A profile of homelessness for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

Suggested citation

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

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Contents

Acknowledgments

Abbreviations

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACT	Australian Capital Territory
AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
CAP	Crisis Accommodation Program
NAHA	National Affordable Housing Agreement
NDC	National Data Collection
NDCA	National Data Collection Agency
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
SLK	statistical linkage key
Tas	Tasmania
THM	Transitional Housing Management program
VHDC	Victorian Homelessness Data Collection
Vic	Victoria
WA	Western Australia

Symbols

. .	not applicable
n.e.s.	not elsewhere specified
<	smaller than

Summary

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are over-represented in the homeless population.

Whilst Indigenous Australians represent around two and a half per cent of the Australian population they accounted for around 9% (9,000) of the total homeless population on Census night in 2006. Also, considering clients of government funded specialist homelessness services we can see that, for the 2008–09 reporting period, Indigenous Australians represented 17% of all people who were homeless or at risk of homelessness and accessed these services.

This report presents information on both Indigenous and other Australians, with the aim of providing a broad profile of Indigenous Australians experiencing, or at risk of homelessness. Information is also presented on Indigenous Australians accessing specialist homelessness services, and what they require and receive from these services. Information on non-Indigenous Australians is also presented for comparison purposes.

Key findings

- According to the 2006 Census, Indigenous Australians experienced higher rates of primary homelessness (sleeping rough, or in improvised dwellings and shelters) than non-Indigenous Australians (27% compared with 15% respectively).
- In 2006, for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, secondary homelessness (living in hostels, crisis accommodation or with friends and family temporarily), was the most common form of homelessness experienced.
- Of the 125,800 clients of specialist homelessness services in 2008–09, 21,400 (17%) identified as being Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.
- While the highest proportion of support periods for Indigenous clients was seen in *Major cities* (35%), this rate was considerably lower than that of non-Indigenous clients (70%).
- A higher proportion of Indigenous Australians are accessing services in *Inner* and *Outer regional, Remote* and *Very remote* areas than non-Indigenous Australians (63% compared to 30%).
- From 2006–07 to 2008–09, the main reason Indigenous Australians sought assistance from a specialist homelessness service remained the same—with 'interpersonal reasons' being reported most frequently. Of these interpersonal reasons, 'domestic or family violence' was reported most frequently , and Indigenous females presenting alone or with children were most likely to report this reason—around 42% for both of these client groups in 2008–09. Similar patterns were also seen for non-Indigenous clients.

Indigenous homelessness in Australia

Introduction

It is known that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are over-represented in the homeless population. For example, on Census night 2006, Indigenous Australians represented around two and a half per cent of the Australian population but accounted for around nine per cent of the homeless population. In addition, Indigenous people are also over-represented in the use of services provided by government funded specialist homelessness agencies funded through the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP). For example, in 2008–09, a sixth of specialist homelessness service clients were Indigenous.

Homelessness has many drivers and causes, including the shortage of affordable housing, long term unemployment, mental health issues, substance abuse and family and relationship breakdown (FaHCSIA 2008).

Indigenous Australians are more likely to be homeless than non-Indigenous Australians due to a number of factors, including:

- Indigenous people generally have less access to affordable and secure housing
- Indigenous people are more mobile than non-Indigenous people as they often need to leave their homes to access services or to observe cultural obligations (ABS & AIHW 2008).

What is homelessness?

The concept of homelessness is subjective and is influenced by prevailing community standards (ABS & AIHW 2008). It generally describes those people who are sleeping rough, as well as people staying in temporary, unstable or substandard accommodation.

Homelessness is also understood to be more than just a lack of housing. It is a complex problem with multiple causes which can potentially affect anyone, at any time, as a result of particular circumstances. For some individuals it is a once in a lifetime event, whereas others may cycle in and out of homelessness over a period of time. For some, homelessness is a chronic condition (AIHW 2009).

The cultural definition of homelessness, which is commonly used in AIHW and ABS publications, is based on the concepts used by Chamberlain and MacKenzie (Chamberlain & MacKenzie 2008). This defines individuals as homeless if their accommodation falls below the minimum community standard of a small rental flat with a bedroom, living room, kitchen, bathroom and some security of tenure (ABS & AIHW 2008). More information on the cultural definition can be found in Appendix 1.

This understanding of homelessness has its limitations. For example, the community standards around a person's security of tenure would state that someone who is 'couch surfing' does not have secure tenure and is considered homeless. While the community standard would state this view, this does not necessarily mean that the person believes they are homeless.

Homelessness for Indigenous Australians

Some authors have related homelessness experienced by Indigenous Australians to their history, values and beliefs (ABS & AIHW 2008). For example, 'spiritual homelessness' and 'public place dwelling' (also known as 'sleeping in the long grass' and 'itinerancy') are experiences faced by Indigenous Australians.

Spiritual homelessness is defined as the state of being disconnected from one's homeland, separation from family or kinship networks, or not being familiar with one's heritage. 'Public place dwelling' or 'itinerancy', is a difficult concept to define. However, it generally describes a group of people, usually Indigenous Australians, from remote communities that are living—usually sleeping rough in the 'long grass'—on the outskirts of a major centre, for example Darwin. People dwelling in public places may not consider themselves homeless, or the services they require may not involve physical accommodation. For more information on these concepts the reader is referred to Keys Young, 1998 and Memmott & Fantin, 2001. Experiences like these are difficult to capture under the broad cultural definition of homelessness.

Two of the most well-known sources of information on homelessness come from *Counting the Homeless* (Chamberlain & MacKenzie 2008) and the SAAP National Data Collection (NDC) (AIHW 2010). The cultural definition is used in *Counting the Homeless* and can be applied to the SAAP NDC (although SAAP does have its own definition of homelessness). More information on these data sources can be found in the following section and Appendix 1.

This report provides information about Indigenous homeless numbers from *Counting the Homeless*, as well as the Indigenous homeless and at risk of homelessness population accessing specialist homelessness services. In doing this, the report presents basic homelessness demographic information on Indigenous homelessness along with information from specialist homelessness services which shows the reasons why Indigenous clients contacted a specialist homelessness service agency, and what type of support they received. Information about non-Indigenous clients is included for comparison purposes.

A response to homelessness

In 2009, the Australian Government released the White Paper, *The Road Home: A national approach to reducing homelessness* (FaHCSIA 2008), outlining the government's response to tackling homelessness within Australia. In this report the government set two headline targets to be achieved by 2020:

- To halve the number of homeless.
- To offer supported accommodation to all rough sleepers who need it.

The White Paper also identified several subgroups of the population, considered to be vulnerable to homelessness—Indigenous Australians being one of these groups.

Specific targets were set for Indigenous Australians experiencing, or at risk of homelessness in the White Paper and subsequent National Agreements and National Partnership Agreements. For example, one target was to reduce the incidence of homelessness in remote Australia by 50 per cent by 2018 (NPARIH 2009:8).

Government-funded specialist homelessness agencies

For the period covered by this report, most specialist homelessness agencies were funded under the SAAP. Specialist homelessness agencies are required to collect data on service use. In addition to demographic data about clients of specialist homelessness services, the SAAP collection includes the reasons for seeking help, the services provided, and where people go when they stop receiving a service. The SAAP NDC provides data about people who are homeless as well as those people who are 'at risk of homelessness', for example, people who have no security of tenure in relation to their home.

For the reporting year 2008–09, significant developments occurred within the SAAP NDC. On 1 January 2009, the SAAP V Agreement (the fifth version of the SAAP) between the Australian Government and the states and territories was replaced by the National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA) and the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH). The data collection from the specialist homelessness agencies previously funded through the SAAP program will continue until 2010–11. The policy shifts these agreements represent—such as improvements in intervention strategies for those at risk of homelessness; and greater follow-up support for clients who were previously homeless—may affect aspects of the data for 2008–09, particularly around the numbers of clients accessing services and the length of support provided to clients.

Important information about the data

This report draws on two data sources for the information presented about the homeless and those at risk of homelessness. These are the ABS report *Counting the Homeless 2006* (Chamberlain & MacKenzie 2008), which uses data primarily from the Census of Population and Housing; and data from the SAAP NDC held at the AIHW.

Accurate interpretation of the analyses presented in this report requires an understanding of the concepts and terms used in the SAAP NDC and *Counting the Homeless 2006*. Readers are encouraged to consult the SAAP NDC Collectors Manual (AIHW 2005) and *Counting the Homeless 2006* (Chamberlain & MacKenzie 2008). Links to where these references and additional information on the data sources—such as data quality and counting rules—can be found in the appendix material.

It should be noted that the data presented in this report on the number of SAAP clients has been derived from support period data. This is due to the fact that rather than collecting information on clients directly, the SAAP NDC collects information on periods (episodes) of support provided to clients by specialist homelessness services. When interpreting SAAP data it is important to recognise there is a difference between support periods and clients. For example, as SAAP clients can receive multiple support periods during a financial year and this results in a count of support periods that is larger than the individual number of clients who received support. For example, there were 125,800 individual SAAP clients in 2008–09 and a total of 212,400 SAAP support periods provided (AIHW 2010).

In addition, SAAP support periods are determined either from closed support periods combined with support periods that remain open at the end of a reporting period, or from closed support periods only. Numbers based on both closed and ongoing open support periods are always greater than those based on closed support periods only.

The title of each table alerts the reader to the method of calculation used. For more information on how to interpret the tables within this report, see Appendix 1.4 'Interpretation of tables'.

As one of the two (along with the Census) main data sources for reporting on the homeless and at risk of homelessness population, SAAP data can be used to provide a profile of homeless people who access specialist homelessness services. However, it should be noted that these people only represent a subgroup of the total homeless and at risk of homelessness population, as not all people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness will access a specialist homelessness service.

Where appropriate, numbers have been weighted to adjust for a small number of SAAP agencies that provide specialist homelessness services who do not supply their data to the national collection and the non-consent of some clients to provide their information to agencies.

Box 1: Number of support periods and number of clients in SAAP data

When interpreting SAAP data it is important to understand the difference between support periods and clients. Rather than collecting information on clients directly, the SAAP NDC collects information on support periods provided by specialist homelessness services. The data presented on clients is then derived from support period data.

