

4.2 GEOGRAPHICAL CATEGORIES

There are a number of ways of approaching a geographical analysis. The Australian Bureau of Statistics uses the Australian Standard Geographical Classification (ASGC) for the collection and dissemination of geographically organised statistics (ABS 2006c). The ASGC provides seven interrelated classification structures which are designed for different practical purposes. This report uses the 'Main Structure' which covers the whole of Australia without gaps or overlaps. The Main Structure comprises five hierarchical levels: census districts, statistical local areas, statistical subdivisions, statistical divisions, and states and territories. This analysis uses statistical divisions and statistical subdivisions as the main geographical categories, because patterns can be identified more easily if larger geographical categories are used.

The Northern Territory is divided into two statistical divisions (excluding off-shore and migratory). The first is Darwin (population 105 991), which includes Darwin City, the satellite city of Palmerston, and the surrounding rural area of Litchfield Shire (see Map 2). The second statistical division is Northern Territory Balance (population 84 910), which includes the subdivisions of Finnis, Bathurst-Melville, Alligator, Daly, East Arnhem, Lower Top End, Barkly, and Central NT (see Map 3).

Statistical subdivisions are defined as 'socially and economically homogeneous regions characterised by identifiable links between the inhabitants' (ABS 2006c, p. 14). Some statistical subdivisions correspond to major regional population centres. There are 44 of these across the country but none in the Northern Territory.

In other cases, statistical subdivisions cover non-urban areas. These are defined as rural areas that do not include cities with populations of 25 000 or above. These non-urban areas are said to have 'identifiable links between economic units within the region' and there may be the 'unifying influence' (ABS 2006c, p. 14) of one or more country towns. These rural/remote subdivisions have small populations, and sometimes high rates of homelessness but few homeless people.

4.3 OVERVIEW: NORTHERN TERRITORY

About half (55 per cent) of the population lives in Darwin. The census identified 2478 homeless people in Darwin and the rate of homelessness was 234 per 10 000 (Table 4.1). This is higher than the rates of homelessness in other major capital cities such as Sydney (39 per 10 000), Melbourne (41 per 10 000) and Adelaide (47 per 10 000).

There were 2307 homeless people in the Northern Territory Balance

where the rate was 272 per 10 000, also higher than in other states. Altogether, 45 per cent of the population lives outside of Darwin and 48 per cent of the homeless were in these communities.

This chapter focuses on the spatial distribution of the homeless population across the Territory. Chapter 5 discusses Indigenous and non-Indigenous issues.

4.1 NUMBER OF HOMELESS PEOPLE AND RATE PER 10 000 OF THE POPULATION, DARWIN AND NORTHERN TERRITORY BALANCE

	Darwin	Northern Territory Balance	All
Number	2478	2307	4785
Rate	234	272	248

Source: Census of Population and Housing 2006; SAAP Client Collection 2006; National Census of Homeless School Students 2006.

4.4 DARWIN

Table 4.2 shows that the rate of homelessness in the three subdivisions of Darwin. It was 276 per 10 000 in Darwin City where there were 1829 homeless people; 75 per 10 000 in Palmerston where there were 180 homeless people; and 302 per 10 000 in Litchfield Shire where there were 469 homeless people.

4.2 NUMBER OF HOMELESS PEOPLE AND RATE PER 10 000 OF THE POPULATION, DARWIN

	Darwin City	Palmerston	Litchfield Shire	All
Number	1829	180	469	2478
Rate	276	75	302	234

Source: Census of Population and Housing 2006; SAAP Client Collection 2006; National Census of Homeless School Students 2006.

Palmerston is a rapidly growing satellite city about 12 kilometres from Darwin. There may be more homelessness in Palmerston than indicated in Table 4.2, because homeless people in Palmerston may have travelled into Darwin. There are more services in inner Darwin, as well as more low-cost accommodation such as boarding houses.

Table 4.3 shows that 25 per cent of the homeless in Darwin were staying in boarding houses; another 40 per cent were with friends or relatives; 20 per cent were in improvised dwellings or sleeping rough ('living in the long grass'); and 15 per cent were in SAAP accommodation. The number of homeless in Darwin declined from 2008 people in 2001 to 1829 in 2006,

but the numbers were up in some categories and down in others.

The number of persons in SAAP in Darwin increased significantly. In 2006, there were 274 people in SAAP, compared with 129 in 2001. The proportion of Indigenous people in SAAP increased from 10 per cent in 2001 to 45 per cent in 2006.

The number of persons staying with other households in Darwin remained steady at just over 700 (734 in 2006 and 717 in 2001).

In contrast, the number of people in boarding houses decreased from 604 in 2001 to 461 in 2006. There are a number of boarding houses in Darwin but there are also many backpackers' hostels. Backpackers' hostels will accommodate homeless people if demand for their accommodation is down. Homeless people in backpackers' hostels are counted in the census, but they are not identified as part of the homeless population.

