people in the 6 months before the survey, 11% of agencies turned away over 40 people and 17% of agencies turned away no-one. Of those people excluded, 470 people were excluded because of a problematic substance use issue, 290 because of a mental illness and 275 exhibited violent behaviour.

There were high rates of exclusions from cross-target and single men's agencies (Figure 6.7). As mentioned previously, single men aged 25 years or over had large proportions of their support periods at agencies with these primary target groups. This suggests that single older men with problematic alcohol and substance use issues and mental health issues who seek to access SAAP services may face more obstacles than other client groups. This is supported by the data available on evictions.

Clients had an early unplanned termination of their accommodation from 205 agencies on approximately 1,090 occasions in the 6 months before the survey. Of the 1,090 instances of eviction, 32% (345 instances) were as a result of violence, threatening behaviour, and theft or damage to property, and 24% (260 instances) were as a result of evidence of substance use or intoxication. A majority of agencies (71%) terminated the accommodation of between 1 and 20 people, and a small number (4%) terminated the accommodation of between

21 and 60 people. Twenty-five per cent of agencies did not terminate the accommodation of anyone earlier than planned. Agencies for single men had a much higher termination rate per agency than other target groups (Figure 6.7), with men exiting early in circumstances of violent conduct, intoxication, or substance abuse, supporting the evidence that alcohol and mental health issues limit the access of single older men to SAAP services.



6.4 Who counts as homeless?

The pattern of throughput in SAAP indicates that it is operating at capacity in terms of accommodation, and not everyone who requests accommodation receives it. In addition to those accommodated in SAAP, many of the people who are turned away are likely to be included in the estimate of the homeless population derived by the Counting the Homeless project.

Australia is one of the few countries in the world that can claim to rigorously estimate their homeless population (AIHW 2005a). This count is based largely on the ABS Census of Population and Housing held every 5 years, with additional statistics collected from homeless refuges for the SAAP National Data Collection and the National Census of Homeless School Students. These sources are used to derive an estimate of the homeless population in the Counting the Homeless project.

The relative consistency and reliability of the estimates from both the Counting the Homeless project and the SAAP National Data Collection are notable, given the difficulties in collecting quality data on a population that differs markedly in circumstances, and that may wish to remain undetected and anonymous. The estimates from these sources have proved beneficial for both policy development and advocacy purposes. However, used in isolation, estimates of the number of homeless people or the number of people supported by SAAP may suggest that homelessness is a static, one-off experience.

This section discusses the Counting the Homeless project's estimate. In the next section, the categories of homelessness from the project are used to examine the housing circumstances of SAAP clients, both before and after they were accommodated in SAAP. Combining the snapshot picture of homelessness from the Counting the Homeless project in this way with SAAP data with more temporal characteristics allows the broad picture of homelessness to be more fully described.

Estimates of the homeless population based on the 2006 Census of Population and Housing were not available for this volume of *Australia's welfare*. This section therefore presents an analysis of homelessness using 2001 estimates. The ABS Census of Population and Housing measures the number of people in Australia on census night, their key characteristics and their dwellings. The nature, purpose and scope of this Census is described in Box 6.3.

The Counting the Homeless project uses data from the Census to derive an estimate of homelessness in Australia. For this project to be successful, homelessness first needs to be defined. A cultural definition, developed by Chamberlain and MacKenzie in 1992, has underpinned the estimation of homelessness in the 1996 and 2001 Censuses of Population and Housing, and has been used again for the analysis of the 2006 census data. The definition has been reviewed in three previous volumes of *Australia's welfare* (see AIHW 2001, 2003 and 2005).

The Counting the Homeless project defines homelessness in terms of security of tenure and standard of dwelling, that is, the degree to which a person's dwelling meets with the conventional expectations of a house, such as having different rooms to sleep and live in, a kitchen and a working bath or shower and toilet, as well as having some security of tenure.

Applying this definition to census data, people have been defined as homeless if they had no access to such housing. Chamberlain and MacKenzie (2003:11) state there are three groups that fall below the minimum community standard for adequate housing.

Box 6.3: The ABS Census of Population and Housing

The Population Census is conducted every 5 years and collects a range of demographic, social and economic information from all people and dwellings (excluding diplomatic personnel and dwellings) in Australia on census night. Information is available for all geographic areas from collection district upwards.

Purpose

The purpose of the Census is to measure the number and key characteristics of persons and dwellings in Australia on census night. This provides a reliable basis to estimate the population for each state and territory and local government area for electoral purposes and distribution of government funds. The Census also provides the characteristics of the population and its housing for small areas and small population groups to support the planning, administration and policy development activities of governments, business and other users.

Scope

All persons and dwellings in Australia and the external territories of Christmas Island and Cocos (Keeling) Islands on census night, excluding diplomats, their families and diplomatic dwellings, and visitors from overseas who are not required to undergo migration formalities, such as foreign crews on ships (ABS 2007).

These three groups, or tiers, are described as primary homelessness for people without any conventional housing, secondary homelessness for people who were staying with friends or relatives short-term or were accommodated in SAAP on census night, and tertiary homelessness for people living in boarding houses. The Counting the Homeless project estimated that the number of people in these categories on Census night 2001 totalled 99,900. In addition there is a group of almost 23,000 people that were identified as 'marginally housed' (see Box 6.4).

The route from census data to an estimation of homelessness, however, is not always straightforward. A case in point is the classification of boarding houses. The Census distinguished between persons who were resident in private and non-private dwellings, with non-private dwellings having 19 categories of both communal and transitory accommodation, including 'hotel, motel' and 'boarding houses, private hotel'.

The Counting the Homeless project had some practical difficulties with these classifications. For example, when accommodation for workers in remote communities was classified by the ABS as a boarding house, these and other such dwellings were reclassified for the Counting the Homeless project 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 (see *Australia's welfare 2003*). Similar considerations were integral to deriving the homelessness estimates for all tiers of homelessness in the Counting the Homeless project.

An implication of this approach is that such tiers of homelessness may be seen as representing degrees of housing disadvantage, with those people experiencing secondary and tertiary homelessness experiencing decreasing levels of disadvantage relative to those people experiencing primary homelessness. This assumption is implicit in the argument by some that boarding house residents should be excluded from the homelessness estimate derived from the Census (AIHW 2003a:324).

Box 6.4: The ABS's operational categories of homelessness

Primary

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

Secondary

People who were staying with friends or relatives and who had no other usual address, as well as people in SAAP services. This category excluded short-term residents of boarding houses.

Tertiary

People living in boarding houses, both short and long term.

Marginal

People renting a caravan in a caravan park, with no-one in the caravan having full-time employment and all persons in the caravan at their usual address.

Source: Chamberlain & MacKenzie 2003.

A contrasting approach to applying the homelessness definition was suggested by the Western Australia Homelessness Taskforce and the Technical Forum on the Estimation of Homelessness in Australia, and others (see AIHW 2003a:392). Rather than narrowing the definition of homelessness, they have argued that a consistent application of the tertiary homeless definition would lead to widening the category to include marginal residents of caravan parks in addition to some residents of boarding houses.

Boarding houses typically provide only basic amenities and no security of tenure to people living in single rooms. The majority of people identified as marginal residents of boarding houses in the 2001 Census were male (72%), of whom 74% were either unemployed or not in the labour force. Boarding houses are generally in urban areas, with 67% of those identified in the Counting the Homeless project located in capital cities (Chamberlain & MacKenzie 2003:63).

In regional centres, country towns and remote locations, caravan parks can be said to have taken over the role of providing cheap accommodation (Chamberlain & MacKenzie 2003:38, 51). Marginal residents of caravan parks were defined as those people who were renting a caravan in a caravan park, with no-one in the caravan having full-time employment and all persons in the caravan at their usual address (see Box 6.4).

Such marginal residents belong to the tertiary homelessness category both for reasons of insecurity of tenure as well as a failure to meet minimum community standards on housing. Of those people identified in the 2001 Census as marginal residents of caravan parks, 78% were housed in caravan parks outside capital cities, and many of the remainder were in caravan parks in the industrial areas or outer suburbs of major cities (AIHW 2005a:325).

In 2001 the definition of primary homelessness was changed so that it was no longer applicable throughout Australia. An exception was made for remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, where a residence did not need to have both a working shower or bath and a toilet to be defined as a house. The reasons for this change were the reported difficulties in applying the definition in communities where amenity blocks were used by multiple households. As a consequence, the Census Field Officer's Manual (remote Indigenous communities) was changed so that 'to be counted as a house for the census a dwelling needs to be a permanent structure built for the purpose of housing people' (Chamberlain & MacKenzie 2003:22). It was argued that in remote Indigenous communities such housing was culturally appropriate as it accorded with the wishes of the local community.

Homeless people on census night

Marginal residents of caravan parks were categorised as belonging to the tertiary homelessness category when the total number of people estimated to have been experiencing homelessness on census night 2001 was derived (Table 6.3). Of the 122,770 homeless people, the largest proportion (40%) were those staying with friends or relatives with no other usual address. Interestingly, for Indigenous people defined as experiencing homelessness, the smallest proportion of the homeless were in this category (Chamberlain & MacKenzie 2003:39). As another example of the potential difficulties of applying definitions cross-culturally, it has been argued that the ABS methodology for deriving usual place of residence could be problematic within particular Indigenous communities (see *Australia's welfare 2005*).

Table 6.3: The whereabouts of homeless people on census night, 2001 (per cent)

Categories of homelessness	Male	Female	Total	Total	
				Per cent	Number
Primary: (sleeping rough/improvised)	61	39	100.0	11.5	14,158
Secondary: (friends/relatives)	53	47	100.0	39.6	48,614
Secondary: (SAAP)	47	53	100.0	11.6	14,251
Tertiary: (boarding houses)	72	28	100.0	18.6	22,877
Tertiary: (caravan parks)	n.p.	n.p.	..	18.6	22,868
Total homeless	100.0	122,768

Source: Chamberlain & MacKenzie 2003.