What is the difference?

Support periods:

- A support period is a period of time during which a person receives ongoing support from a specialist homelessness agency—also known as a support relationship.

- It begins when the client first receives support and/or supported accommodation from an agency; it is considered finished when either the client or the agency ends the support relationship.

- Every time a client arrives at an agency seeking assistance (where no support relationship is already in place), a new support period commences. Therefore a client can have many support periods.

Clients and accompanying children:

- To estimate the actual number of people (clients and accompanying children) associated with these support periods, information that links multiple support periods for a single person is collected (where consent is provided).

- In this way, clients and accompanying children with multiple support periods can be identified and estimates of people can be made.

Note: See Appendix 1 for where to find more information on SAAP glossary items such as support period, client and accompanying child.
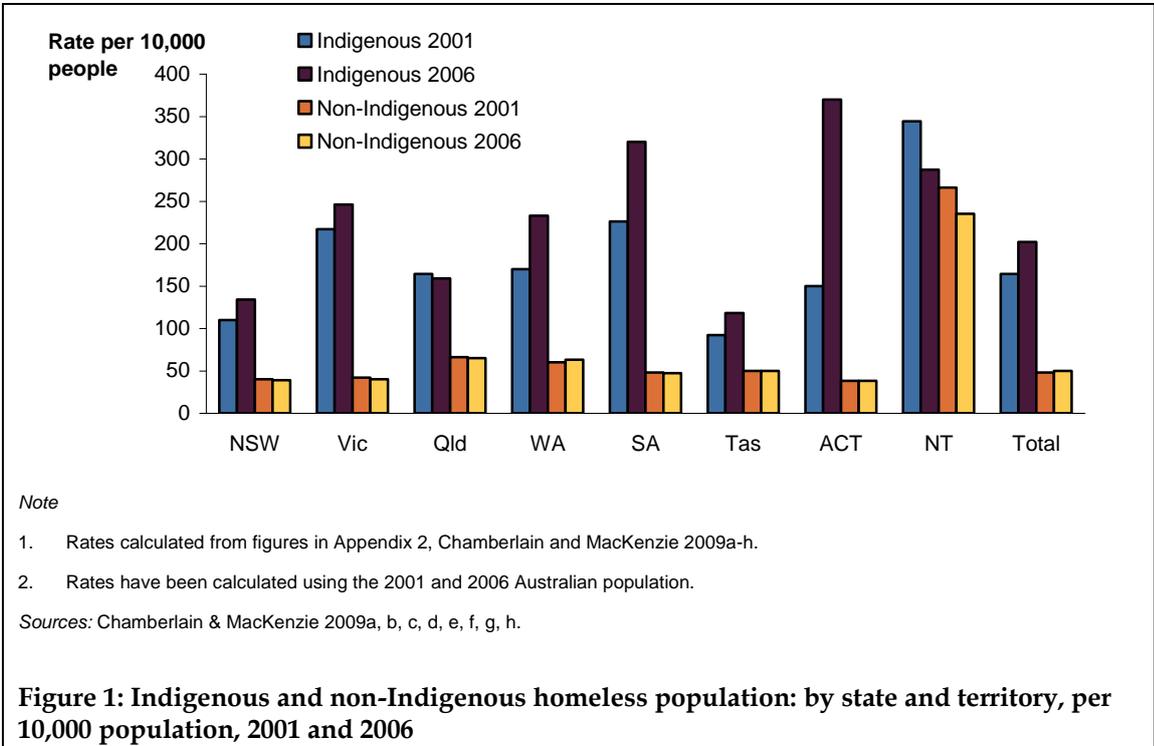

A profile of Indigenous homeless people

The number of homeless Indigenous Australians

Indigenous Australians are more likely to be homeless than other Australians. Estimates of the homeless population in Australia are best provided by the Census. On Census night in 2006, there were an estimated 105,000 homeless people in Australia (53 per 10,000 people overall). Of these, over 9,000 identified as being of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander origin. While this number may seem small in comparison to non-Indigenous Australians, when examining the rates of homelessness it can be seen that Indigenous Australians had four times (191 per 10,000) the rate of non-Indigenous Australians (49 per 10,000) (Chamberlain & MacKenzie 2008) (Table A1). These comparisons are consistent across most states and territories (Figure 1).

Similarly, comparing the proportion of the homeless population who are Indigenous (approximately 9% in 2001 and 2006) to the proportion of Indigenous Australians in the total population (2.4%) shows that Indigenous Australians are over-represented in the homeless population (Chamberlain & MacKenzie 2008).

As well—focussing on state and territory rates—the rate of homelessness for Indigenous Australians appears to have increased in the period from 2001 to 2006; whereas the rate for non-Indigenous Australians appears to have remained relatively unchanged (Figure 1). The main exception to this pattern is in the Northern Territory where rates fell for both population groups.

Note

1. Rates calculated from figures in Appendix 2, Chamberlain and MacKenzie 2009a-h.

2. Rates have been calculated using the 2001 and 2006 Australian population.

Sources: Chamberlain & MacKenzie 2009a, b, c, d, e, f, g, h.

Figure 1: Indigenous and non-Indigenous homeless population: by state and territory, per 10,000 population, 2001 and 2006

While rates are better for comparison purposes between jurisdictions and between Censuses, it is important to track changes in the actual number of homeless Indigenous Australians as these determine the extent of services needed. For example, while the rates of Indigenous homelessness for Queensland dropped from 164 to 159 per 10,000 between 2001 and 2006 (Table A1), the actual number of homeless Indigenous Australians increased from 1,918 to 2,148 (Table 1). This increase in the numbers can be used to indicate a need for increased service provision.

Table 1: Number of Indigenous and non-Indigenous homeless population: by state and territory, 2001 and 2006

	Indigenous								
Census year	NSW	VIC	QLD	WA	SA	TAS	ACT	NT	Aust
2001	1,376	564	1,918	1,054	544	151	55	1,864	7,526
2006	1,961	777	2,148	1,496	858	207	149	1,652	9,248
	Non-Indigenous								
Census year	NSW	VIC	QLD	WA	SA	TAS	ACT	NT	Aust
2001	25,057	19,634	22,487	10,607	6,958	2,235	1,162	3,559	91,699
2006	25,235	19,734	24,529	11,837	6,996	2,281	1,202	3,126	94,940

Note: This table utilises data contained in the individual state and territory *Counting the homeless* reports (Chamberlain & MacKenzie 2009a-h). However, it should be noted that due to differing methodology in relation to missing data on Indigenous status, the national and the state and territory totals do not correspond with the results presented in the original *Counting the homeless* report (Chamberlain & MacKenzie 2008).

Sources: Chamberlain & MacKenzie 2009a, b, c, d, e, f, g, h.

What types of homelessness are Indigenous people experiencing?

While definitions on homelessness vary, not everyone's experience of being homeless will be exactly the same, be it 'sleeping rough', having no permanent place to live, or living in inadequate accommodation. In Australia however, the cultural definition of homelessness is one of the most frequently reported and accepted definitions of homelessness. The ABS defines three broad types (categories) of homelessness—'primary', 'secondary' and 'tertiary' (See Appendix 1). Chamberlain & MacKenzie applied these definitions using the methodology outlined in Box 2 to count the number of homeless people in each of these categories. On Census night August 2006 the most frequently reported type of homelessness experienced by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians was secondary homelessness (59% and 64% respectively), followed by primary homelessness (27%) and tertiary homelessness (14%) for Indigenous Australians, and tertiary (21%) and primary homelessness (15%) for non-Indigenous Australians (Figure 2; Table A2).

Consistent with the overall pattern of homelessness across Australia, in most states and territories, secondary homelessness is also the most common type experienced, with the exception of the Northern Territory where Indigenous Australians experience primary homelessness more often, with 60% in this category (Table A2).

Box 2: Counting the Homeless—Primary, Secondary and Tertiary

Chamberlain & MacKenzie used the following information to count the number of homeless people in the primary, secondary and tertiary homelessness categories of the cultural definition of homelessness.

- **Primary homelessness:**

    Improvised home, tent, sleepers out

- **Secondary homelessness:**

    Hostels for the homeless, night shelter, refuge

    Visitors to private dwellings with 'no usual address'

- **Tertiary homelessness:**

    Boarding house/private hotel.

Note: See Chamberlain & MacKenzie (2008, Chapters 2 and 3) for more detail on how the types of homelessness are applied
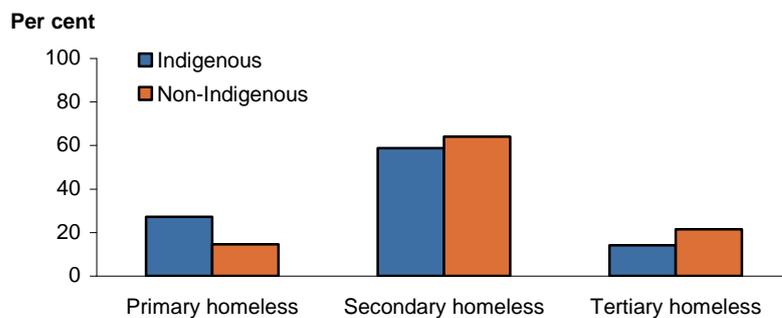
Notes

1. Categories of Primary, Secondary and Tertiary have been calculated from data in the Counting the Homeless State and Territory reports.

2. Categories were calculated using the same methods Chamberlain & MacKenzie (2008) used for operationalising these categories.

Sources: Chamberlain & MacKenzie 2009a, b, c, d, e, f, g, h.

Figure 2: Homeless people, by Indigenous status and homelessness category, 2006

In 2008–09, there were a total of 79,600 (40%) SAAP support periods for which an individual receiving support was categorised as experiencing either primary, secondary or tertiary homelessness, with the remaining support periods categorised as either 'at risk' or 'unknown' homelessness status (Table 2). Of the different types of homelessness, secondary homelessness represented the highest proportion (24%) of all support periods, followed by primary homelessness (11%) and tertiary homelessness (5%). There were roughly equal proportions of support periods for males and females (excluding 'at risk' and 'unknown' categories). Of all support periods for which a type of homelessness was reported, about a sixth of these were for Indigenous clients.

