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**Australian Institute of  
Health and Welfare**

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# **Specialist Homelessness Services Collection: first results**

**September quarter 2011**

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare  
Canberra

Cat. no. HOU 262

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**Please note that there is the potential for minor revisions of data in this report. Please check the online version at <[www.aihw.gov.au](http://www.aihw.gov.au)> for any amendments.**

# Contents

- Acknowledgments..... iv**
- Abbreviations..... v**
- Summary ..... vi**
- 1 Introduction.....1**
  - Why a new collection on homelessness services?.....1
  - Things you should know about the data collection .....1
  - Client groups.....5
  - Future reports and data releases .....7
- 2 An overview of the data .....8**
  - Who was supported? .....8
  - Why did they seek support? .....11
  - What services were provided? .....12
  - Client outcomes .....15
- 3 Indigenous clients .....19**
- 4 Children .....23**
- 5 People escaping domestic and family violence .....26**
- 6 People experiencing primary homelessness .....29**
- 7 People leaving care and custodial settings.....32**
- Glossary.....41**
- References .....45**
- Appendix A.....46**
  - Outline of major differences between the SAAP NDC and the SHSC .....46
- Appendix B .....51**
  - Data quality statement (Specialist Homelessness Services Collection – September quarter 2011) .....51
- Appendix C.....57**
  - Non-response adjustment (weighting) methodology .....57
- Appendix D .....61**
  - Data tables .....61
- List of tables .....71**
- List of figures .....72**

# Acknowledgments

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We are grateful to the Australian Government Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and the state and territory departments responsible for the delivery of specialist homelessness services for funding this collection and for working with us to design and implement the collection and related collection systems.

We also acknowledge the contribution of the Specialist Homelessness Services User Advisory Group which provided valuable advice and support in implementing the collection.

We are especially grateful to all homelessness agencies (and their clients) for their support in implementing and participating in this new data collection.

# Abbreviations

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACT	Australian Capital Territory
AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
CMS	client management system
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
FaHCSIA	Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
H2H	Homeless 2 Home (client and case management system)
NAHA	National Affordable Housing Agreement
No.	number
NPAH	National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness
NSW	New South Wales
NT	Northern Territory
Qld	Queensland
SA	South Australia
SAAP	Supported Accommodation Assistance Program
SAAP NDC	SAAP National Data Collection
SHIP	Specialist Homelessness Information Platform (client and case management system)
SHOR	Specialist Homelessness Online Reporting
SHSC	Specialist Homelessness Services Collection
SLK	statistical linkage key
SMART	SAAP Management and Reporting Tool (client and case management system)
Tas	Tasmania
THM	Transitional Housing Management
Vic	Victoria
WA	Western Australia

# Symbols

..	not applicable
n.a.	not available

# Summary

This report presents the first results of the new Specialist Homelessness Services Collection (SHSC) from the first quarter of data collection—July to September 2011. The SHSC describes the clients who seek assistance from specialist homelessness agencies and the services they receive.

## Clients

In this quarter, an estimated 91,627 clients were assisted by specialist homelessness agencies—59% were female and 41% male. Eighteen per cent of clients were aged under 10; and half of all clients (50%) were aged under 25.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were significantly over-represented among SHSC clients—19% of clients were of Indigenous origin.

In 31% of support periods, clients had lived in short-term or emergency accommodation in the month before presenting for support, and 19% had ‘slept rough’.

Most clients presented to specialist homelessness agencies alone (66%), but more than one-third presented with children or were themselves children.

Domestic and family violence was the most common main reason for seeking assistance (26%). This was the most common main reason reported by females (36% of female clients), but for male clients it was ‘housing crisis’ (18% of male clients).

## Service needs and assistance

The most commonly identified service need for clients was for ‘advice/information’ (72% of all support periods), followed by ‘other basic assistance’ (51%) and ‘advocacy/liaison on behalf of client’ (42%).

Short-term or emergency accommodation was identified as a need for clients in 32% of support periods, medium-term/transitional housing in 23% of support periods and long-term housing was identified as a need for clients in 26% of support periods. Accommodation was provided in 16% of all support periods in the quarter.

‘Assistance to sustain a tenancy or prevent tenancy failure or eviction’ was identified as a client need in 21% of support periods.

## Outcomes

Based on closed support periods, some modest improvements over the quarter were evident for clients as a whole in relation to their housing situations:

- Before and at the end of support, most clients were living in a house, townhouse, or flat (65% at the beginning of support; 66% at the end of support).
- There was a small decrease in clients who had no dwelling, were living in a motor car or in an improvised dwelling (10% at the beginning of support; 7% at the end of support).
- Before and at the end of support, the most common type of tenure for clients was renting in private housing (20% both at the beginning and at the end of support).
- There was an increase in the proportion of clients renting in social housing (14% at the beginning of support; 17% at the end of support).

# 1 Introduction

This report presents the first results of the new Specialist Homelessness Services Collection (SHSC). The SHSC, which began on 1 July 2011, describes all clients who receive services from specialist homelessness agencies and the assistance they receive. Data in this report are drawn from the first quarter of the collection (the September quarter 2011) which includes the collection months July to September 2011.

## Why a new collection on homelessness services?

The need for improved data was expressed in the Australian Government's 2008 White paper on homelessness. That document —*The road home: a national approach to reducing homelessness*—was instrumental in shaping the government response to homelessness. It highlighted the need for strategies that prevent homelessness, improve connections between specialist and 'mainstream' services, and assist those who experience long-term or chronic homelessness or risk.

The National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA) (Council of Australian Governments 2009) provides the framework for governments to work together to reduce homelessness and improve housing affordability. The NAHA is supported by the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH) (COAG 2009) which outlines the roles and responsibilities of the Australian Government and state and territory governments in reducing and preventing homelessness. Funding for the NAHA began on 1 January 2009, and for the NPAH on 1 July 2009.

The SHSC was designed to support the information needs of these national agreements, to enable monitoring of assistance provided to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, and to contribute to the evidence base that shapes policy and service development.

The development of the new collection and new collection systems was undertaken by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) in collaboration with the Australian Government Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and relevant departments of all state and territory governments. Re-development of the collection was funded through COAG and the ongoing operations for the collection and the collection management system are funded by the state and territory governments.

## Things you should know about the data collection

### Comparisons with the SAAP National Data Collection

The SHSC replaces the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) National Data Collection (NDC) which collected data from homelessness agencies from 1996 to June 2011.

The SHSC aims to significantly improve the relevance and quality of data, with the main differences being:

- The scope of agencies has expanded. Agencies that reported in SAAP and have continued to be funded have been included in SHSC, along with agencies that were not

required to report in SAAP and some agencies that were newly funded under the NAHA and NPAH.

- There are many new and revised data items in SHSC.
- Children who receive services directly are counted as clients in SHSC, whereas in the SAAP NDC most children were treated as 'accompanying children' (where they attended with a parent who was a client), with limited data collected.
- Data are collected and validated more thoroughly using different reporting tools and processes and are submitted monthly rather than six-monthly.

Additionally, information on services requested but not provided has been incorporated into the collection and is collected on an ongoing basis, although it is not presented in this report (see section on 'unassisted people' below). Previously this information was only collected at two points during the year.

Further detail on the differences between the SAAP NDC and SHSC is presented in Appendix A.

*As a result of these differences, caution should be exercised in comparing SHSC and SAAP NDC data, particularly as only one quarter of SHSC data is currently available.*

### **Better information on clients**

Compared with the SAAP NDC, the SHSC provides better information about clients of homelessness agencies. This is for a number of reasons, but is particularly because changes in the data collection protocols allow more complete reporting of the information needed to derive the statistical linkage key (SLK). The SLK is used to distinguish between unique individuals and to identify multiple support periods that are likely to relate to an individual. The SLK validity rate has risen from 86% in the last quarter of the SAAP NDC to 93% in the first quarter of the SHSC, and the rate is expected to improve further.

These changes, along with more frequent data collection and submission, will improve the ability to build a picture of clients and how their circumstances change over the course of their support.

While the ability to derive information about clients (including the number of clients) is improved in the SHSC, the information collected is based on periods of support, or episodes, as it was in the SAAP NDC. Analysis of support period data remains important, particularly when examining progress through episodes of support or events that are time-focused.

### **How the collection is conducted**

SHSC data are collected by specialist homelessness agencies every month. Data are collected about the characteristics and circumstances of a client when they first present at an agency, and further data—on the assistance the client receives and the client's circumstances at the end of the month—are collected at the end of every month in which the client receives services, and at the end of the support period.

Data are collected via a number of client management systems and submitted to the AIHW via the Specialist Homelessness Online Reporting (SHOR) web portal. Over 80% of homelessness agencies that participate in the collection use the Specialist Homelessness Information Platform (SHIP). This client management system is provided by the AIHW on behalf of all states and territories except South Australia where all agencies use the Homelessness 2 Home (H2H) system.



Information on the development of the SHSC, definitions and concepts, and collection materials and processes can be found on the AIHW website, <http://www.aihw.gov.au/shsc/>. Information on key definitions, concepts and classifications can be found in the Glossary to this report or in the SHSC's collection manual (AIHW 2011b).

### **Participation of agencies**

Ninety-three per cent of participating agencies returned support period data for at least one month in the September quarter 2011. This high level of participation is important to ensure that the data collected accurately reflects the support provided to clients. It compares favourably with the SAAP NDC agency participation rate, which was 90% in 2010–11 and 92% on average between 2001–02 and 2010–11.

### **Data quality**

The introduction of the new collection has affected the completeness of information provided, as agencies needed time to adjust to the new collection requirements and systems for collecting and reporting data.

Not all agencies have submitted data for all months, and many records have some data missing. Detailed information on completeness, response rates and other aspects of data quality is provided in the data quality statement for the collection (Appendix B).

Due to issues related to the quality of some data, including high levels of missing data in some instances, some data items are not reported here (for example, results from new questions on mental health diagnoses). In addition, some South Australian data are not available or have had to be excluded from some analyses (as noted in relevant tables and figures) as a result of decisions relating to the implementation of the H2H system in South Australia. Specifically, SA data on clients' needs, where associated services have not been provided, are not included; nor is SA data on client outcomes and some related analyses that are based on closed support periods. This is due to implementation issues in identifying closed support periods for SA data.

It is expected that data completeness will improve as agencies become more familiar with the new collection and a longer time series of data becomes available.

### **Adjusting for non-response (weighting)**

Adjustments for non-response (or 'weighting') are commonly applied to datasets when there is a high rate of missing data.

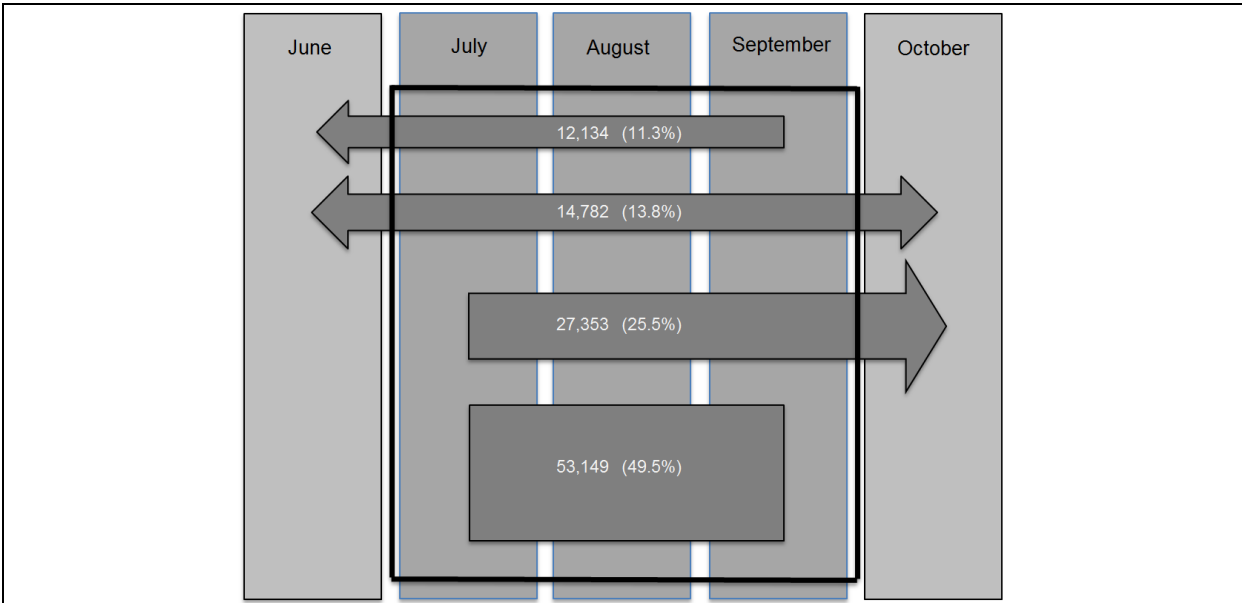
A weighting method to adjust for missing support period information is being developed. This method relies on a longer time series of data and will produce more reliable estimates for the annual report. However, to give an estimate of the full size of the sector in the September quarter 2011, a simplified version of the method has been used for this report. Only the broad level figures in Chapter 2 have been adjusted for non-response. All other figures given are raw, or unweighted. For further information on the weighting method used in this report, see Appendix C.

### **Data 'snapshots'**

As agencies submit SHSC data on the clients they assist each month, the client picture is constantly evolving. In order to report this information, 'snapshots' of the data are taken at

particular points in time. The data presented in this report are based on a snapshot taken on 27 February 2012, and includes all data submitted and validated by that date. As the processes for collecting and submitting data become more efficient, quarterly snapshots will be taken earlier, and more timely reporting on the data will be possible.

The data in this quarterly report cover clients who were already receiving support at 1 July 2011 and clients who began receiving support at any time in the reporting period. Figure 1 depicts the number of support periods reported and how they span the reporting period. Around 80,500 new support periods were reported as beginning during the quarter, and two-thirds (66%) of these support periods opened and closed within the September quarter.



**Figure 1: Summary of number of support periods and indicative duration over the reporting period, September quarter 2011**

At the end of the quarter there were about 42,000 open support periods (unweighted—see above for more details). This is higher than the (approximately) 27,000 support periods indicated as ongoing at 1 July. These differences may be due to a number of factors, including:

- The collection began with a ‘soft go-live’ approach which allowed some agencies flexibility in the timing for beginning the new SHSC. As a result some support periods, particularly short ones, that were open at the end of June may not have been reported in September quarter 2011 data.
- Some agencies, including all in South Australia, treated all ongoing clients (and therefore support periods) as new from 1 July.
- The September quarter 2011 data includes support periods reported by agencies that are in scope of the SHSC but were not in the SAAP NDC, including new agencies that were funded to start from 1 July.

It is expected that in subsequent quarters the number of support periods open at the beginning of the quarter will be closer to the numbers that are ongoing at the end of the quarter.

## Client groups

This report presents, firstly, an overview of the data collated from the September quarter 2011 based on all clients and their support periods (Chapter 2).

The report then highlights findings in relation to a number of selected groups of special interest, namely clients who were:

- Indigenous (Chapter 3)
- children (Chapter 4)
- escaping domestic and family violence (Chapter 5)
- recorded as experiencing primary homelessness before their support period (Chapter 6), or
- in care or custodial settings at the time of (or shortly before) presenting to the homelessness agency (Chapter 7).

These groups are of particular interest to policy-makers, homelessness agencies and the wider community.

While these client groups are treated as discrete population groups in these chapters, there is considerable overlap between the groups, as outlined below (Table 1.1).

**Table 1.1: Number of clients in special groups of interest, and overlap with other groups, September quarter 2011<sup>(a)</sup>**

	Indigenous	Children	Domestic and family violence	Primary homelessness	People exiting care and custodial settings	None of the above
Indigenous	<b>15,649</b>	6,105	5,239	3,506	1,009	..
Children		<b>25,086</b>	9,513	3,109	1,504	..
Domestic and family violence			<b>26,987</b>	3,399	933	..
Primary homelessness				<b>15,012</b>	1,083	..
People exiting care and custodial settings					<b>4,348</b>	..
None of the above						<b>22,328</b>

(a) Numbers of clients in groups of interest are not weighted.

## Unassisted people

Information about people who seek assistance from a homelessness agency, but do not receive assistance ('unassisted people') is collected in a number of ways in the SHSC. These data have not been included in this report. The AIHW is currently working with states and territories to further analyse this information and finalise the framework for presenting this information.

## Notes on the presentation of data in this report

As noted above, data in this report are presented either based on *clients* or *support periods*.

An individual client may have had more than one support period in the quarter – either from the same agency or from a different agency. Data from individual clients who received services from different agencies and/or at different times are matched based on a statistical linkage key (SLK). All analyses based on client data include only those clients for whom full and valid SLK data (i.e. date of birth, sex, and alphacode based on selected letters of name) are available.

Clients who have more than one support period may present with different characteristics in these different support periods. This has implications for the presentation and interpretation of client-level data. In particular:

- Demographic data is derived based on clients' characteristics as defined at the start of their first support period during the quarter.
- Data about client groups, main reason for seeking assistance and client management plans are also presented at the client level; however, all responses recorded for clients (where these are not the same across support periods) are reported on.

This means that if a client has the same information recorded against a specific data item in different support periods, the client will be counted only once in the data table.

However, if a client has more than one support period and has different characteristics recorded in the support periods, the client will be counted more than once. For example, a client who receives support from one agency as a member of a couple and later attends a different homelessness agency on their own will appear in both the 'couple, no children' and 'person alone' categories when describing client groups.

**In these cases, the number of clients identified in tables can vary as a number of different characteristics can be reported for the same client. Also, the percentages will add up to more than 100% as percentages are calculated using the total number of unique clients as the denominator. In these situations, percentages should be read as meaning that  $x\%$  of clients had this characteristic at least once during the quarter.**

- Data on length of accommodation is based on accommodation provided in the September quarter 2011 reporting period only, due to incomplete data for support periods that started before 1 July. Accommodation length for a client is obtained by totalling the individual accommodation period lengths that occurred in any support period in the reporting period.

A separate period of accommodation is recorded if the accommodation type changed during the reporting period—for example, if the client moves from short-term accommodation to long-term accommodation, two accommodation periods are recorded.

Data on client outcomes and some data on services and assistance are presented at the support period level:

- As a client may have more than one support period during the quarter, these data do not identify the number of *clients* with these outcomes.
- These data are generally based on closed support periods only, as they measure the outcome after receiving support.

- Data on length of support periods is based on support provided in the September quarter 2011 reporting period only, due to incomplete data for support periods that started before 1 July.

Where data quality and confidentiality provisions allow, state and territory tables equivalent to those in Appendix D will be made available on the AIHW's website ([www.aihw.gov.au](http://www.aihw.gov.au)) in the near future.

## **Future reports and data releases**

This report is the first in a series of reports that present summary data for each quarter of the collection. When the full year of data has been collected, an annual report will be produced for 2011–12.

It is likely that as data quality and completeness improves over time, future reports will become more comprehensive. Likewise, analyses based around different client groups may be included in future publications subject to user interest. Other reports exploring topics of interest (e.g. related to specific target groups) will also be produced on an 'ad hoc' basis.

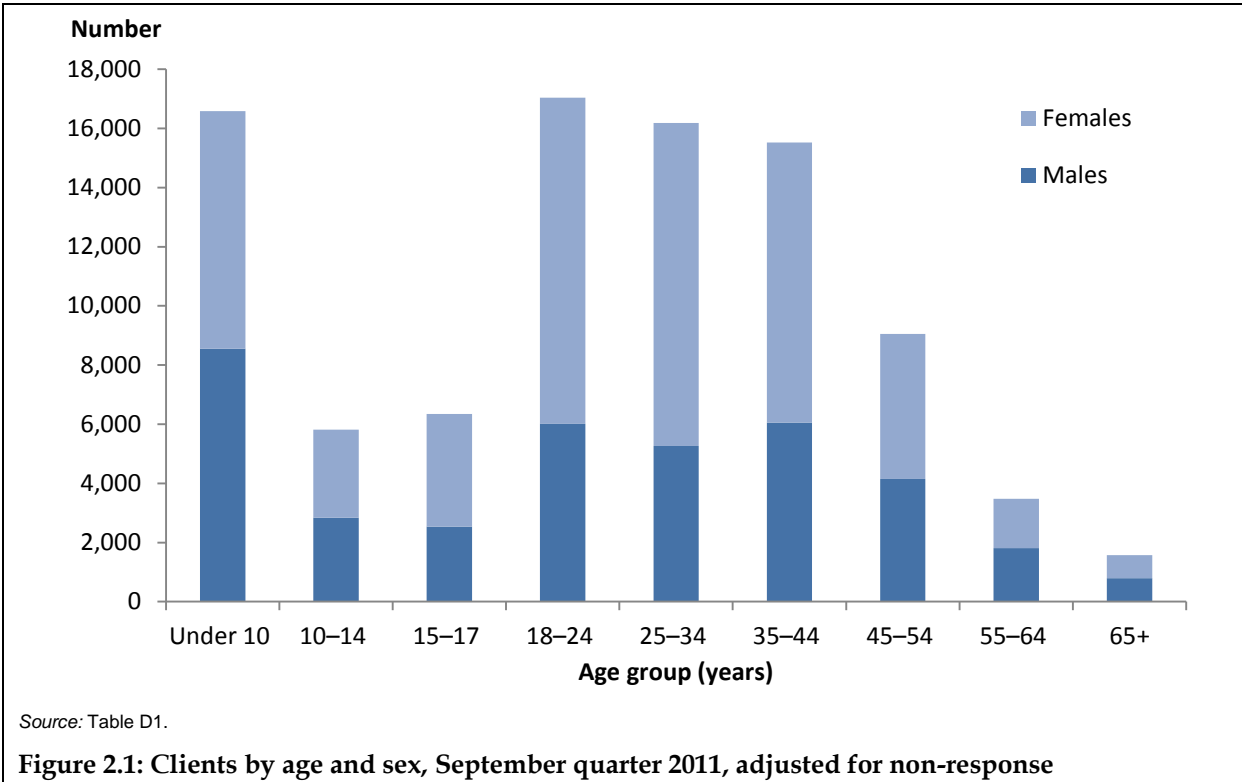
Data from this collection will also be made available through other formats where possible, such as 'data cubes'. These products will allow users to undertake their own analysis but will be subject to confidentialisation of client and agency information.