On socioeconomic measures, both marginal residents of caravan parks and boarding house residents experienced similar levels of disadvantage, and far more disadvantage than people staying with friends and relatives (Chamberlain & MacKenzie 2003:52). The limited data that is available from the Counting the Homeless project also indicates that between 60% and 70% of people in improvised dwellings, boarding houses and SAAP experienced a sustained period of homelessness (6 months or longer), dropping to about 50% of adults staying with friends and family (Chamberlain & MacKenzie 2003:51–2, 63).

When comparing marginal residents of caravan parks and boarding houses with those staying with friends and relatives, Chamberlain and MacKenzie argued that people in boarding houses and caravan parks were more likely to have ‘been around the system’ for a sustained period of time, to have fewer options and to have been longer without conventional accommodation (Chamberlain & MacKenzie 2003:53). Temporality, they concluded, was an important issue in homelessness. The following section looks at the circumstances of SAAP clients before and after their support periods to examine if these clients came from, or exited to, other tiers of homelessness.

6.5 Homelessness before and after SAAP accommodation

In order to look more closely at the interplay between degrees of homelessness and temporality, this section presents data on people who have been accommodated by SAAP, investigating their housing experiences before and after SAAP support using the categories of homelessness outlined in Counting the Homeless. The data show that people may move through primary, secondary or tertiary homelessness throughout their homeless experience or experiences. Individuals may not only experience one tier of homelessness, but may move from one tier to another, and this movement may vary for different groups in the homeless population.

This section looks at those SAAP clients who were accommodated at least once during their support period, or, in Counting the Homeless terms, those who would fall into the secondary (SAAP) homelessness category during their support period. In any one support period a client may have been accommodated for all or only some of the time, or not at all, during the total time they were supported. Furthermore, they may have had just one or several periods of accommodation within a single period of support.

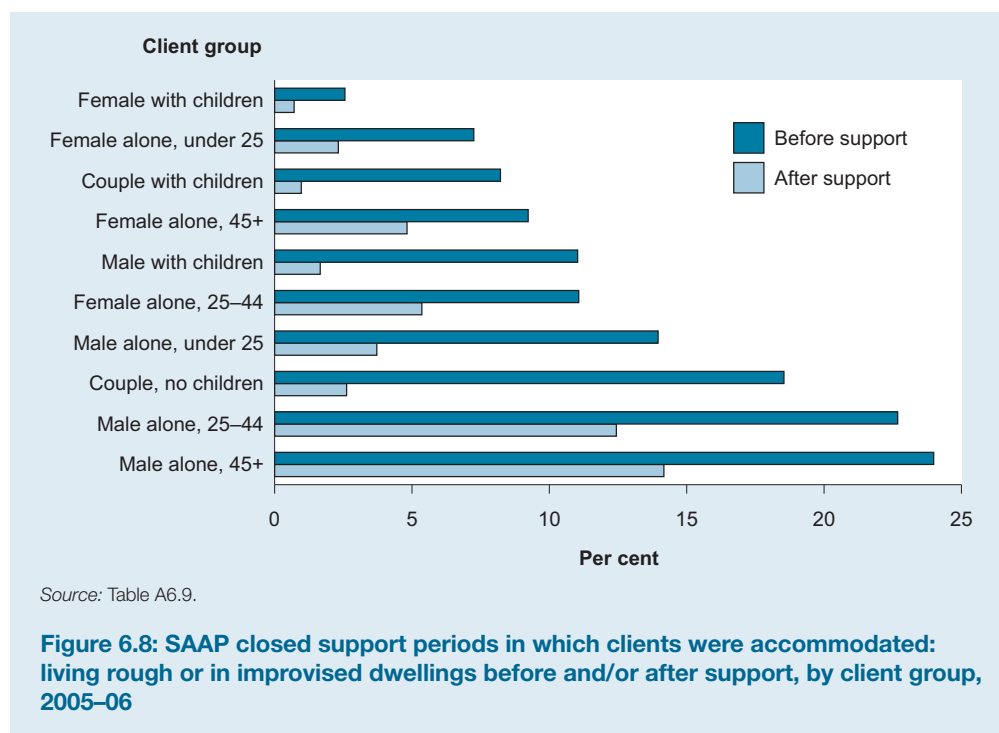
It should be noted that, in the SAAP National Data Collection, although information is collected on the housing situation, tenure type and who clients were living with both

before and after their SAAP support period, the after information is less reliable and care needs to be taken when interpreting these data. Useable after support information was not returned in between 32% and 39% of closed support periods with accommodation for these questions.

Primary homelessness in the SAAP context

The SAAP National Data Collection collects information on whether clients were living rough or in improvised dwellings before and after support. This category of dwelling type is equivalent to the Counting the Homeless project's category of primary homelessness. On census night 2001, the figures showed that 12% of the homeless population were in this primary category and that the majority were male (61%) (Table 6.3).

Looking at the most recent SAAP data (2005–06), overall, clients were living rough before 13% of closed support periods including accommodation, and left to no conventional accommodation after 5% of such support periods (Table A6.9). As seen in Counting the Homeless, the majority of SAAP clients who were living rough before and/or after their support periods were male (75% before support and 73% after) (AIHW unpublished data). Figure 6.8 shows that this overall drop from before to after support is also seen in each client group, although there were marked differences between the groups. A higher proportion of males presenting to a SAAP agency alone, particularly older males, were living rough. Males aged 45 years or older reported the highest proportion (24% before support and 14% after support), followed by males alone aged 25–44 years (23% before support and 12% after support). Females with children were least likely to be living rough before and/or after support (3% before and 1% after support).



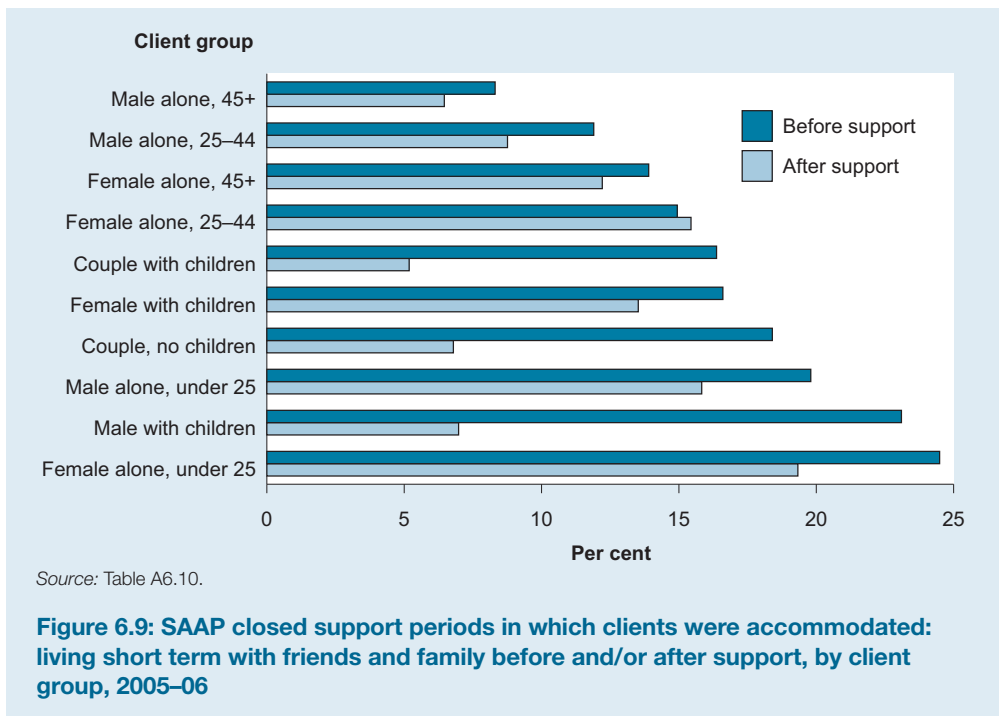
Secondary homelessness in the SAAP context

The next category discussed in *Counting the Homeless* was secondary homelessness and consisted of two parts. One part captured people who were visiting at an address and reported having no usual address of their own, while the second part captured those staying in SAAP accommodation.

People who were visiting at an address and reported no usual address of their own formed the largest category identified as homeless in the *Counting the Homeless* project (40%; Table 6.3). Males represented just over half (53%) of people identified in this category. In SAAP, a close parallel can be drawn with those living short-term with friends or family before or after their support period.