For Indigenous clients, about 40 % of their support periods were identified as following a period of homelessness, with the remainder being for people at risk of homelessness or for

unknown reasons. Secondary homelessness remained the highest proportion of the support periods (29%) compared to primary (10%) and tertiary homelessness (3%). A larger proportion of support periods were for Indigenous females (72%) than Indigenous males (28%).

Table 2: SAAP support periods: Indigenous status, by homeless category and gender, 2008–09

	Indigenous status							
	Indigenous		Non-Indigenous		Males and females		All clients	
Homeless category	Male	Female	Male	Female	Indigenous	Non-Indigenous	Total (%)	Total (number)
Primary	19.2	6.3	19.2	4.7	9.9	11.0	10.8	21,700
Secondary	26.0	29.4	21.0	24.2	28.5	22.8	23.8	48,000
Tertiary	4.1	2.1	8.7	2.9	2.7	5.4	4.9	9,900
At risk[a]	38.4	50.5	37.2	55.4	47.1	47.5	47.5	95,500
Unknown	12.3	11.6	13.8	12.8	11.8	13.2	13.0	26,100
Total	*100.0*	*100.0*	*100.0*	*100.0*	*100.0*	*100.0*	*100.0*	. .
Total (%)	**12.2**	**21.6**	**87.8**	**78.4**	**17.8**	**82.2**	**100.0**	. .
Total (number)	**10,000**	**25,900**	**71,700**	**93,800**	**35,800**	**165,400**	**. .**	**201,300**

(a) At risk of homelessness includes all people who provided information about their house/dwelling circumstances and/or tenure, but did not fit either a primary, secondary or tertiary homelessness category. Due to limitations with the data approximating these homeless categories, it is possible that a number of at risk of homelessness clients could in fact be homeless.

Notes

1. Number excluded due to errors and omissions: 5,034 males; 6,102 females; and 11,136 of all clients.

2. Columns/rows may not add due to rounding.

Source: SAAP Client Collection.

The number of Indigenous Australians accessing specialist homelessness services

The characteristics of people experiencing homelessness vary. The demographic profile of Indigenous Australians who are homeless can be seen through analysis of clients accessing specialist homelessness services. It should, however, be noted that these people only represent a subgroup of the total homeless population, as not all people who are homeless will access a specialist homelessness service. Similarly, these are not the only services available as clients can access mainstream services, such as Centrelink and social housing.

As a subset of the overall population, analysis of SAAP data shows similar patterns in SAAP clients to what is found in the census. That is, that Indigenous Australians are also over-represented as a proportion of total clients accessing these services, compared to their proportion of both the total Australian population and the homeless population.

In the 2006–07 reporting period, Indigenous clients made up a sixth (17%) of the total client population of specialist homelessness services (Table 3). By comparison, in 2006, Indigenous Australians made up around nine per cent of the homeless population and two and a half per cent of the total Australian population (Chamberlain & MacKenzie 2008). For the following two years (2007–08 & 2008–09), the proportion of Indigenous Australians accessing specialist homelessness services remained the same at 17 per cent (Table 3).

Table 3: SAAP clients: Indigenous status as a percentage of total clients, 2006–07 to 2008–09

	2006–07		2007–08		2008–09	
Indigenous status	Per cent	Total clients	Per cent	Total clients	Per cent	Total clients
Indigenous	16.9	20,100	16.9	21,300	17.0	21,400
Non-Indigenous	75.6	89,800	77.7	97,600	77.9	98,000
Missing Indigenous status	7.5	8,900	5.3	6,700	5.0	6,300
Total	*100.0*	*. .*	*100.0*	*. .*	*100.0*	*. .*
Total (%)	**100.0**	**. .**	**100.0**	**. .**	**100.0**	**. .**
Total number	**. .**	**118,800**	**. .**	**125,600**	**. .**	**125,800**

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

Sources: SAAP client collection.

For the 2008–09 reporting period, clients of specialist homelessness services were more likely to be female, especially Indigenous clients. Overall, almost three-quarters (71%) of Indigenous clients were female compared with three-fifths (60%) of non-Indigenous clients (Table 4).

Table 4: SAAP: Clients by Indigenous status and gender, 2008–09

	Clients by Indigenous status			
	Males		Females	
	Total (number)	Total (%)	Total (number)	Total (%)
Indigenous	6,200	14	15,200	21
Non-Indigenous	38,900	86	59,000	79
Total	*45,100*	*100*	*74,200*	*100*
	Clients by gender				
	Males		Females		Total
	Total (number)	Total (%)	Total (number)	Total (%)	
Indigenous	6,200	29	15,300	71	21,400
Non-Indigenous	3,900	40	59,000	60	97,900
Total	*45,100*	*38*	*74,200*	*62*	*119,300*

Note: Number omitted due to errors and omissions: 2,490 (male) and 3,839 (female).
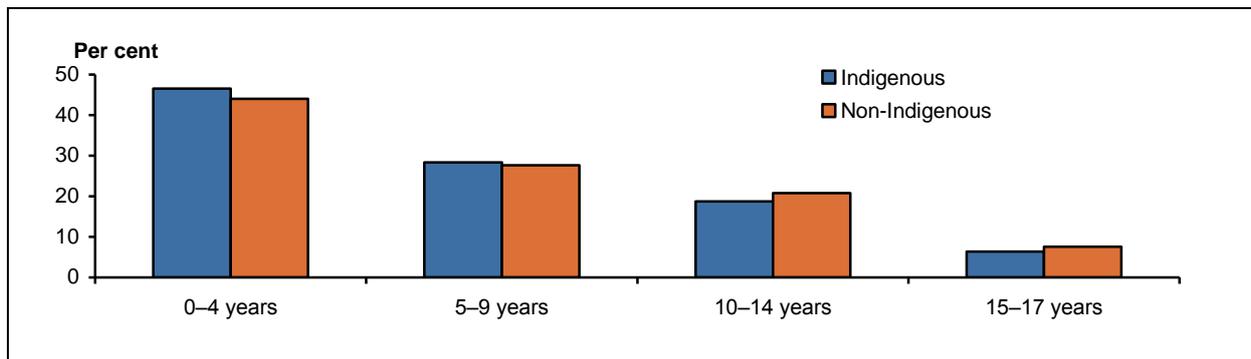
Source: SAAP client collection.

Looking at Figure 3, the proportion of Indigenous clients was lower for older age groups compared with non-Indigenous clients where the proportion of older age groups was higher. For Indigenous clients, the proportion of both female and male clients was lower for the older age groups, whereas for non-Indigenous clients, the proportion of females was lower for older age groups and higher for males. However, the lower proportions in Indigenous SAAP clients for the older age groups may reflect higher mortality rates in the middle adult age groups (35-54) (AIHW 2009: 8).
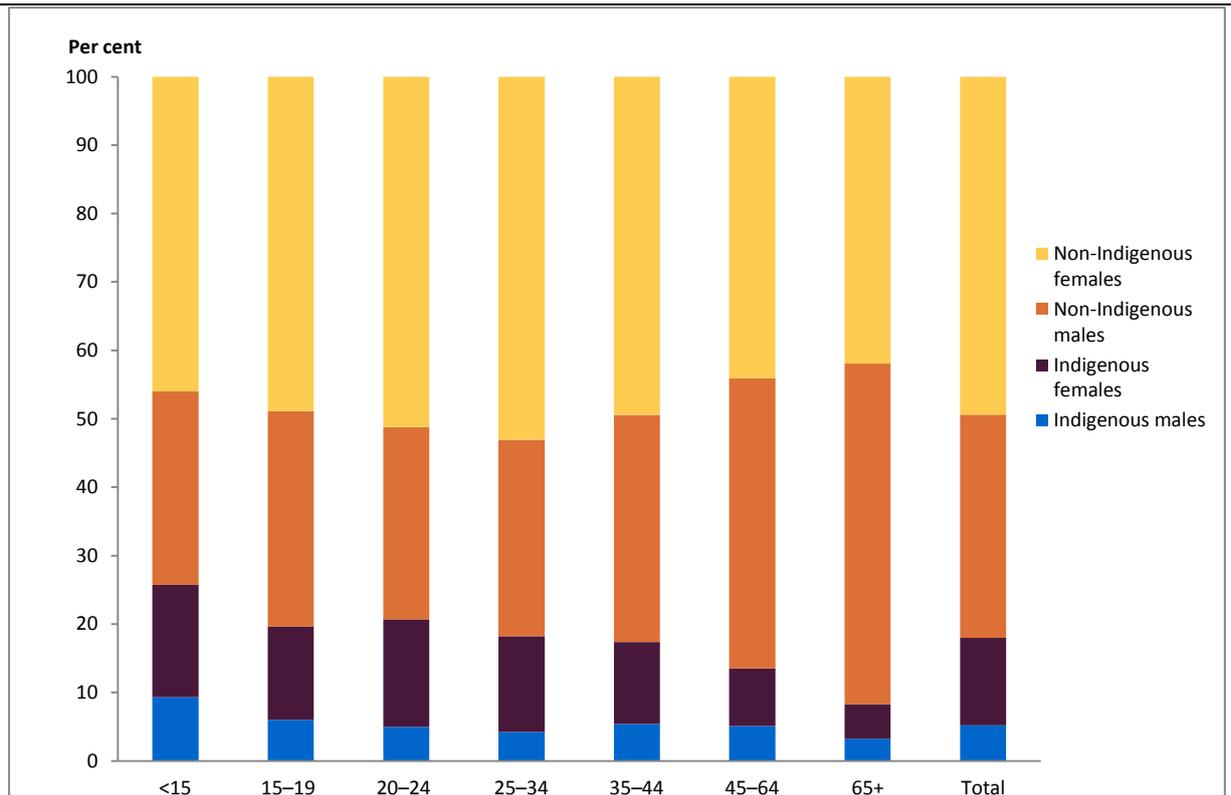
Source: SAAP Client Collection.