## 2 An overview of the data

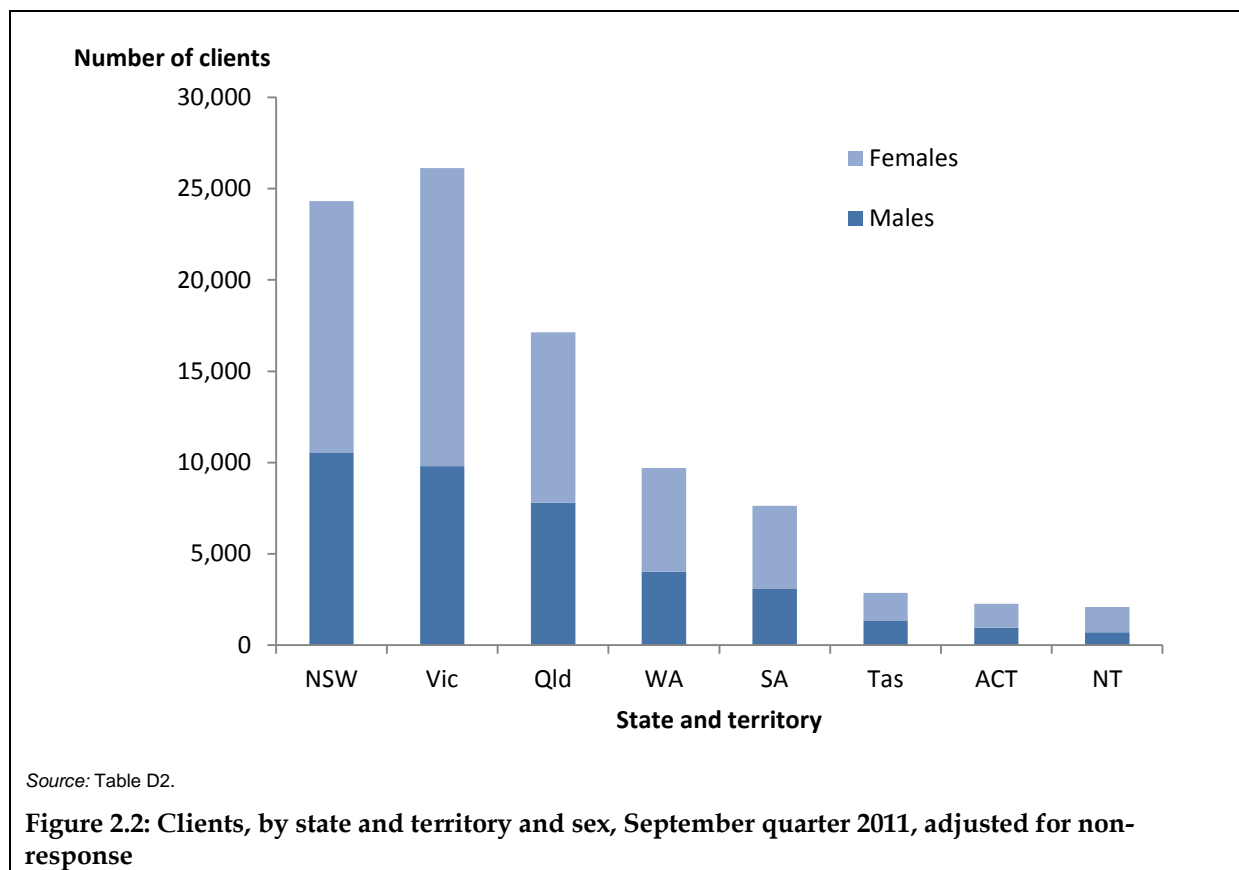
In the September quarter 2011, an estimated 91,627 clients were assisted by specialist homelessness agencies (80,450 unweighted; see Appendix C for more information about adjustments made for non-response).

### Who was supported?

Overall, 59% of clients were female and 41% were male. Eighteen per cent of clients were aged under 10; and half of all clients were under 25 (Figure 2.1).



Victoria recorded the highest number of SHSC clients (26,132 clients, 29% of all SHSC clients), followed by NSW (24,311 clients, 27%) (Figure 2.2). The NT recorded the lowest number of clients (2,084 clients, 2%). However, when adjusted for resident populations in each state and territory (as at 30 June 2011), the NT had the highest rate of people accessing specialist homelessness agencies in the quarter (91 per 10,000 people) and NSW had the lowest rate of people accessing specialist homelessness agencies (33 per 10,000 people). The national rate of people accessing homelessness services in the September quarter was 41 per 10,000.



*All other data reported in this chapter are based on raw data and are not adjusted for non-response.*

### Indigenous Australians

Almost one-fifth (19%) of clients who provided information on their Indigenous status were Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander; 12% of clients did not have information on Indigenous status recorded.

Further information about Indigenous clients is presented in Chapter 3.

### Country of birth

Most clients (85%) who provided information on their country of birth were Australian-born (this information was missing for 10% of clients).

The main countries of birth reported for those not born in Australia were New Zealand (14% of all clients who were not born in Australia), Sudan (9%) and England (6%).

### Previous experiences of homelessness

Based on support period data that identified clients' previous experiences of homelessness:

- in 31% of all support periods, clients had lived in short-term or emergency accommodation in the month before presenting for support
- in 19% of all support periods, clients had 'slept rough' in the month before presenting to the homelessness agency

- the ACT had the highest proportion of clients who had slept rough in the month before support (27% of support periods), followed by Queensland (25%) (Table D3).

Information on previous homelessness was missing for about one-third (32%) of all support periods.

### **Client's main source of income**

Among clients who had a main source of income recorded, 67% reported a government pension or allowance as their main source of income at the beginning of the support period:

- 19% received Newstart allowance
- 18% received a parenting payment
- 15% received a disability support pension.

Information on main source of income was missing for 29% of clients.

### **Labour force status**

Just over half (54%) of clients aged 15 years and over and whose labour force status was recorded were not in the labour force at the beginning of the support period. The majority of all other clients were unemployed (38%). Ten per cent were employed, full or part time.

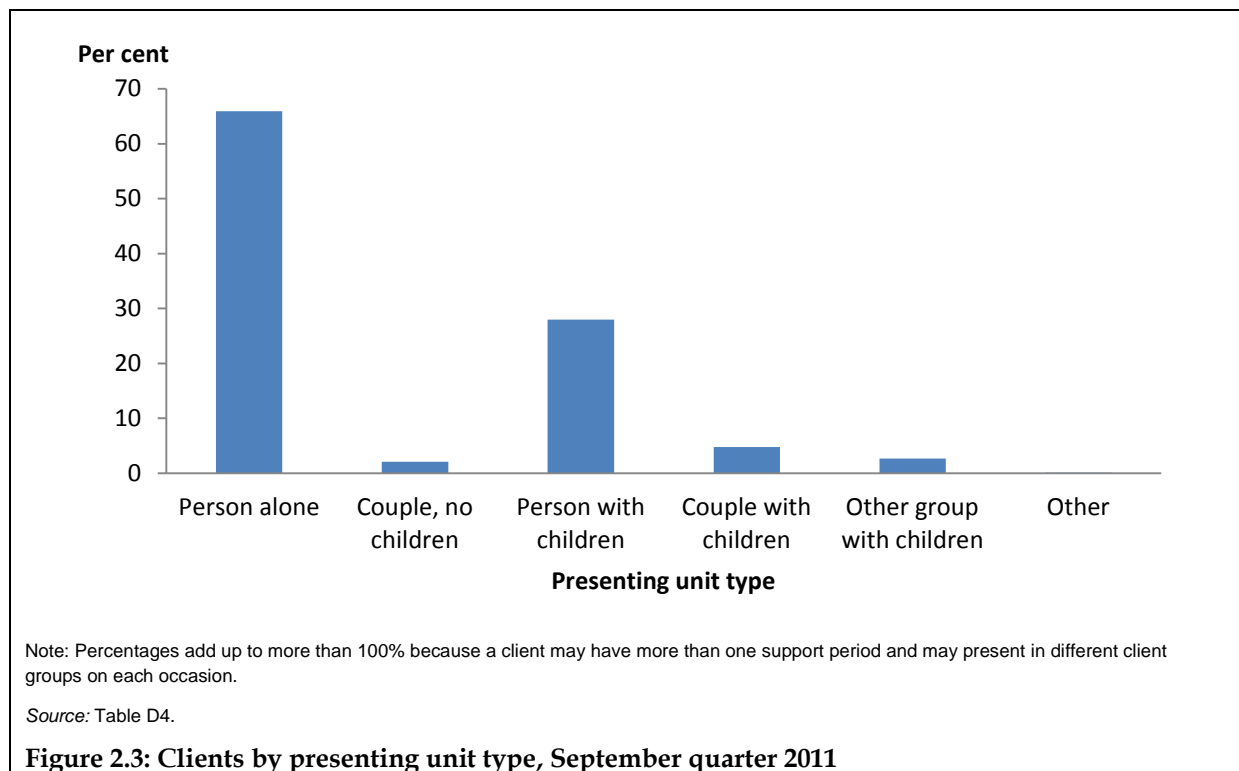
Information on labour force status was missing for 19% of all clients aged 15 years or over.

### **Client groups presenting for assistance**

Most clients presented to specialist homelessness agencies alone (66%). The majority of all other clients presented in a group of two or more people that included children (36%) (Figure 2.3). Note that clients who had more than one support period, and who presented as part of different client group types on each occasion, are counted more than once.

Based on support periods, the average size of client groups (not including people attending alone) was 3.7 people.

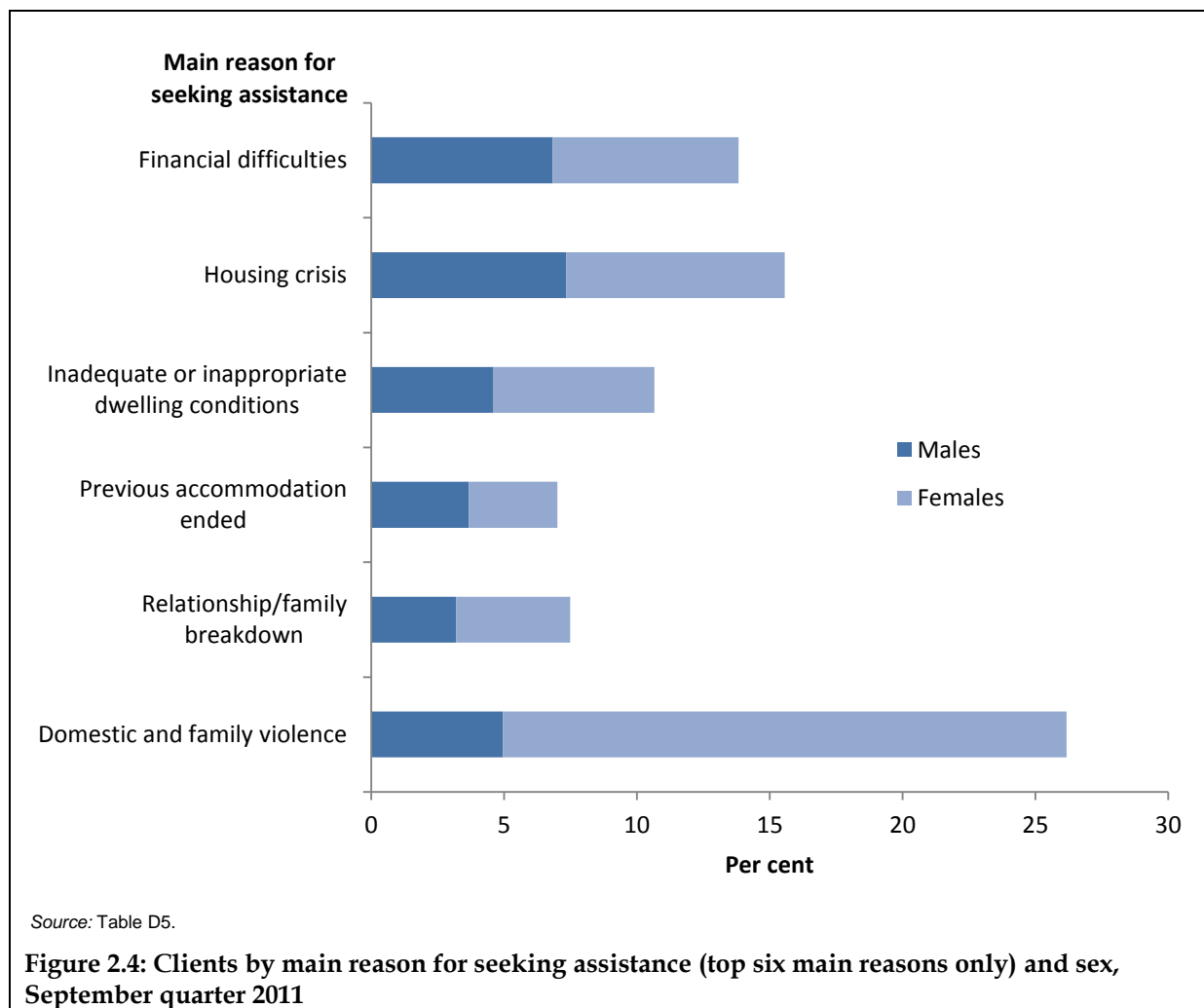




## Why did they seek support?

The most common main reason clients gave for seeking assistance related to domestic and family violence (which was reported by 26% of clients for whom the main reason for seeking assistance was recorded). This was followed by housing crisis (16%) and financial difficulties (14%) (Figure 2.4).

Domestic and family violence was the most common main reason for female clients seeking assistance (36%), followed by housing crisis (14%). For male clients, the most common main reason for seeking assistance was housing crisis (18%) followed by financial difficulties (17%).



## What services were provided?<sup>1</sup>

### Service needs and assistance

Based on support periods where clients' needs for services were reported, the most commonly identified service need for clients was for 'advice/information' (which was identified as a need in 72% of all support periods). This was followed by 'other basic assistance' (51%) and 'advocacy/liaison on behalf of client' (42%). These, and other general assistance and support services, were also the services that were most likely to be provided directly by the homelessness agency (provided by the agency in 96–98% of support periods, although clients could also be referred to another agency for additional services related to this need) (Figure 2.5).

Short-term or emergency accommodation was identified as a need for clients in 32% of support periods, medium-term/transitional housing in 23% of support periods and long-term housing was identified as a need for clients in 26% of support periods. Needs for short-term or emergency accommodation were met directly by the agency in 69% of support

<sup>1</sup> Excludes SA data—see Chapter 1 for more information.

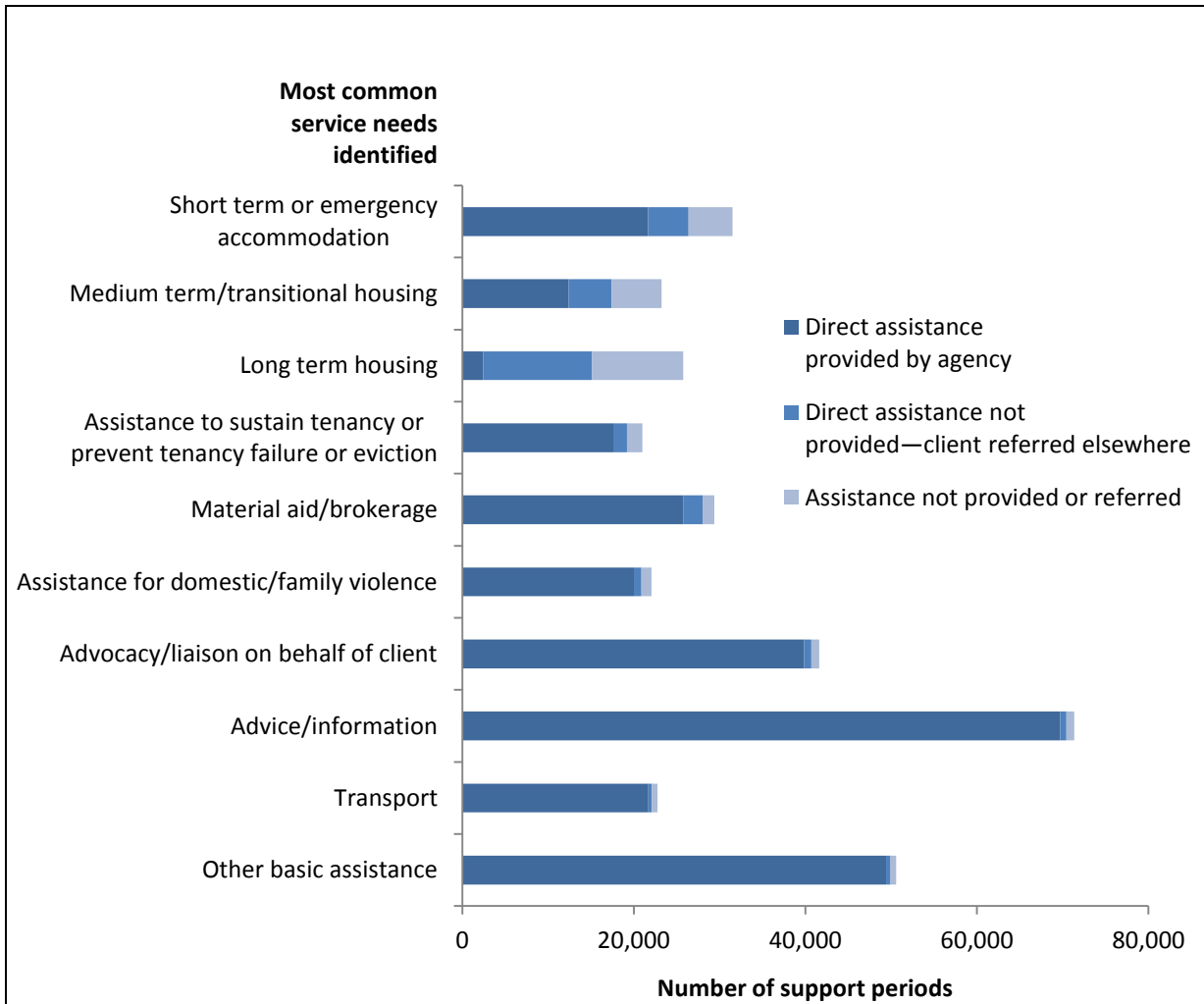
periods where this need was identified; this fell to 53% for medium-term or transitional housing, and to 9% for long-term housing. In nearly half (49%) of the support periods where the client was identified as having a need for long-term housing, they were referred to another agency.

Needs for accommodation was also the area in which clients were most likely to have been neither provided with the service directly by the homelessness agency nor referred to another agency. In particular, in 41% of support periods where the client was identified as needing long-term housing, they were neither provided the service nor referred to another agency. For those with medium-term housing needs, this proportion was 25% and for short-term housing needs, 16%.

'Assistance to sustain a tenancy or prevent tenancy failure or eviction' was identified as a client need in 21% of support periods. Services to meet this need were provided directly by the agency in 84% of these support periods.

In general, there were relatively low levels of need identified for specialised services. The most common need for a specialised service was for 'health/medical services' (identified as a need for clients in 11% of support periods) followed by 'specialist counselling services' (7%), 'financial advice and counselling', and 'mental health services' (both 6%). While the need for specialised services was relatively low (compared with the need for general assistance and accommodation services), on average across all the specialised service categories:

- clients in 26% of support periods did not receive any services to meet the need directly from the homelessness agency, and were referred to other organisations only, and
- clients in 15% of support periods where specialised service needs were identified were neither provided with the relevant service by the homelessness agency nor referred to another agency for services.



**Notes:**

1. Excludes SA data—see Chapter 1 for more information.
2. Clients in support periods who received direct assistance from the agency in relation to a service need may also have been referred to another agency for further assistance. Table D6 provides information on the extent to which clients were provided with assistance and referred in relation to a need for a service.