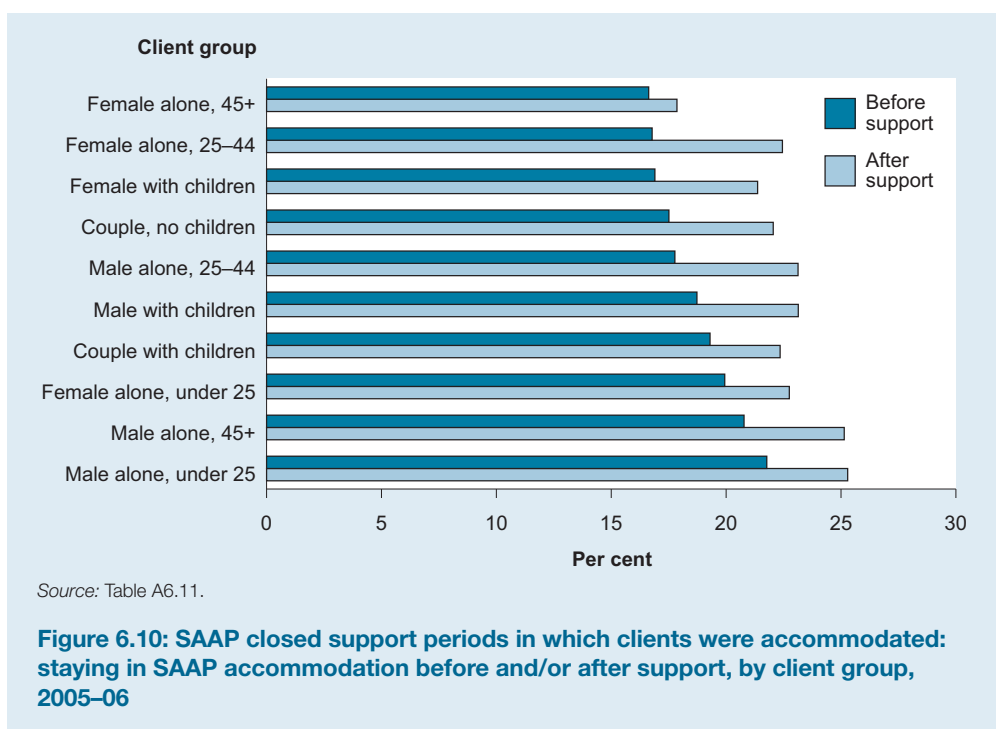
Overall, SAAP clients were living short-term with friends or family in much lower proportions than the overall homeless population; before 16% of support periods with accommodation, and after 13% of such support periods (Table A6.10). Unlike in the *Counting the Homeless* project, the majority of SAAP clients staying with friends or family short-term before and/or after support were female (58% before support and 66% after), and females were also more likely to have reported this living situation before and/or after support (18% before support and 15% after for females compared with 14% before and 10% after for males) (AIHW unpublished data). For people approaching SAAP agencies on their own, all three female age groups had greater percentages of clients staying with friends or family before and after support than the equivalent male groups (Figure 6.9). Within the SAAP population then, this type of secondary homelessness is one that seems to stand out as more likely to represent the homelessness experience of women.

The second group of people making up the secondary homeless group were those accommodated in a SAAP agency on census night (12%; Table 6.3). From the 2005–06 SAAP data, it is evident that a significant proportion of clients move from accommodation in



one SAAP agency to another. Overall, clients were accommodated in a SAAP agency before 19% of all support periods including accommodation, and left to SAAP accommodation in 23% of such support periods (Table A6.11). Figure 6.10 shows that there was less variation between the client groups for this measure than is seen for others in this section. Before SAAP support between 17% and 22% of clients in all groups had been in SAAP accommodation and, when the small outlier group 'other' is excluded, between 18% and 25% were in SAAP accommodation after support. Again, excluding the 'other' group, a greater proportion of clients in all groups were in SAAP accommodation after support than before.

Chamberlain and MacKenzie suggest that people experiencing homelessness may approach SAAP agencies as a last resort after they have exhausted their own support networks (2003:61). This may explain the lower proportions of SAAP clients who stay short term with friends or family before and/or after support compared with the overall homeless population, and may also explain the higher proportion of SAAP clients who are in SAAP accommodation before and/or after support. People experiencing homelessness may, for a period, be able to live temporarily with friends or family members. However, if their period of homelessness continues, they may exhaust these options and then seek SAAP accommodation.



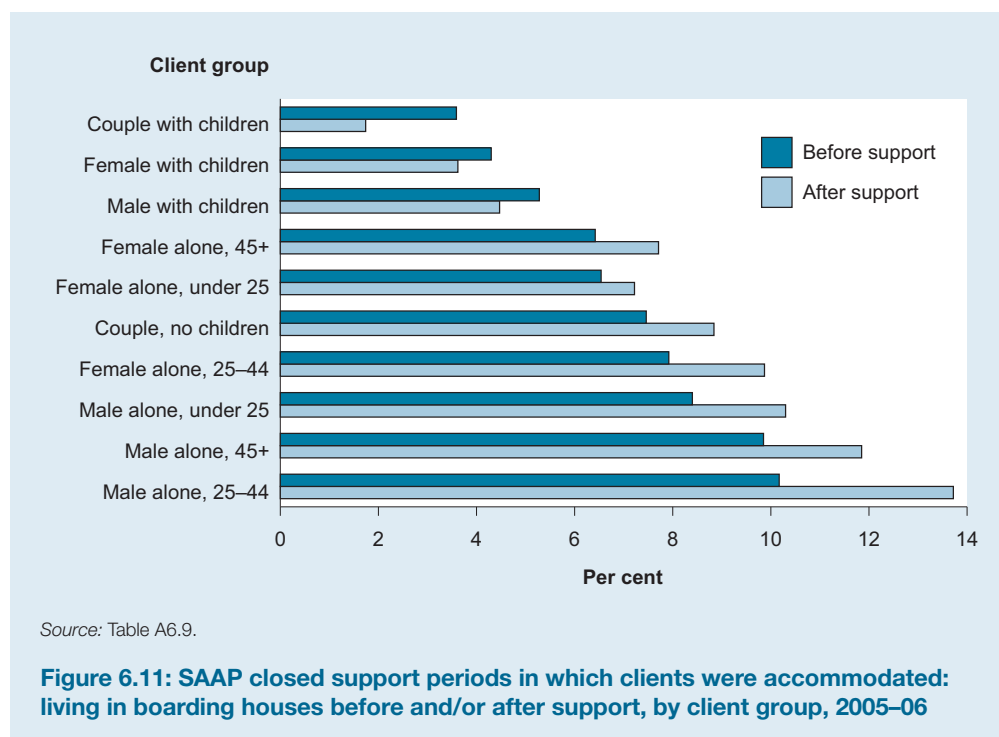
Tertiary homelessness in the SAAP context

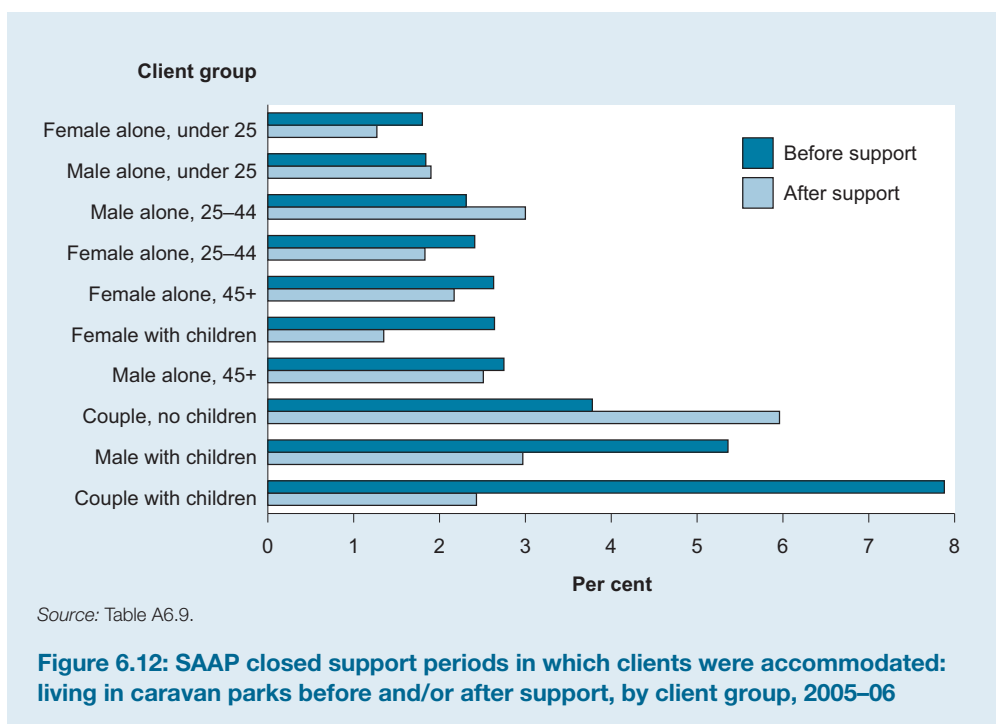
In the 2001 Census, around 19% of the homeless population were identified as tertiary homeless because they lived in boarding houses, and of these 72% were male. (Table 6.3; see also AIHW 2003a:394 for adjustments made to the estimate of boarding house residents). The SAAP equivalent to tertiary homelessness is living in boarding/rooming houses.

A lower proportion of SAAP clients were living in boarding or rooming houses before and/or after closed support periods in which they were accommodated than was seen for the overall homeless population (before and after 8% of such support periods) (Table A6.9). Like the overall homeless population, a higher proportion of SAAP clients who came from or exited to boarding or rooming houses were male (61% before support and 58% after support) (AIHW unpublished data). Figure 6.11 shows that the most likely group to be living in this type of accommodation before and/or after support were males who presented alone. The highest proportion was for males aged 25–44 years, who reported living in boarding or rooming houses 10% of the time before support and 14% of the time after support.

In the Counting the Homeless project, there was another group that may be considered to be in the tertiary homelessness category. These were people identified as living in caravan parks and where there was no full-time employed person residing in the caravan. These people represented 19% of the total homeless population (Table 6.3).

A roughly equivalent category can be reported with 2005–06 SAAP data: those clients who identified themselves as having lived in a caravan before or after their SAAP support period. Overall, clients were living in caravan parks before 3% of closed support periods including accommodation, and left to caravan parks after 2% of such support periods (Table A6.9). Higher proportions of couples both with and without children, and males with children, were in this type of accommodation. Eight per cent of couples with children were staying in a caravan before SAAP support, dropping to 2% after support. An opposite trend was seen for couples without children; 4% were staying in a caravan before support, rising to 6% after support. Males with children were staying in a caravan before 5% and after 3% of closed accommodated support periods (Figure 6.12).





SAAP clients may have been in caravans before and/or after their accommodated support periods less frequently than the overall homeless population figures might suggest because of the location of most SAAP agencies. Chamberlain and MacKenzie suggest that caravans may be more commonly used by people experiencing homelessness in more remote locations (2003:49). Most SAAP agencies, however, are located in Major Cities (57%) or Inner Regional centres (23%) (AIHW 2007a:11).