Figure 3: SAAP clients: Indigenous status, by age and gender, 2008–09 (per cent)

There were a total of 79,000 accompanying children presenting to specialist homelessness services in 2008–09 (Table A4). Of these, 18,700 accompanying children, almost a quarter (24%) were Indigenous. In both the Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations of accompanying children, the proportions of males and females were roughly equal. The proportion of Indigenous accompanying children aged between 0–4 years was 47% and 44% for non-Indigenous accompanying children (Figure 4).
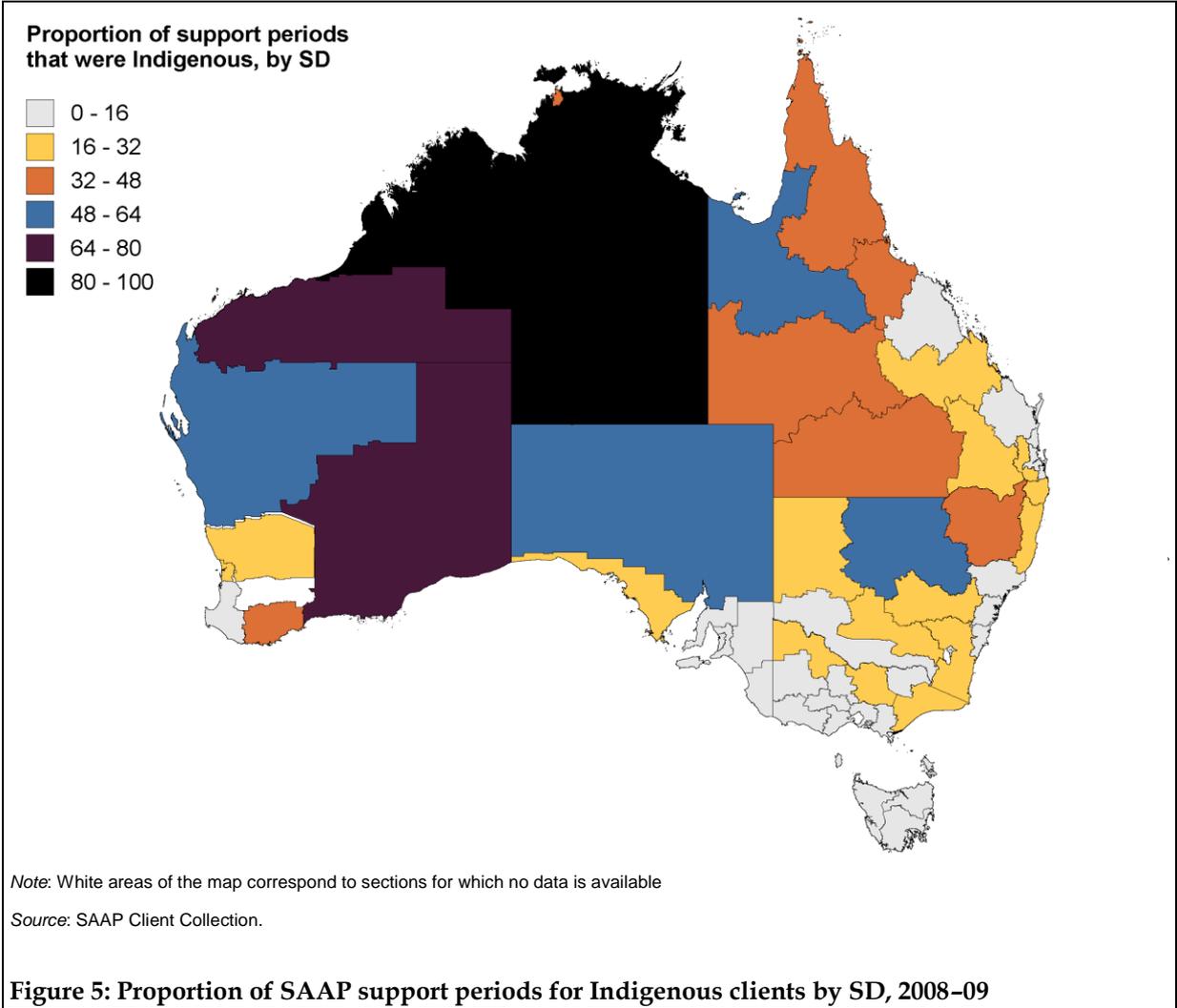

Source: SAAP Client Collection.

Figure 4: SAAP accompanying children: proportion of accompanying children, by Indigenous status and age, 2008–09
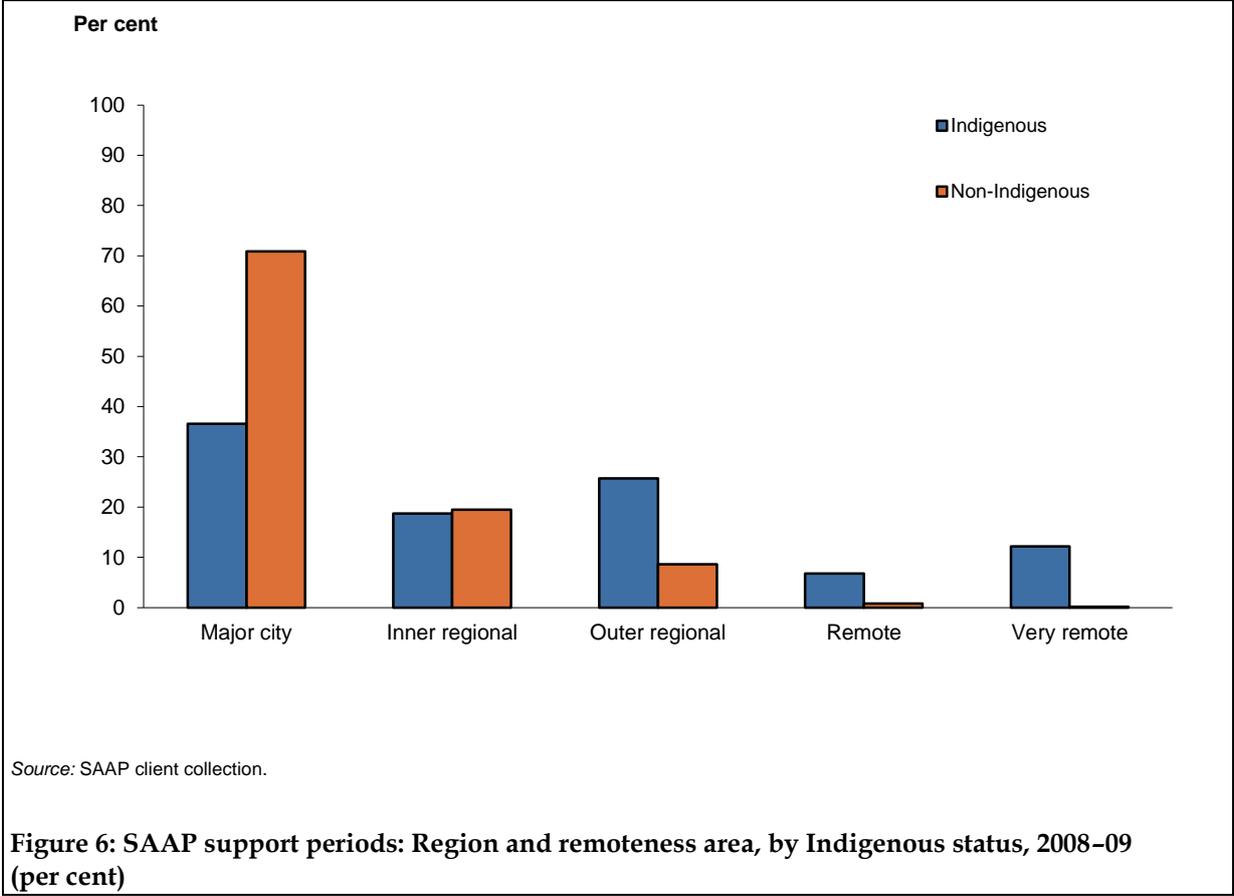
Geographical distribution of Indigenous peoples accessing specialist homelessness services

The geographical location of a specialist homelessness agency can provide an indication of where people are accessing services. However, it should be noted that this data is derived from the postcode supplied by the agency in their mailing address and this may not always match the actual location of the agency. Figure 5 is a map of Australia divided into statistical divisions (SDs) (see Appendix material for more detail about SDs). This map shows the support periods for Indigenous clients as a proportion of the total number of support periods in each SD in order to show the location of services that predominantly provide support to Indigenous Australians. For agencies in the Northern Territory and the Kimberly region of Western Australia, Indigenous clients form the largest proportion of total support periods (more than 80%). For agencies in the Pilbara and South-Eastern regions of Western Australia, Indigenous clients also account for a high proportion of the total support periods (64-80%). On the other hand, agencies in the South Eastern regions of Australia (particularly Tasmania, Victoria and Southern New South Wales) have lower proportions of support periods for Indigenous clients.

Note: White areas of the map correspond to sections for which no data is available

Source: SAAP Client Collection.

Figure 5: Proportion of SAAP support periods for Indigenous clients by SD, 2008–09

The geographical distribution of support periods provided for Indigenous clients using the regional classifications within the Australian Standard Geographical Classification (ASGC) Remoteness Structure (ABS 2007b) are shown in Figure 6.

Considering regional data for all clients of specialist homelessness services, most support periods were in *Major cities* for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous clients. While most support periods for Indigenous clients were also in *Major cities* (over 35%), this was considerably lower than support periods for non-Indigenous clients (around 70%).Therefore, for the remaining categories combined, the proportion of support periods was much higher for Indigenous clients (around 63%), than non-Indigenous clients (around 30%). In each of the *Outer regional, Remote* and *Very remote* categories, there were more support periods for Indigenous clients than for non-Indigenous clients.

Source: SAAP client collection.

Figure 6: SAAP support periods: Region and remoteness area, by Indigenous status, 2008–09 (per cent)

Support and services provided to Indigenous Australians

The support and services received by people experiencing homelessness varies according to the reasons they sought support from a specialist homelessness agency, the type of services needed, and the duration of support needed. It should be noted that specialist homelessness services are not the only services available to people who are homeless. However, taking this into account, the SAAP NDC provides a comprehensive profile of this subset of the homeless population.

