⯈7 Services for people experiencing homelessness

7.1   Introduction

Australia is one of only a handful of countries in the world who can claim to rigorously estimate their homeless population, an enterprise that has proven beneficial for both policy development and advocacy purposes. This count is largely derived from two sources of information—the ABS Census of Population and Housing, and statistics collected from homeless refuges funded under the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP), the major government response to homelessness.

An estimated 99,900 people were reported as experiencing homelessness on the night of the last Census in 2001 (Chamberlain & MacKenzie 2003), although in this chapter an argument is presented for reporting a higher figure of around 122,770 homeless people on that night.

The chapter begins by introducing the cultural definition of homelessness which underlies the Census, the operationalisation of this definition and the resulting numbers, contrasting these with the previous Census. Some implications of this approach for policy development and advocacy purposes are considered, followed by a discussion on its limitations.

Iterative homelessness, a complementary approach for characterising homelessness, is then introduced with a discussion of its implications for policy development and advocacy. This approach, as developed by Robinson (2003), focuses on the ongoing movement of people through different forms of tenuous or marginal housing and seeks to answer the question of which factors contribute to their repeated uprootings and failures to establish a home.

SAAP data are introduced to test the usefulness and limitations of this approach drawing on particular sectors of the SAAP client population, namely, older men, women escaping domestic violence, and younger men and women. The chapter concludes with presentations of new initiatives that address homelessness, both within SAAP and in other responses of the Australian and state and territory governments.

7.2   Who counts as homeless?

The ABS Census is a point-in-time count of Australia's population, held every 5 years. For the past two Censuses, Census data have been used to estimate the number of people who were homeless on that particular night. SAAP data and, to a lesser extent, a national census of homeless school students are also used to further refine the estimate (Chamberlain & MacKenzie 2003). This statistical estimation is based on the widely

used definition of cultural homelessness, first developed by Chamberlain and MacKenzie in 1992 (Chamberlain & MacKenzie 1992).

This cultural definition was reviewed along with other definitions of homelessness in the last edition of *Australia's Welfare* (AIHW 2003a) and defines homelessness by reference to the degree to which people's housing met with conventional expectations of, or the minimum culturally acceptable concept of, a dwelling. Such culturally acceptable minimum community standards of housing, it was argued, encompass having one room to sleep in, one to live in, and your own kitchen and bathroom, along with some security of tenure. The homeless, those without such accommodation, were then categorised into three tiers—primary, secondary and tertiary homelessness. This cultural definition underpinned the 1996 Census (AIHW 2003a), and was again employed during the 2001 Census (Chamberlain & MacKenzie 2003).

The ABS identified people as belonging in one of these homelessness tiers through a series of questions, or counting rules (Chamberlain & MacKenzie 2003). These counting rules identified three operational categories of people which, because of collection restraints, differed slightly from the underlying cultural definition's classification (Box 7.1).

Box 7.1: ABS operational categories of homelessness

Primary

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

Secondary

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

Tertiary

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

On this basis, 99,900 people were estimated to have been homeless on Census night 2001, less than the estimated 105,304 people on Census night 1996 (Table 7.1). The largest difference evident between the two Censuses is the drop in the number of primary homeless from 20,579 to 14,158, a result of procedural changes between the two Censuses.

This decrease was caused by a change in the counting rules concerning improvised dwellings in remote Indigenous communities. In 2001, the ABS modified its instructions such that, if such residences were permanent structures built for the purpose of housing people, they were *no longer to be counted as improvised dwellings*. If this change had not been made, the number of homeless counted by the two Censuses is likely to have stayed much the same (Chamberlain & MacKenzie 2003).

Table 7.1: Homeless people, by whereabouts, Census night 1996 and 2001

	1996		2001	
	Number	**Per cent**	**Number**	**Per cent**
Tertiary—boarding house	23,299	22	22,877	23
Secondary—SAAP	12,926	12	14,251	14
Secondary—friends/relatives	48,500	46	48,614	49
Primary—sleeping rough/improvised	20,579	20	14,158	14
Total homeless	**105,304**	**100**	**99,900**	**100**

Source: Chamberlain & MacKenzie 2003.

The change to the counting rule for remote Indigenous dwellings had a differential effect on the number of homeless in the states and territories (Table 7.2). For the Northern Territory, particularly, there was a large drop in the rate of homelessness over the 5 years between Censuses, from 523 per 10,000 to 288. This can be directly attributed to the changed counting rules for remote Indigenous communities. Queensland, Western Australia, New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory also showed decreases in their rates of homelessness. Conversely, in the most southern of the states (Tasmania, Victoria and South Australia), the rates rose.