4.3 PERSONS IN DIFFERENT SECTORS OF THE HOMELESS POPULATION, DARWIN

Percentage

	Darwin	Palmerston	Litchfield Shire	All
Boarding house	25	2	3	19
SAAP	15	6	0	11
Friends/relatives	40	74	77	50
Improvised dwellings	20	18	20	20
	100	100	100	100

Number

	Darwin	Palmerston	Litchfield Shire	All
Boarding house	461	3	12	476
SAAP	274	10	0	284
Friends/relatives	734	134	362	1230
Improvised dwellings	360	33	95	488
	1829	180	469	2478

Source: Census of Population and Housing 2006; SAAP Client Collection 2006; National Census of Homeless School Students 2006.

Finally, the number of persons in the improvised dwellings category in Darwin declined from 558 in 2001 to 360 in 2006. In 2006, nearly everyone in this category was sleeping rough and 74 per cent were Indigenous. Local service providers were unsure whether the number of rough sleepers had 'really decreased'. Some people reported 'significant undercounting in 2006', but others said 'the number sleeping rough varies a great deal'. One census collector spoke to some homeless people a few days after the census and most of them had not filled out census forms.

Overall, the number of homeless people in Darwin declined by about 180 people between 2006 and 2001, but this is partly explained by the decline in the number of rough sleepers who were probably undercounted.

There were 180 homeless people in Palmerston (Table 4.3). Three-quarters (74 per cent) of these people were staying with other households and eighteen per cent were in the primary population. Most people in the primary population were sleeping rough and all were Indigenous.

In Litchfield Shire, there were 469 homeless people (Table 4.3). Three-quarters (77 per cent) were staying with other households and 20 per cent were in the primary population. There were about 30 households in the primary population who were in improvised dwellings such as sheds and garages. These sheds varied from broken-down shacks to prefabricated sheds assembled on a concrete block. Three-quarters of these households owned or were purchasing their dwellings.

Overall, there were 2478 homeless people in the Darwin statistical division on census night, and three-quarters (74 per cent) of the homeless were in Darwin City. Most of the SAAP accommodation was in Darwin City, as were most of the boarding house rooms.

4.5 NORTHERN TERRITORY BALANCE

Northern Territory Balance has eight subdivisions. The population is 84 910 and includes Alice Springs (population 23 895), Katherine (population 8191), and Tennant Creek (population 2922). There were 49 902 people in remote communities.

4.4 NUMBER OF HOMELESS PEOPLE AND RATE PER 10 000 OF THE POPULATION, NORTHERN TERRITORY BALANCE

	Katherine	Tennant Creek	Alice Springs	Remote	All
Number	415	43	446	1403	2307
Rate	507	147	187	281	272

Source: Census of Population and Housing 2006; SAAP Client Collection 2006; National Census of Homeless School Students 2006.

Table 4.4 shows the rate of homelessness in the main towns and in remote areas. The rate was: 507 per 10 000 in Katherine where there were 415 homeless people; 147 per 10 000 in Tennant Creek where there were 43 homeless people; 187 per 10 000 in Alice Springs (446 homeless); and 281 per 10 000 in remote communities (1403 homeless).

In Katherine 42 per cent (175 people) of the homeless were in the primary population (Table 4.5). All were rough sleepers and 95 per cent were

Indigenous. Local informants reported that it was common for Indigenous people to sleep in 'camps on the edge of town'. Another 40 per cent (168 people) of the homeless were staying temporarily with other households and 97 per cent of this group were non-Indigenous. In 2001, there were 21 people in SAAP; this figure increased to 61 in 2006.

4.5 PERSONS IN DIFFERENT SECTORS OF THE HOMELESS POPULATION, NORTHERN TERRITORY BALANCE

Percentage

	Katherine	Tennant Creek	Alice Springs	Remote	All
Boarding house	3	65	18	7	9
SAAP	15	0	14	0	6
Friends/relatives	40	12	43	36	37
Improvised dwellings	42	23	25	57	48
	100	100	100	100	100

Number

	Katherine	Tennant Creek	Alice Springs	Remote	All
Boarding house	11	28	78	101	218
SAAP	61	0	64	2	127
Friends/relatives	168	5	193	496	862
Improvised dwellings	175	10	111	804	1100
	415	43	446	1403	2307

Source: Census of Population and Housing 2006; SAAP Client Collection 2006; National Census of Homeless School Students 2006.

Alice Springs had a much lower rate of homelessness than Katherine (187 compared with 507 per 10 000) (Table 4.4), but more homeless people (446 compared with 415) (Table 4.5). There was also an important change in Alice Springs. The number of homeless people declined from 727 in 2001 to 446 in 2006, and the rate of homelessness dropped from 290 to 187 per 10 000.

In 2006, 43 per cent of the homeless in Alice Springs were staying with other households (Table 4.5), similar to the proportion in 2001, but the actual number of people in this situation decreased from 304 to 193.

The proportion in boarding houses in Alice Springs was also similar (18 per cent in 2006 compared with 16 per cent in 2001), but the number of people in boarding houses had declined from 119 to 78.

The number of persons in improvised dwellings declined from 238 to 111. In 2006, about 80 per cent in this category were rough sleepers and about two-thirds were Indigenous. Local service providers were unsure whether this decrease was 'real'. Some people thought the numbers had not

changed, and others questioned whether the count was reliable. A number of people pointed out that ‘this is a very mobile population and the numbers go up and down’.