In 2008–09, there were 125,800 SAAP clients, of which 21,400 identified as being Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (Appendix Table A3). There were 212,400 SAAP support periods, and of these there were 35,800 support periods for clients who identified as being Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (Appendix Table A5) (See Box 1 for details on clients and support periods).
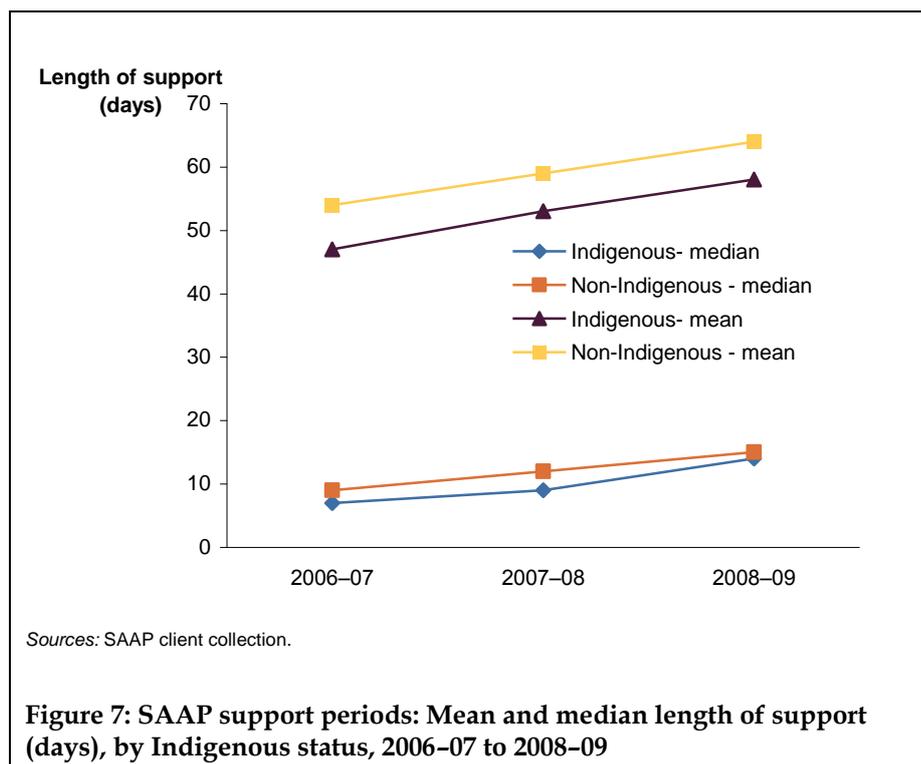
Length of support

For both Indigenous and non-Indigenous clients there was a trend for both the mean and median length of support to increase over the three reporting periods between 2006–07 and 2008–09 (Figure 7). The median length of support for Indigenous clients doubled from seven to 14 days (mean: from 47 to 58 days) whereas for non-Indigenous clients the median length of support increased from 9 to 15 days (mean: from 54 to 64 days) (Figure 7).[1]

This increase in the length of support periods may reflect policy shifts—reflected in SAAP, NAHA and NPAH Agreements—that place a more holistic emphasis on support, particularly pre- and post-crisis support. Essentially, these policy shifts are aimed at:

- Improving early intervention strategies for those at risk of homelessness to prevent them from becoming homeless in the first instance.
- Providing greater follow up support with clients who were previously homeless, so that they do not cycle back into homelessness following support.

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[1] When looking at the length of support that clients of specialist homelessness services receive, a measure of the median length of support may provide a better indication than the mean. The mean can be affected by a small number of clients with much longer support periods relative to the rest of the client population such as those with high and complex needs.

Length of support (days)

Sources: SAAP client collection.

Figure 7: SAAP support periods: Mean and median length of support (days), by Indigenous status, 2006–07 to 2008–09

Main reason for seeking assistance

A person who is experiencing homelessness may have several reasons why they seek assistance from a specialist homelessness service. The following section provides information on what clients report as their 'main reason for seeking assistance'. See Appendix 1 for details on where to find glossary information in the SAAP NDC.

There are four broad categories which have been used in this report to present information relating to the main reason an individual seeks support (Figures 8 and 9):
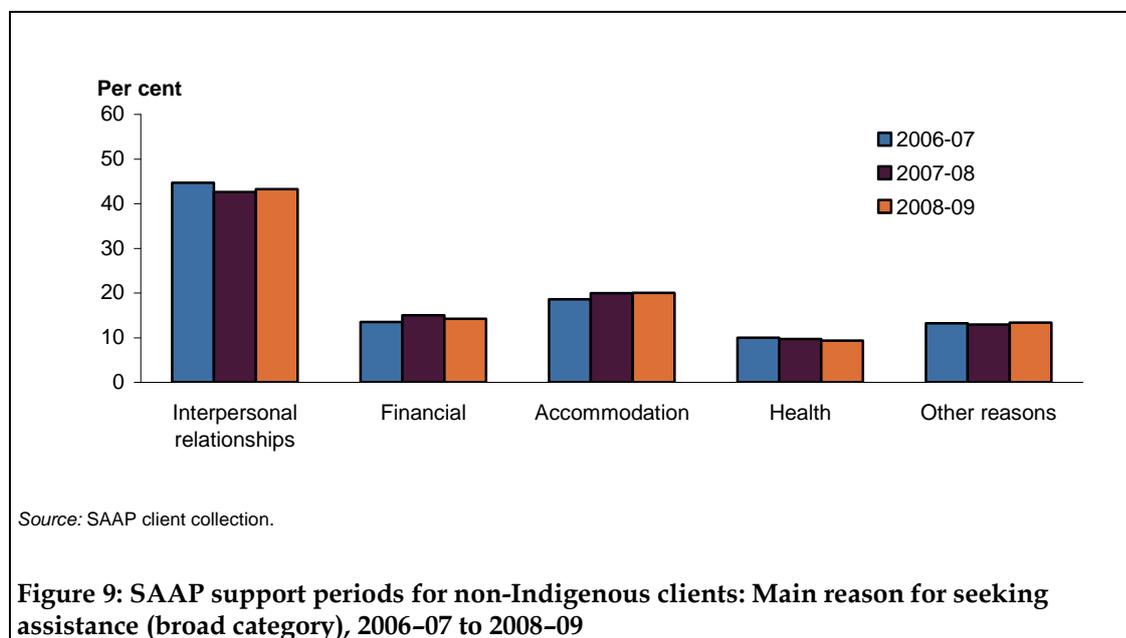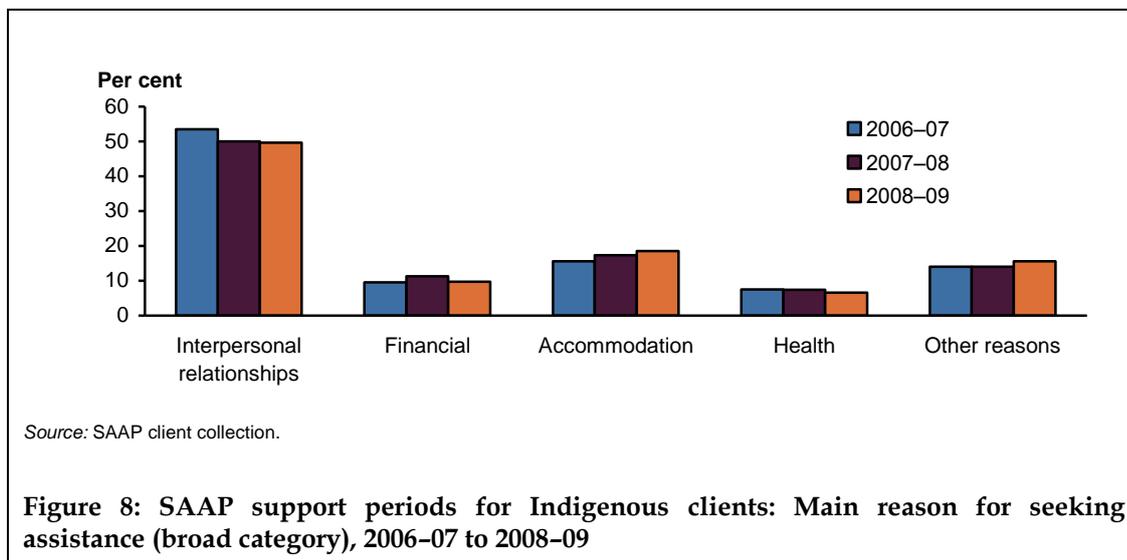
- Interpersonal relationships (including 'domestic/family violence' and relationship/family breakdown)
- Financial (including 'gambling' and 'rent too high')
- Accommodation (including 'overcrowding issues' and 'eviction/asked to leave')
- Health (including 'mental health issues' and 'problematic drug/alcohol/substance use')
- Other reasons (including 'recently left institution' and 'itinerant').

Each broad category of main reason for seeking assistance consists of a number of more specific sub-categories (see Appendix sections A9 and A10).

Figures 8 and 9 show that the order of reported reasons within these broad categories is the same for the last three SAAP reporting years, for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous clients.

For all support periods from 2006–07 to 2008–09, the broad category of 'interpersonal relationships' was the most common of reasons reported (Figures 8 and 9). While this broad category appears to have marginally decreased, it has consistently included around half of all the individual main reasons reported in these years.