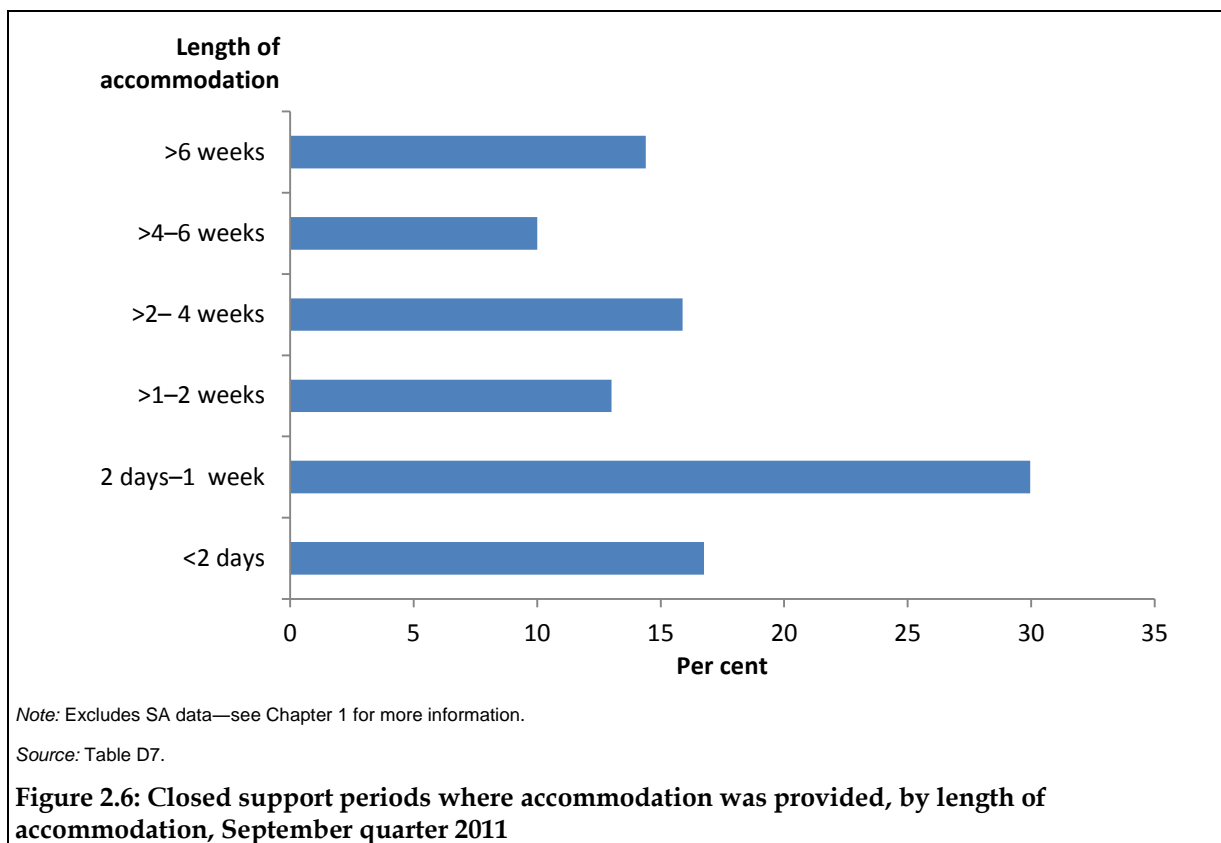
Source: Table D6.

**Figure 2.5: Support periods, by most common service needs identified (top 10 needs only) and service provision status, September quarter 2011**

**Accommodation**

Accommodation was provided in 16% of all support periods in the September quarter 2011.

For closed support periods where accommodation was provided (27% of closed support periods), clients were most often accommodated for two days to a week (30%), with a further 17% accommodated for less than two days (Figure 2.6). One-quarter of support periods (25%) involved more than four weeks accommodation.



## Client outcomes<sup>2</sup>

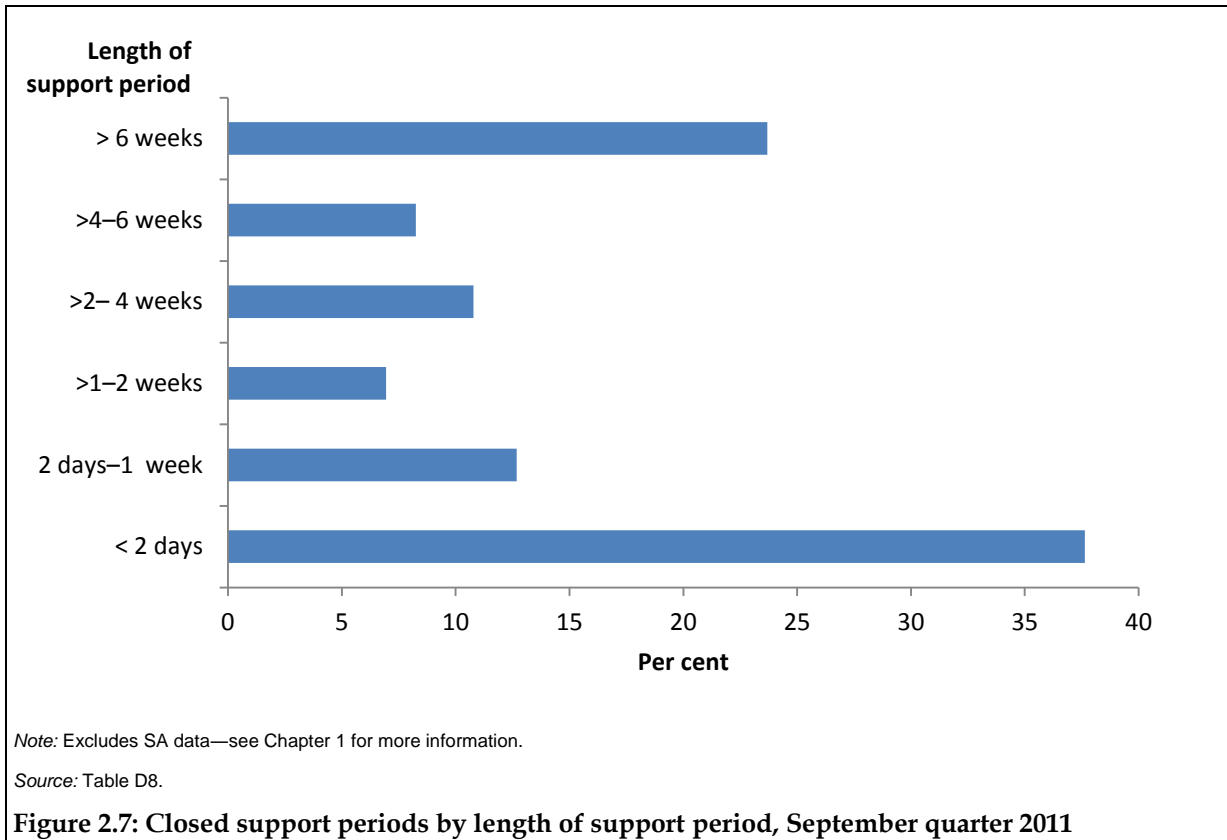
### Length of support periods

For support periods that closed in the September quarter:

- 38% were less than two days
- 13% were between two days and one week
- 24% were greater than six weeks (Figure 2.7).

Thirty-nine per cent of support periods were still ongoing at the end of the quarter.

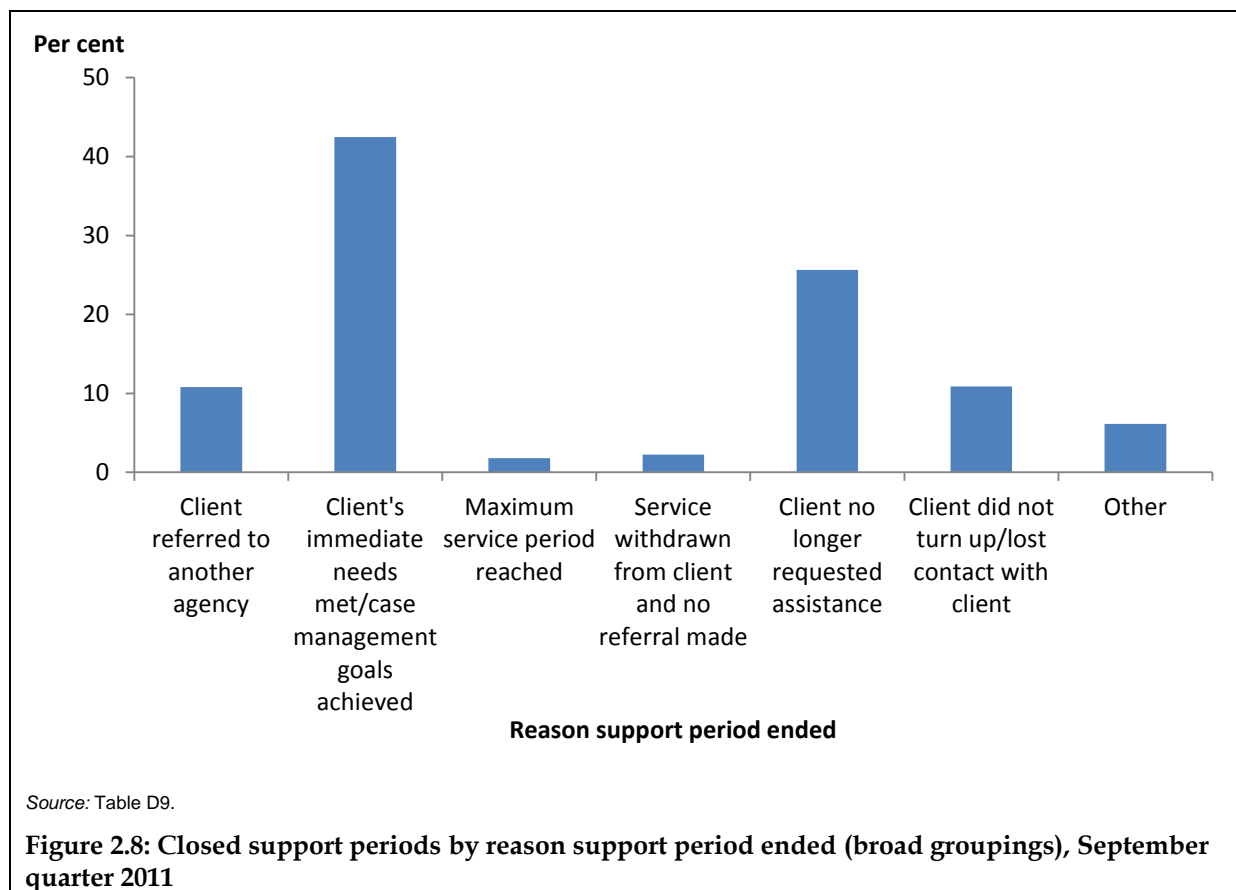
<sup>2</sup> Excludes SA data—see Chapter 1 for more information.



### Why did support end?

The most common reason support periods ended in the September quarter 2011 was that the client’s immediate needs were met, or their case management goals were achieved (43%) (Figure 2.8).

Other reasons were that the client no longer requested assistance (26%) or the client was referred to another agency (11%) —either another specialist homelessness service or another mainstream agency.



### To what extent were case management goals achieved?

Most of the clients who were reported to have a case management plan completed up to half of their case management goals and a further 15% completed all of their goals. For 9% of clients the case management plan goal status was unknown.

More than half (51%) of clients did not have a case management plan. The most common reasons were that the service episode was too short (47%) or that the client was part of another person's case management plan (30%).

### Changes in housing situation

Information is collected in the SHSC about a client's housing situation in terms of their dwelling type and their tenure (that is, their legal right to occupy a dwelling, which can be relevant to the stability of accommodation options).

This information is collected for several different points in time for SHSC clients: a week before the client presents to the homelessness agency, when they present to the agency and begin receiving support, at the end of each collection month (if the support period is ongoing), and at the end of the support period. Information presented in this section is based on closed support periods only and draws on information about clients' housing situations at the time they begin receiving support from the homelessness agency and at the end of the support period only.

Based on analysis of closed support periods over the September quarter 2011, some modest improvements over the quarter were evident for clients as a whole in relation to dwelling type:

- Before and at the end of support, most clients were living in a house, townhouse, or flat (65% at the beginning of support; 66% at the end of the support period).
- There was a small decrease in the proportion of closed support periods where clients had no dwelling, were living in a motor car or in an improvised dwelling (10% at the beginning of support; 7% at the end of the support period).
- Similarly, there was a small increase in the proportion of support periods where clients were living in emergency accommodation (8% at the beginning of support; 11% at the end of the support period) (Table D10).

In relation to the type of tenure clients held over their accommodation (for closed support periods only):

- Before and at the end of support, the most common type of tenure for clients was renting in private housing (20% both at the beginning and at the end of support).
- There was a small increase in the proportion of clients renting in social (public, community or transitional) housing (14% at the beginning of support; 17% at the end of the support period).
- Slightly fewer clients reported having no tenure at the end of support (22% when presenting for support and 19% after receiving support) (Table D11).

### **Changes in employment**

Based on analysis of closed support periods where valid information about a client's labour force status was received, the employment situation of all clients aged over 15 does not appear to have changed noticeably after support. For all employment types (employed, unemployed, and not in the labour force), the greatest change after support is a decrease of one percentage point in closed support periods where clients are unemployed.

For clients where a need for assistance with employment or training was identified, there were more noticeable outcomes for clients: there was a decrease of 6 percentage points in unemployment after support (55% of closed support periods when presenting for support and 49% after support).



## 3 Indigenous clients

### Identification of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

In the SHSC, clients were counted as Indigenous if in any support period during the first quarter, they identified as being of:

- Aboriginal, but not Torres Strait Islander origin
- Torres Strait Islander, but not Aboriginal origin
- both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander origin.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are significantly over-represented among Australia's homeless population with 15,649 SHSC clients identified as being of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander origin. This represented 19% of all SHSC clients, whereas it is estimated Indigenous Australians represent around 2.5% of the total Australian population (ABS 2009).

Among clients who were identified as being Indigenous, 93% identified as being of Aboriginal but not Torres Strait Islander origin, 4% identified as being Torres Strait Islander but not Aboriginal origin, and 3% identified as being of both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander origin.

### Key facts

#### Demographics

- Indigenous clients of specialist homelessness services were more likely to be female than male (62% female; 38% male). This was slightly different to the breakdown for non-Indigenous clients where 58% were female and 42% male.
- The Indigenous client group is relatively young compared with non-Indigenous clients; 39% of Indigenous clients were aged under 18 compared with 29% of non-Indigenous clients (Figure 3.1).

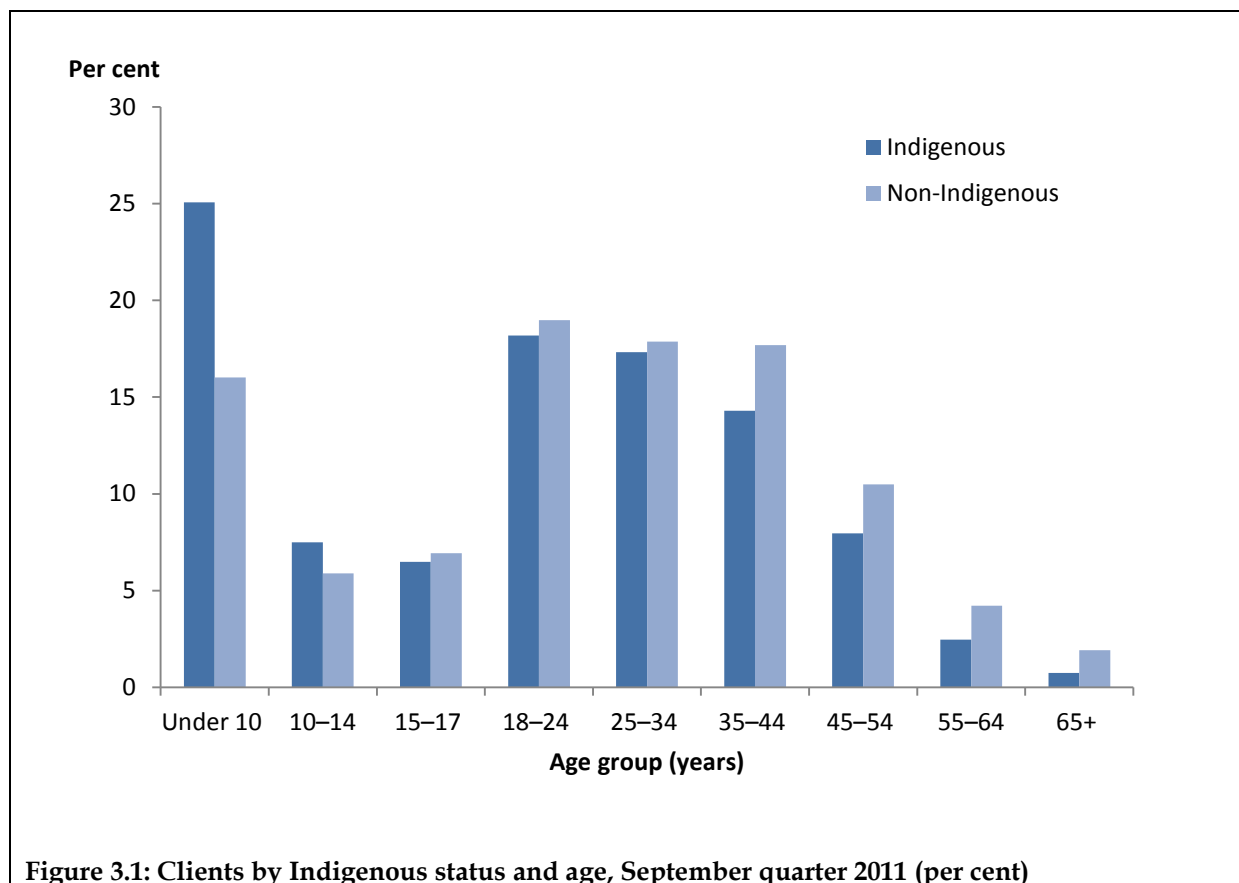


Figure 3.1: Clients by Indigenous status and age, September quarter 2011 (per cent)

### Main reason for seeking assistance

- The most common reason for seeking assistance among Indigenous clients was domestic and family violence (25%). Of those reporting domestic and family violence as the main reason, 79% were females of any age and 40% of all clients in this group were children.
- Other commonly reported reasons for seeking assistance included: inadequate or inappropriate dwelling conditions (15%), housing crisis (14%), financial difficulties (14%), relationship/family breakdown (6%) and previous accommodation ended (6%).

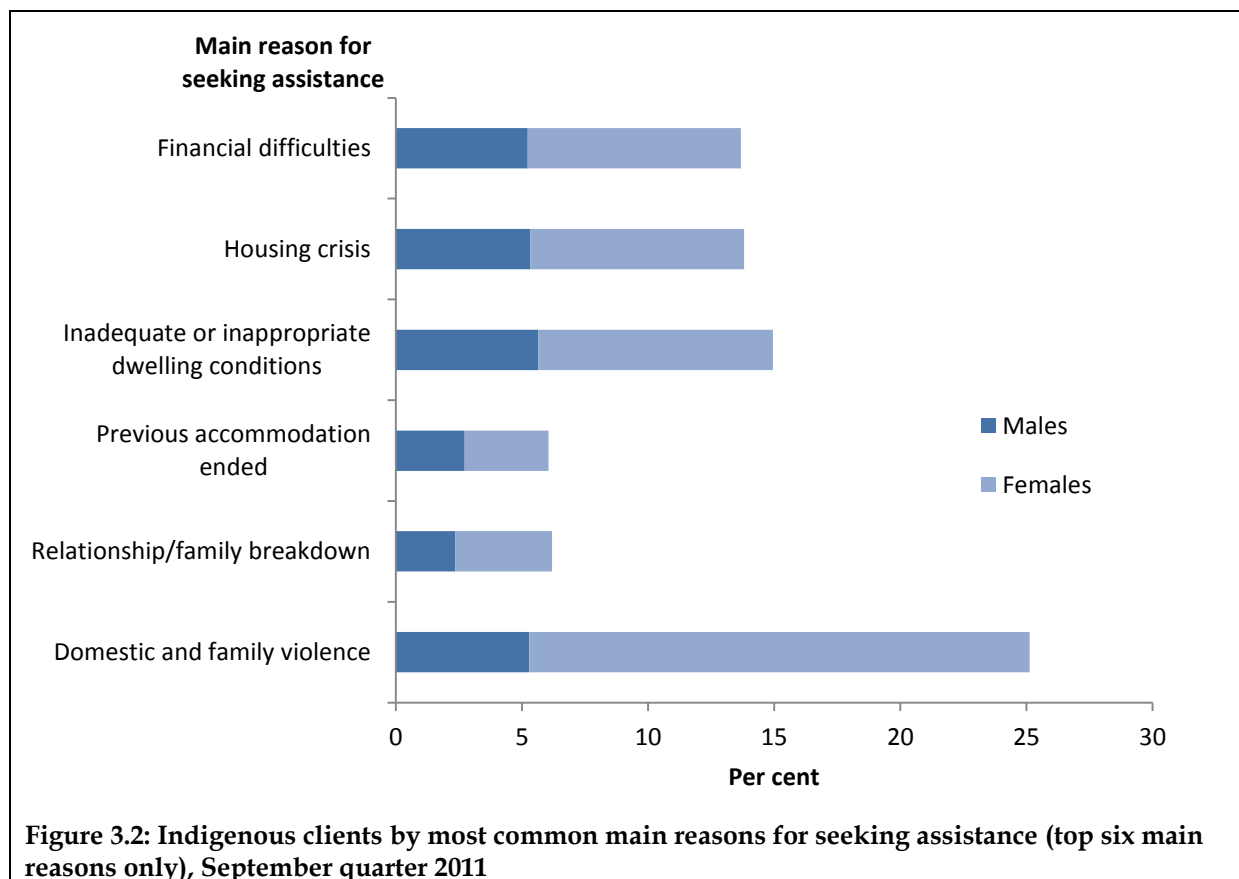


Figure 3.2: Indigenous clients by most common main reasons for seeking assistance (top six main reasons only), September quarter 2011

### Services received

- 46% of Indigenous clients received accommodation.
- For both Indigenous males and females, the distribution of accommodation periods was very similar.
- 15% of Indigenous clients who received accommodation were provided with accommodation for up to one week; around 17% had accommodation for more than six weeks.
- 53% of Indigenous clients had no case management plan<sup>3</sup>.

