

Specialist homelessness services

The Specialist Homelessness Services Collection (SHSC) describes all clients who receive services from specialist homelessness agencies and the assistance they receive, including clients with psychiatric or other mental health problems.

The SHSC includes data on the use of [specialist homelessness services](#) by [clients with a current mental health issue](#). This section presents information provided by SHS agencies on clients with a current mental health issue for 2013–14. The data have been weighted for undercounting due to non response by clients.

Clients are identified as having a current mental health issue if they have provided any of the following information:

- they indicated that at the beginning of a support period they were receiving services or assistance for their mental health issues or had in the last 12 months
- their formal referral source to the specialist homelessness agency was a mental health service
- they reported 'mental health issues' as a reason for seeking assistance
- their dwelling type either a week before presenting to an agency, or when presenting to an agency, was a psychiatric hospital or unit
- they had been in a psychiatric hospital or unit in the last 12 months
- at some stage during their support period, a need was identified for psychological services, psychiatric services or mental health services.

Key points

- Of the 213,000 Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) clients aged 10 years and over reported in 2013–14, over a quarter (56,281 or 26%) was a client with a current mental health issue.
- More than 2 in 5 clients (44%) with a current mental health issue reported an episode of homelessness in the 12 months before presenting compared with over 1 in 4 of those clients (29%) without a current mental health issue.
- Clients with a current mental health issue aged 18–24 had the highest rate of SHS agency use (509 per 100,000 population).
- About half of those clients with a current mental health issue received between 6–45 days (25%) or over 180 days (24%) of support in 2013–14.

The Specialist Homelessness Services Collection (SHSC) began on 1 July 2011, replacing the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) National Data Collection which included data from specialist homelessness agencies from 1996 to June 2011. Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) that are funded under the National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA) and the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH) are in scope for this collection.

For further details regarding the scope and coverage of the Specialist Homelessness Services Collection, see the [data source section](#).

Service Provision

Mental health-related support

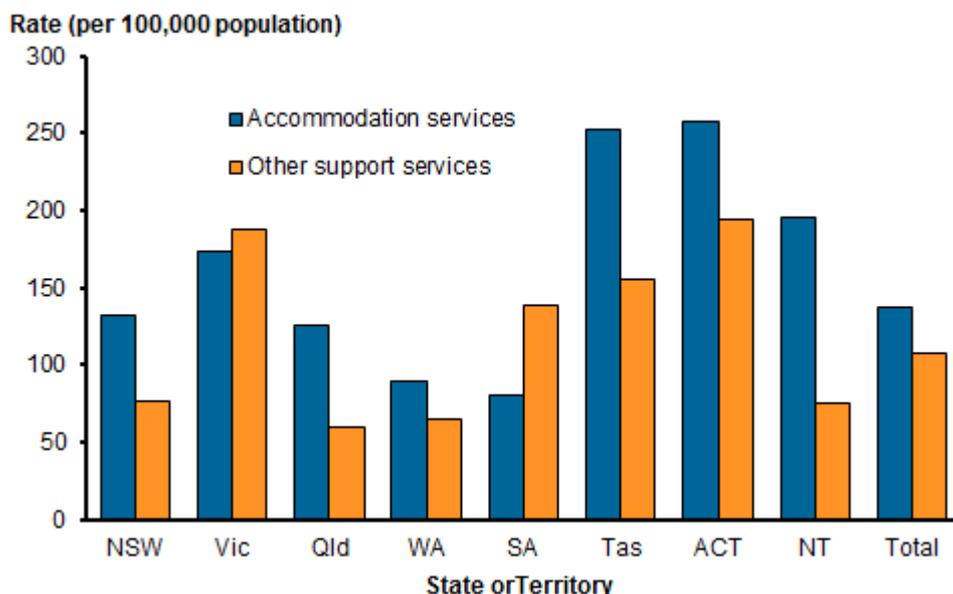
There were about 212,000 [Specialist Homelessness Services \(SHS\) clients](#) aged 10 years and over reported in 2013–14. Of these, over a quarter (56,281 or 26%) were clients with a current mental health issue.

Nationally, there were 138 clients per 100,000 population with a current mental health issue who accessed [accommodation services](#) from SHS agencies in 2013–14 (Figure SHS.1). Across jurisdictions, rates ranged from 258 for the Australian Capital Territory to 80 per 100,000 population for South Australia.

For other types of support services provided (excluding accommodation services) the national rate was 108 per 100,000 population. Rates varied between jurisdictions, from 195 per 100,000 population for the Australian Capital Territory to 60 for Queensland.