The proportion of SAAP clients coming from or exiting to the housing circumstances discussed in this section could differ to the proportions identified in the Counting the Homeless project for several reasons. One is the influence of the large number of SAAP clients who reported being accommodated in a house or flat before or after support (59% before support and 68% after). The majority of these clients also reported 'secure' tenure (54% before support and 60% after; discussed in Section 6.7) and therefore, by the Counting the Homeless criteria, may not have been homeless before and/or after their SAAP support period (AIHW unpublished data).

A second factor that could contribute to these proportional differences is the demographic variation seen between the SAAP client population and the overall homeless population. In SAAP in 2005–06, 50% of all closed accommodated support periods were for women, while the Counting the Homeless figures indicate that 42% of the overall homeless population were female (AIHW unpublished data; Chamberlain & MacKenzie 2003:38). In addition, when Chamberlain and MacKenzie looked at where different family types were accommodated, they found that families (that is, at least one adult and a child aged 17 years or younger) were much more often accommodated in SAAP than either couples or single people. They found that 41% of families experiencing homelessness on census night 2001 were in SAAP accommodation, compared with 8% of singles and 4% of couples (Chamberlain & MacKenzie 2003:35).

These data reinforce the idea, discussed in Section 6.2, that factors such as the target group of agencies may affect which people experiencing homelessness are able to access SAAP services, and suggest that SAAP clients may not be representative of all people experiencing homelessness. They also support the literature on iterative experiences in SAAP presented in *Australia's welfare 2005*. This literature suggests that for many homeless people it is the repeated moves through marginal accommodation that is the main feature of their homeless experience, rather than any single instance of being without conventional housing. Iterative homelessness is discussed further in Section 6.7.

6.6 People in SAAP with mental health and problematic substance use issues

Governments are paying increasing attention to people with mental health and problematic substance use issues, particularly in relation to the homeless population (see Box 6.5). This section begins by looking at the prevalence of mental health and substance use issues in SAAP.

Box 6.5: Mental health and homelessness

People experiencing homelessness and mental illness often require access to a range of services provided by the Australian Government, state and territory governments and the non-government sector. There has been significant investment in mental health services by all governments in recent years, with the *National mental health report 2005* finding that Australian governments spent a total of \$3.2 billion in 2002–03 (DoHA 2005). Several new government initiatives have been developed to improve service responses to people with mental health issues, with some that are designed to address mental health and homelessness.

COAG's *National Action Plan on Mental Health 2006–11* (COAG 2006) involves new investment by all governments over 5 years totalling about \$4 billion. The measures in the plan aim to promote better mental health and provide additional support to people with mental illness, their families and their carers. The plan sets out agreed outcomes and specific policy directions that emphasise coordination and collaboration between government and non-government providers in order to deliver a connected care system.

This National Action Plan focuses on promotion, prevention and early intervention; improving mental health services; providing opportunities for increased recovery and participation in the community and employment, including through more stable accommodation; providing better coordinated care; and building workforce capacity.

The success of the plan will be monitored against nationally agreed progress measures over the 5-year period. One of these progress measures is to increase the ability of people with a mental illness to participate in the community, employment, education and training, including through an increase in access to stable accommodation. With regard to homelessness, progress will be measured by whether there is a decreased prevalence of mental illness in homeless populations. How this will actually be measured is currently under development.

The Personal Helpers and Mentors Program is one initiative of the plan that aims to assist people who have a severe functional limitation resulting from a mental illness to better manage their daily activities and to access a range of appropriate services, including housing support, when they need them (FaCSIA 2007c).

Quantifying the extent to which people with a mental health or problematic substance use issue appear in the SAAP population can be difficult. As can be seen from the criteria used to form the groups below, there is no single data item that allows easy identification of clients who have these issues.

In addition, it is most likely that the prevalence of mental health and substance use issues is underreported in the National Data Collection. For example, clients may not identify mental health as a reason for seeking assistance, and it is likely to be understated for a number of reasons, including the well-documented stigma attached to mental illness and the fact that gaining assistance for this problem may not be the most pressing issue at the time.

In this section the SAAP client population is divided into four main client groups:

1. Mental health

This group includes clients who met at least one of the following criteria:

- were referred from a psychiatric unit
- reported psychiatric illness and/or mental health issues as reasons for seeking assistance
- were in a psychiatric institution before or after receiving assistance
- needed, were provided with or were referred on for support in the form of psychological or psychiatric services.

2. Substance use

This group includes clients who met at least one of the following criteria:

- reported drug, alcohol and/or substance abuse as a reason for seeking assistance
- needed, were provided with or were referred on for support in the form of drug and/or alcohol support or intervention.

3. Comorbidity

This group includes clients who reported at least one of the mental health characteristics and at least one of the substance use characteristics listed above in the same support period. Support periods in the comorbidity group do not appear in the mental health or substance use groups.

4. Other

This group includes clients who met none of the criteria used to form the mental health and substance use groups.

In 2005–06, 13,500 SAAP clients (or around 13%) reported a mental health problem and 14,100 (also around 13%) reported a problematic substance use issue (Table 6.4). Some clients reported both a mental health and a problematic substance use issue (comorbidity) within the same support period (6,700 or around 6% of clients). The majority of clients in the substance use and comorbidity groups were males (60% and 58% respectively), while most of the clients in the mental health group, as well as SAAP overall, were female (both at 60%).

Table 6.4: SAAP clients: mental health, substance use and comorbidity by sex and age, 2005–06

Sex and age	Mental health		Substance use		Comorbidity		Other		Total	
	Per cent	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent	Number
Males^(a)	39.9	5,400	60.2	8,400	58.3	3,900	37.2	31,300	39.8	42,400
0–24 years	26.4	1,400	25.2	2,100	24.3	900	35.0	10,700	32.5	13,500
25–44 years	50.9	2,700	54.0	4,500	58.9	2,300	44.8	13,800	47.1	19,500
45–64 years	20.7	1,100	19.5	1,600	16.1	600	17.2	5,300	17.9	7,400
65 years or over	1.9	100	1.3	100	0.7	<50	3.0	900	2.6	1,100
Total males (per cent)	100.0	..	100.0	..	100.0	..	100.0	..	100.0	..
Females^(a)	60.1	8,100	39.8	5,600	41.7	2,800	62.8	52,900	60.2	63,900
0–24 years	32.2	2,500	38.4	2,100	40.8	1,100	38.1	19,500	37.5	23,200
25–44 years	52.4	4,100	53.0	2,900	50.6	1,400	48.9	25,100	49.4	30,600
45–64 years	14.4	1,100	8.2	400	8.4	200	11.4	5,800	11.6	7,200
65 years or over	1.0	100	0.3	<50	0.3	<50	1.7	900	1.6	1,000
Total females (per cent)	100.0	..	100.0	..	100.0	..	100.0	..	100.0	..
Total SAAP clients^(b)	12.7	13,500	13.2	14,100	6.3	6,700	79.2	84,300	n.a.	106,500

(a) Sex totals include number excluded due to errors and omissions in 'age'. Consequently, age group figures may not sum to the sex total.

(b) Totals include records excluded due to errors and omissions in 'sex' and 'age'. Consequently, the sex totals and age figures may not sum to the total.

Notes

1. Number excluded due to errors and omissions in 'sex' and 'age' (weighted): 428 'mental health'; 290 'substance use'; 163 'comorbidity'; 2,280 'other' and 3,063 'total' clients.
2. Client groups are not mutually exclusive. A client can have more than one support period in a year and their circumstances might vary between support periods. Consequently, the number of clients in the 'substance use', 'mental health', 'comorbidity' and 'other' groups will not sum to the total number of clients.
3. Figures have been weighted to adjust for agency non-participation and client non-consent.

Source: SAAP Client Collection.

Table 6.5 shows the proportion of support periods for each family type in the four groups. When interpreting these data it must be kept in mind that a support period where comorbidity for mental health and substance use issues was reported is placed in the comorbidity group, and will not appear in either of the mental health or substance use groups. Males who presented to a SAAP agency alone accounted for a disproportionate number of the support periods in the substance use and comorbidity groups. Specifically, support periods for single males aged 25–44 years made up the largest individual proportion for both groups: 32% of support periods in the substance use group and 35% in the comorbidity group. These clients only had 19% of the total number of support periods.

Single women, in contrast, had more support periods in the mental health group than either the substance use or comorbidity groups, as did females with children, who made up 20% of the mental health group compared with 12% of the substance use group and 10% of the comorbidity group.

Table 6.5: SAAP support periods by client group, 2005–06 (per cent)

	Mental health	Substance use	Comorbidity	Other	Total	
					Per cent	Number
Male alone, under 25 years	9.7	13.1	13.2	11.1	11.3	19,700
Male alone, 25–44 years	19.4	31.6	35.0	15.3	18.5	32,300
Male alone, 45 years or over	9.3	14.7	10.1	7.3	8.5	14,800
Female alone, under 25 years	13.3	9.4	12.2	13.4	12.9	22,400
Female alone, 25–44 years	14.2	11.1	11.4	12.4	12.4	21,600
Female alone, 45 years or over	7.2	2.7	2.6	6.0	5.6	9,700
Couple, no children	2.1	2.1	1.9	3.1	2.8	4,900
Couple with children	3.2	2.2	2.4	4.5	4.0	7,000
Male with children	0.9	1.2	0.8	1.5	1.4	2,400
Female with children	20.3	11.8	10.2	24.9	22.3	38,800
Other	0.4	0.3	0.2	0.5	0.4	800
Total (per cent)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	..
Total (number)	17,100	19,800	8,600	128,900	..	174,400