'Accommodation' is the next most frequent broad reason for seeking assistance. Unlike 'interpersonal relationships', 'accommodation' appears to be increasing (marginally) over the three years, and more so in support periods for Indigenous clients compared to non-Indigenous clients (Figures 8 and 9; see also Tables A9 and A10). The most frequently reported reasons in this broad category differed between support periods for Indigenous clients (overcrowding issues, around 5%) and non-Indigenous clients (eviction or being asked to leave their residence, around 7%).
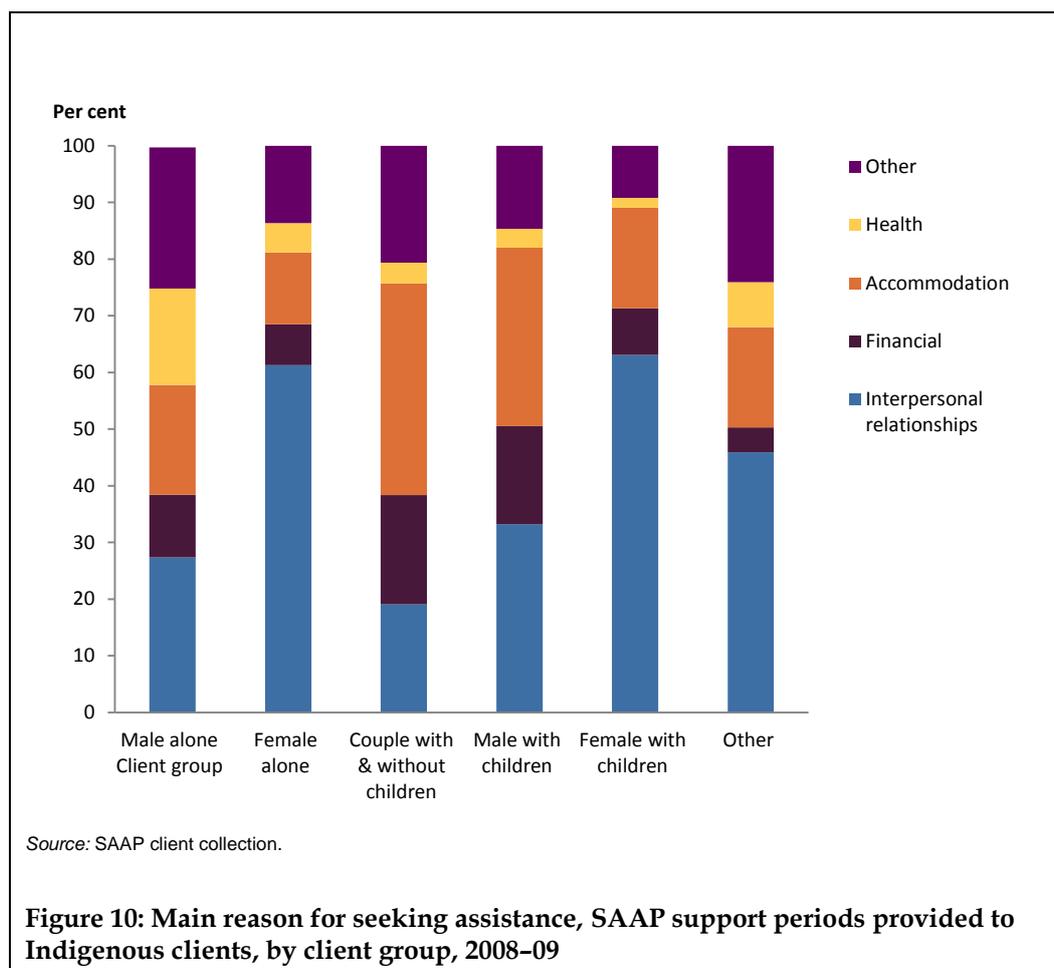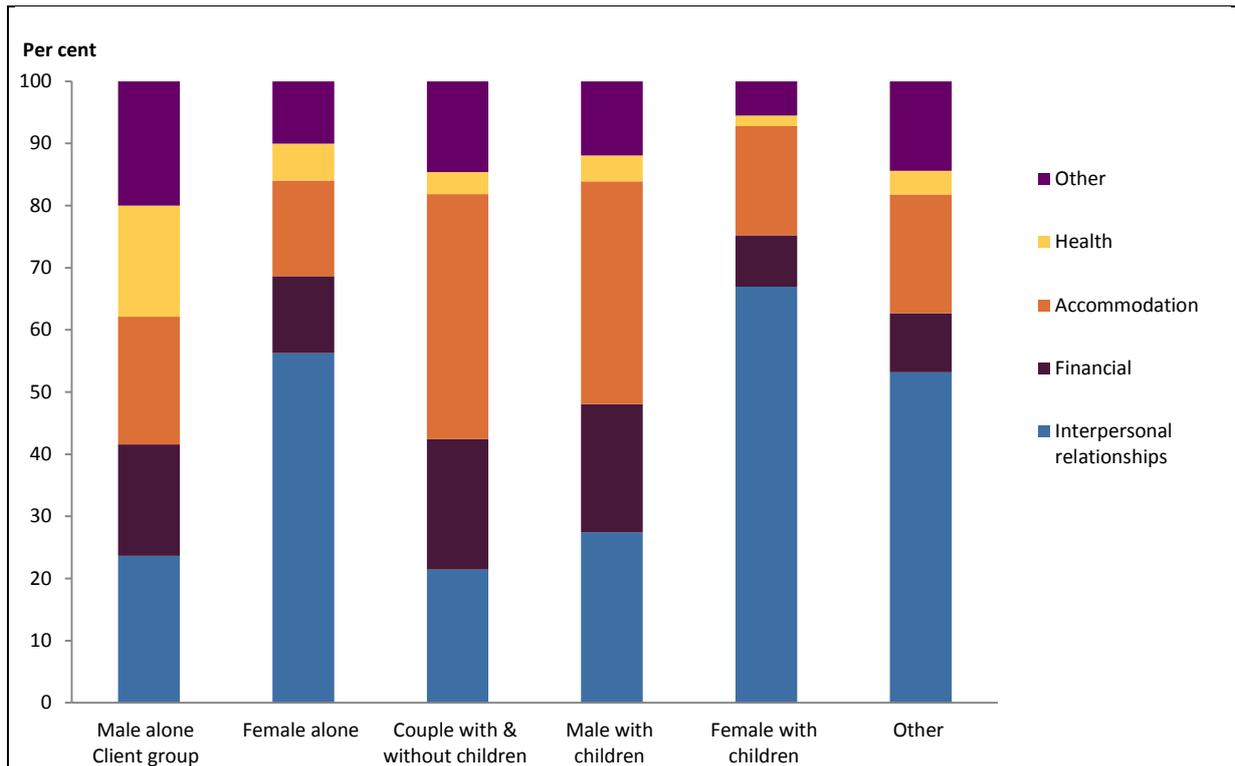

Source: SAAP client collection.

Figure 8: SAAP support periods for Indigenous clients: Main reason for seeking assistance (broad category), 2006–07 to 2008–09

Source: SAAP client collection.

Figure 9: SAAP support periods for non-Indigenous clients: Main reason for seeking assistance (broad category), 2006–07 to 2008–09

Client group

Clients can be grouped together for analysis purposes based on their shared characteristics, for example single women under the age of 25—the SAAP data refers to this as a 'client group'. Figures 10 and 11 present information on the 'main reason for seeking assistance' by different client groups; for presentation purposes some client groups have been aggregated (more detailed client group information can be found in Tables A13 and A14). The pattern of reported reasons within these client groups is essentially the same for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous clients (Figures 10 and 11).

In 2008–09, for Indigenous client groups 'female with children' and 'female alone' reported 'interpersonal relationships' as their main reason for seeking assistance in over 60 per cent of support periods (Figure 10); with 'domestic or family violence' being the most frequently reported main reason for seeking assistance in this category (Table A13). This finding was the same in support periods for non-Indigenous clients (Figure 11).

People in the client group Indigenous couples, with and without children, reported 'accommodation issues' as their main reason for seeking assistance in over a third (37%) of support periods (Figure 10); with 'overcrowding' being the most frequently reported main reason for seeking assistance in this category (Table A13). For non-Indigenous clients 'eviction or being asked to leave their accommodation' was the most frequently reported reason for seeking assistance (Table A14).

Source: SAAP client collection.

Figure 10: Main reason for seeking assistance, SAAP support periods provided to Indigenous clients, by client group, 2008–09

Per cent

Source: SAAP client collection.

Figure 11: Main reason for seeking assistance, SAAP support periods provided to non-Indigenous clients, by client group, 2008–09

Types of services provided

Clients of specialist homelessness agencies will receive different types of support services depending on their needs. In addition, a client can receive many services within a support period, so the number of services reported in a year will be more than the number of support periods reported (see also the earlier sections of this report). The following sections provide information on the types of services clients need and receive during the period of support provided by the specialist homelessness service.

There are 32 individual service types that a specialised homelessness service can report as being provided to a client. These services can be aggregated into six broad categories of services. These are:

- Housing/accommodation
- Financial/employment
- Personal support
- General support/advocacy
- Specialist services
- Basic support/services not elsewhere specified (n.e.s).

See Tables A15 and 16 for the full list of individual services.

Meeting the needs of Indigenous clients

Clients present to specialist homelessness services with a range of needs. During a support period, agency workers identify what services are required to help address those needs. The client may receive these services directly from the agency, be referred on, or both. There may also be needs where neither a service nor a referral to another service is provided.

This section looks at closed support periods for SAAP clients from 2006–07 to 2008–09. In all three reporting years, around 90 per cent of the services identified as needed for Indigenous clients were provided by specialist homelessness services. In the latest of these years, 2008–09, of the services identified as needed for Indigenous clients (181,700 services in 28,800 closed support periods), 165,800 (around 90 per cent) of these services were provided by specialist homelessness agencies (Table 5).

Of the six broad categories of support services, the highest proportions of services provided in 2008–09 were for 'basic support/other not elsewhere classified' (97% of services needed were provided), 'general support/advocacy' (96%) and 'personal support' (95%) (Table 5). The lowest proportion of support services were provided for 'specialist services' (75%). Similar proportions were also seen in 2006–07 and 2007–08 for these service types.

In all three years for non-Indigenous clients, similar proportions were also seen for services reported in closed support periods. In 2008–09, specialist services were generally less frequently provided to non-Indigenous clients compared with Indigenous clients (70% compared to 75%).