### Outcomes<sup>3</sup>

- 51% of Indigenous clients who had a case management plan achieved some or all of their case management goals.
- For Indigenous clients whose support periods had ended (and where valid data were available both at the beginning and end of support):
  - 67% were living in a house/townhouse/flat before support; this increased to 70% after support.
  - 9% were in emergency accommodation before support; this increased to 11% after support.

<sup>3</sup> Excludes SA data—see Chapter 1 for more information.

- 8% had no dwelling before support; this decreased to 5% after support.
- By the end of the support period, the proportion of Indigenous clients with no tenure had decreased by 4 percentage points, from 25% to 21%.

## 4 Children

### Methods used to count children

SHSC clients 0–17 years old are considered to be children for the purpose of this report.

Age is defined as age of the client on the start date of their first support period in the reporting period or the first date of the reporting period, whichever is the latter. As age is calculated at the beginning of the support period or the start of the reporting period, all young people who turned 18 during the reporting period are counted as children.

In the September quarter 2011, an estimated 28,755 children were reported to be clients by the agencies that participated in the collection (adjusted for non-response; 25,086 clients using unweighted data). Children made up 31% of all clients recorded. All remaining data in this chapter is based on raw data that is not adjusted for non-response.

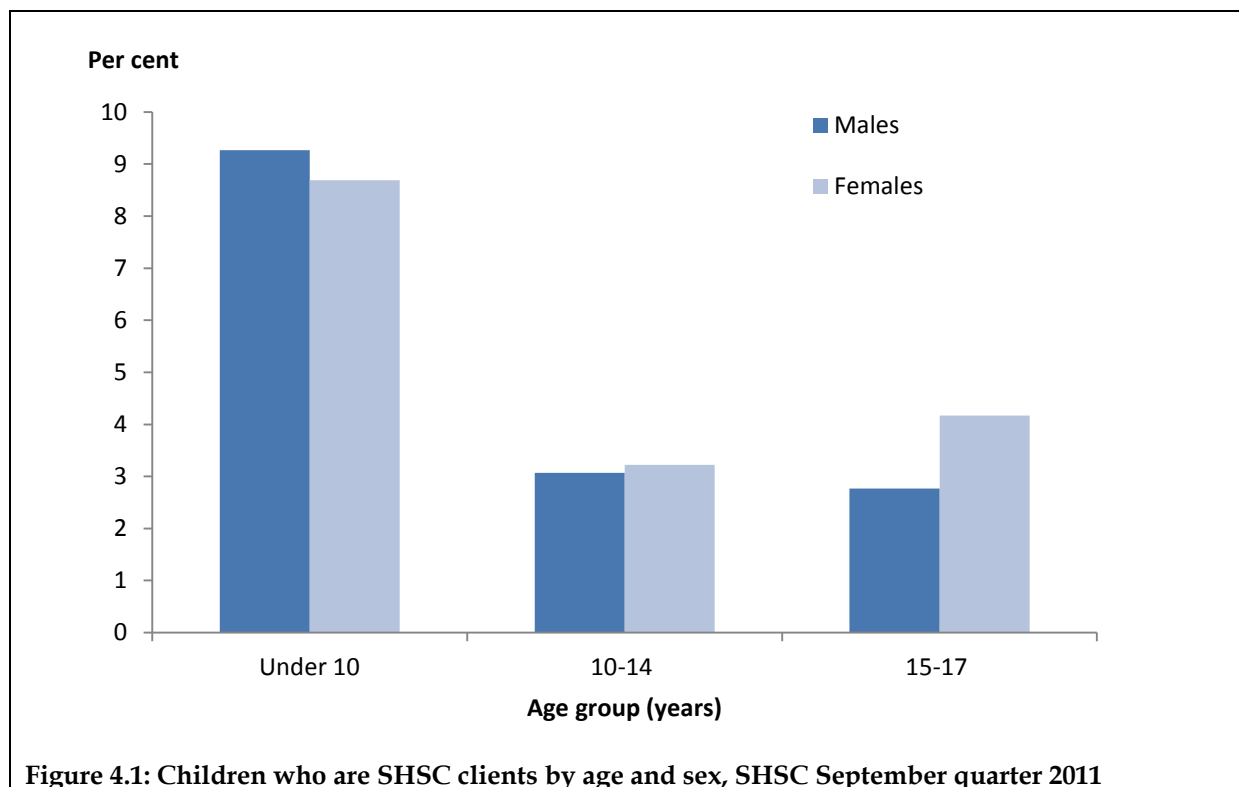
SHSC collects detailed information about children as they are considered clients in their own right when they receive a service from a homelessness agency. The same information is recorded for adults and children.

This differs from the approach taken in the SAAP NDC where children were recorded as accompanying a parent who was a client, and less information was collected. Further detail can be found in Appendix A.

### Key facts

#### Demographics

- Most child clients were under 10 years old—58% of children (or 18% of all clients). Twenty per cent of child clients were aged 10–14 and 22% were aged 15–17.
- The proportion of girls increased with age: 48% in the 0–10 year age group were girls, 51% in the 10–14 year group and 60% in the 15–17 year group (Figure 4.1).
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were over-represented among SHSC clients, particularly among children aged less than 10. The proportion of Indigenous children to all children was 28% (31% for children under 10) despite making up only 5% percent of all Australian children (AIHW Population Database).
- Most children (59%) attended the homelessness agency as part of a client group described as a 'person with child(ren)', and a further 8% attended as part of group described as a 'couple with child(ren)'. One-third of all children (32%) attended the homelessness agency as a 'person alone'.



### Main reason for seeking assistance

The most common main reason for child clients seeking assistance was domestic and family violence (31%), followed by housing crisis (14%), relationship/family breakdown (10%), and inadequate or inappropriate dwelling conditions (9%). A main reason for seeking assistance was not specified for 32% of children.

### Services received

- 47% of all children in the SHSC received accommodation.
- Almost one-quarter (24%) of children were accommodated for more than six weeks. The distribution for accommodation provided of any length for both males and females was very similar.
- In 24% of episodes, children aged 7-17 needed educational assistance or school liaison. Of those, 91% had this service provided or referred<sup>4</sup>.
- 43% of all children had a case management plan compared with 52% for adult clients<sup>4</sup>.

### Outcomes<sup>4</sup>

For all children whose support period had ended (and where valid data were available both at the beginning and end of support):

- 77% were living in a house/townhouse/flat at the time they presented, and by the end of the support period this proportion had increased to 79%.

<sup>4</sup> Excludes SA data—see Chapter 1 for more information.

- 10% were in emergency accommodation at the time they presented (13% at the end of the support period).
- The proportion of children with no tenure had decreased from 23% to 20%.
- Of all children with a case management plan, 51% achieved half or more of all goals. This was similar to the outcomes for all clients (52%).

## 5 People escaping domestic and family violence

### Methods used to count people experiencing/escaping domestic and family violence

For the purposes of this report, SHSC clients were counted as experiencing domestic and family violence if, in any support period during the first quarter:

- domestic and family violence was a reason they sought assistance from a homelessness agency, or
- during their support period they required domestic or family violence assistance.

The SHSC reports on clients who are victims of domestic and family violence. Currently, perpetrators of domestic and family violence who may also be receiving assistance from a homelessness agency are not identified in the SHSC.

Domestic and family violence is a major risk factor for homelessness (Australian Government 2008). In the September quarter 2011, the agencies that participated in SHSC reported 26,987 clients escaping domestic and family violence. This group accounted for 34% of all clients of specialist homelessness services.

### Key facts

#### Demographics

- People escaping domestic and family violence (including children) were predominantly female (77%)—and 14% of all females escaping domestic and family violence were aged under 10. The majority of males reported as escaping domestic and family violence were children, with nearly half aged under 10 years (Figure 5.1).
- Children under 10 make up 22% of those escaping domestic and family violence.
- 22% of clients escaping domestic and family violence were Indigenous.



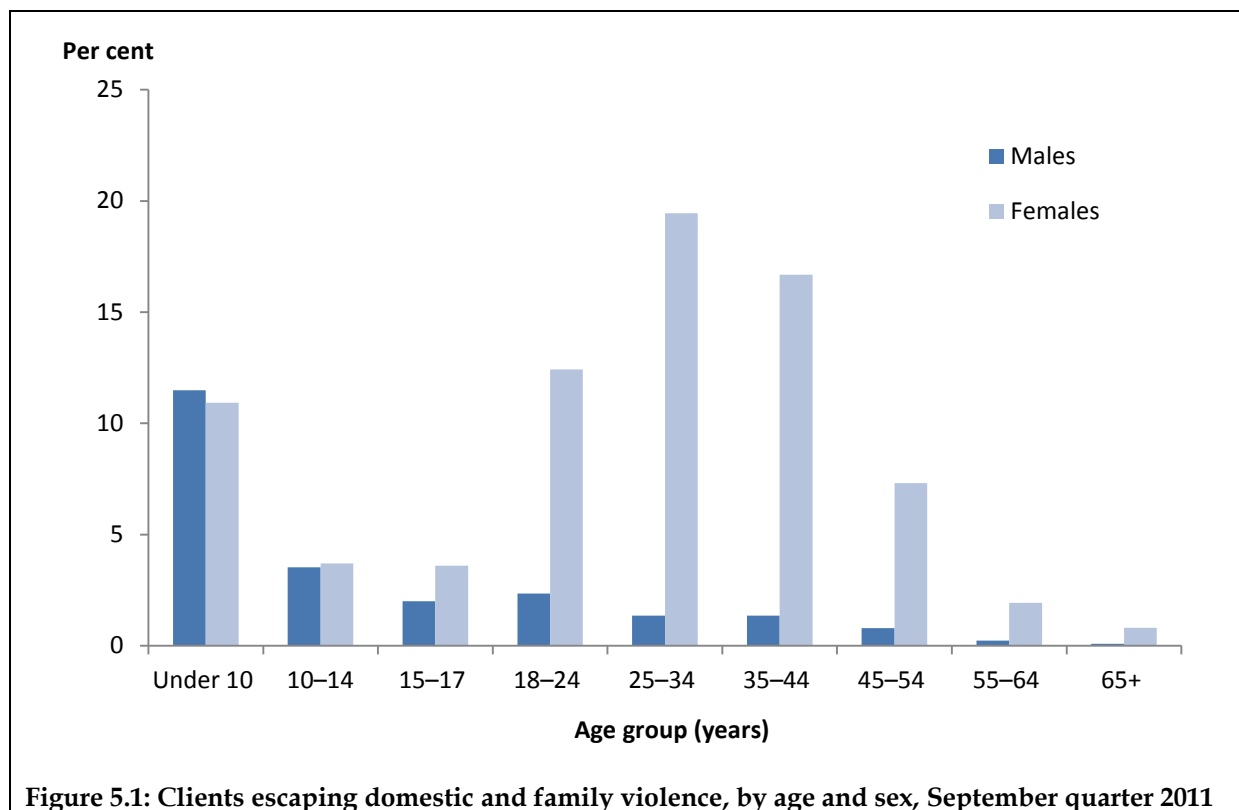


Figure 5.1: Clients escaping domestic and family violence, by age and sex, September quarter 2011

### Reasons for seeking assistance

- Information on all reasons given by clients for seeking assistance is recorded by homelessness agencies: 94% of clients escaping domestic and family violence and who recorded any reasons for seeking assistance, reported this as a reason for seeking assistance. Six per cent of those escaping domestic and family violence did not report it as a reason at all for seeking homelessness services yet did require assistance for domestic and family violence (see box above for information on how this population group was identified).
- 74% of people escaping domestic and family violence who provided information on their main reason for seeking assistance, reported domestic and family violence as the main reason. Information on the main reason for seeking assistance was missing for 11% of clients escaping domestic and family violence.
- Other than domestic and family violence, the most reported main reason for seeking assistance for this population was housing crisis (7%) followed by relationship/family breakdown (6%).

### Services received

- 43% of those escaping domestic and family violence received accommodation.
- 19% of clients escaping domestic and family violence received accommodation for more than six weeks. However, the relative distribution of clients across the various accommodation length periods was consistent with that of all SHSC clients.
- Nearly half of all clients escaping domestic and family violence had no case management plan (47%). The most common reason for not having a case management plan was

because the service episode was too short (43%) followed by situations where a client forms part of another person's case management plan (35%)<sup>5</sup>.

## **Outcomes<sup>5</sup>**

- 38% of people escaping domestic and family violence had half or more of their case management goals achieved, which was seven percentage points higher than for all clients.
- For clients whose support period related to domestic and family violence had ended (and where valid data was available both at the beginning and end of support):
  - 76% were living in a house/townhouse/flat at the time they presented; by the end of the support period this proportion had increased to 78%.
  - The proportion living in an 'improvised building/dwelling' or 'no dwelling/street/park/in the open' (non-conventional accommodation) decreased from 4% before support to 2% after support.
  - 10% were in emergency accommodation before support, and 12% at the end of the support.
  - The proportion with no tenure decreased from 17% before support to 14% after support.

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<sup>5</sup> Excludes SA data—see Chapter 1 for more information.

## 6 People experiencing primary homelessness

### Methods used to count people experiencing primary homelessness

SHSC clients were counted as experiencing primary homelessness if, in the month before, or at any time during, any support period in the first quarter they reported:

- sleeping rough, or
- living in non-conventional accommodation.

*Or*

In the week before, or when presenting to a homelessness agency their type of residence was recorded as being in a tent, improvised dwelling, motor vehicle, or no dwelling.

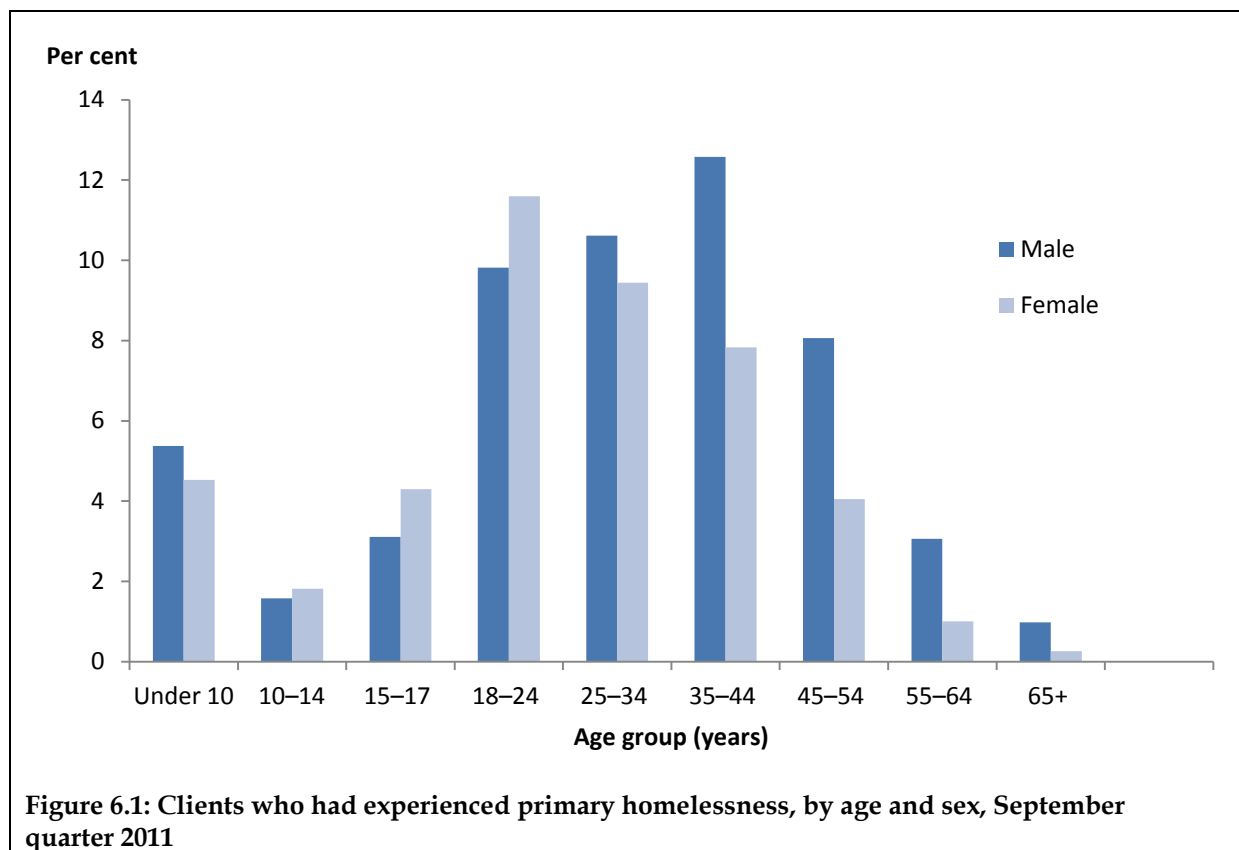
Living on the street or sleeping in rough conditions are often the picture of homelessness that many people think of. Those experiencing primary homelessness lack the basic amenities and safety offered by conventional accommodation and are therefore in vulnerable situations.

In the September quarter 2011, agencies participating in the collection reported that 15,012 clients had experienced primary homelessness. These clients made up 19% of all clients recorded.

### Key facts

#### Demographics

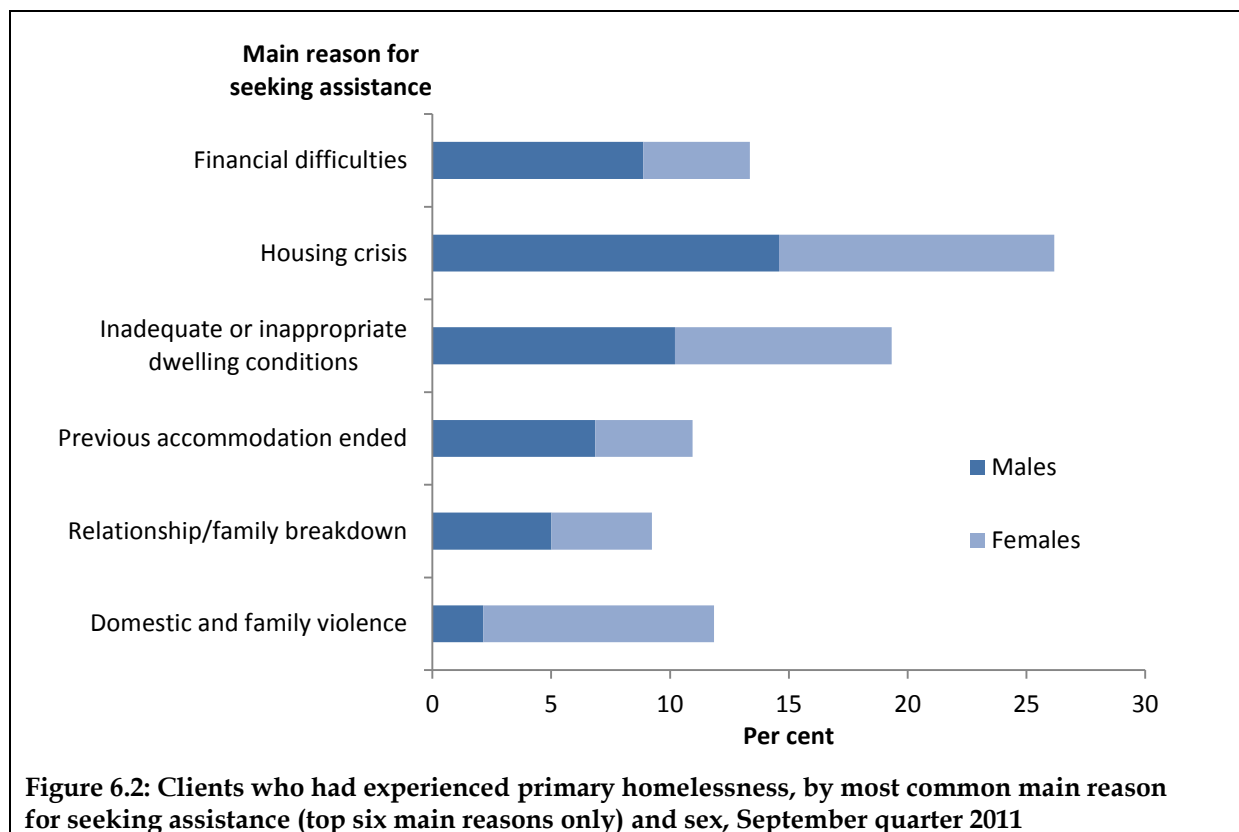
- Males represented 55% and females 45% of people who had experienced primary homelessness. The proportion of males was considerably higher (14 percentage points) than for all clients.
- Children accounted for 21% of clients who experienced primary homelessness (Figure 6.1).
- Approximately 25% of people who experienced primary homelessness were Indigenous.