Overall, it seems likely that homelessness has decreased in Alice Springs, but the number of people recorded sleeping rough was probably an underestimate.

4.6 PEOPLE IN DIFFERENT SECTORS OF THE HOMELESS POPULATION, NORTHERN TERRITORY BALANCE, EXCLUDING KATHERINE, TENNANT CREEK AND ALICE SPRINGS

	Finnis	Bathurst- Melville	Alligator	Daly	East Arnhem	Lower Top End	Barkly	Central NT	Total
Improvised dwell.	88	0	153	146	77	108	10	222	804
Friends/relatives	83	0	39	65	31	142	62	74	496

Source: Census of Population and Housing 2006; SAAP Client Collection 2006; National Census of Homeless School Students 2006.

In remote locations, 57 per cent of the homeless were in improvised dwellings or sleeping rough and 36 per cent were with other households (Table 4.5). Table 4.6 shows the number of people in these categories in remote subdivisions. Overall, there were 496 people staying with other households and 804 people in improvised dwellings or sleeping rough.

There were 222 in the primary population in Central NT, 153 in Alligator, 146 in Daly and 108 in Lower Top End. About 60 per cent were Indigenous and most people were living a traditional lifestyle, often moving from place to place. There were 300 to 350 non-Indigenous people. Some were prospectors, possibly living in sheds or other makeshift dwellings, as well as various people described as ‘loners’. This is a mobile population, spread thinly across the Territory.

4.6 MARGINAL RESIDENTS OF CARAVAN PARKS

The national report pointed out that boarding houses are more common in capital cities and less common in regional centres and country towns. In these regional and country communities, SAAP workers sometimes refer homeless people to local caravan parks if there is no emergency accommodation available. Marginal residents of caravan parks were defined as people who were renting caravans or cabins, living at their usual address, and with no one in the dwelling having full-time employment.

Seventy per cent of boarding house residents across the country were in the capital cities, and in the Northern Territory 66 per cent of boarding

house residents were in Darwin City (Table 4.7). Nationally, 71 per cent of marginal caravan park residents were outside of the capital cities, and in the Northern Territory this figure was 65 per cent (Table 4.7). In some communities, local SAAP workers send homeless people to the local caravan park if there is no alternative accommodation available. Caravan parks may also house some people on a longer-term basis because they are unable to re-enter the private rental market.

4.7 SPATIAL DISTRIBUTION OF PERSONS IN BOARDING HOUSES AND MARGINAL RESIDENTS OF CARAVAN PARKS, NORTHERN TERRITORY

	Boarding house (N=694)	Caravan (N=273)
	%	%
Darwin City	66	35
Remainder of NT	34	65
	100	100

Source: Census of Population and Housing 2006; SAAP Client Collection 2006; National Census of Homeless School Students 2006.

The 2001 Census identified 775 marginal residents of caravan parks in the Northern Territory, but this declined to 273 in 2006, a decrease of 65 per cent. A number of parks that used to provide budget accommodation for poor people have closed.

Table 4.8 shows that there were 96 marginal residents of caravan parks in Darwin and 51 in Litchfield Shire, but none in Palmerston. Most caravan parks in Darwin provide accommodation for tourists or for people who own caravans. Only a minority of parks still provide accommodation for poor people and crisis accommodation.

4.8 NUMBER OF HOMELESS PEOPLE AND NUMBER OF MARGINAL RESIDENTS OF CARAVAN PARKS, DARWIN

	Darwin City	Palmerston	Litchfield Shire	All
Homeless	1829	180	469	2478
Rate per 10 000	276	75	302	234
Caravans	96	0	51	147
Total	1925	180	520	2625
Rate per 10 000	290	75	334	248

Source: Census of Population and Housing 2006; SAAP Client Collection 2006; National Census of Homeless School Students 2006.

There were 126 marginal caravan park dwellers in the Northern Territory Balance (Table 4.9), down from 461 in 2001. Parks that provide

accommodation for marginal people have closed in these communities as well. In 2006, there were 10 marginal residents of caravan parks in Katherine, 24 in Alice Springs and 89 in remote locations.

4.9 NUMBER OF HOMELESS PEOPLE AND NUMBER OF MARGINAL RESIDENTS OF CARAVAN PARKS, NORTHERN TERRITORY BALANCE

	Katherine	Tennant Creek	Alice Springs	Remote	All
Homeless	415	43	446	1403	2307
Rate per 10 000	507	147	187	281	272
Caravans	10	3	24	89	126
Total	425	46	470	1492	2433
Rate per 10 000	519	157	197	303	287

Source: Census of Population and Housing 2006; SAAP Client Collection 2006; National Census of Homeless School Students 2006.

For some policy purposes, marginal residents of caravan parks might be thought of as part of the tertiary population. If these residents are included, then the rate of homelessness was 290 per 10 000 in Darwin, 197 per 10 000 in Alice Springs, and 303 per 10 000 in remote locations.