Table 5: Services needed by Indigenous and non-Indigenous SAAP clients in closed support periods, 2006-07 to 2008-09 (per cent provided)

Type of support	2006–07		2007–08		2008–09	
	Indigenous	Non-Indigenous	Indigenous	Non-Indigenous	Indigenous	Non-Indigenous
Housing/accommodation	85.0	82.2	83.6	81.7	83.6	84.2
Financial/employment	83.1	82.0	83.6	85.1	86.2	86.8
Personal support	93.2	93.6	94.0	94.7	94.6	95.5
General support/advocacy	95.6	96.2	96.0	96.4	96.0	96.1
Specialist services	69.9	66.6	70.6	66.2	75.2	69.6
Basic support/other n.e.s.	97.9	97.6	97.8	97.2	96.9	96.9
Total services required (number)	**175,900**	**737,012**	**180,900**	**768,495**	**181,700**	**765,722**
Total services provided (number)	**159, 800**	**660,386**	**164, 500**	**693,898**	**165, 800**	**697,328**
Total support periods (number)	**29,100**	**129,311**	**30,500**	**141,733**	**28,800**	**133,224**

Notes

1.   This data has been derived from the subtotal column of Tables A11 and A12 comprising 'provided only' and 'provided and referred on' of services required in closed support periods.

2.   Number excluded due to errors and omissions for Indigenous SAAP clients in 2006-07: 744, in 2007-08: 1,063 and 2008-09: 847.

3.   Number excluded due to errors and omissions for non-Indigenous SAAP clients in 2006-07: 4,649, in 2007-08: 4,578 and 2008-09: 4,743.

Sources: SAAP Client Collection.

In 2008–09, of the services identified as needed for Indigenous clients, 15,900 services (9%) were not directly provided by a specialist homelessness agency (see Table A11). These included services that were 'neither provided nor referred' and those that were 'referred on'. For more details regarding unmet needs, please refer to the *SAAP National Data Collection annual report 2008–09* and *Demand for SAAP accommodation by homeless people 2007–08*.

A closer look at services provided to Indigenous clients in 2008–09

This section takes a closer look at the services provided to Indigenous clients for the 2008–09 SAAP reporting period. It compares the services provided to different client groups in support periods of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous clients. Again, when interpreting this data it is important to note that clients can receive multiple services in a support period, and this means percentages for different categories will not add to 100 per cent.

Compared with non-Indigenous clients, Indigenous clients appear to have higher proportions of services provided to them in the categories of 'housing/support', 'specialist services' and 'basic support/other not elsewhere specified' (Figure 12).

For Indigenous clients, the highest proportion of 'housing/ accommodation' services were provided to males aged 25 and over presenting alone— nearly 70 per cent of support periods. However, for non-Indigenous clients, the highest proportion of 'housing/ accommodation' services were provided to males aged under 25 presenting alone — two thirds of support periods (66%).

For both Indigenous and non-Indigenous clients the highest proportion of services provided were reported in the 'general support or advocacy' category—76 and 80 per cent of support periods respectively. Indigenous clients with children were most frequently provided with general support and/or advocacy services—around 79 per cent for all three client groups (Table A15). Non-Indigenous clients with children also had the highest proportions of these services provided to them (80–84% in their respective support periods) (Table A16).

Personal support services were provided to Indigenous clients in almost three-fifths (57%) of support periods. 'Emotional support' (50%) and 'domestic violence counselling' (20%) were the most frequently recorded types of personal support services provided. In particular, females with children (58%) and females aged 25 and over presenting alone (56%) had the highest proportions of support periods where emotional support was provided. For non-Indigenous clients females with children (67%) and females aged under 25 presenting alone (60%) were the client groups with the highest proportion of support periods where emotional support was provided.

Notes

1.   Clients were able to receive multiple services within a support period, so percentages do not add to 100.

2.   Services provided are calculated as a proportion of the number of support periods.

Source: SAAP client collection.

Figure 12: SAAP support periods: proportion of services provided (broad category) in a support period, by Indigenous status, by client group, 2008–09 (per cent)
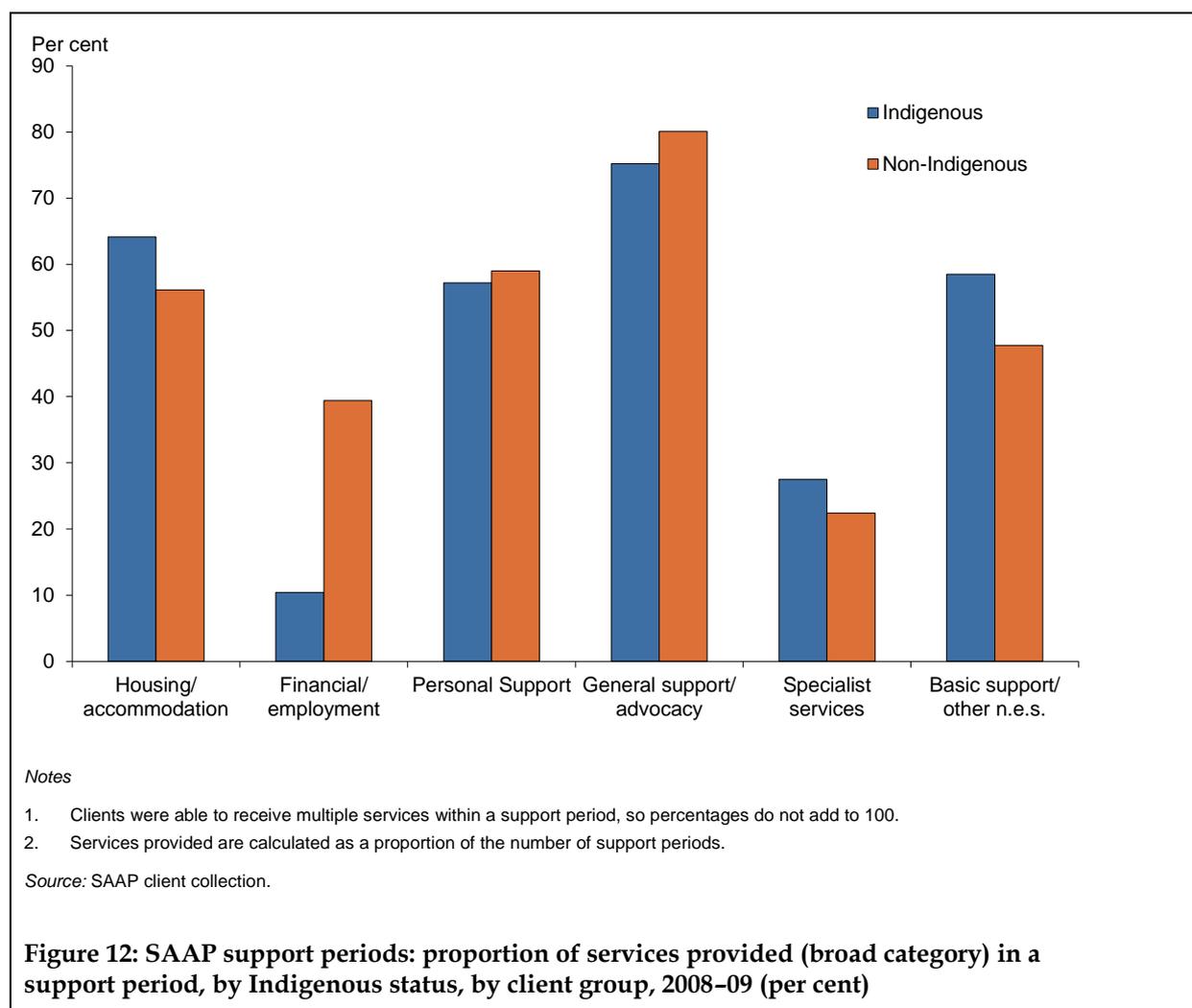
Services provided to Indigenous accompanying children

Children that accompany SAAP clients (accompanying children) are also provided with support services by specialised homelessness service agencies. There are six broad categories of specialised homelessness service support services for accompanying children. These are:

• Accommodation
• School liaison/child care
• Personal support
• General support/advocacy
• Specialist services
• Basic support/other not elsewhere specified (n.e.s.).

For the list of distinct services provided under each broad category, see Appendix Tables A17 and A18.

In 2008–09 the highest proportions of services provided to Indigenous accompanying children were in the 'basic support/other not elsewhere specified' category, with these services being provided in 63 per cent of support periods (Figure 13 and Table A17). This was followed by 'Accommodation', with 61 per cent of support periods and 'general

support/advocacy', 36 per cent. For non-Indigenous accompanying children, the highest proportion of services provided was in the 'general support/advocacy' category, and these services were provided in over half (54%) of support periods.

Generally, Indigenous accompanying children had higher proportions of services provided in their support periods (Figure 13). However, Indigenous accompanying children had lower proportions of services provided in the 'General support/advocacy' category; with these services provided in 36 per cent of their support periods, compared with 54 per cent of support periods for non-Indigenous accompanying children.

Note: Accompanying children could receive multiple services within a support period, so percentages do not add to 100.

Source: SAAP Client Collection.