Table 7.2: Homelessness rates, by state/territory, Census night 1996 and 2001

	NSW	**Vic**	**Qld**	**WA**	**SA**	**Tas**	**ACT**	**NT**
	Rate per 10,000 population							
1996	49.4	41.0	77.3	71.5	48.1	43.9	40.3	523.1
2001	42.2	43.6	69.8	64.0	51.6	52.4	39.6	288.3

Source: Chamberlain & MacKenzie 2003.

Generally speaking, in all of the southern states and territories the rate was consistently between 40 and 50 homeless people per 10,000 people in the population, with Western Australia and Queensland having a higher rate between 64 and 70. The Northern Territory, however, experienced a far higher rate, regardless of the large decrease between 1996 and 2001.

Using these estimations, Chamberlain and MacKenzie draw certain conclusions about policy development for programs directed at assisting the homeless, especially SAAP. Historically, monies from SAAP had more or less been distributed to states and territories on the basis of their populations (see AIHW 2003a), on the assumption that the homeless population was distributed in proportion to the general population. According to Chamberlain and MacKenzie, however, their work shows that the geographical distribution of the homeless population across states and territories is very uneven, and they argue that this should inform how SAAP resources are distributed (Chamberlain & MacKenzie 2003:57).

Chamberlain and MacKenzie's interpretation of the Census data provides a strong argument for the redeployment of SAAP funds to those states and territories with the higher rates of homelessness, although they acknowledge that there are other factors

needing consideration, such as the proficiency of local service providers, the special needs of minority groups and the expressed needs of different groups of homeless people such as women and children escaping domestic violence or homeless teenagers. Given the high profile of the Census and the work of Chamberlain and MacKenzie and its ensuing policy implications, careful assessment must be made of the internal consistency and value for policy development of this approach. The following begins this assessment by discussing difficulties in the application of the Census definition and approach to particular sections of the population.

The categorisation of Indigenous homelessness

In the 1996 Census, interviewers in remote Indigenous communities were instructed that, for a residence to be counted as a dwelling, it needed to have both a working shower or bath and a toilet. If not, the dwelling was classified as an improvised house. In 2001, the ABS modified these instructions such that, if such residences were permanent structures built for the purpose of housing people, they were *no longer to be counted as improvised dwellings*. As a consequence, the number of Indigenous people counted as living in improvised dwellings in remote communities dropped from 9,750 in 1996 to 2,680 in 2001 (Chamberlain & MacKenzie 2003:56).

The inherent methodological difficulties in enumerating homelessness are illustrated by the differences between the Census count and the count of improvised dwellings in the Community Housing and Infrastructure Needs Survey (CHINS) (ABS 2002a). The CHINS estimated that there was more than double the number of people living in improvised dwellings than estimated in the Census. This discrepancy is attributable to different field procedures that resulted in differences in applying the definition of improvised dwellings. This in turn influenced the count of people without conventional accommodation.

In the 2001 Census, primary homelessness (i.e. people without conventional accommodation) varied as a percentage of total homelessness in each jurisdiction. from a low of 6% in the Australian Capital Territory to 40% of all the homeless counted in the Northern Territory (Table 7.3). The next highest proportions were in Western Australia (19%) and Queensland (16%). The high percentages in these three states could be related to the size of their remote Indigenous populations. In the 1996 Census, almost all improvised Indigenous dwellings were located in remote areas (ATSIC 2002, cited in AIHW 2003a). This is likely to have been the case for 2001 as well.

Table 7.3: Homeless people, by whereabouts and state/territory, Census night 2001 (per cent)

	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Aust
Tertiary—boarding house	29	26	22	15	19	11	5	17	23
Secondary—SAAP	15	25	9	8	15	13	24	4	14
Secondary—friends/relatives	45	40	53	58	54	66	65	39	49
Primary—sleeping rough/improvised	11	9	16	19	12	10	6	40	14
Total homeless	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*
Total homeless (number)	**26,676**	**20,305**	**24,569**	**11,697**	**7,586**	**2,415**	**1,229**	**5,423**	**99,900**

Source: Chamberlain & MacKenzie 2003.

Those Indigenous Australians living in improvised dwellings had a significant impact on the number of Indigenous Australians counted as homeless. Of the 6,862 Indigenous people identified as homeless, around 2,676 had no conventional accommodation, including people who were living on the streets, in parks, squats or improvised dwellings. These homeless Indigenous Australians comprised just under 19% of the 14,158 Australians identified as having no conventional accommodation on Census night 2001 (Table 7.4). If the CHINS had been used as the basis of the estimates, the number of Indigenous homeless would have increased by about 43% from about 6,900 to about 9,800 (ABS 2002a; Chamberlain & MacKenzie 2003).