### Main reason for seeking assistance

Among those whose main reason for seeking assistance was specified, 26% of clients who had experienced primary homelessness reported housing crisis as their main reason for seeking assistance. Other reasons for seeking assistance were inadequate or inappropriate dwelling conditions (19%) and financial difficulties (13%).

Housing crisis was the most common reason for seeking assistance for both males and females who had experienced primary homelessness (Figure 6.2) but females were much more likely to seek assistance for domestic and family violence than males (22% of females and 4% of males). Information on main reason for seeking assistance was missing for 5% of clients who had experienced primary homelessness.



### Services received

- Homelessness agencies provided accommodation to 53% of clients who had experienced primary homelessness.
- Almost one-quarter were accommodated for more than four weeks.
- 46% of people who had experienced primary homelessness had a case management plan (where this information was recorded)<sup>6</sup>.

### Outcomes<sup>6</sup>

- Of those who had experienced primary homelessness, 16% had all their case management goals met while 11% had none of their goals met.
- For those clients whose support periods had ended (and where valid data was available both at the beginning and end of support):
  - Clients were in a primary homelessness situation before support in one-third of support periods (32%). This decreased to 23% after support.
  - The proportion of support periods where a client was in emergency accommodation rose from 11% before support to 18% after support.
  - Clients were renting, including paying rent in emergency accommodation, in 34% of support periods before support, rising to 44% after support.

<sup>6</sup> Excludes SA data—see Chapter 1 for more information.

## 7 People leaving care and custodial settings

### **Methods used to count people leaving care and custodial settings**

#### **Clients leaving a care setting**

SHSC clients were counted as leaving care settings if, in their first support period:

- their reason for seeking assistance was a transition from other care arrangements, or
- their type of residence when presenting to the homelessness agency or in the week before was:
  - hospital (excluding psychiatric)
  - psychiatric hospital or unit
  - disability support
  - rehabilitation
  - aged care facility.

#### **Clients leaving a custodial setting**

SHSC clients were counted as leaving a custodial setting if, in their first support period:

- their reason for seeking assistance was a transition from custodial arrangements, or
- their type of residence when presenting to the homelessness agency or in the week before was:
  - adult correctional facility
  - youth or juvenile justice detention centre
  - immigration detention centre.

Children aged under 10 have been excluded from this group because of concerns about the quality of the data.

#### **Clients with a care or protection order**

SHSC clients were counted as having a care or protection order if, in their first support period:

- their reason for seeking assistance was a transition from foster care/child safety residential placements, or
- they had a care or protection order in the week before, or when presenting to the homelessness agency and their care arrangements were not living with parents or 'other living arrangements'.

Clients living with parents or in 'other living arrangements' have been excluded from this group as there are issues with the quality of the data.

For all sub-groups, data has been derived based on the client's first support period in this quarter only. Where clients have had more than one support period in the quarter and they begin subsequent support periods after leaving care and custodial settings they have not been counted in this target group.

In the September quarter 2011, agencies participating in the SHSC reported 4,348 clients leaving care and custodial settings. Clients leaving care and custodial settings made up 5% of all clients recorded. While this group of clients is relatively small compared to the overall

SHSC client group it is a group of particular policy interest as people can be highly vulnerable to homelessness when leaving care and custodial settings. Support at these transition points can prevent homelessness (Australian Government 2008).

Of this group of clients receiving assistance from homelessness agencies after leaving a care or custodial setting:

- 40% became clients after leaving a care setting such as a hospital,
- 33% after leaving a custodial setting such as an adult correctional facility, and
- 27% are young people who had a care or protection order when they became clients.

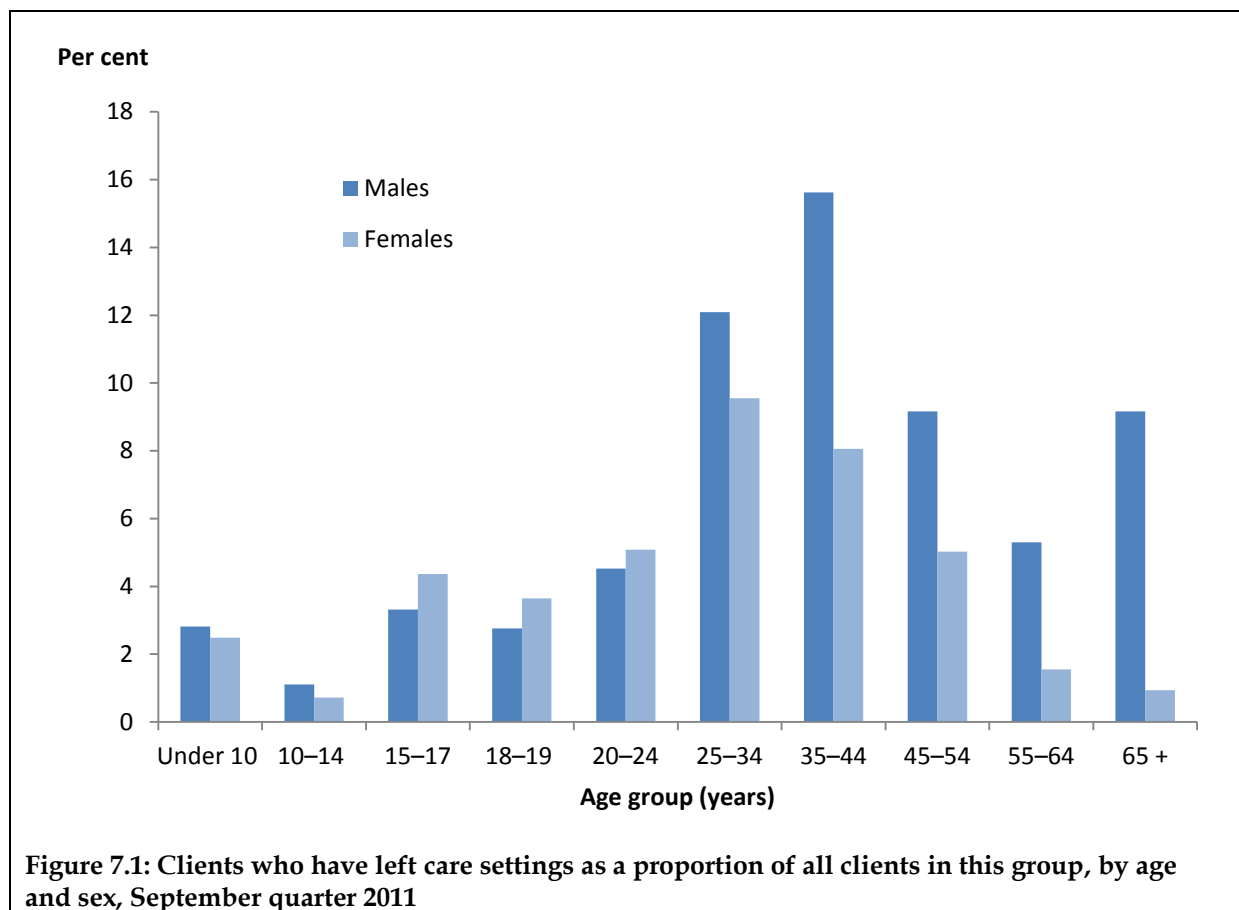
Some clients belong to more than one of these groups.

## **Key facts**

### **Demographics**

#### **Clients leaving a care setting**

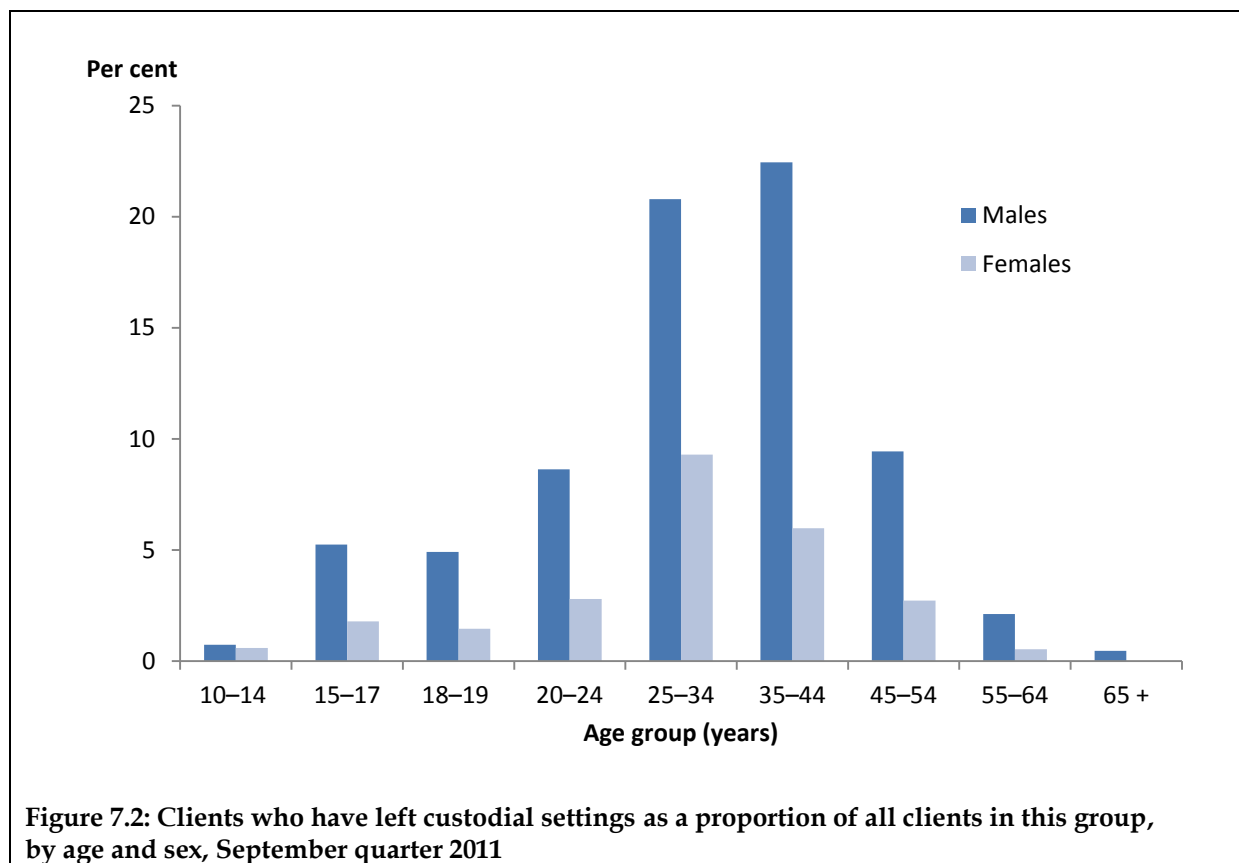
- There were more male clients leaving a care setting than female clients (59% compared to 41%).
- Almost half (45%) of clients leaving care settings were aged 25–44 years.
- People aged 25–34 and 35–44 were the two most common age groups for both male and female clients leaving care settings. Female clients aged 25–34 and 35–44 made up 18% of this group and male clients in these age groupings made up 28% (Figure 7.1).
- 19% of clients leaving care settings were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.



### Clients leaving a custodial setting

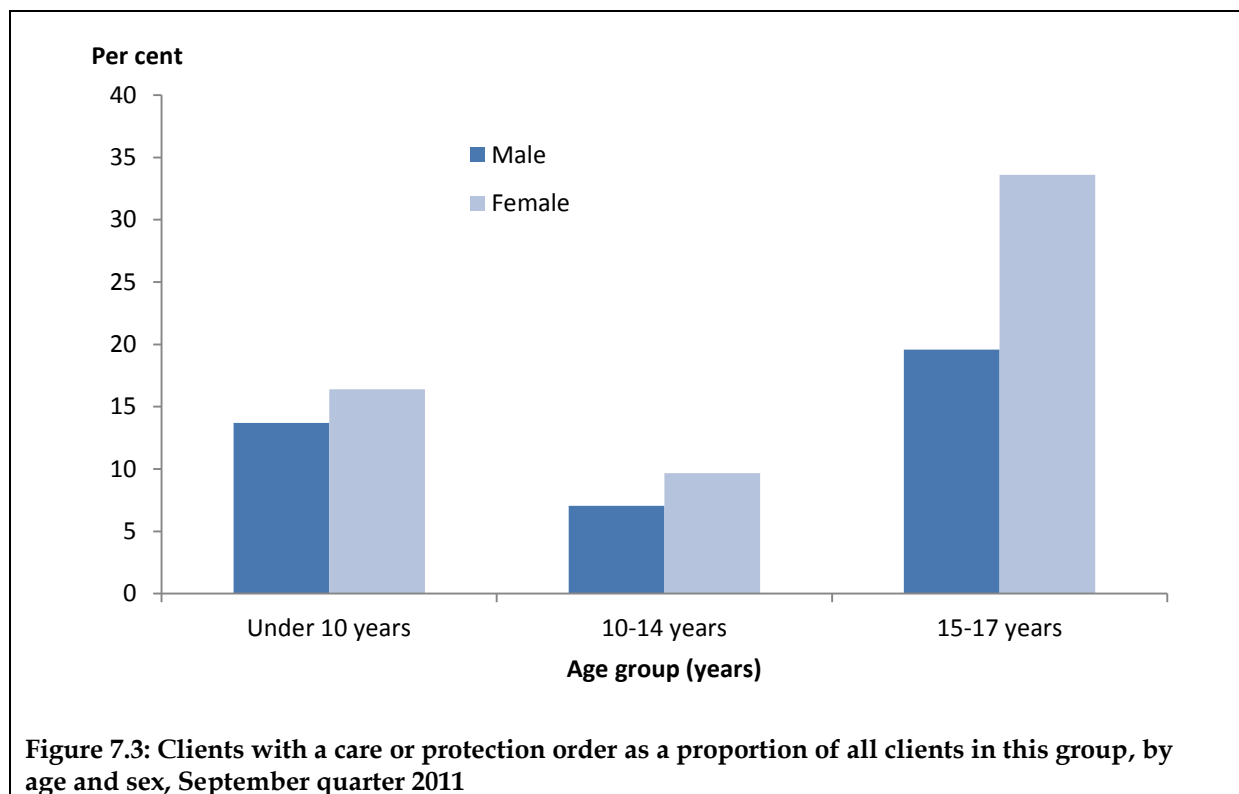
- There are more male clients than female clients seeking assistance after exiting from custodial settings (75% male; 25% female).
- Of those exiting from a custodial setting the most common age group was 25-34 (30%) closely followed by the 35-44 age group (28%). Twenty-six per cent of all clients in this group were aged under 25 years.
- The most common age group for male clients was 35-44 years (who comprised 21% of all clients in this group). For females the most common age group was 25-34 years (9% of all clients in this group) (Figure 7.2).
- One-quarter (25%) of clients leaving custodial settings were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.





#### Clients with a care or protection order

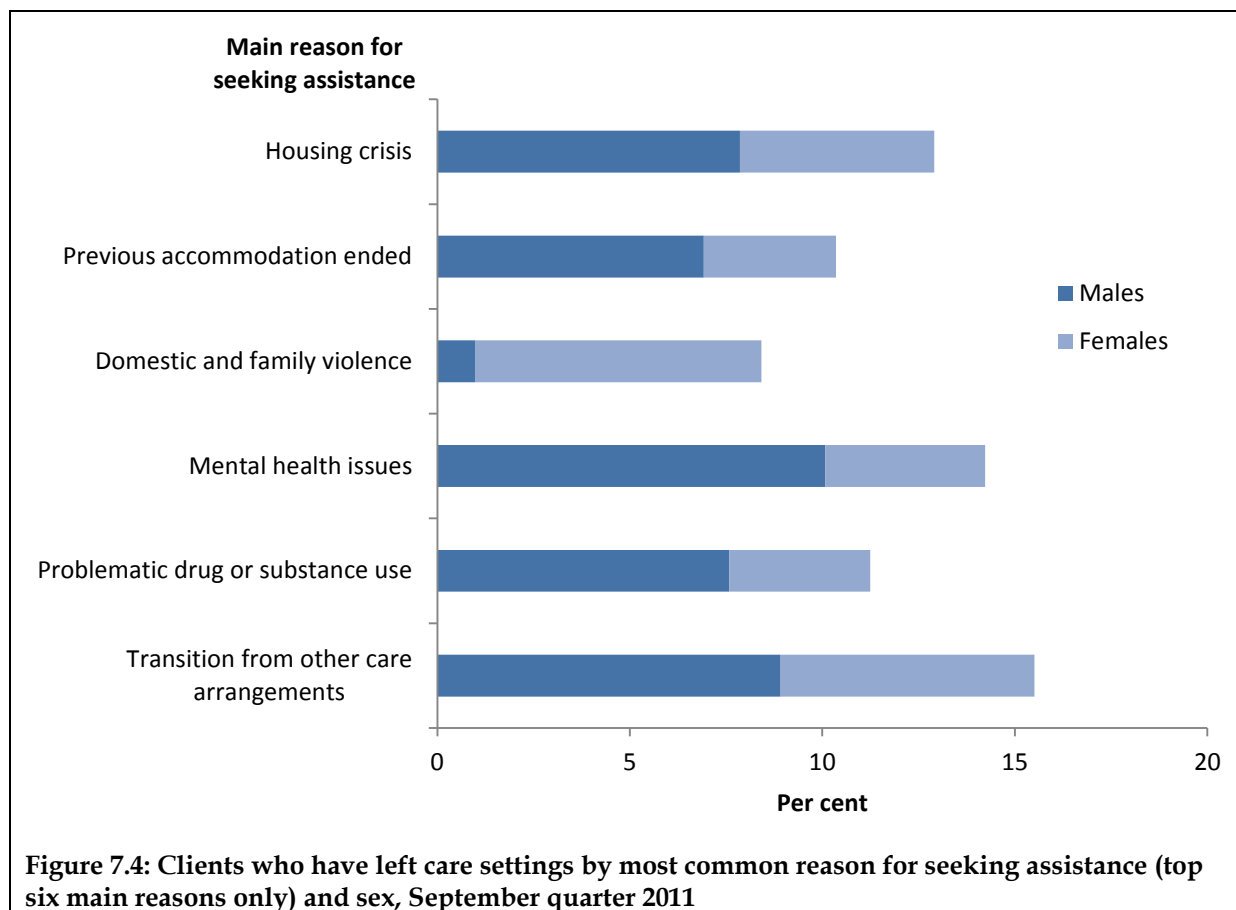
- There were more female clients with a care or protection order than male clients (60% female; 40% male).
- Over half (53%) of clients with a care or protection order are aged 15-17 and about one-third (30%) are aged under 10 (Figure 7.3).
- Over one-third (37%) of clients with a care or protection order were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.