Clients in the accommodation services group are also likely to have received other types of support services. In contrast, those clients in the [other support services](#) group have not received accommodation services.

Figure SHS.1: SHS clients with current mental health issue, by service type, states and territories, 2013–14



Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection. Source data Specialised homelessness services Table SHS.4 (279KB XLS)

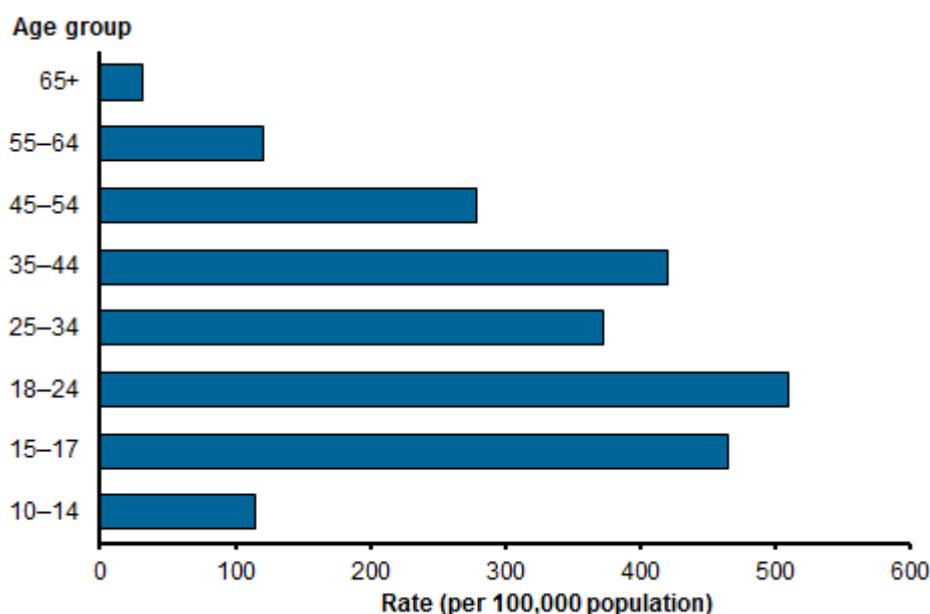
Specialist homelessness services clients

For clients with a current mental health issue, those aged 18–24 had the highest rate of SHS agency use followed by 15–17 year olds (509 and 465 per 100,000 population respectively) for 2013–14 (Figure SHS.2). Rates of SHS agency use were higher for male clients than females (279 and 204 per 100,000 population respectively).

The rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander SHS clients with a current mental health issue was almost 6 times that of non-Indigenous Australians (1,208 and 202 per 100,000 population respectively).

There were about 1,600 clients with a current mental health issue aged 10–14.

Figure SHS.2: SHS clients with current mental health issue, by age group, 2013–14



Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection. Source data Specialised homelessness services Table SHS.1 (279KB XLS)

A specialist homelessness agency/outreach worker was the most frequently recorded source of referral to SHS agencies (13%) for clients with a current mental health issue during 2013–14. The next most frequently recorded sources were referrals from other agencies (government or non-government) (12%) and family and/or friends (6%).

More than 2 in 5 SHS clients (44%) with a current mental health issue reported an episode of homelessness in the 12 months before presenting to an agency compared to over 1 in 4 (29%) of those clients without a current mental health issue (AIHW 2014).