Table 7.4: Homeless people, by whereabouts and Indigenous status, Census night 2001 (per cent)

	Tertiary— boarding house	Secondary— SAAP	Secondary— friends/relatives[a]	Primary—sleeping rough/improvised	Australia
Indigenous	7.1	11.0	3.4	18.9	8.5
Non-Indigenous	92.9	89.0	96.6	81.1	91.5
Total homeless	*100.0*	*100.0*	*100.0*	*100.0*	*100.0*
Total homeless (no.)	**22,877**	**14,251**	**29,439**	**14,158**	[a] **80,725**

(a) These numbers include a correction for undercounting 19,175 young people in the friends/relative category. The total reflects this change (from 99,9000; see Table 7.3).

Source: Chamberlain & MacKenzie 2003.

In changing the counting rules for remote Indigenous communities for the 2001 Census, the ABS noted that, in such communities, bathroom and toilet facilities are often provided in communal amenities blocks used by multiple households and proposed that this 'accorded with the wishes of the local community', although no supporting evidence was offered (Chamberlain & MacKenzie 2003:56). In their discussion of these changes, Chamberlain & Mackenzie (2003:22) suggest that this ABS decision could be argued to be culturally appropriate, while acknowledging that the point could generate some debate.

The possibility of multiple culturally appropriate understandings of homelessness provokes a discussion of a single standard approach. The beauty of the Census is that it provides a single, rigorous point-in-time national count of the homeless that is useful for broad policy development and advocacy. The latest changes in counting rules for remote Indigenous housing, however, highlight the difficulties in this 'one size fits all' approach to defining homelessness when a finer analysis is needed. As the way in which Indigenous homelessness is defined or categorised influences how policy responses are framed, the Census data need to be carefully examined so that the implications for the way in which homelessness is defined can be understood and appreciated.

In this context, the Census has been criticised as marginalising or misrepresenting Indigenous homelessness. Memmott, for example, has claimed that the Census was designed to collect non-Indigenous categories of information that either may make little sense within Indigenous contexts, or which may be interpreted differently in cross-cultural situations (Box 7.2).

> **Box 7.2: ABS and Indigenous definitions**
>
> *Usual place of residence*
>
> *While the ABS methodology assumes households occupy one place of residence, there is strong evidence in remote Aboriginal communities of linked or clustered households that are characterised by an extended family group dispersed across a number of places of residence. As Aboriginal people in remote Australia may consider themselves to reside in an area or within a number of localities, the concept of 'usual place of residence' that underlies the ABS data is problematic.*
>
> *Family*
>
> *The ABS definition of family is based on the standard definition of a mainstream nuclear family whereas many Aboriginal people think of family in broader terms. As well as members of the immediate 'nuclear family', this can include blood relationships and classificatory relationships.*
>
> *Source:* Memmott et al. 2004a:4–5.

The ABS concept of 'usual place of residence' is used in the Census to identify the secondary homeless—people who have no other usual address and have been staying temporarily with friends or relatives. As indicated in Box 7.2, however, Indigenous people could interpret questions based on 'usual place of residence' and 'family' within a very different cultural framework. When, for example, Indigenous people leave where they are living to escape domestic violence or other family problems and move in with members of their extended family, this could still be considered their usual address, of which there would be a number.

In fact, the Census identified only 1,000 Indigenous Australians in the secondary homelessness category, the smallest number of Indigenous Australians in any of the four categories (3.4% of the 29,439 in Table 7.4). In contrast, for non-Indigenous Australians, this was the largest category of people identified as homeless. Under the framework provided by the Census, these figures represent an undercounting of the secondary homeless population in those cases where Indigenous Australians are not reporting they are living somewhere other than their usual place of residence, according to the standard ABS definition of these terms.

On closer examination of what it means to be Indigenous and homeless, however, these figures could be viewed as an example of the cultural misrepresentation of Indigenous homelessness, whose lived experience of homelessness may be influenced by such culturally specific factors as a broad understanding of family, distributed places of residence, and cultural mobility requirements and other cultural obligations. It may be that the services required by Indigenous people identified as homeless by the Census are something other than housing or accommodation (Memmott et al. 2004b), and policy responses certainly need to be informed by a wider understanding of Indigenous homelessness than that provided by the Census alone.

An attempt at objectivity would seem vital to an enterprise such as the Census, and the universal application of a single cultural definition of homelessness provides such

objectivity. But the difficulties apparent in applying such a definition to those Indigenous Australians living in remote communities illustrate the inherent constraints imposed by any single approach to homelessness, and the importance of exploring different definitions for different policy contexts.

Counting the 'marginally housed' as homeless

Reservations have been expressed about the inclusion of the 'tertiary' homeless in the Census count, those people identified as living in boarding houses. While some may accept that people staying temporarily with friends or relatives can be considered as homeless, others have criticised the inclusion of boarding house residents when counting the homeless (Chamberlain & MacKenzie 2003:13, 52). Of all three categories, boarding house residents are closer to the accepted norm of culturally defined housing standards and are perceived as having more variable housing conditions.