## Main reason for seeking assistance

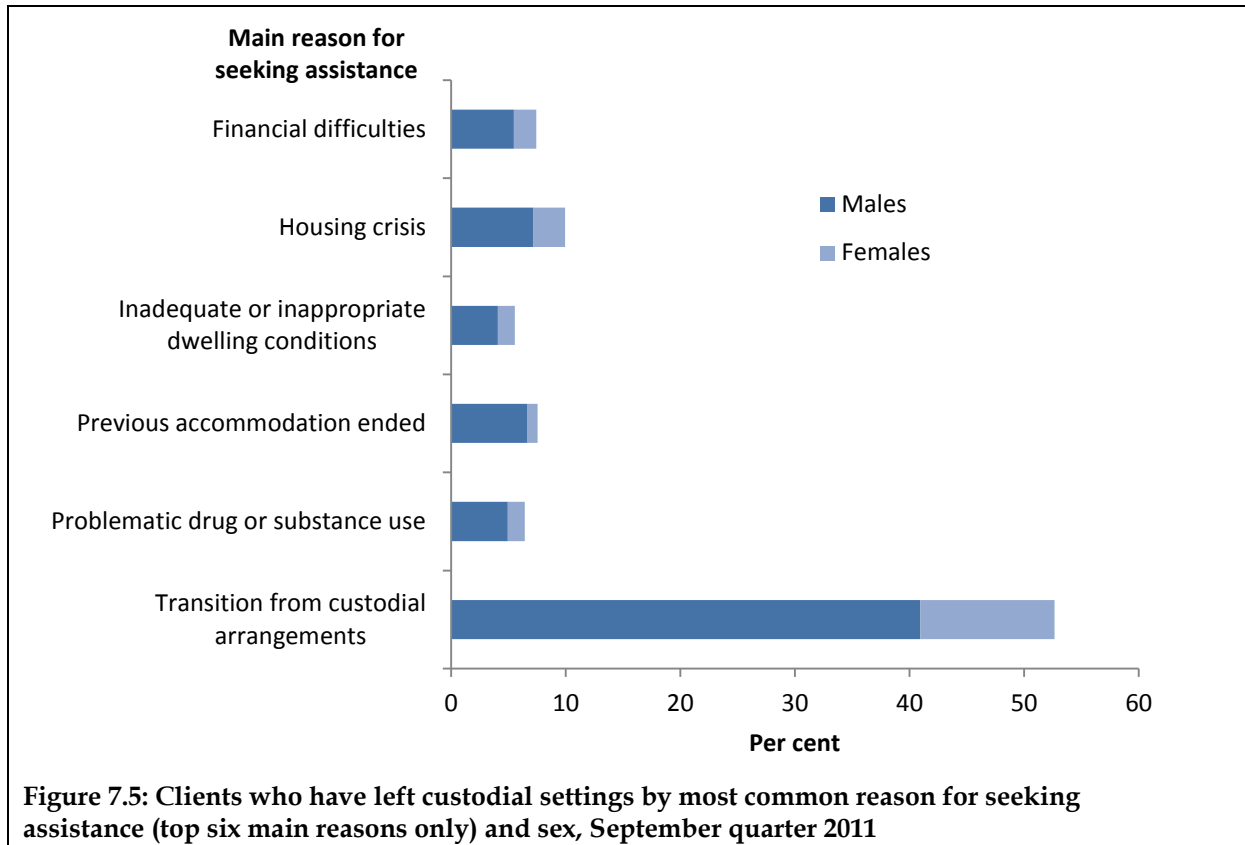
### Clients leaving a care setting

- Besides seeking assistance with the ‘transition from other care arrangements’ (which was the main reason for 16% of clients in this group), the most common reason for seeking assistance was mental health issues (14%), followed by housing crisis (13%) and problematic drug or substance use (11%) (Figure 7.4).
- Female clients reported domestic and family violence as the most common reason for seeking assistance (18%), but only 2% of male clients reported this as a main reason.



### Clients leaving a custodial setting

- Besides seeking assistance with the 'transition from custodial arrangements' (which was the main reason for most clients in this group—53%), the most common reason for seeking assistance was housing crisis (10%), followed by previous accommodation ended (8%) and financial difficulties (7%) (Figure 7.5).
- For male clients the most common reason for seeking assistance, after 'transition from custodial arrangements' (which was recorded as the main reason for 55% of males), was housing crisis (10%) followed by previous accommodation ended (9%).
- Female clients reported domestic and family violence and housing crisis (both 11%) as the most common reasons for seeking assistance after transition from custodial arrangements (recorded as the main reason for 47% of females).



**Clients with a care or protection order**

- The most common reasons for seeking assistance among children with a care or protection order was relationship/family breakdown and domestic and family violence (both 19%) followed by transition from foster care/child safety residential placements (10%) and time out from family/other situation (9%) (Figure 7.6).
- The two most common reasons for seeking assistance were the same for both males and females in this group: domestic and family violence was reported by 17% of males and 20% of females, while relationship/family breakdown was reported by 15% of males and 22% of females.

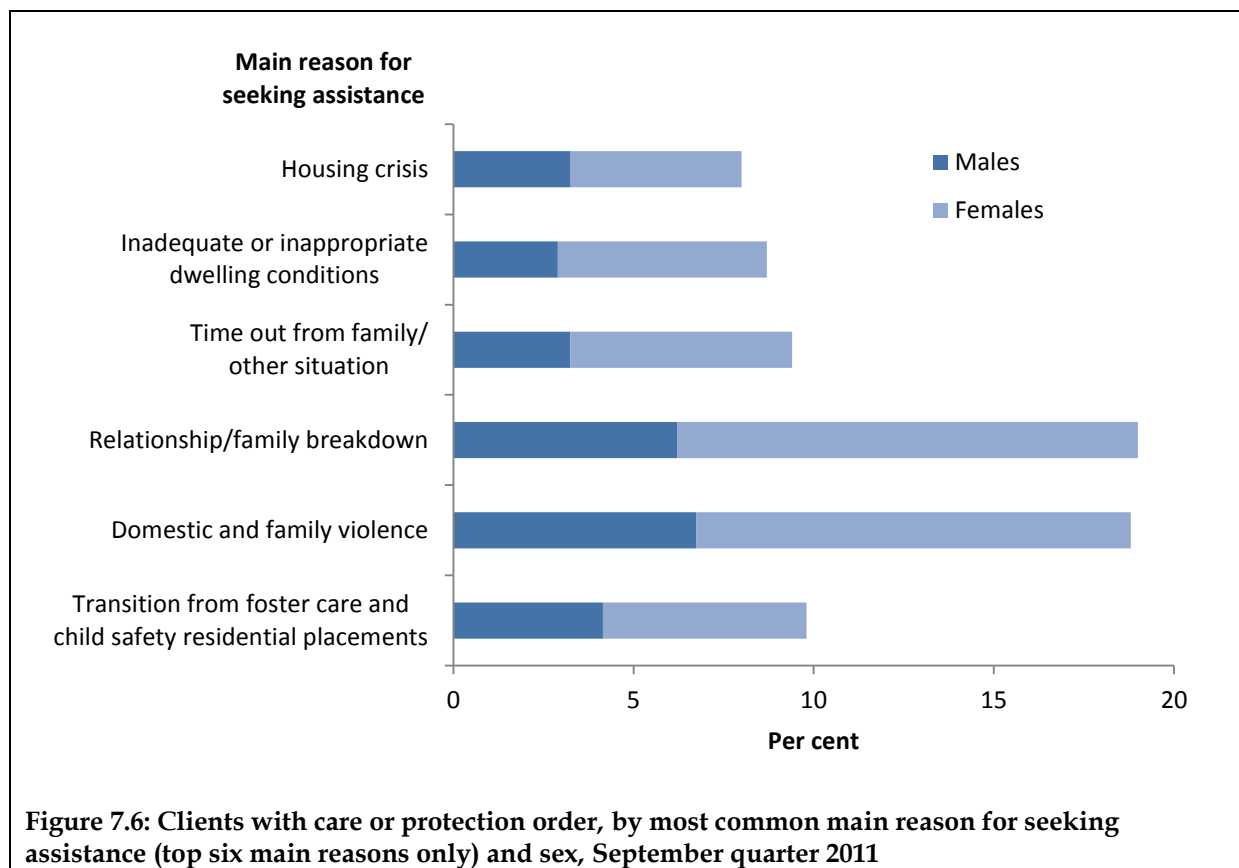


Figure 7.6: Clients with care or protection order, by most common main reason for seeking assistance (top six main reasons only) and sex, September quarter 2011

## Services received

### Clients leaving a care setting

- 60% of clients leaving a care setting were provided with accommodation.
- One-quarter (25%) of all clients leaving a care setting were provided with accommodation for more than six weeks.
- 56% of clients leaving a care setting had a case management plan<sup>7</sup>.

### Clients leaving a custodial setting

- 51% of clients leaving a custodial setting were provided with accommodation.
- 19% of all clients leaving a custodial setting were provided with accommodation for more than six weeks.
- 62% of clients leaving a custodial setting had a case management plan<sup>7</sup>.

### Clients with a care or protection order

- 54% of clients with a care or protection order were provided with accommodation.
- 22% of all clients with a care or protection order were provided with accommodation for more than six weeks.
- 47% of clients with a care or protection order had a case management plan<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> Excludes SA data—see Chapter 1 for more information.

## **Outcomes<sup>8</sup>**

### **Clients leaving a care setting**

- A similar proportion of clients leaving a care setting (compared with all clients) had all their case management goals achieved (16% compared with 15%).
- For clients leaving a care setting whose support periods had ended (and where valid data were available both at the beginning and end of support):
  - 17% were living in a house/townhouse/flat before support; 27% after support.
  - 9% were in emergency accommodation before support; 18% after support.

### **Clients leaving a custodial setting**

- A similar proportion of clients leaving a custodial setting (compared with all clients) had all their case management goals achieved (16% compared with 15%).
- For clients leaving a custodial setting whose support periods had ended (and where valid data were available both at the beginning and end of support):
  - Over one-quarter (27%) lived in a house/townhouse/flat before support; 31% after support.
  - 8% were in emergency accommodation before support; 19% after support.

### **Clients with a care or protection order**

- A lower proportion of clients with a care or protection order (compared with all clients) had all their case management goals achieved (10% compared with 15%).
- For clients with a care or protection order whose support periods had ended (and where valid data were available both at the beginning and end of support):
  - 79% were in a house/townhouse/flat before support; 75% after support.
  - 11% were in emergency accommodation before support; 17% after support.

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<sup>8</sup> Excludes SA data—see Chapter 1 for more information.

# Glossary

The following concepts and terms have been used in this report. More detailed descriptions of data concepts can be found in the SHSC's Collection Manual (AIHW 2011b).

<b>Age</b>	Age is calculated as age of the client on the start date of their first support period of the reporting period or the first date of the reporting period, whichever of the two is the later date.
<b>Care and protection order</b>	Legal orders or arrangements which give child protection departments some responsibility for a child's welfare. The level of responsibility varies with the type of order or arrangement. These orders include guardianship and custody orders, third party parental responsibility orders, supervisory orders, interim and temporary orders, and other administrative arrangements.
<b>Client</b>	<p>A person who receives a specialist homelessness service. A client can be of any age—children are also clients if they receive a service from a specialist homelessness agency.</p> <p>To be a client, the person must directly receive a service and not just be a beneficiary of a service. Children who present with a parent or guardian and receive a service are considered to be a client. This includes a service that they share with their parent or guardian such as meals or accommodation.</p> <p>Children who present with a parent or guardian but do not directly receive a service are not considered to be clients. This includes situations where the parent or guardian receives assistance to prevent tenancy failure or eviction.</p>
<b>Closed support period</b>	A support period that had finished on or before the end of the reporting period – 30 September 2011.
<b>Homelessness</b>	<p>A person is homeless if they are either:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• living in non-conventional accommodation or 'sleeping rough', or</li><li>• living in short-term or emergency accommodation due to lack of other options.</li></ul>
<b>Non-conventional accommodation</b>	<p>Non-conventional accommodation is defined as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• living on the streets</li><li>• sleeping in parks</li><li>• squatting</li><li>• staying in cars or railway carriages</li><li>• living in improvised dwellings</li><li>• living in long grass.</li></ul>

<b>Ongoing support period</b>	<p>A support period is considered ongoing at the end of the reporting period if each of the following conditions is met:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• no support end-date is provided</li> <li>• no after-support information is provided</li> <li>• corresponding client data was received in the month following the end of the reporting period.</li> </ul>
<b>Primary homelessness</b>	<p>People without conventional accommodation, such as people living on the streets, in parks, under bridges, in derelict buildings, improvised dwellings, etc.</p>
<b>Reporting period</b>	<p>For the purposes of this report the reporting period is 1 July 2011 to 30 September 2011. This means that data in this report relates to clients supported in this period, and where data were received by the AIHW by 28 February 2012.</p>
<b>Short-term or emergency accommodation</b>	<p>Short-term or emergency accommodation includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• refuges</li> <li>• crisis shelter</li> <li>• couch surfing</li> <li>• living temporarily with friends and relatives</li> <li>• insecure accommodation on a short-term basis</li> <li>• emergency accommodation arranged by a specialist homelessness agency (e.g. in hotels, motels etc.).</li> </ul> <p>The following short-term accommodation options are not included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• hotels, motels, caravan parks and other temporary accommodation used when a person is on holiday or travelling</li> <li>• custodial and care arrangements, such as prisons and hospitals</li> <li>• temporary accommodation utilised by a person while renovating usual residence or building a new residence (e.g. weekenders, caravans).</li> </ul>
<b>Specialist homelessness agency</b>	<p>An organisation that receives government funding to deliver specialist homelessness services. Assistance is provided to clients aimed at responding to or preventing homelessness. Agencies may also receive funding from other sources.</p> <p>Inclusion of agencies in the SHSC is determined by the state and territory departments responsible for administering the government response to homelessness. Not all funded agencies are required to participate in data collection.</p>
<b>Specialist homelessness service(s)</b>	<p>Assistance provided by a specialist homelessness agency to a client aimed at responding to or preventing homelessness. The specialist homelessness services that are in scope for this collection and that may be provided during a support period are:</p>



Housing/accommodation services:

- Short term or emergency accommodation
- Medium term/transitional housing
- Long term housing
- Assistance to sustain tenancy or prevent tenancy failure or eviction
- Assistance to prevent foreclosures or for mortgage arrears.

General assistance and support:

- Assertive outreach
- Assistance to obtain/maintain government allowance
- Employment assistance
- Training assistance
- Educational assistance
- Financial information
- Material aid/brokerage
- Assistance for incest/sexual
- Assistance for domestic/family violence
- Family/relationship assistance
- Assistance for trauma
- Assistance with challenging social/behavioural problems
- Living skills/personal development
- Legal information
- Court support
- Advice/information
- Retrieval/storage/removal of personal belongings
- Advocacy/liaison on behalf of client
- School liaison
- Child care
- Structured play/skills development
- Child contact and residence arrangements
- Meals
- Laundry/shower facilities
- Recreation
- Transport
- Other basic assistance.

Specialised services:

- Child protection services
- Parenting skills education

- Child specific specialist counselling services
- Psychological services
- Psychiatric services
- Mental health services
- Pregnancy assistance
- Family planning support
- Physical disability services
- Intellectual disability services
- Health/medical services
- Professional legal services
- Financial advice and counselling
- Counselling for problem gambling
- Drug/alcohol counselling
- Specialist counselling services
- Interpreter services
- Assistance with immigration services
- Culturally specific services
- Assistance to connect culturally
- Other specialised services.

**Support period**

The period of time a client receives services from an agency is referred to as a support period. A support period starts on the day the client first receives a service from an agency.

A support period ends when:

- the relationship between the client and the agency ends
- the client has reached their maximum amount of support the agency can offer
- a client has not received any services from the agency for a whole calendar month
- and there is no ongoing relationship.

Where a client has an appointment with the agency which is more than a calendar month in the future then it is not necessary to close the support period. This is because it is expected that there is an ongoing relationship with the client.

The end of the support period is the day the client last received services from an agency.

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# Appendix A

## Outline of major differences between the SAAP NDC and the SHSC

There have been many changes between the SAAP NDC and the SHSC. While there is broad consistency in the aspects of homelessness on which data is collected, many of the changes limit the ability to directly compare data across these collections. This section outlines the main differences in data collection methodology and data concepts and definitions, and the implications for comparing data.

### Scope of the collection

Changes in funding arrangements and a shift in the focus of homelessness services in SHSC mean that there are differences in the scope of agencies and clients compared with SAAP NDC.

#### Agencies

**SAAP NDC:** Broadly, all agencies that were previously funded under SAAP were in scope.

**SHSC:** All agencies that receive funding under the National Affordability Housing Agreement (NAHA) or the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH) to provide a specialist homelessness service are in scope.

**Implications:** All former SAAP agencies continuing to provide services are included in the collection. Although there is only a small increase in the number of agencies, a shift in the focus and targeting of homelessness services and improved access to services will potentially lead to an increase in client numbers and a greater variability in client demographics and circumstances. For example, the inclusion of intake services and high volume services will result in a shift of the type and number of clients seen in the SHSC.

Comparisons of the numbers of agencies across collections are also complicated through changes in how state and territory governments define and identify agencies in SHSC.

#### Clients

**SAAP NDC:** A client was a person who was homeless or at imminent risk of homelessness who:

- was accommodated by a SAAP agency, or
- entered into an ongoing support relationship with a SAAP agency, or
- received support or assistance from a SAAP agency which entailed generally one hour or more of a worker's time, either with that client directly or on behalf of that client, on a given day. This included the time taken for the assessment process only if this process led to other support being offered or to a referral.

An accompanying child was:

- under 18 years of age

- had a parent(s) or guardian(s) who was a SAAP client and
  - accompanied the parent or guardian at any time during the parent or guardian's support period, and/or
  - received SAAP assistance directly as a consequence of a parent or guardian's support period.

**SHSC:** A client is any person who receives a specialist homelessness service. A specialist homelessness service is assistance provided to a client aimed at responding to or preventing homelessness. Children are clients if they receive a service from a specialist homelessness agency.

To be a client, the person must directly receive a service and not only be a beneficiary of a service. Children who present with a parent or guardian and receive a service are considered to be clients. However, children who present with a parent or guardian but *do not directly* receive a service are not considered to be clients.

**Implications:** Both the increased scope of agencies and the inclusion of children as clients will increase the scope of clients in SHSC. Counting children as clients in SHSC will lead to more accurate data about children who receive homelessness services.

Although the way children are counted in SHSC has resulted in improvements to the information that can be reported, this fundamentally different approach means that it is not possible to directly compare reporting on children in SHSC data with SAAP NDC data.

## Data collection content

### New and revised data items

**SAAP NDC:** There were 29 data items for clients and 8 data items for accompanying children in the Client Collection. These data items were collected once during a support period, except for accommodation periods – each accommodation period was recorded.

**SHSC:** There are now 53 data items – 19 new and 23 revised data items collected from clients (including children). All 53 data items are collected at the beginning of a support period and a subset of these data items (19 in total) are collected at different times in the support period.

**Implications:** With 19 new data items and revisions to nearly all retained data items that were in SAAP, the new collection includes much more extensive and relevant information about clients and unassisted persons.

For those data items that have been revised in SHSC, the majority of changes are to response categories; either completely new categories, or updates to existing categories. The changes to data items affect comparability with SAAP NDC data items, but in many cases, information in SHSC can be mapped to SAAP data items.

### Presenting units

**SAAP NDC:** Information on people who seek services together was collected through the data item 'Person(s) receiving assistance'. Further information on these clients was obtained by deriving the age of people seeking assistance alone. This resulted in the following client group types:

- males and females
  - alone (under 25 years)

- alone (25 years and over)
- with children
- couples
  - with children
  - without children.

**SHSC:** To collect information about people who seek services together, the concepts of the presenting unit and presenting unit head have been added in the SHSC. The data items, 'Presenting unit ID', 'Relationship to presenting unit head' and 'Number of people in presenting unit' record information on presenting units.

**Implications:** The presenting unit concept and its associated data items have enabled a much improved presentation of information about groups who present to an SHSC agency. The new data item 'Presenting unit ID' links records for members of the presenting unit. In combination, all presenting unit information enables the determination of *any number* and *all relationships* within that presenting unit. For example, it is possible in SHSC to produce information on family groups, something that was not possible in the SAAP NDC.

It is still possible, however, to produce the same client groups that were presented in the SAAP NDC, allowing direct comparison with SAAP data for these client groups.

#### **Information before and during support periods**

**SAAP NDC:** In the SAAP NDC, certain questions were asked about a client's situation *immediately before* they commenced support and *immediately after* their support. These terms were problematic because the term 'immediately' was difficult to interpret.

**SHSC:** A key change relates to the timeframes for which certain information is reported during the support period. This affects both the operational and conceptual aspects of the collection.

Throughout the new collection there are five reference timeframes used for various data items:

- a week before the start of the support period
- when the support period starts
- during each month
- at the last service provision date each month
- at the end of the support period.

**Implications:** SHSC data items relating to a client's status at various stages of support are more specific and provide greater accuracy. More reference timeframes provide a more detailed and accurate picture of clients' circumstances before, during and at the end of their support periods. Combined with monthly collection of data and better linkage of client support periods, a better picture of client experiences over time is also possible.

Comparability with SAAP is not straightforward as the reference periods are different. However, information in both collections on a client's status before and after support is very similar.

## Changes to the way data are collected

There are several aspects of data collection that have changed between the SAAP NDC and SHSC. The tools used to collect data have changed. The SAAP Management and Reporting Tool (SMART) system developed by the AIHW has been replaced by online reporting tools – SHIP and other client management systems.

The timing of data submissions has shifted from twice a year to monthly and a web-portal (SHOR) for submitting data has replaced email submission of SMART extracts.

### Clients versus support periods

**SAAP NDC:** A limited amount of information on clients was available in the SAAP NDC. This was largely restricted to demographic characteristics such as their age, sex and Indigenous status. The number of clients with certain experiences, support or outcomes was more difficult to determine due to poorer data linkage, particularly between years.

**SHSC:** Changes in the application of consent and a different approach to data collection have improved client identification and resulted in improved availability of information on clients.

Client records are constructed using a statistical linkage key (SLK). This links a person (or client) to their support period. This is particularly important when a client has multiple support periods; the SLK links data from multiple support periods to a single person.

**Implications:** It is important to note that the SHSC still collects episode-based information – that is, information is collected from agencies participating in the SHSC about each period of support for each client.

A client's informed consent in both the SAAP NDC and SHSC is required for data items considered sensitive. In SHSC, it was agreed (with approval from the AIHW Ethics Committee) that information used to construct the SLK could not identify an individual and is not sensitive information. As such, consent is not required for SLK information in SHSC.

This change enables better collection of SLK information and, in turn, SLK validity rates have risen from 86% in the last quarter of the SAAP NDC to 93% in the first quarter of the SHSC; the SLK validity rate is expected to improve further.