Reference

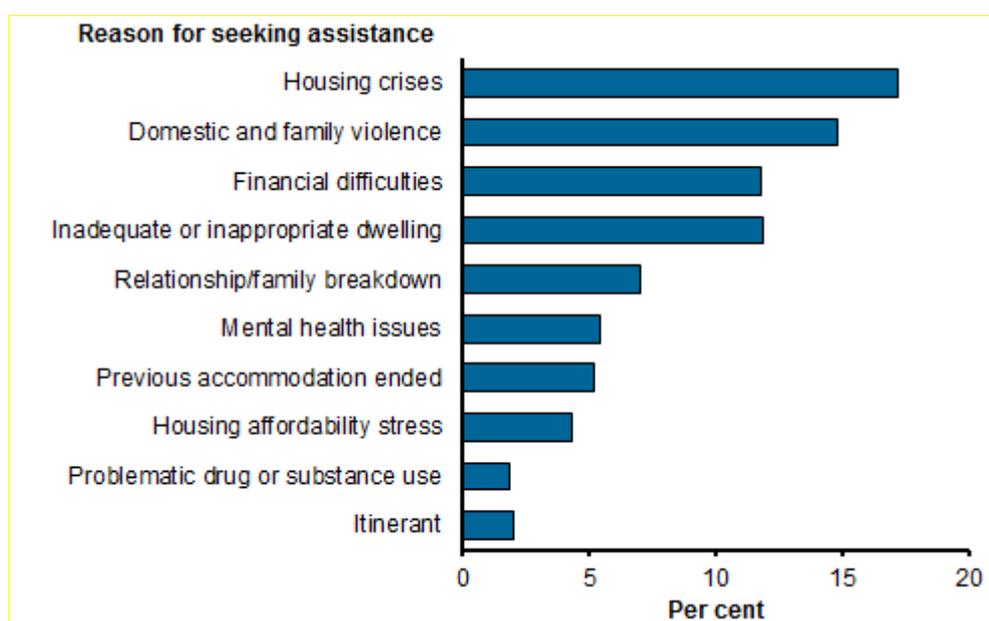
AIHW 2014. Specialist Homelessness Services Collection 2013–14 (unpublished data). Canberra: AIHW.

Service use

Main reason for seeking SHS agency assistance

Around 1 in 6 SHS clients (17%) with a mental health issue reported a housing crisis as the main reason for seeking assistance, followed by domestic and family violence (15%) and financial difficulties and inadequate or inappropriate dwelling conditions (12% respectively). These were also the same top three main reasons for seeking assistance for SHS clients without a current mental health issue. About 1 in 18 SHS clients with a current mental health issue (6%) had mental health issues recorded as their main reason for seeking assistance (Figure SHS.3).

Figure SHS.3: SHS clients with a current mental health issue, by the 10 most frequently reported main reasons for seeking assistance, 2013–14



Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection. Source data Specialised homelessness services Table SHS.2 (279KB XLS)

When all presenting reasons for seeking assistance are considered, financial difficulties (11%) and mental health issues (10%) were the most frequently reported reasons.

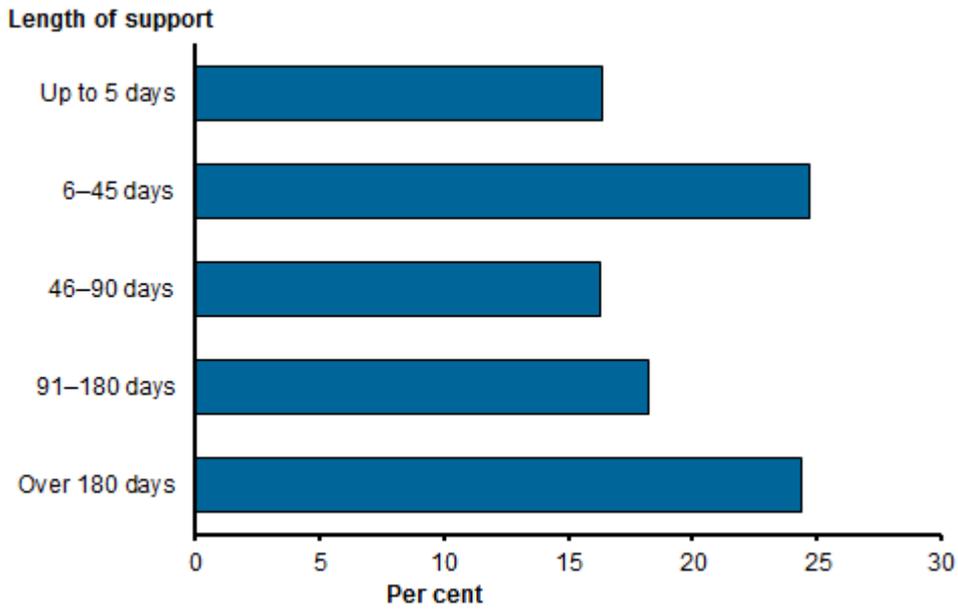
Services and assistance

Of the 56,281 SHS clients with a current mental health issue in 2013–14, 55,352 clients (98%) received a service or referral. The most common service or referral provided was advice/information (89%), followed by other basic assistance (75%), advocacy/liaison on behalf of client (70%) and material aid/brokerage (49%).

Length of support provided

Around half of clients with a current mental health issue received between 6–45 days of support or over 180 days of support (25% and 24% respectively) in 2013–14. About 1 in 6 clients received 5 days or less (16%) (Figure SHS.4). These figures represent the total period of support provided to a client during 2013–14.