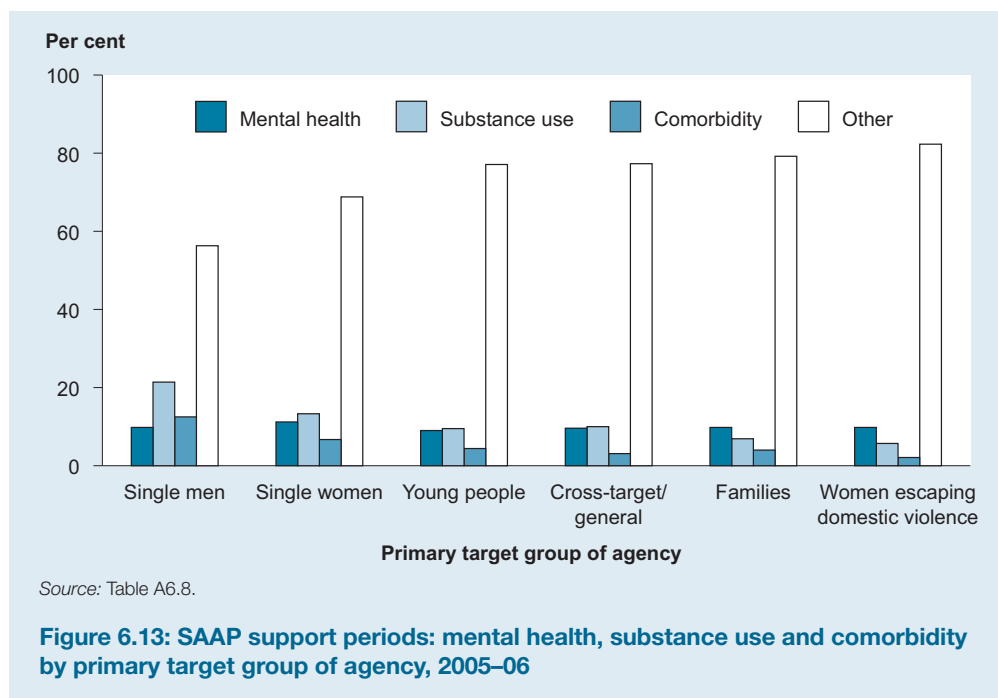
Notes

1. Number excluded due to errors and omissions (weighted): 5,595.

2. Figures have been weighted to adjust for agency non-participation and client non-consent.

Source: SAAP Client Collection.

Figure 6.13 locates clients with these issues within the SAAP primary target group sectors. Agencies are distinguished by their nominated primary target group, then the percentage of their support periods where mental health, substance use, comorbidity or other issues were identified. This type of analysis enables those agencies supporting higher proportions of clients with more complex needs than others to be identified.



Single men's agencies reported the greatest proportion of support periods for clients with substance use issues or comorbidity (21% and 13% of support periods provided by these agencies respectively). Single women's agencies had the greatest proportion of support periods for clients with mental health issues (11%), and the second highest proportion of support periods for clients with comorbidity (7%). Agencies targeting women escaping domestic violence provided the greatest proportion of support periods to other clients (82%), and had the smallest proportion of support periods for clients with substance use problems or comorbidity.

These figures suggest that single men's agencies face more of a service burden than the other SAAP sectors with regard to dealing with clients with high and complex needs. It is even more interesting that this sector is also one of the most likely to provide short accommodation periods, with a mean stay of 30 days and a median of just 7 days (Figure 6.2). The indications are that this sector also has a much higher eviction rate per agency than other target groups, with men exiting early in circumstances of violent conduct, intoxication, or substance abuse (Figure 6.7; NSW Ombudsman 2004).

Another important issue is the question of which of the services required by clients with mental health or substance use issues do SAAP agencies find the most difficult to meet. Table 6.6 presents a selection of specialist services that SAAP workers indicated these clients needed and gives the percentage of these that were not able to be met.

For clients with mental health issues, intellectual disability services were unmet following 24% of closed support periods where a SAAP worker indicated that it was needed. For physical disability services the corresponding figure was 22%, while psychiatric services remained unmet following 13% of such closed support periods.

Table 6.6: SAAP closed support periods: selected specialist services required by clients with mental health and/or substance use issues: proportion that were neither provided nor referred, 2005–06 (per cent)

Type of specialist service	Mental health	Substance use	Comorbidity	Total SAAP population
Psychological services	8.1	n.a.	13.3	9.6
Psychiatric services	13.2	n.a.	14.2	13.7
Drug/alcohol support	n.a.	14.2	22.4	16.9
Health/medical services	6.1	5.9	7.2	5.9
Physical disability services	22.4	16.2	16.7	17.2
Intellectual disability services	24.3	32.0	24.9	24.2

Notes

1. Number excluded due to errors and omissions (weighted): 3,631 (closed support periods with no information on service requirements or provision).
2. This table presents the percentage of support periods where a need for a service was recorded and that service was neither provided nor referred. The proportion of each service 'provided', 'referred' or 'neither provided nor referred' equals 100% for each client group (this table only presents the 'neither provided nor referred' component of this).
3. Figures have been weighted to adjust for agency non-participation.

Source: SAAP Client Collection.

For those clients with substance use issues, drug and/or alcohol support or intervention services remained unmet following 14% of closed support periods where a SAAP worker indicated that it was needed, and intellectual disability services went unmet after 32% of such closed support periods.

A higher level of unmet need was recorded for clients with comorbidity who were assessed to need drug and/or alcohol support or intervention; this service was not provided after 22% of these closed support periods. Similarly, psychological services were not provided or referred after a greater proportion of closed support periods in which the services were required for clients with comorbidity (13%) than for clients with mental health issues alone (8%).

6.7 Iterative homelessness and SAAP

In Section 6.5 the homelessness experiences of SAAP clients before and after SAAP support periods with accommodation were examined using SAAP categories equivalent to those outlined in the Counting the Homeless project. The ensuing discussion canvassed the proposition that a dynamic understanding of homelessness, one describing a cycling through precarious housing, from boarding houses to friends, to SAAP and the street and back, might be more appropriate, at least for SAAP clients.

In this section this idea is followed up by incorporating, as far as the data allow, the idea of movement through tenuous housing by analysing the housing circumstances of clients before and after SAAP support. Such housing circumstances are grouped according to security of tenure, using an analysis of how precarious or secure clients were before and after those SAAP support periods with accommodation, as an indicator of vulnerability to homelessness.

Precarious housing is defined as clients who had the following tenure arrangements either before or after support:

- SAAP/Crisis Accommodation Program accommodation
- institutional setting
- improvised dwellings/sleeping rough
- other 'no tenure'
- rent-free accommodation
- boarding.

Clients who were purchasing or had purchased their own home or who were renting in the private, public or community housing sectors are considered to have 'secure' housing for the purposes of the analyses presented in this section.

The proportion of precarious to secure housing for each client group, both before and after SAAP support periods with accommodation, is shown in Table 6.7. The youngest of the single men and single women (aged under 25 years) had the largest proportions of precarious housing both before and after such support periods, as might be expected. The other client groups most likely to be in precarious housing circumstances both before and after a SAAP support period with accommodation were single men aged 25 years or over. Interestingly, couples with and without children and males with children were the client groups who appeared to gain the most benefit from having been accommodated in SAAP. These groups showed the largest increases in secure housing from before support to after support.

Table 6.7: SAAP closed support periods in which clients were accommodated: security of housing tenure before and after support by client group, 2005–06 (per cent)

	Before support				After support			
	Precarious housing	Secure housing	Total	Total (number)	Precarious housing	Secure housing	Total	Total (number)
Male alone, under 25 years	81.2	18.8	100.0	8,300	71.9	28.1	100.0	5,100
Male alone, 25–44 years	72.5	27.5	100.0	13,400	66.3	33.7	100.0	6,700
Male alone, 45 years or over	71.1	28.9	100.0	5,900	63.1	36.9	100.0	3,500
Female alone, under 25 years	75.5	24.5	100.0	7,700	67.9	32.1	100.0	5,800
Female alone, 25–44 years	53.2	46.8	100.0	6,200	51.6	48.4	100.0	4,400
Female alone, 45 years or over	48.7	51.3	100.0	2,100	42.3	57.7	100.0	1,700
Couple no children	66.7	33.3	100.0	1,000	46.1	53.9	100.0	700
Couple with children	59.3	40.7	100.0	1,700	35.5	64.5	100.0	1,500
Male with children	64.7	35.3	100.0	500	40.9	59.1	100.0	500
Female with children	41.1	58.9	100.0	13,200	37.9	62.1	100.0	11,200
Other	61.1	38.9	100.0	200	29.8	70.2	100.0	100
Total (per cent and number)	63.7	36.3	100.0	60,100	54.8	45.2	100.0	41,300

Notes

1. Number excluded due to errors and omissions before support (weighted): 9,345.
2. Number excluded due to errors and omissions after support (weighted): 28,167.
3. Figures have been weighted to adjust for agency participation and client non-consent.

Source: SAAP Client Collection.

Vulnerability to homelessness is also high for those clients with substance use issues, who were in precarious housing before 73% of SAAP closed support periods with accommodation (Table 6.8), dropping to 65% after SAAP accommodation. Perhaps contrary to expectations (see Robinson 2003), these data show that clients with mental health issues were less likely than those with substance use issues to be experiencing precarious housing either before or after SAAP accommodation (66% before support and 57% after support). Clients with comorbidity came from precarious accommodation in a greater proportion of their accommodated support periods than clients who reported only one of these, and also left to precarious accommodation after a greater proportion (76% before support and 68% after support).

Homelessness and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

The experience of homelessness may be mediated by culture, and perhaps especially so for Indigenous Australians. In this light, the following tables in this section present some data on the security of accommodation before and after accommodated support periods for SAAP clients from different cultural backgrounds.