### Monthly submission of data

**SAAP NDC:** Data were submitted twice yearly.

**SHSC:** Data are submitted monthly.

**Implications:** For technical reasons, it was difficult to match client information from one collection year to the next in SAAP. This difficulty has been removed in SHSC. Monthly collection of data enables the consistent and continuous construction of a picture of clients over time – as they enter support, are provided with accommodation and other services, their circumstances at the end of support, and, most importantly, subsequent support provided over months and years.

Receiving data more often also allows for more frequent release of data – that is, both quarterly and annually.

## **New collection systems**

**SAAP NDC:** SMART was the client management system (CMS) used by most agencies to record and extract required information about their clients. Some agency groupings such as Salvation Army agencies used their own CMSs. Some agencies also used paper forms to submit their data.

**SHSC:** The Specialist Homelessness Online Reporting (SHOR) web portal is used by almost all agencies to submit SHSC data to AIHW. The Specialist Homelessness Information Platform (SHIP), which is used by most agencies participating in the SHSC, and other CMSs (such as the H2H system used by all agencies in SA) have been developed for agencies to record their client information. The layout of paper forms has also changed, and improved methods have been implemented at AIHW to capture this information electronically.

**Implications:** The major benefit of the new systems is an improved data collection process. This includes more efficient error checking (data validation), and better integration into the day-to-day operations of agencies. In SHSC error checking is built into both the CMSs and SHOR. Data validation in CMSs helps prevent errors from occurring at data input; in SHOR, it helps prevent errors being submitted to AIHW, both resulting in a substantial reduction in errors in data provided to AIHW.



# Appendix B

## Data quality statement (Specialist Homelessness Services Collection—September quarter 2011)

### Summary of key data quality issues

- The Specialist Homelessness Services Collection (SHSC) replaces the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) National Data Collection (NDC). There are significant differences between the two, creating comparability issues.
- Analysis of the September quarter 2011 SHSC data identified some implementation issues. In particular, the rate of invalid/'don't know'/missing responses was high for many data items. Data items with very high rates of invalid/'don't know'/missing responses are not reported on in this publication.
- All agencies that receive funding under the National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA) or the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH) to provide specialist homelessness services are in scope for the SHSC, but only those expected to provide data are covered. Many high volume services and intake services are not covered, nor are Transitional Housing Management (THM) services in Victoria, which had not commenced reporting SHSC data in the September quarter 2011.
- 93% of covered agencies returned support period data for the September quarter 2011, although some reported only for one or two months.
- Matching of data from individual clients who presented at different agencies and/or at different times requires a valid statistical linkage key (SLK). 93% of support periods had a valid SLK in the September quarter 2011.

### Description

The SHSC collects information on people seeking services from agencies that receive funding under the NAHA or the NPAH to provide specialist homelessness services. Data is collected monthly from agencies participating in the collection.

The SHSC replaced the SAAP NDC on July 1 2011. There are significant differences between the SAAP NDC and the SHSC.

### Institutional environment

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) is a major national agency set up by the Australian Government under the *Australian Institute of Health and Welfare Act 1987* to provide reliable, regular and relevant information and statistics on Australia's health and welfare. It is an independent statutory authority established in 1987, governed by a management Board, and accountable to the Australian Parliament through the Health and Ageing portfolio.

The AIHW aims to provide authoritative information and statistics to promote better health and wellbeing. The Institute collects and reports information on a wide range of topics and

issues, ranging from health and welfare expenditure, hospitals, disease and injury, and mental health, to ageing, homelessness, disability and child protection.

The Institute also plays a role in developing and maintaining national metadata standards. This work contributes to improving the quality and consistency of national health and welfare statistics. The Institute works closely with governments and non-government organisations to achieve greater adherence to these standards in administrative data collections to promote national consistency and comparability of data and reporting.

One of the main functions of the AIHW is to work with the states and territories to improve the quality of administrative data and, where possible, to compile national datasets based on data from each jurisdiction, to analyse these datasets and disseminate information and statistics.

The *Australian Institute of Health and Welfare Act 1987*, in conjunction with compliance to the *Privacy Act 1988*, ensures that the data collections managed by the AIHW are kept securely and under the strictest conditions with respect to privacy and confidentiality.

For further information see the AIHW website [www.aihw.gov.au](http://www.aihw.gov.au).

The AIHW has been the Data Custodian for the SAAP NDC since 1996. The SHSC was developed by AIHW in conjunction with the states and territories and is being administered by the AIHW.

### **Timeliness**

The SHSC began collecting data from 1 July 2011. The SHSC collects information from all participating agencies every month. Data collected is regularly loaded to a Master Database. From this Master Database 'snapshots' are created at particular points in time for reporting purposes. Snapshots will be taken following the end of each quarter, and another one for the whole collection year for annual reporting. It is planned, from 2012-13, to publish quarterly results by the end of the following quarter, and annual results in October each year.

The September quarter 2011 snapshot contains data submitted to the AIHW for the July, August and September 2011 collection months, using responses received and validated as at 28 February 2012 when the snapshot was taken.

### **Accessibility**

Published results from the SHSC first quarter are available elsewhere in this report and on the AIHW website.

Data not available online or in reports can be obtained from the Communications, Media and Marketing Unit on (02) 6244 1032 or via email to [info@aihw.gov.au](mailto:info@aihw.gov.au). Requests that take longer than half an hour to compile are charged for on a cost-recovery basis.

### **Interpretability**

Information on the development of the SHSC, definitions and concepts, and collection materials and processes can be found on the AIHW website, [www.aihw.gov.au](http://www.aihw.gov.au). Information on definitions, concepts and classifications can also be found in the SHSC's collection manual (AIHW 2011b).

## **Relevance**

### **Scope and coverage**

The SHSC is a key source of information for measuring the outcomes and outputs for people who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness, who seek specialist homelessness services.

The SHSC collects, via specialist homelessness agencies, information on people seeking services from those agencies. All agencies that receive funding under the NAHA or NPAH to provide specialist homelessness services are in scope for the SHSC. However, only those expected to provide data are covered. Victorian Transitional Housing Management (THM) agencies, as well as many high volume services and intake services, are not covered, as it is difficult for such agencies to report. In the first quarter, 1,460 agencies were covered.

Not everyone in scope for SHSC is homeless, as specialist homelessness agencies provide services to people at risk of homelessness, as well as people who are currently homeless.

Not all homeless people and people at risk of homelessness are in scope for the SHSC—only those who seek services from specialist homelessness agencies are in scope.

Data are collected by homelessness agency workers for each client support period. Some basic information is also collected on instances where people seek, but do not receive assistance, from a homelessness agency ('unassisted people').

### **Reference period**

The SHSC collects information every month, the data is regularly loaded to a Master Database, and snapshots of this database are created at particular points in time for reporting purposes. Snapshots are taken following the end of each quarter for quarterly reporting.

The 'September quarter 2011' data refers to data for July, August, and September, 2011. It covers support periods active in at least one of those months: clients who had an active support period in at least one of those months, and unassisted people who sought services in one of those months. Information on unassisted people is not presented in this report due to issues with the quality of this data arising from inconsistent interpretation of the data concepts.

### **Geographic detail**

Data are published at the national and State/Territory level.

### **Statistical standards**

A client is defined in the SHSC as a person who receives a specialist homelessness service—assistance provided to a client aimed at responding to or preventing homelessness. A client may be of any age—children are clients if they receive a service from a specialist homelessness service.

A support period is defined in the SHSC as a period of support provided by a specialist homelessness service agency to a client. This definition is the same as that used in SAAP.

A homeless person is defined, in the SHSC, as a person who is:

- living in non-conventional accommodation or 'sleeping rough' or
- living in short-term or emergency accommodation due to a lack of options.

This definition is aligned, to some extent, with the cultural definition of homelessness (see section on 'Coherence' below) used in the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Census (Chamberlain & MacKenzie 2008). The SHSC definition also aligns to some extent with the

SAAP definition of homelessness ('A person who does not have access to safe, secure and adequate housing', AIHW 2011a).

Standard Australian Classification of Countries 2008 (ABS 2008) codes were used as the code-frame for questions relating to country of birth.

Australian Classification for Source of Income 2010 (ABS 2010b) codes were used as the code-frame for questions relating to a client's source of income.

## **Accuracy**

### **Potential sources of error**

As with all data collections, the SHSC estimates are subject to errors. These can arise from data coding and processing errors, inaccurate data, or missing data. Reported findings are based on data reported by agency workers.

### **Data validation**

The AIHW receives data from specialist homelessness agencies every month. This data goes through two processes of data validation, that is, error checking. Firstly, data validation is incorporated into the client management systems (CMSs) most agencies use to record their data. Secondly, data is submitted through the AIHW online reporting web-portal, Specialist Homelessness Online Reporting (SHOR). SHOR completes a more thorough data validation and reports any errors that need correcting before data can be submitted, to staff of the homelessness agency.

The SHOR data validation system was not fully functional during the September quarter 2011, as more work was needed to ensure edit checks were appropriate to the data being received. However, the data validation systems in CMSs were fully functional; and testing of the data received indicates that erroneous data is minimal, although some invalid values are present.

### **Agency participation**

93% of relevant agencies returned support period data for at least one month in the September quarter 2011. This compares favourably with the SAAP agency participation rate, which was 90% in 2010-11 and 92% on average between 2001-02 and 2010-11.

### **Statistical Linkage Key (SLK) validity**

An individual client may seek or receive support on more than one occasion – either from the same agency or from a different agency. Data from individual clients who presented at different agencies and/or at different times is matched based on a statistical linkage key (SLK) which is constructed from information about the client's date of birth, sex and an alphacode based on selected letters of their name, allowing client level data to be created.

If a support period record does not have a valid SLK, it cannot be linked to a client, and thus it is not included in client-level tables (although it is included in support period-level tables). In the September quarter 2011, 93% of support periods had a valid SLK.

### **Incomplete responses**

In many support periods, in the September quarter 2011, valid responses were not recorded for all questions, because invalid responses were recorded, 'don't know' was selected, or no response was recorded.

The rate of invalid/'don't know'/missing responses was higher than expected for many data items. For example:

- 'time period the client received assistance for their mental health issue' and 'facilities/institutions the client has been in in the last 12 months' have the highest rates of invalid/'don't know'/missing response—51% each
- 'dwelling type at presentation' and the outcome variable 'dwelling type at the last service date in the reporting period' have invalid/missing/'don't know' response rates of 26% and 29% respectively
- 'main reason for seeking assistance' has an invalid/missing/'don't know' response rate of 17%.

'Sex' and 'date of birth' have some of the lowest rates of invalid/missing/'don't know' response—less than 1% and 7% respectively.

Support periods with invalid/'don't know'/missing responses were retained in the collection, and, due to the difficulty of doing so accurately, no attempt was made to deduce or impute the true value of invalid/'don't know'/missing responses.

Data items with very high rates of invalid/'don't know'/missing responses were not reported on in this publication.

### **Non-response bias**

Less than 100% agency participation, less than 100% SLK validity and a high rate of incomplete responses do not necessarily mean that estimates are biased. The non-respondents are not systematically different in terms of how they would have answered the questions, then there is no bias. Given the results of analyses of agency participation, SLK validity and incomplete responses performed to date, some non-response bias is expected.

### **Non-response adjustment**

As some data is missing because of agency non-participation and SLK invalidity, non-response adjustment (or 'weighting') has been applied to create a selection of weighted estimates. Only a limited number of estimates were amenable to non-response adjustment in the September quarter 2011.

A more complete method for adjusting for missing information will be applied to annual data; the method used in the September quarter 2011 is a simplified version of that method.

Non-response adjustment in the SHSC is performed for support periods, and, separately, for clients. The process used is described in Appendix C.

The process accounts only for agency non-participation and SLK invalidity—due the difficulty of doing so accurately, no adjustments are made for incomplete responses.

In the September quarter 2011, non-response adjustment was performed at the national level only. This may lead to biased estimates, as analysis has shown that agency participation and SLK validity vary with characteristics such as state/territory, age group and sex, and the non-response adjustment process does not account for this.

The non-response adjustment process used in the September quarter 2011, which designates agencies 'participating' if they returned support period data at any time during the reporting period, causes weighted estimates to be, on average, underestimates.

Improvements to the weighting methodology will be implemented during 2011–12. In particular, the method used to weight the annual data will be much more extensive than the

method used for the September quarter 2011 data. This will lead to comparability issues, as different weighting methodologies give different estimates for the same raw data.

## **Coherence**

The SHSC replaces the SAAP NDC, which began in 1996. The SHSC differs from the SAAP NDC in many respects.

The major definitional differences between SAAP and SHSC concern children and support. In the SAAP NDC, children who accompanied a parent or guardian were included as accompanying children; in the SHSC, children are included as clients if they directly receive a service. In SAAP, support was considered to entail generally one hour or more of a worker's time; in SHSC no time-related condition exists. Further information on the comparability of SHSC and SAAP can be found in Appendix A.

## **The cultural definition of homelessness**

In the SHSC, homelessness is defined living in non-conventional accommodation or living in short-term or emergency accommodation due to a lack of options. Some other collections instead define homelessness using the cultural definition, which delineates three homelessness categories:

- Primary homelessness includes all people without conventional accommodation.
- Secondary homelessness includes people who move frequently from one form of temporary shelter to another, including all people staying in emergency or transitional accommodation provided under SAAP; people residing temporarily with other households because they have no accommodation of their own; and people staying in boarding houses on a short-term basis.
- Tertiary homelessness refers to people who live in boarding houses on a medium to long-term basis (Chamberlain & MacKenzie 2008).

The cultural definition of homelessness does not define 'at risk of homelessness'.

## **Comparison with other collections**

The other major data sources on homelessness are:

The ABS Census, which collects data from all persons in Australia on Census night, including data allowing respondents' homelessness status to be derived (see ABS 2006). The cultural definition of homelessness is used. Data is currently available for 2001 and 2006.

The ABS General Social Survey's homelessness module (ABS 2010a), which collects data from usual residents of private dwellings, including data on whether respondents have ever been homeless. The survey defines homelessness as being without a permanent place to live for a selection of reasons. Data is currently available for 2010 only.

Chamberlain and Mackenzie's National Census of Homelessness School Students, which collects data on homeless school students via principals of all government and Catholic secondary schools (FaHCSIA 2006). Both the cultural definition of homelessness and a service delivery definition are used. Data is currently available for 2006 and selected prior years.

As these collections differ greatly from SHSC in scope, collection methodology, definitions and reference periods, comparisons between collections should be made with caution.

# Appendix C

## Non-response adjustment (weighting) methodology

This section describes the methodology used to create the weighted estimates in Chapter 2.

Only basic data items have been adjusted for non-response in the September quarter 2011, as the application of non-response adjustment to more complex data items requires a stratified approach which was not feasible for the September quarter 2011.

A more complete method for adjusting for missing support period information is being developed; the method described in this section is a simplified version of that method.

### The weighting methodology

Non-response adjustment in the SHSC is performed for support periods, and, separately, for clients, as follows:

1. support period records are weighted to account for agencies that did not participate
2. client records are weighted to account for:
  - a. support period-level weighting, i.e. non-participation of agencies
  - b. support period records with invalid Statistical Linkage Keys (SLKs)
  - c. mixed agency participation and mixed SLK validity.

### Support period weights

Support period weights adjust only for agency non-participation. The weight for a support period is:

$$w_i = \frac{N_A}{n_{A,r}}$$

where  $w_i$  is the support period weight for a valid support period,  $N_A$  is the total number of agencies in scope, and  $n_{A,r}$  is the number of agencies which responded at some time during the quarter.

### Client weights

Clients may have more than one support period in the quarter. Further, clients may be supported at an agency that participates in the collection in one support period, and in another support period the client may be supported at a non-participating agency—this is referred to as mixed agency participation. As well, a client may provide information that can be used to form a valid SLK (which is used to create client level data) in some support periods but not others. This could happen, for example, where one support period was brief and another support period was longer and agency workers were able to obtain more data—this is referred to as mixed SLK validity.

The weighting process accounts for mixed agency participation and mixed SLK validity. It begins by accounting for non-responding agencies and support periods with invalid SLKs in aggregate. An intermediate weight is calculated as:

$$w_j = \frac{N_A}{n_{A,r}} * \frac{N_S}{n_{S,v}}$$

where  $w_j$  is the intermediate weight for a valid support period,  $N_A$  is the total number of agencies in scope,  $n_{A,r}$  is the number of agencies which respond at some time during the quarter,  $N_S$  is the number of support periods for which data was supplied, and  $n_{S,v}$  is the number of support periods with a valid SLK.

Next, the process accounts for mixed agency participation and mixed SLK validity by taking into account the number of support periods recorded for each client—clients with one support period are less likely to have at least one support period at a participating agency, therefore they require larger adjustments than clients with many support periods, as they are more likely to have at least one support period at a participating agency. The weight for a client is:

$$w_k = \frac{1}{1 - \prod_{j=1}^{n_k} (1 - w_{k,j}^{-1})}$$

where  $w_k$  is the client weight,  $w_{k,j}$  is the  $j^{th}$  intermediate weight for client  $k$ ,  $n_k$  is the number of observed support periods for client  $k$ , and  $\prod_{j=1}^{n_k}$  is the product over all support periods for client  $k$ .

## Considerations

Non-response adjustment makes the following core assumptions:

- Responses and non-responses are clearly defined, i.e. agencies that should have participated in the collection can be divided into two distinct groups—those that participated and those that did not.
- Responses are representative of non-responses, i.e. it is assumed that agencies that respond are similar to agencies that do not respond. Similarly support periods with valid SLKs are assumed to be similar to support periods without valid SLKs.

When these assumptions do not hold, estimates are biased (i.e. higher or lower, on average, than their true values). Varying agency participation (a violation of the assumption that responses and non-responses are clearly defined) and lack of appropriate stratification (a violation of the assumption that, within strata, responses are representative of non-responses) lead to bias.

### Varying agency participation

Agencies were designated as ‘participating’ if they returned support period data at any time during the reporting period.

Not all SHSC participating agencies returned support period data in all three months of the September quarter. This is likely because:

- some agencies were not ready to participate in the new collection earlier in the quarter



- some agencies did not provide later months' information in time to be included in this report
- some agencies had activity for some months but not others.

Ideally, non-response adjustment would have taken account of this varying participation over time; however, the quantity and quality of September quarter 2011 data did not lend itself to such a refinement. It is expected that, in future quarters, improved levels of agency participation and more timely submission of data will reduce the need for, and impact of, weighting.

Unless varying agency participation occurs only due to some agencies having activity for some months but not others, designating agencies as '*participating*' if they participated at any time during the reporting period causes weighted estimates—both of numbers of support periods and of numbers of clients—to be, on average, underestimates. This occurs because agencies that participated in only one or two months in the quarter, because they were not ready to participate earlier in the quarter or did not provide later months' data in time, have missing support periods, and the weighting methodology does not adjust for these missing periods.

### **Stratification**

Non-response adjustment is typically applied using a stratified approach: respondents are split into strata—often based on location, age group and sex—and weights are calculated within strata. This occurs because persons with the same location, age group and sex can be assumed to be more similar than persons generally.

For September quarter 2011, a stratified approach could not be implemented because there were no previous reporting periods with which to compare the September quarter 2011 data. Non-response adjustment benefits from comparison of response over time to indicate the efficacy of a particular adjustment approach.

As a result, national-level weights are applied to state/territory estimates. This means that all weighted estimates for jurisdictions with high agency participation, such as Tasmania, are likely to be over-estimates; and all weighted estimates for jurisdictions with low agency participation, such as Victoria, are most likely under-estimates.

Weights generated for all persons regardless of age or sex were used to create estimates of numbers of clients by age and sex. Because SLK validity varies between age and sex groups, this means that some weighted estimates are likely to be under-estimates and others are likely to be over-estimates. For example, the number of clients aged 0–17 years is likely to be higher than 28,755 (the figure in Table D1) because SLK validity is low for persons aged 0–17 years.

The weighting methodology will be improved over the next year, as more SHSC data is collected. It is planned to implement a stratified approach; this will reduce (and in some cases eliminate) bias caused by varying rates of agency participation and SLK validity.

### **Comparability of weighted estimates over time**

Improvements to the weighting methodology will be implemented over the course of 2011–12. In particular, the method used to weight the annual data will be much more extensive than the method used in this report. This will lead to comparability issues, as different weighting methodologies give different estimates for the same raw data. However,

comparability issues will occur for a range of other reasons as well, including more data being submitted and improved validation of data over time.