Figure SHS.4: SHS clients with a current mental health issue, by total length of support provided, 2013–14



Source: Specialist Homelessness Services Collection. Source data Specialised homelessness services Table SHS.7 (279KB XLS)

Data source

Specialist Homelessness Services Collection

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 Specialist Homelessness Services Collection (SHSC) in general, but only those who received funding for at least four months during the 2013–14 financial year are in scope for the 2013–14 reporting period. Covered agencies are those in-scope agencies for which details have been provided to the AIHW by the relevant state/territory department.

Specialist homelessness agencies provided assistance to 254,001 clients in 427,930 support periods (AIHW 2014). It should be noted that these figures have been adjusted for non-responses.

Data collected include basic socio-demographic information and the services needed by, and provided to, each client. Information about each client's situation before and after receiving SHS agency services is also collected.

It should be noted that unlike the previous SAAP National Data Collection, the SHSC does not use the concept of accompanying children but instead only counts children if they have been provided with a service. Information about clients who access services together allows for family groups to be counted as well.

For further information on the SHS collection, refer to *Specialist Homelessness Services 2013–14* (AIHW 2014).

Caveats

There are a number of considerations related to the 2013–14 SHSC data:

- Data presented in this section excludes data for clients who were aged less than 10 at the beginning of their first support period in 2013–14.
- Data presented in this section are weighted, meaning that there has been adjustments made to represent the population from which the data sample was drawn. This means data takes into account under counting of support periods that result from non-response. In previous releases, unweighted data were reported. Any comparison between the 2013–14 data reported here and data in the archived Specialist homelessness services chapters needs to be made with caution.
- Only those agencies that received NAHA or NPAH funding for at least four months during the 2013–14 financial year are in scope for the 2013–14 reporting period. Covered agencies are those in-scope agencies for which details have been provided to the AIHW by the relevant state/territory department.
- 96% of covered agencies returned support period data for all months they were expected to participate, in 2013–14.
- The rate of invalid/'don't know'/missing responses was high for a number of 2013–14 SHSC data items.
- Matching of data from individual clients who presented at different agencies and/or at different times requires a valid statistical linkage key (SLK); with 94% of support periods having a valid SLK in 2013–14.

Reference

AIHW 2014. Specialist Homelessness Services 2013–14. Cat. no. HOU 276. Canberra: AIHW.

Key concepts

Mental health-related Specialist Homelessness Services

Key Concept	Description
Accommodation services	Accommodation services include short-term or emergency accommodation, medium-term/transitional housing, assistance to obtain long term housing, assistance to sustain tenancy or prevent tenancy failure or eviction and assistance to prevent foreclosures or for mortgage arrears.
Other support services	Other support services refer to the assistance, other than accommodation services, provided to a client. Includes mental health services, family/relationship assistance, disability services, drug/alcohol counselling, legal/financial services, immigration/cultural services, domestic/family violence services, other specialist services and general assistance and support services.
Specialist homelessness agency client	A specialist homelessness agency client is 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. To be a client the person must: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• directly receive a service and not just be a beneficiary of a service. Children who present with an adult and receive a service are considered to be a client;• children of a client or other household members who present but do not directly receive a service are not considered to be clients.
Specialist homelessness service(s)	Specialist homelessness service(s) is assistance provided by a specialist homelessness agency to a client aimed at responding to or preventing homelessness. The specialist homelessness services in scope for this collection include accommodation provision, assistance to sustain housing, mental health services, family/relationship assistance, disability services, drug/alcohol counselling, legal/financial services, immigration/cultural services, domestic/family violence services, other specialist services and general assistance and support.
Specialised Homelessness Service (SHS) clients with current mental health issue	SHS clients with current mental health issue are identified as such if they have provided any of the following information: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• they indicated that at the beginning of a support period they were receiving services or assistance for their mental health issues or had in the last 12 months• their formal referral source to the specialist homelessness agency was a mental health service• they reported 'mental health issues' as a reason for seeking assistance• their dwelling type either a week before presenting to an agency, or when presenting to an agency, was a psychiatric hospital or unit• they had been in a psychiatric hospital or unit in the last 12 months• at some stage during their support period, a need was identified for psychological services, psychiatric services or mental health services
Support period	A support period is the period of time a client receives assistance from an agency. A support period starts on the day the client first receives a service from

an agency and ends when:

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