Table 6.8: SAAP closed support periods for clients with mental health and substance use issues in which they were accommodated: security of housing tenure before and after support by mental health and/or substance use, 2005–06

	Before support		After support	
	Per cent	Number	Per cent	Number
Clients with mental health issues				
Precarious housing	66.0	4,400	57.2	2,800
Secure housing	34.0	2,300	42.8	2,100
Total	100.0	..	100.0	..
Total (number)	..	6,700	..	5,000
Clients with substance use issues				
Precarious housing	73.3	7,900	65.2	4,700
Secure housing	26.7	2,900	34.8	2,500
Total	100.0	..	100.0	..
Total (number)	..	10,800	..	7,300
Clients with comorbidity				
Precarious housing	76.2	3,600	67.8	2,100
Secure housing	23.8	1,100	32.2	1,000
Total	100.0	..	100.0	..
Total (number)	..	4,800	..	3,100

Notes

1. Number excluded due to errors and omissions before support (weighted): 2,457.
2. Number excluded due to errors and omissions after support (weighted): 9,434.
3. Figures have been weighted to adjust for agency participation and client non-consent.

Source: SAAP Client Collection.

Although nationally the majority (68%) of SAAP clients were Australian-born and did not identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, Indigenous people were over-represented as SAAP clients relative to their population size. Of all Australians aged 10 years or over, 2% were estimated to be Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander in June 2004, a considerably smaller proportion than the 17% of SAAP clients who so identified in 2005–06. Some states had a higher proportion of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander clients than others, with the Northern Territory and Western Australia having the highest proportions (63% and 41%, respectively), and overall a greater proportion of female clients were Indigenous (21% of female clients compared with 12% of male clients) (AIHW 2007a, 2007b, 2007c).

Data on the security of tenure before and after SAAP support periods with accommodation for different cultural groups in Australia, including Indigenous Australians, are presented in Table 6.9. As well, Indigenous data are given for both Remote and Very Remote areas. Indigenous Australians seem to be the least likely, of all four cultural groups, to live in precarious housing either before or after SAAP support periods with accommodation, and this effect became more pronounced as the SAAP agencies became more remote (from 55% of support periods before SAAP overall, to 26% in Very Remote areas).

Table 6.9: SAAP closed support periods in which clients were accommodated: security of housing tenure before and after support by cultural and linguistic diversity, 2005–06 (per cent)

	Indigenous Australians			Australian-born non-Indigenous	Overseas-born, mainly English-speaking countries ^(b)	Overseas-born, mainly non-English-speaking countries ^(c)	Total	
	Remote area ^(a)	Very Remote area ^(a)	Total				Per cent	Number
Before support								
Precarious housing	45.7	25.6	54.6	67.9	62.4	55.9	63.7	38,000
Secure housing	54.3	74.4	45.4	32.1	37.6	44.1	36.3	21,700
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	..
Total (number)	1,800	1,900	13,300	38,400	3,000	5,100	..	59,700
After support								
Precarious housing	41.0	23.3	47.7	58.1	55.5	48.6	54.7	22,400
Secure housing	59.0	76.7	52.3	41.9	44.5	51.4	45.3	18,600
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	..
Total (number)	1,300	1,700	9,400	25,700	1,900	3,900	..	41,000

(a) Unweighted data. Figures could not be weighted to adjust for agency non-participation and client non-consent at the remoteness level. The remoteness of SAAP agencies has been assigned using the Australian Standard Geographical Classification Remoteness Structure (ABS 2001). SAAP agencies are categorised based on the postcode supplied by the relevant state or territory community services department. Please note that this postcode forms part of the mailing address of the agency and may not match the actual location of the agency.

(b) Mainly English-speaking countries: Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, South Africa, the United Kingdom, the United States of America and Zimbabwe.

(c) Mainly non-English-speaking countries: countries, excluding Australia, that are not listed as mainly English-speaking.

Notes

1. Number excluded due to errors and omissions before support (weighted): 9,791.
2. Number excluded due to errors and omissions after support (weighted): 28,486.
3. Figures have been weighted to adjust for agency non-participation and client non-consent.

Source: SAAP Client Collection.

In the Northern Territory and Western Australia, there were more Indigenous female clients than other Australian-born female clients—76% compared with 21% in the Northern Territory and 53% compared with 34% in Western Australia (AIHW 2007b, 2007c). Furthermore, on a national basis, 27% of all accompanying children in 2005–06 were Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander (AIHW 2007a). Given the large number of Indigenous women and children in SAAP, Table 6.10 presents security of tenure data for women with children in different cultural groups. The pattern of decreasing precarious housing by remoteness is also evident for Indigenous women with children, but Indigenous women with children were less likely to be in precarious housing before and after SAAP support than Indigenous clients overall. However, they were more likely to be in precarious housing before support than clients born overseas in non-English-speaking countries (40% compared with 35%). Women with children in each of the four cultural groups had similar proportions of precarious housing after support (from 37% to 40%). For all SAAP clients, precarious housing after support ranged from 48% to 58%.

These tables seem to suggest that Indigenous Australians generally are the least likely, of all four cultural groups, to live in precarious housing either before or after SAAP accommodation.

But to assume this is to ignore the potential problems that exist in attempting to apply definitions cross-culturally. There may be a variety of factors that have resulted in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander SAAP clients having higher proportions of security of tenure. A far more thorough analysis would need to be done before any conclusions can be drawn.

Table 6.10: SAAP closed support periods for females with children in which they were accommodated: security of housing tenure before and after support by cultural and linguistic diversity, 2005–06 (per cent)

	Indigenous Australians			Australian-born non-Indigenous	Overseas-born, mainly English speaking countries ^(b)	Overseas-born, mainly non-English speaking countries ^(c)	Total	
	Remote area ^(a)	Very Remote area ^(a)	Total				Per cent	Number
Before support								
Precarious housing	37.4	20.2	39.5	44.0	43.3	34.5	41.2	5,300
Secure housing	62.6	79.8	60.5	56.0	56.7	65.5	58.8	7,500
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	..
Total (number)	800	800	4,600	6,200	500	1,500	..	12,800
After support								
Precarious housing	35.1	21.0	38.0	37.4	39.5	38.2	37.8	4,100
Secure housing	64.9	79.0	62.0	62.6	60.5	61.8	62.2	6,700
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	..
Total (number)	600	700	3,600	5,300	500	1,400	..	10,800

(a) Unweighted data. Figures could not be weighted to adjust for agency non-participation and client non-consent at the remoteness level. The remoteness of SAAP agencies has been assigned using the Australian Standard Geographical Classification Remoteness Structure (ABS 2001). SAAP agencies are categorised based on the postcode supplied by the relevant state or territory community services department. Please note that this postcode forms part of the mailing address of the agency and may not match the actual location of the agency.

(b) Mainly English-speaking countries: Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, South Africa, the United Kingdom, the United States of America and Zimbabwe.

(c) Mainly non-English-speaking countries: countries, excluding Australia, that are not listed as mainly English speaking.

Notes

1. Number excluded due to errors and omissions before support (weighted): 1,516.

2. Number excluded due to errors and omissions after support (weighted): 3,466.

3. Figures have been weighted to adjust for agency non-participation and client non-consent.

Source: SAAP Client Collection.

6.8 SAAP data from 1996–97 to 2005–06

This section presents time series data from the SAAP program, including funding levels, the number of clients and support periods, and the average number of support periods per client. Total recurrent funding for SAAP has risen by 59% over the 10 years of the collection, from \$219.8 million in 1996–97 to \$348.8 million in 2005–06 (Table 6.11). When these figures are adjusted for inflation, in real terms total funding increased by 20%. When recurrent funding to agencies is examined, total funding increased by 66%, from \$200.5 million in 1996–97 to \$333.4 million in 2005–06. In real terms, this represented an increase of 26% over the 10 years.

Table 6.11: SAAP funding to agencies and mean funding per support period and client: current and constant 2005–06 dollars, 1996–97 to 2005–06

Reporting period	Total recurrent funding ^(a)	Funding to agencies ^(a)	Funding per support period ^(b)	Funding per client ^(b)
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
2002–03	310,359,000	296,635,000	1,680	3,040
2003–04	321,413,000	308,749,000	1,650	3,080
2004–05	331,802,000	319,778,000	1,850	3,190
2005–06	348,836,000	333,432,000	1,850	3,130
Constant 2005–06 \$				
1996–97	289,987,000	264,611,000	1,690	3,180
1997–98	288,232,000	274,193,000	1,670	2,910
1998–99	299,569,000	287,110,000	1,760	3,170
1999–00	299,815,000	282,970,000	1,800	3,140
2000–01	321,570,000	301,009,000	1,760	3,240
2001–02	333,712,000	314,887,000	1,780	3,290
2002–03	349,696,000	334,232,000	1,900	3,430
2003–04	346,875,000	333,207,000	1,780	3,320
2004–05	343,594,000	331,142,000	1,910	3,300
2005–06	348,836,000	333,432,000	1,850	3,130

(a) 'Total recurrent funding' and 'Funding to agencies' for 1999–00, 2000–01 and 2001–02 includes relatively small amounts provided through the Partnerships Against Domestic Violence Program. 'Total recurrent funding' and 'Funding to agencies' for 2003–04, 2004–05 and 2005–06 includes state-only recurrent allocations which are in addition to the SAAP agreement between each of those jurisdictions and the Australian Government.

(b) 'Funding per support period' and 'Funding per client' are based on SAAP recurrent allocations to agencies and do not take into account other funding sources that may be used by agencies to support SAAP clients.

Notes

1. In 2005–06 the definition of a support period, the definition of a client and the statistical linkage key were changed. Data using these are therefore not comparable to previous years.
2. Support period figures have been weighted to adjust for agency non-participation.
3. Client figures have been weighted to adjust for agency non-participation and client non-consent.

Source: AIHW 2007a.