# Appendix D

## Data tables

Table D1: Clients and support periods, by age group, September quarter 2011, adjusted for non-response

Age group (years)	Sex					
	Males		Females		All clients	
	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent
	<b>Clients</b>					
0–9	8,556	22.5	8,030	15.0	16,586	18.1
10–14	2,837	7.5	2,981	5.6	5,819	6.4
15–17	2,541	6.7	3,810	7.1	6,350	6.9
18–24	6,013	15.8	11,030	20.6	17,043	18.6
25–34	5,268	13.9	10,919	20.4	16,187	17.7
35–44	6,051	15.9	9,479	17.7	15,530	16.9
45–54	4,148	10.9	4,907	9.2	9,055	9.9
55–64	1,810	4.8	1,668	3.1	3,479	3.8
65+	797	2.1	781	1.5	1,578	1.7
<i>Total</i>	<i>38,021</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>53,606</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>91,627</i>	<i>100.0</i>
	<b>Support periods</b>					
0–9	9,628	20.4	9,037	13.8	18,665	16.6
10–14	3,293	7.0	3,374	5.2	6,668	5.9
15–17	3,206	6.8	4,791	7.3	7,997	7.1
18–24	7,460	15.8	13,766	21.1	21,226	18.8
25–34	6,960	14.7	13,719	21.0	20,678	18.3
35–44	7,977	16.9	11,770	18.0	19,747	17.5
45–54	5,485	11.6	6,054	9.3	11,540	10.2
55–64	2,325	4.9	1,970	3.0	4,295	3.8
65+	962	2.0	914	1.4	1,876	1.7
<i>Total</i>	<i>47,296</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>65,396</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>112,692</i>	<i>100.0</i>

Notes:

1. Number excluded due to errors and omissions (weighted): 0 clients, 3,069 support periods.
2. Data in this table is adjusted for non-response, and this methodology results in estimated figures that are not whole numbers. As a result, all figures in this table are rounded to the nearest whole number, and male/female client numbers may not add to the figure for 'all clients' due to rounding errors.

**Table D2: Clients and support periods, by state and territory, September quarter 2011, adjusted for non-response**

	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Australia
<b>Number</b>									
Clients									
Males	10,558	9,805	7,804	4,010	3,108	1,358	949	704	38,021
Females	13,753	16,327	9,326	5,689	4,531	1,509	1,314	1,379	53,606
<i>Total</i>	<i>24,311</i>	<i>26,132</i>	<i>17,130</i>	<i>9,699</i>	<i>7,638</i>	<i>2,866</i>	<i>2,264</i>	<i>2,084</i>	<i>91,627</i>
Support periods									
Males	12,532	14,350	9,290	4,947	3,490	1,598	1,068	793	48,067
Females	16,614	22,232	11,068	7,118	5,475	1,821	1,492	1,604	67,423
<i>Total</i>	<i>29,147</i>	<i>36,583</i>	<i>20,357</i>	<i>12,065</i>	<i>8,964</i>	<i>3,419</i>	<i>2,559</i>	<i>2,397</i>	<i>115,491</i>
<b>Per cent</b>									
Clients									
Males	43.4	37.5	45.6	41.3	40.7	47.4	41.9	33.8	41.5
Females	56.6	62.5	54.4	58.7	59.3	52.6	58.1	66.2	58.5
<i>Total</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>
Support periods									
Males	43.0	39.2	45.6	41.0	38.9	46.7	41.7	33.1	41.6
Females	57.0	60.8	54.4	59.0	61.1	53.3	58.3	66.9	58.4
<i>Total</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>

Notes:

1. Number excluded due to errors and omissions (weighted): 0 clients, 270 support periods.
2. State/territory client numbers do not sum to the national figure because clients may appear in more than one jurisdiction.
3. Data in this table is adjusted for non-response, and this methodology results in estimated figures that are not whole numbers. All figures in this table are rounded to the nearest whole number.

**Table D3: Support periods by previous experience of homelessness in the month before support, September quarter 2011 (per cent)**

<b>Previous homelessness status</b>	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Australia
Sleeping rough	17.8	20.8	24.9	14.2	11.0	21.6	26.8	19.3	19.1
Short-term or emergency accommodation	33.5	35.6	29.6	20.5	29.6	37.4	34.4	22.1	31.4
Not homeless	53.6	52.2	51.8	68.1	59.3	49.2	48.0	62.3	55.1
<i>Total valid responses (number)</i>	<i>17,704</i>	<i>20,648</i>	<i>13,505</i>	<i>8,296</i>	<i>7,809</i>	<i>2,029</i>	<i>1,295</i>	<i>1,496</i>	<i>72,782</i>
Not stated	34.7	39.2	29.0	26.0	6.1	36.4	45.5	32.7	32.2
<b>Total (number)</b>	<b>27,099</b>	<b>33,982</b>	<b>19,018</b>	<b>11,213</b>	<b>8,318</b>	<b>3,189</b>	<b>2,375</b>	<b>2,224</b>	<b>107,418</b>

Note: Percentages do not add to 100 because clients may have reported both 'sleeping rough' and being in 'short-term or emergency accommodation' in the month before support.

**Table D4: Clients, by presenting unit type, September quarter 2011, not adjusted for non-response**

<b>Presenting unit type</b>	<b>Number of clients</b>	<b>Per cent of clients<sup>(a)</sup></b>
Person alone	52,999	66.0
Couple, no children	1,685	2.1
Person with children	22,482	28.0
Couple with children	3,837	4.8
Other group with children	2,147	2.7
Other	98	0.1

(a) Percentages do not sum 100% because clients may have more than one presenting unit type.

**Table D5: Clients by main reason for seeking assistance, September quarter 2011, not adjusted for non-response**

Main reason for seeking assistance	Sex		Total	
	Males	Females	Number	Per cent of valid responses <sup>(a)</sup>
Financial difficulties	4,610	4,719	9,329	13.8
Housing affordability stress	1,465	2,121	3,586	5.3
Housing crisis	4,947	5,557	10,504	15.6
Inadequate or inappropriate dwelling conditions	3,105	4,085	7,190	10.7
Previous accommodation ended	2,474	2,255	4,729	7.0
Time out from family/other situation	748	1,161	1,909	2.8
Relationship/family breakdown	2,148	2,904	5,052	7.5
Sexual abuse	31	226	257	0.4
Domestic and family violence	3,340	14,326	17,666	26.2
Non-family violence	164	324	488	0.7
Mental health issues	1,065	720	1,785	2.6
Medical issues	428	317	745	1.1
Problematic drug or substance use	839	379	1,218	1.8
Problematic alcohol use	618	154	772	1.1
Employment difficulties	103	50	153	0.2
Unemployment	154	61	215	0.3
Problematic gambling	70	9	79	0.1
Transition from custodial arrangements	663	212	875	1.3
Transition from foster care and child safety residential placements	99	129	228	0.3
Transition from other care arrangements	185	148	333	0.5
Discrimination including racial and sexual discrimination	20	39	59	0.1
Itinerant	1,080	689	1,769	2.6
Unable to return home due to environmental reasons	190	222	412	0.6
Disengagement with school or other education and training	173	161	334	0.5
Lack of family and/or community support	576	687	1,263	1.9
Other	2,350	2,531	4,881	7.2
<b>Total clients<sup>(a)</sup></b>	<b>27,429</b>	<b>40,067</b>	<b>67,496</b>	<b>n.a.</b>

(a) Total and percentages do not add to 100 as clients who had more than one support period and who identified different (main) reasons for seeking support on each occasion are recorded more than once.

Note: Number of client support periods where a main reason for seeking assistance was not reported: 15,754 (7,144 males and 8,610 females).

**Table D6: Support periods, by need for services and assistance and service provision status, September quarter 2011, not adjusted for non-response**

Services and assistance types	Need identified	Service provision status			Total	
		Provided only	Referred only	Provided and referred		Not provided or referred
<b>Housing/accommodation</b>						
Short term or emergency accommodation	31,494	19,273	4,739	2,376	5,106	31,494
Medium term/transitional housing	23,230	10,454	5,029	1,941	5,806	23,230
Long term housing	25,754	1,853	12,674	585	10,642	25,754
Assistance to sustain tenancy or prevent tenancy failure or eviction	21,004	15,117	1,491	2,580	1,816	21,004
Assistance to prevent foreclosures or for mortgage arrears	868	493	146	89	140	868
<b>General assistance and support</b>						
Assertive outreach	14,055	11,687	525	1,179	664	14,055
Assistance to obtain/maintain government allowance	9,597	6,042	941	1,982	632	9,597
Employment assistance	5,343	2,874	756	703	1,010	5,343
Training assistance	4,576	2,462	681	652	781	4,576
Educational assistance	8,188	5,092	833	1,245	1,018	8,188
Financial information	19,472	13,873	1,490	2,694	1,415	19,472
Material aid/brokerage	29,399	22,020	2,285	3,771	1,323	29,399
Assistance for incest/sexual assault	1,461	729	230	301	201	1,461
Assistance for domestic/family violence	22,053	17,557	867	2,456	1,173	22,053
Family/relationship assistance	19,595	15,177	840	2,038	1,540	19,595
Assistance for trauma	6,025	4,027	599	721	678	6,025
Assistance with challenging social/behavioural problems	9,155	6,752	524	1,047	832	9,155
Living skills/personal development	19,563	16,738	502	1,221	1,102	19,563
Legal information	13,016	7,219	2,203	2,552	1,042	13,016
Court support	7,141	4,480	866	1,084	711	7,141
Advice/information	71,336	62,782	728	6,918	908	71,336
Retrieval/storage/removal of personal belongings	9,711	7,953	424	721	613	9,711
Advocacy/liaison on behalf of client	41,628	33,972	848	5,867	941	41,628
School liaison	5,494	4,065	327	675	427	5,494
Child care	5,816	3,615	677	990	534	5,816
Structured play/skills development	4,823	3,812	267	447	297	4,823
Child contact and residence arrangements	2,214	1,309	268	349	288	2,214

*(continued)*

**Table D6 (continued): Support periods, by need for services and assistance and service provision status, September quarter 2011, not adjusted for non-response**

Services and assistance types	Need identified	Service provision status			Total	
		Provided only	Referred only	Provided and referred		Not provided or referred
Meals	20,929	19,079	558	1,003	289	20,929
Laundry/shower facilities	17,695	16,733	198	539	225	17,695
Recreation	15,362	13,924	314	716	408	15,362
Transport	22,751	20,272	432	1,405	642	22,751
Other basic assistance	50,599	46,502	489	2,925	683	50,599
<b>Specialised services</b>						
Child protection services	3,632	1,515	782	887	448	3,632
Parenting skills education	4,835	2,238	875	1,009	713	4,835
Child specific specialist counselling services	2,894	804	962	585	543	2,894
Psychological services	3,931	918	1,475	639	899	3,931
Psychiatric services	1,762	385	685	301	391	1,762
Mental health services	5,711	1,590	1,905	1,010	1,206	5,711
Pregnancy assistance	1,280	434	260	328	258	1,280
Family planning assistance	1,141	453	291	200	197	1,141
Physical disability services	441	105	158	90	88	441
Intellectual disability services	511	121	154	116	120	511
Health/medical services	10,619	3,320	3,522	2,436	1,341	10,619
Professional legal services	3,313	596	1,547	773	397	3,313
Financial advice and counselling	5,752	2,519	1,236	1,158	839	5,752
Counselling for problem gambling	312	131	93	27	61	312
Drug/alcohol counselling	4,108	1,550	1,007	679	872	4,108
Specialist counselling services	6,771	2,604	1,977	1,223	967	6,771
Interpreter services	1,472	837	245	337	53	1,472
Assistance with immigration services	1,278	563	210	378	127	1,278
Culturally specific services	4,364	2,491	511	1,131	231	4,364
Assistance to connect culturally	2,633	1,441	362	599	231	2,633
Other specialised services	7,149	3,669	1,317	1,750	413	7,149

Notes

1. Excludes SA data—see Chapter 1 for more information.
2. Agencies can provide multiple services to a client, numbers will not sum to the total number of support periods.



**Table D7: Closed support periods where accommodation was provided by length of accommodation and state and territory, September quarter 2011, not adjusted for non-response**

Length of accommodation	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Australia
< 2 days	778	673	423	444	n.a.	127	20	216	2,681
2 days–1 week	1,136	986	1,247	780	n.a.	176	58	412	4,795
8 days–2 weeks	551	340	685	266	n.a.	97	47	96	2,082
15 days–4 weeks	683	458	769	341	n.a.	115	96	80	2,542
29 days–6 weeks	439	344	499	170	n.a.	77	37	36	1,602
> 6 weeks	687	473	688	222	n.a.	124	65	45	2,304
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,274</b>	<b>3,274</b>	<b>4,311</b>	<b>2,223</b>	<b>n.a.</b>	<b>716</b>	<b>323</b>	<b>885</b>	<b>16,006</b>

Note: Excludes SA data—see Chapter 1 for more information.

**Table D8: Closed support periods, by length of support period and state and territory, September quarter 2011, not adjusted for non-response**

Length of support period	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Australia
< 2 days	4,346	11,926	2,994	2,147	n.a.	276	63	370	22,122
2 days–1 week	1,465	2,494	1,432	1,339	n.a.	249	71	406	7,456
8 days–2 weeks	951	1,337	964	490	n.a.	145	65	132	4,084
15 days–4 weeks	1,794	1,927	1,364	677	n.a.	292	156	127	6,337
29 days–6 weeks	1,440	1,316	1,179	512	n.a.	214	106	81	4,848
> 6 weeks	4,316	3,276	3,484	1,535	n.a.	665	386	265	13,927
<b>Total</b>	<b>14,312</b>	<b>22,276</b>	<b>11,417</b>	<b>6,700</b>	<b>n.a.</b>	<b>1,841</b>	<b>847</b>	<b>1,381</b>	<b>58,774</b>

Note: Excludes SA data—see Chapter 1 for more information.

**Table D9: Closed support periods, by reason support period ended, September quarter 2011, not adjusted for non-response**

<b>Reason support period ended</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Per cent</b>
Client referred to another specialist homelessness agency	4,320	7.5
Client referred to a mainstream agency	1,886	3.3
Client's immediate needs met/case management goals achieved	24,493	42.5
Maximum service period reached	1,038	1.8
Service withdrawn from client and no referral made	1,290	2.2
Client no longer requested assistance	14,740	25.6
Client did not turn up	2,309	4.0
Lost contact with client	3,968	6.9
Client institutionalised	150	0.3
Client incarcerated	116	0.2
Client died	51	0.1
Other	3,212	5.6
<i>Total valid responses</i>	<i>57,573</i>	<i>100.0</i>
Not stated	1,201	..
<b>Total</b>	<b>58,774</b>	<b>..</b>

Note: Excludes SA data—see Chapter 1 for more information.

**Table D10: Closed support periods, dwelling type, when presenting for support and at the end of the support period, September quarter 2011, not adjusted for non-response**

Dwelling type	At presentation to homelessness agency		At end of support period	
	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent
House/townhouse/flat	20,363	65.0	20,720	66.1
Caravan	495	1.6	456	1.5
Tent	121	0.4	67	0.2
Cabin	91	0.3	68	0.2
Boat	6	0.0	4	0.0
Improvised building/dwelling	621	2.0	506	1.6
No dwelling/street/park/in the open	1,990	6.4	1,319	4.2
Motor vehicle	488	1.6	329	1.0
Boarding/rooming house	2,000	6.4	2,048	6.5
Emergency accommodation	2,471	7.9	3,430	10.9
Hotel/motel/bed and breakfast	1,173	3.7	1,106	3.5
Hospital (excluding psychiatric)	187	0.6	122	0.4
Psychiatric hospital/unit	168	0.5	109	0.3
Disability support	31	0.1	32	0.1
Rehabilitation	201	0.6	190	0.6
Adult correctional facility	167	0.5	129	0.4
Youth/juvenile justice correctional centre	56	0.2	38	0.1
Boarding school/residential college	14	0.0	13	0.0
Aged care facility	22	0.1	29	0.1
Immigration detention centre	3	0.0	3	0.0
Other	670	2.1	620	2.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>31,338</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>31,338</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Notes:

1. Excludes SA data—see Chapter 1 for more information.
2. Numbers are for closed support periods where a valid response was recorded both when presenting to an agency and at the end of support.

**Table D11: Closed support periods, tenure type, when presenting for support and at the end of the support period, September quarter 2011, not adjusted for non-response**

Tenure type	At presentation to homelessness agency		At end of support period	
	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent
Renter—private housing	5,754	20.4	5,731	20.3
Renter—public housing	2,553	9.0	2,936	10.4
Renter—community housing	796	2.8	1,054	3.7
Renter—transitional housing	497	1.8	723	2.6
Renter—caravan park	369	1.3	336	1.2
Renter—boarding/rooming house	2,192	7.8	2,066	7.3
Renter—emergency accommodation/night shelter/women's refuge/youth shelter where rent is charged	1,973	7.0	2,887	10.2
Other renter	738	2.6	659	2.3
Rent free—private housing	1,805	6.4	1,581	5.6
Rent free—public housing	753	2.7	756	2.7
Rent free—community housing	248	0.9	280	1.0
Rent free—transitional housing	72	0.3	110	0.4
Rent free—caravan park	30	0.1	19	0.1
Rent free—boarding/rooming house	272	1.0	253	0.9
Rent free—emergency accommodation/night shelter/women's refuge/youth shelter where rent is not charged	904	3.2	952	3.4
Other rent free	1,830	6.5	1,532	5.4
Life tenure scheme	4	0.0	6	0.0
Owner—shared equity or rent/buy scheme	53	0.2	41	0.1
Owner—being purchased/with mortgage	670	2.4	640	2.3
Owner—fully owned	172	0.6	163	0.6
Other tenure type not elsewhere specified	212	0.8	190	0.7
No tenure	6,317	22.4	5,299	18.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>28,214</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>28,214</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Notes:

1. Excludes SA data—see Chapter 1 for more information.
2. Numbers are for closed support periods where a valid response was recorded both when presenting to an agency and at the end of support.

# List of tables

Table 1.1:	Number of clients in special groups of interest, and overlap with other groups, September quarter 2011.....	5
Table D1:	Clients and support periods, by age group, September quarter 2011, adjusted for non-response .....	61
Table D2:	Clients and support periods, by state and territory, September quarter 2011, adjusted for non-response .....	62
Table D3:	Support periods by previous experience of homelessness in the month before support, September quarter 2011 (per cent) .....	62
Table D4:	Clients, by presenting unit type, September quarter 2011, not adjusted for non-response.....	63
Table D5:	Clients by main reason for seeking assistance, September quarter 2011, not adjusted for non-response .....	64
Table D6:	Support periods, by need for services and assistance and service provision status, September quarter 2011, not adjusted for non-response.....	65
Table D7:	Closed support periods where accommodation was provided by length of accommodation and state and territory, September quarter 2011, not adjusted for non-response .....	67
Table D8:	Closed support periods, by length of support period and state and territory, September quarter 2011, not adjusted for non-response .....	67
Table D9:	Closed support periods, by reason support period ended, September quarter 2011, not adjusted for non-response.....	68
Table D10:	Closed support periods, dwelling type, when presenting for support and at the end of the support period, September quarter 2011, not adjusted for non-response.....	69
Table D11:	Closed support periods, tenure type, when presenting for support and at the end of the support period, September quarter 2011, not adjusted for non-response.....	70

# List of figures

Figure 1:	Summary of number of support periods and indicative duration over the reporting period, September quarter 2011.....	4
Figure 2.1:	Clients by age and sex, September quarter 2011, adjusted for non-response.....	8
Figure 2.2:	Clients, by state and territory and sex, September quarter 2011, adjusted for non-response.....	9
Figure 2.3:	Clients by presenting unit type, September quarter 2011 .....	11
Figure 2.4:	Clients by main reason for seeking assistance (top six main reasons only) and sex, September quarter 2011 .....	12
Figure 2.5:	Support periods, by most common service needs identified (top 10 needs only) and service provision status, September quarter 2011.....	14
Figure 2.6:	Closed support periods where accommodation was provided, by length of accommodation, September quarter 2011 .....	15
Figure 2.7:	Closed support periods by length of support period, September quarter 2011 .....	16
Figure 2.8:	Closed support periods by reason support period ended (broad groupings), September quarter 2011.....	17
Figure 3.1:	Clients by Indigenous status and age, September quarter 2011 (per cent) .....	20
Figure 3.2:	Indigenous clients by most common main reasons for seeking assistance (top six main reasons only), September quarter 2011 .....	21
Figure 4.1:	Children who are SHSC clients by age and sex, SHSC September quarter 2011 .....	24
Figure 5.1:	Clients escaping domestic and family violence, by age and sex, September quarter 2011 .....	27
Figure 6.1:	Clients who had experienced primary homelessness, by age and sex, September quarter 2011 .....	30
Figure 6.2:	Clients who had experienced primary homelessness, by most common main reason for seeking assistance (top six main reasons only) and sex, September quarter 2011 .....	31
Figure 7.1:	Clients who have left care settings as a proportion of all clients in this group, by age and sex, September quarter 2011 .....	34
Figure 7.2:	Clients who have left custodial settings as a proportion of all clients in this group, by age and sex, September quarter 2011 .....	35
Figure 7.3:	Clients with a care or protection order as a proportion of all clients in this group, by age and sex, September quarter 2011 .....	36
Figure 7.4:	Clients who have left care settings by most common reason for seeking assistance (top six main reasons only) and sex, September quarter 2011 .....	37
Figure 7.5:	Clients who have left custodial settings by most common reason for seeking assistance (top six main reasons only) and sex, September quarter 2011 .....	38
Figure 7.6:	Clients with care or protection order, by most common main reason for seeking assistance (top six main reasons only) and sex, September quarter 2011 .....	39