Figure 13: SAAP support periods: services provided to Accompanying children (broad category), by Indigenous status, 2008–09 (per cent)
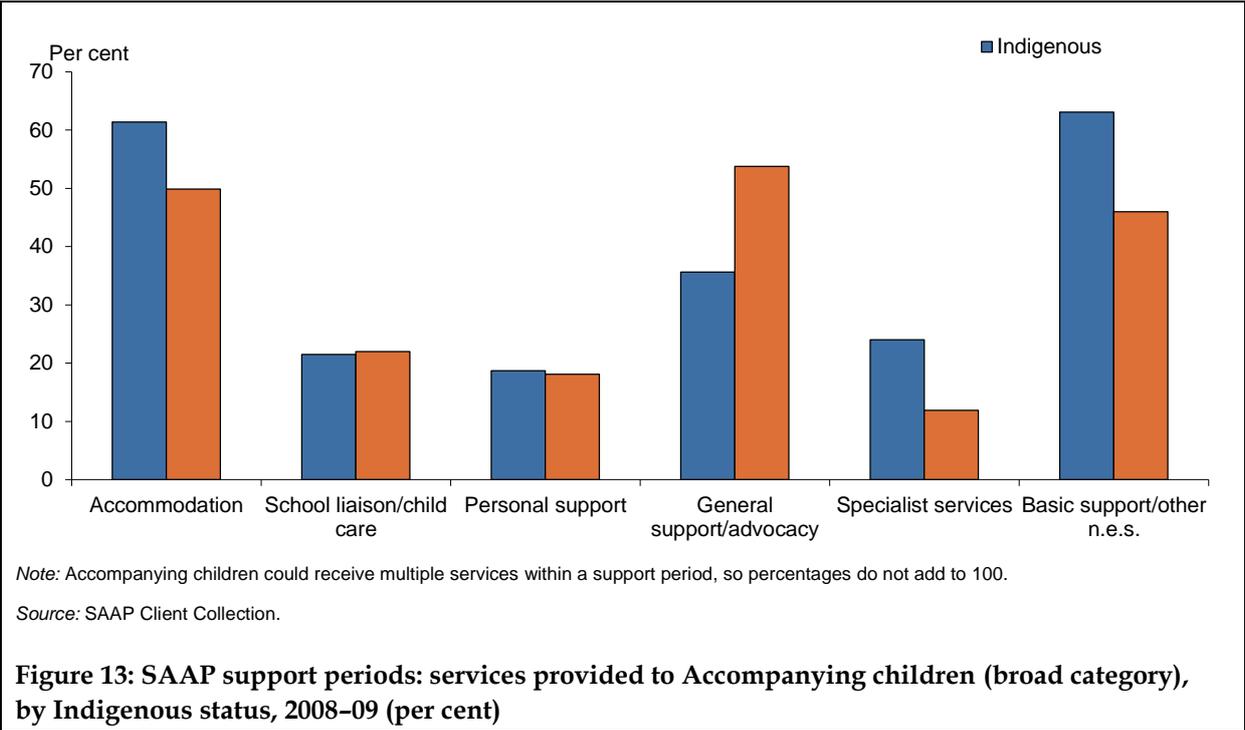
Accommodation

During a support period, a client can have more than one accommodation period and the length of each accommodation period can vary. The following section looks at the number of times a client is accommodated by a specialised homelessness agency within a support period; it does not show the length of the accommodation period.

The majority of clients are accommodated once in a support period—almost three-quarters for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous accommodated clients (Figure 14). Clients who are accommodated twice within a support period make up the second highest proportion, approximately one-sixth of Indigenous and non-Indigenous accommodated clients.

Figure 14: SAAP clients: Total number of accommodation periods in a support period, by sex and Indigenous status, 2008–09
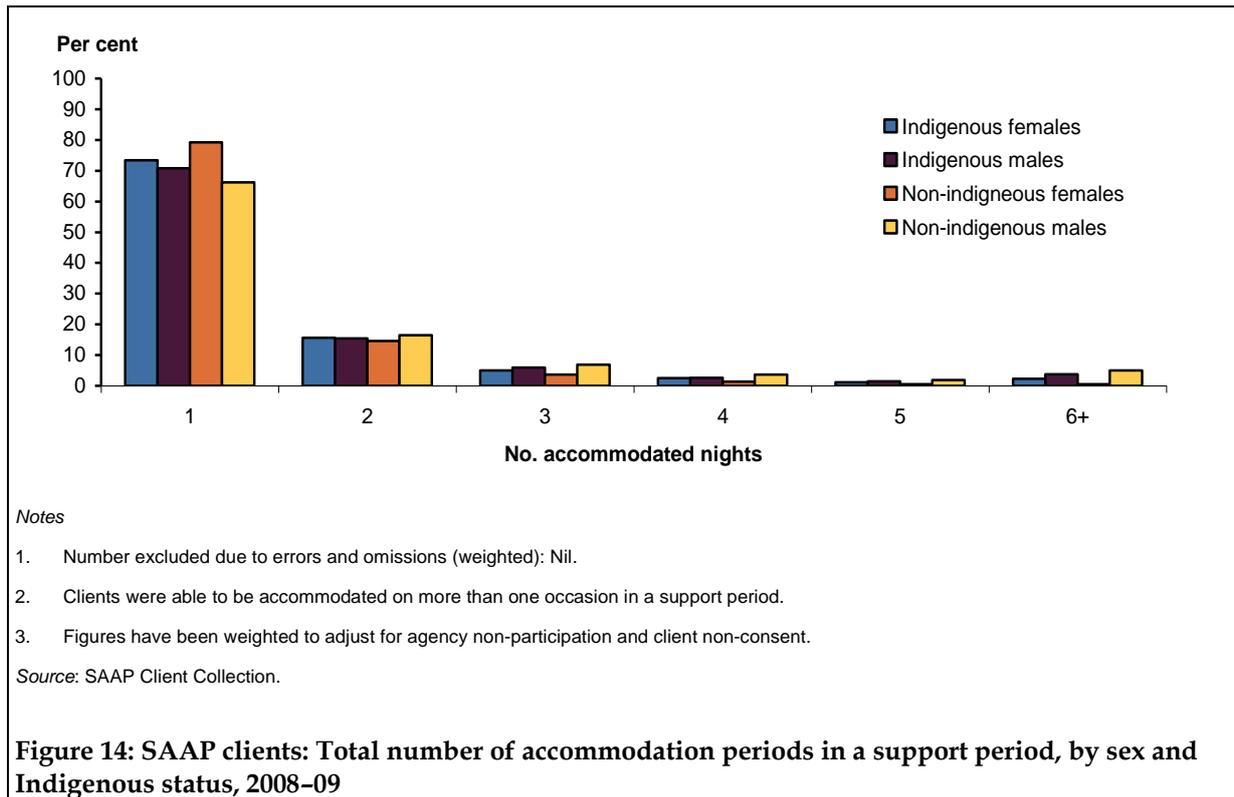
Tenancy outcomes for specialist homelessness service clients

For the purposes of this report, specialist homelessness service clients (and any accompanying children) were considered to have secured and sustained a tenancy if after support:

- They had a lease and were living in a housing situation that was either:
    - Purchasing or had purchased their own home
    - Private rental
    - Public housing rental
    - Rent-free accommodation
    - Boarding
- They did not return to a specialist homelessness service agency within 30 days for crisis, short-term or medium-term accommodation.

From 2006–07 to 2008–09, there were marginal increases in the proportions of both Indigenous (1.4%) and non-Indigenous specialist homelessness service clients (3%) who were assisted to secure and sustain their tenancies. Whilst there was a greater increase for non-Indigenous people over this period, by the end of 2008–09 the proportions (59%) were equal for both Indigenous people and non-Indigenous people (Table 6).

Table 6: SAAP closed support periods: proportion and number of homeless and at risk of homelessness clients and accompanying children who were assisted to secure and sustain their tenancies [a], by Indigenous status, 2006–07 to 2008–09 (per cent)

Indigenous status	Proportion who secured and sustained tenancy		
	2006–07	2007–08	2008–09
Indigenous	57.8	58.6	59.2
Non-Indigenous	56.5	56.8	59.5
Total	**56.3**	**56.7**	**58.8**
Indigenous status	Number who secured and sustained tenancy		
	2006–07	2007–08	2008–09
Indigenous	18,900	20,100	19,900
Non-Indigenous	66,600	73,400	76,700
Total	**89,400**	**96,500**	**100,200**
Indigenous status	Total number of clients and accompanying children		
	2006–07	2007–08	2008–09
Indigenous	32,700	34,300	33,600
Non-Indigenous	117,800	129,200	129,000
Total	**158,700**	**170,300**	**170,400**[b]

(a)   See Appendix 1 for where to find more information on how 'Assisted to secure and sustain their tenancies' was derived in this report.

(b)   This number excludes clients who only had one support period during 2008–09 and this support period was ongoing at the end of the 2008–09 reporting period. If their support period ended in 2009–10, they would be included in 2009–10 reporting. Similarly, clients whose support period started prior to 2008–09 but which ended in 2008–09, are included in this 2008–09 number.

Notes

1.   Total number of missing Indigenous status for 2006–07: 8,200; 2007–08: 6,800, 2008–09: 7,700.

2.   Number of missing Indigenous status for those who secured and sustained tenancy for 2006–07: 3,900, 2007–08: 3,000, 2008–09: 3,700.

Source: SAAP Client Collection.

Case management goals achieved

A 'case management plan' is a personal plan or a support agreement which usually has a statement of the client's problem or need, some goals for the client and strategies to achieve those goals. The stated benefits of case management for clients may include:

- Improved quality of service and improved outcomes.
- Increased empowerment with clients measuring and evaluating their own progress and change.
- Increased involvement in decision making and service provision.
- Increased access to services.

(FaHCSIA 2010).

The case management plan is usually developed between the client and agency as a result of an assessment process (AIHW, 2005). During a support period a client may successfully achieve a number of the goals set out in their plan, and this section looks at the extent to which these goals are achieved.

In 2008–09, there was a case management plan for clients in 105,600 SAAP closed support periods. Of these, about a sixth (16%) were for Indigenous clients compared with four-fifths (81%) for non-Indigenous clients (Table 7). There were higher proportions of closed support periods for Indigenous clients than non-Indigenous clients where some goals were achieved

(32% compared to 29%) and where most goals were achieved (23% compared to 21%). In contrast, there was a lower proportion of closed support periods for Indigenous clients than non-Indigenous clients where all goals were achieved (39% compared to 45%).

Table 7: SAAP closed support periods where a case management plan was in existence by the end of support: extent to which clients' case management goals were achieved, 2008-09 (per cent)

Case management plan goal achievement	Indigenous	Non-Indigenous	Missing Indigenous status	Total (%)	Total (number)
No goals achieved	6.4	5.2	8.6	5.5	5,800
Some goals achieved	31.5	28.8	30.0	29.3	30,900
Most goals achieved	23.0	21.2	20.3	21.4	22,600
All goals achieved	39.2	44.8	41.2	43.8	46,300
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	. .
Total (%)	**16.0**	**81.0**	**3.0**	**100.0**	**. .**
Total (number)	**16,900**	**85,600**	**3,200**	**. .**	**105,600**

Note: Number excluded due to errors and omissions (weighted): 751.

Source: SAAP Client Collection.

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