There seems to be an obvious relationship between funds available to agencies and the amount of support they can provide for people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. Nevertheless, as Table 6.11 shows, an increase or decrease in funding to agencies does not automatically translate into more or fewer resources being spent on each support period or client, into more or fewer clients being supported, or into how often they are supported. The actual funding outcome per client or support period depends on a number of factors, among them the demand for assistance, the types of services that clients need, the ability of agencies to meet those needs, the length of time a client is supported and the costs agencies incur in providing services. For example, while the number of agencies 'in scope' to participate in the Client Collection decreased from 1,225 in 2003–04 to 1,212

in 2004–05 and in real terms recurrent funding to agencies decreased by 1%, funding per support period increased in real terms by 7% (from \$1,780 in 2003–04 to \$1,910 in 2004–05) and funding per client remained relatively steady (at \$3,320 in 2003–04 and \$3,300 in 2004–05) (Table 6.11; AIHW 2007a). It should be noted that agencies often procure other non-SAAP funds to support their clients, and these funding sources are not included in the amounts described above.

In 1996–97, there were an estimated 156,500 support periods (Figure 6.14). This increased to 164,300 in 1997–98 but dropped back over the next 2 years, returning almost to 1996–97 levels in 1999–00. In 2000–01 there was a sharp rise to 170,700 support periods. The main cause of this increase was the participation of one agency that had not previously participated in the Client Collection. Although the weighting system adjusts for non-participation, it does not allow for non-participating agencies, such as this one, that are significantly different from other agencies.

The number of support periods increased further in 2001–02 to 177,000. However, a change in reporting practice part-way through the 2002–03 financial year by the previously mentioned high-volume agency decreased the number of support periods reported to 176,300. If this agency had reported consistently throughout the year, the total number of support periods in 2002–03 was estimated to be about 178,700. This agency reported a full year under its new guidelines in 2003–04, resulting in a substantial increase from the previous year in the number of support periods reported by this agency.

However, in 2003–04, there was still a sharp increase to 187,200 support periods. This was due to the participation of another large agency in 2003–04 that had not participated in the Client Collection since 1997–98. The decrease in 2004–05 to 173,100 support periods was mainly due to an adjustment to the definition of an ongoing support relationship in 2004–05 in preparation for the introduction of the core data set in July 2005.



Source: AIHW 2007a.

Figure 6.14: Number of SAAP support periods and clients, by reporting period, 1996–97 to 2005–06

The number of support periods in 2005–06 was 180,000. The core data set, including refined definitions and a new statistical linkage key, was introduced in this year. The statistical linkage key is fundamental in estimating the number of clients and, with the introduction of the new key, estimates of the number of clients in 2005–06 are not strictly comparable with data from the first 9 years of the collection. In general, the new statistical linkage key reduces the rate of duplication, meaning that two clients with similar names and the same year of birth are now more likely to be counted as separate clients. For this reason, some increase in the numbers of clients in 2005–06 was expected.

Trends in the number of clients provided with SAAP services showed a pattern similar to that for support periods over the first 9 years of the collection, although the changes were less pronounced in the last 5 years. 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 in 1999–00. In 2000–01 the number of clients increased again to 93,000 and has continued to increase each year since then. The highest number of clients of any of the 9 years was recorded in 2004–05, with 100,400 clients provided with SAAP services. In 2005–06, the number of clients was 106,500.

Nationally, the rate of SAAP use was highest in 1997–98, when 59 people out of every 10,000 aged 10 years and over were SAAP clients (Table 6.12). The lowest rate during the 9 years presented was in 1999–00, when 55 people per 10,000 aged 10 years and over used SAAP services at some time during the year. There was considerable variation in the rate of SAAP use across the states and territories: in New South Wales over the 9 years, there

Table 6.12: Number of SAAP clients per 10,000 population, and average number of SAAP support periods per client, 1997–98 to 2005–06

	1997–98	1998–99	1999–00	2000–01	2001–02	2003–03	2003–04	2004–05	2005–06
Age-standardised number of clients per 10,000 population aged 10 years or over									
NSW	54	50	47	46	47	44	43	41	43
Vic	71	73	70	68	69	71	81	82	83
Qld	56	51	52	58	58	58	54	51	49
WA	52	49	52	59	53	54	49	50	45
SA	70	60	61	61	70	74	75	74	77
Tas	97	90	90	91	97	110	116	115	110
ACT	79	72	74	72	63	58	54	51	62
NT	180	183	170	167	169	166	172	162	156
Australia	59	56	55	56	56	57	58	57	58
Average number of SAAP support periods per client									
Australia	1.72	1.80	1.75	1.83	1.85	1.81	1.87	1.72	1.69

Notes

1. Since a client may have support periods in more than one state or territory, national numbers of clients per 10,000 population and support periods per client are not the simple mean of the state and territory figures.
2. 'Clients per 10,000 population aged 10 years or over' shows how many people out of every 10,000 aged 10 years or over in the general population became clients of SAAP. The rate is estimated by comparing the number of SAAP clients aged 10 years or over with the estimated resident population aged 10 years or over at 30 June just before the reporting period. Age-standardised estimates have been derived to allow for different age distributions in the various jurisdictions.
3. The method used to calculate the number of support periods per client was adjusted in 2002–03. The adjusted method has been applied to data on support periods per client presented in this table with the exception of that for 1997–98.
4. Figures have been weighted to adjust for agency non-participation and client non-consent.

Sources: AIHW 2002, 2003b, 2004, 2006, 2007a.

were between 41 and 54 clients per 10,000 of the population; in the Northern Territory the number of clients per 10,000 was between 156 and 183. The number of support periods that clients received in a reporting period has remained relatively stable over time, ranging between 1.7 and 1.9 support periods per client across the years (Table 6.12).

6.9 Policy initiatives

There are many Australian Government initiatives that have been implemented to assist the homeless and those at risk of becoming homeless. These include the National Homelessness Strategy, Housing Assistance programs, the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy, and the Household Organisational Management Expenses advice program. The Australian Government funds programs that target specific groups, such as youth (for example, Job Placement and Employment Training, and Reconnect). In addition, each state and territory government has a homelessness strategy to respond to homelessness at the local level. The pathways into and out of homelessness for different sectors of the population, such as women and children escaping family violence, Indigenous people and people with mental health and substance use issues are also addressed in various strategies. *Australia's welfare 2005* provided an overview of both Australian Government and state and territory government programs.

The non-government sector also has an important role to play in the development of policies for homeless people. Peak bodies, such as Homelessness Australia (formerly the Australian Federation of Homelessness Organisations), ensure that the views of both service providers and homeless people are represented to governments. Another example of the non-government sector taking a leadership role in policy initiatives is detailed in Box 6.6, which discusses the independent Inquiry into Youth Homelessness led by the National Youth Commission.

The SAAP V Multilateral Agreement (2005–10)

The SAAP V Multilateral Agreement began in September 2005, and sets out the Australian and state and territory governments' financial and operational obligations to SAAP. Bilateral agreements detail how the program is delivered in each state and territory (FaCSIA 2007d). The Australian Government has committed \$932 million to SAAP V over the 5 years of the agreement. Of this, \$892 million will be provided directly to state and territory governments to help them meet their partnership responsibilities. The remaining \$40 million of the total Australian Government contribution will be invested in SAAP Innovation and Investment Fund pilot projects, with \$39 million of this contribution to be administered by the state and territory governments.

Under the SAAP V Agreement total resources available to the program will be an estimated \$1.82 billion. The SAAP V Agreement includes a change in funding agreements between the Australian and state or territory governments, which will see a transition to a minimum of 50% funding from the states and territories. The SAAP V Agreement also provides for a national research program that is funded through the Innovation and Investment Fund and the Data and Program Evaluation Fund whereby:

The Australian Government, in cooperation with the state and territory governments, has agreed to focus on the following three strategic priorities over the life of the SAAP V Agreement:

- **Pre-crisis intervention** for people who are at imminent risk of homelessness. Investment in this area recognises that timely intervention leading to the prevention of homelessness can often minimise or prevent a range of secondary problems such as loss of employment and disruption to client's (and their children's) social and educational networks and supports.
- **Post-crisis transition** support for clients exiting SAAP services. Targeted support provided at this time can provide clients with the skills, confidence and management strategies to enable them to secure and maintain appropriate long-term housing. The primary target group for this priority area are clients who have multiple or complex support needs, such as mental health issues, drug or alcohol addiction, or experience long-term unemployment. These clients are inclined to experience cyclical or chronic homelessness.
- **Better linkages** to allied support services and government and non-government agencies in areas such as health, education and employment services. The emphasis on improved linkages recognises that the causes of homelessness are generally varied and complex. Addressing the causes of homelessness and finding sustainable solutions can require the development and implementation of a tailored suite of integrated and well-coordinated supports. (FaCSIA 2006)

The SAAP V agreement requires a mid-term review to be completed in 2007 and a final evaluation to be completed by 30 June 2009. A national evaluation research agenda has been developed, and includes a number of proposed projects, including extensive SAAP National Data Collection analysis, an environmental factor scan to assess possible pressures on the ability of SAAP to meet its objectives, and national sector surveys to measure the implementation of the strategic priorities. The evaluation will have a strategic focus on:

- significant stakeholder engagement with the evaluation process
- integration with the ongoing work of the sector
- helping to drive the SAAP V reform agenda
- an action research approach where possible
- ongoing quantitative and qualitative information gathering and sharing.

The national evaluation aims to assess how well SAAP V has achieved its objectives. This includes the extent to which the program contributed to the overall aim of SAAP to promote 'self-reliance and independence for people who were homeless or at imminent risk of homelessness' (FaCSIA 2007e).

The SAAP Innovation and Investment Fund

The Innovation and Investment Fund is a collaborative venture between the Australian Government and the state and territory governments. The fund was initiated in response to the findings of the SAAP IV National Evaluation regarding sector reform. The fund has a focus on pilot and research projects that will help to identify the key characteristics of good practice in relation to the SAAP strategic priority areas of pre-crisis intervention, post-crisis transition and improved linkages to other support services such as mental health, education and employment services (FaCSIA 2007f).

This fund will be resourced through the combination of Australian Government, state and territory cash contributions and some approved state-only funded SAAP services that meet the strategic directions for SAAP V. The fund will total around \$125.5 million over 5 years, of which the Australian Government will contribute \$39.9 million over 5 years and the state and territory governments \$85.6 million.

The roll-out of the Innovation and Investment Fund has three key stages over the 5 years of the SAAP V Agreement:

- **Year 1 (2005–06)**—The Australian Government and the state and territory governments, through the National SAAP Co-ordination and Development Committee, developed a national action plan to determine funding priorities and outcome objectives for the Innovation and Investment Fund.
- **Years 2 and 3 (2006–07 and 2007–08)**—A range of research and pilot projects will be established based on the priorities identified in the national action plan developed in Year 1. These projects will help to identify the elements of good practice and innovation that contribute to the three strategic priorities covered above. These services will be fully evaluated.
- **Years 4 and 5 (2008–09 and 2009–10)**—Innovation and Investment Funds will be used to promote and replicate the successful service delivery models that were piloted in years 2 and 3 across the whole SAAP sector. (FaCSIA 2007f)

The Innovation and Investment Fund projects will participate in the SAAP National Data Collection in order to evaluate the effectiveness of each project and to allow comparison with SAAP as a whole.

Box 6.6: National Youth Commission Inquiry into Youth Homelessness

The fact that homelessness continues to affect many young people has this year prompted an independent inquiry into youth homelessness, the first since the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission's inquiry in 1989. This inquiry showed that an estimated 20,000 to 25,000 young people were homeless across Australia. Almost 20 years later, it is estimated that there are still around 20,000 homeless children and young people.

The new National Youth Commission (NYC) inquiry will investigate why youth homelessness continues to be a major problem in Australia. It is funded by the Caledonia Foundation and headed by Major David Eldridge from the Salvation Army. The NYC Inquiry aims to develop solutions to youth homelessness, a situation that the NYC believes may worsen over the next 20 years due to recent trends in the housing market, such as decreasing housing affordability, and the increasing number of children and young people involved in the child protection system (Lunn 2007; NYC 2007; also see Chapter 2 and Chapter 5).

Another aim of the of the inquiry is to explore the basis for a renewed national youth homelessness accord between the community, the non-government sector and the Australian and state and territory governments (NYC 2007). The NYC inquiry provided a process for all stakeholders to provide evidence about the issue and ideas for action, and hearings were held in all states and territories during 2007.

6.10 Data development

The evaluation of the SAAP IV Agreement (2000 to 2005) identified a need to improve the timeliness, relevance and accessibility of program information while streamlining data collection processes and maximising cost-effectiveness. This section provides a summary of the new directions in data collection in SAAP, including the initiative in Victoria to integrate the SAAP data collection into the Victorian Homelessness Data Collection (see Box 6.7). A key theme for these new directions is linking SAAP data with other program data collections to enable analyses of homelessness pathways.

The core data set and the new statistical linkage key

Following the evaluation of SAAP IV, the SAAP core data set was developed and introduced in July 2005. The core data set is an overall reduction in the number of items collected in the original SAAP Client Collection, which had not been substantially changed since its introduction in July 1996. The core data set also introduced the collection of Indigenous status for accompanying children, and information about the tenure type of clients before and after support. There are also improved categories for identifying mental health issues. As discussed in Section 6.8, the first year of the core data set, 2005–06, has been collected and reported on by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW). The changes constitute a break in the SAAP National Data Collection data series and thus data for 2005–06 are not strictly comparable with previous years.

One of the most far-reaching changes with the introduction of the core data set is the introduction of a new Statistical Linkage Key, which aims to improve both the quality of the data and the ability to confidentially link with other community services data collections. This will enable better analyses of the pathways that people who are experiencing homelessness take into and out of SAAP, and their interaction with other services. Protocols governing the potential use of this linkage key have been developed.

A feasibility study was commissioned in 2006–07 by the Community and Disability Services Minister's Advisory Council to investigate the readiness for linkage of three community services data collections: SAAP, Child Protection and Juvenile Justice. The AIHW is currently investigating the feasibility of linking data from the Juvenile Justice National Minimum Data Set with the SAAP data collection. The aim of subsequent analyses using a linked database would be to establish the extent to which young people are clients of both SAAP services and juvenile justice. This work could be further extended when child protection unit record data become available. Such cross-sectoral data linkage activity would enable statistical analysis of the characteristics of young people who flow between these three care sectors.

The new SAAP weighting system

The SAAP client collection is subject to incomplete coverage because about 5% of agencies do not participate in the client collection and a little over 10% of clients do not consent to their personal details being reported. To account for these factors, a sophisticated system for adjusting for non-consent and non-participation was developed in 1999. This weighting system has been applied to client collection data every year from 1996–97 to 2005–06.

Since the development of the weighting system, a number of changes have occurred in the SAAP client collection. They include the implementation of the core data set and the new statistical linkage key, an increased uptake in SMART (the SAAP Management

and Reporting Tool, an electronic data collection instrument) and consequent changes to client consent patterns. For example, clients are now less likely to have mixed consent (providing consent for some support periods but not for others) within the same agency. As a result, the AIHW is developing a new weighting methodology to adjust for agency non-participation and client non-consent. The new methodology will produce more robust estimates of SAAP clients and support periods in the new data collection environment.

Box 6.7: Data collection innovation—the Victorian Homelessness Data Collection

The Office of Housing in the Victorian Department of Human Services has developed the Victorian Homelessness Data Collection as a key action of the Victorian Homelessness Strategy. Released in 2002, the strategy is the overarching framework for homelessness responses in Victoria. The Victorian Homelessness Strategy encompasses services funded through the SAAP, the Transitional Housing Management Program, the Housing Establishment Fund, and services for homeless people delivered through other Department of Human Services programs or other government departments. The strategy provides a blueprint for tackling homelessness, with an emphasis on prevention and early intervention strategies.

The Victorian Homelessness Strategy identified the need for better, more consistent data to underpin service planning and resource allocation to improve client outcomes, develop integrated and sustainable service responses, and increase the focus on prevention of homelessness among the most vulnerable groups. One of the key objectives of the Victorian Homelessness Data Collection is therefore to report on client pathways through the homelessness service system using statistical record linkage of de-identified client records.

Currently in Victoria, homelessness data are collected and reported separately across the SAAP, Transitional Housing Management program and the Housing Establishment Fund. At present, each of these programs has significantly different data collection and reporting requirements. Although these programs are providing a similar response to the same client group, the response cannot be measured or compared across the three programs. Furthermore, client pathways through the homelessness service system, such as the number of people moving from crisis to transitional accommodation, cannot currently be easily measured or understood.

The Victorian Homelessness Data Collection, scheduled for implementation in 2008, will aim to overcome these obstacles to provide an evidence base for researchers, peak bodies, agencies and government to understand more about specific issues related to homelessness in Victoria. The AIHW has been contracted to pilot, implement and manage the ongoing collection.

The Victorian Homelessness Data Collection is an agreed set of data concepts and definitions that underpin the collection of information about homelessness service delivery and clients. It was developed using the two national reporting frameworks that relate to homelessness assistance in Victoria. These are the SAAP National Data Collection and the Commonwealth State Housing Agreement Performance Indicator Framework. While these two separate frameworks serve as a basis for the data collection, the emphasis was on adapting these frameworks to the information needs of the Victorian Homelessness Service system as a whole. The Office of Housing developed the data collection in collaboration with the AIHW and representatives of the homelessness sector.

Sources: DHS 2007, unpublished documents

6.11 Summary

This chapter has explored the relationships between the number of people experiencing homelessness, different experiences of homelessness and homelessness assistance. SAAP was presented in the context of the structural elements which influence service delivery to people experiencing homelessness. Structural elements can influence service delivery to particular sections of the homeless population, with access to the various SAAP sectors sometimes dependent on which client group a client belongs to. This in turn can influence the SAAP experiences of those different client groups because of the significant differences in the lengths of support and accommodation provided by various SAAP sectors. Such sector differences can be mediated by cultural factors, as in the case of SAAP service delivery in remote areas.

The pattern of throughput indicates that SAAP is operating at capacity in terms of accommodation, and not everyone requesting an accommodation response to their homelessness needs is getting one. Some groups in particular, such as families with children, experience increased difficulty in acquiring the SAAP accommodation they request. It also seems to be apparent that there are other people, particularly older single men with drug and alcohol and/or mental health issues, whose circumstances become an obstacle to their right to ask for a SAAP bed or support.

The larger issue of the relationship between people seeking SAAP accommodation and the total homeless population was also examined in the chapter. The static dimensions of the homeless population categorised in the Census were used as a lens to examine the temporal characteristics of homelessness that are evident from the ongoing SAAP National Data Collection. Homelessness affects different SAAP client groups differently, sometimes contrary to what might be suggested by the Census. The categories of homelessness outlined in the Counting the Homeless project may imply a static representation of different degrees of homelessness. However, the SAAP data presented in this chapter instead suggest a homeless population that is very dynamic. Throughout their experience or experiences of homelessness, people may move back and forth between primary, secondary or tertiary homelessness. They may also move in and out of homelessness and stable housing situations. For many homeless people it is the repeated moves through marginal accommodation that is the main feature of their homeless experience, rather than any single instance of being without conventional housing.

Responses to homelessness through SAAP and other Australian Government and state and territory governments are not limited to addressing a lack of adequate shelter. The large range of non-accommodation support services provided by SAAP alone is evidence of this. In addition, various projects now exist that aim to utilise linkages between SAAP and other health and community services. These developments in homelessness assistance are encapsulated in the three key strategic priorities of the new SAAP Multilateral Agreement, SAAP V (2005–2010): early intervention, post-crisis support, and improved service linkages for people with multiple and/or complex support needs.

The stronger emphasis on the delivery of cross-program responses to homelessness has started to influence approaches to collecting and reporting data and information. There is increasing attention being paid to the possibilities of collecting and reporting cross-program, client-centred information to measure the outcomes of government-funded policies and programs. Important steps have been made in the past several years towards this goal, with the development of methods to link data both within and across programs.

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