The history of boarding houses dates back to the 1800s, when boarding houses were established in central locations in the large cities to provide accommodation for many younger men, as well as for couples, single women, and families. At that time, boarding houses were seen as fashionable and reputable accommodation. They were usually run by women and provided safe and respectable shelter, meals, laundry and other housekeeping services. In some areas, they were also established at seaside and other locations to accommodate holiday makers (Greenhalgh et al. 2004).

The decline in the reputation of boarding houses has been linked to the changing fortunes of the inner cities. This decline was also influenced by both the 1970s government policy of deinstitutionalisation and the ongoing gentrification of the inner city which started in the 1980s. Changing profiles of ownership, an increasing number of residents with high and complex needs, and changes to the viability of the boarding house industry were also factors.

The residents of boarding houses are considered homeless because their accommodation is below the minimum community standard. Boarding houses, as opposed to hotels and motels, are seen to provide cheap accommodation for people living in single rooms with only basic amenities and insecure tenure. Of the 99,900 people the 2001 Census identified as homeless, 22,877 (23%) were residents of boarding houses (see Table 7.1). The majority were male (72%) and 74% were either unemployed or outside the labour force (Chamberlain & MacKenzie 2003:38, 51).

There were large differences in the proportion of tertiary homeless identified in each jurisdiction, ranging from 5% of the homeless in the Australian Capital Territory to just under 30% in New South Wales and Victoria (see Table 7.3). These figures are influenced by the concentration of such establishments in cities such as Sydney and Melbourne; 67% of boarding houses are located in capital cities. In regional centres, country towns and remote locations, in contrast, they were relatively absent. In such locations, as Chamberlain and MacKenzie (2003:50) note, caravan parks can be said to have taken over the role of boarding houses in providing cheap accommodation to marginalised populations.

The use of caravan parks as long-term or permanent housing is relatively recent, only legally available in all jurisdictions since 1993. Before this, parks were developed as

holiday destinations and used for short-term accommodation. The number of people living in caravan parks long-term increased by 6,263 between the 1996 and 2001 Censuses, with a total of 61,463 people identified as permanent residents in 2001. The elderly were over-represented, with 23% of permanent residents aged over 65 years, and another 19% aged between 55 and 64 years. The tenure of permanent residents can include owning or purchasing a van while renting a site or renting both. Most caravan parks have a mixture of both types of tenure, with the availability of permanent arrangements depending on various factors such as local and state licensing and planning controls (Wensing et al. 2003).

The populations in caravan parks are very diverse, with the 2001 Census identifying four different populations, leaving aside visitors from overseas. As well as holiday makers—those having a usual address elsewhere in Australia—there were another two groups who were viewed as having made a 'deliberate if constrained lifestyle choice' to live in a park. These were people either owning or purchasing their caravan, and people renting a caravan, at least one of whom had a full-time job. The fourth group were renting a caravan, had no other usual address, and no-one living in the van had full-time employment.

Table 7.5: Homeless people including those in caravan parks, by state/territory, Census night 2001

	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Aust
Marginal residents of caravan parks	6,881	3,407	7,989	2,503	932	271	110	775	22,868
ABS identified homeless	26,676	20,305	24,569	11,697	7,586	2,415	1,229	5,423	99,900
Total homeless	**33,557**	**23,712**	**32,558**	**14,200**	**8,518**	**2,686**	**1,339**	**6,198**	**122,768**

Source: Chamberlain & MacKenzie 2003.

There were 22,868 people identified in this group, classified as marginal residents of caravan parks (Table 7.5), and 78% of these marginal residents were housed in caravan parks outside of capital cities, in contrast to the clustering of marginal residents of boarding houses in major cities. Many of the remainder were in caravan parks in the industrial areas or outer suburbs of major cities. On socioeconomic measures these marginal residents faired as poorly as boarding house residents, and far more poorly than the secondary homeless staying temporarily with friends and family (Chamberlain & MacKenzie 2003:51–2).

Despite acknowledging that the marginally housed in caravan parks are at least as badly off as the tertiary homeless in boarding houses, and worse off than the secondary homeless, Chamberlain and MacKenzie decided not to include them when counting the homeless, saying that 'the cultural definition stands'. It is clear, however, that such marginal residents of caravan parks do not meet the stated culturally acceptable minimum community standards of housing, namely, having one room to sleep in and one to live in, your own kitchen and bathroom, and some security of tenure. If the definition of homelessness underpinning the Census is expanded to include those who are marginally housed in caravan parks, then the number of people identified as experiencing homelessness by the Census in 2001 increases from 99,900 to 122,770.

7.3   Another approach to defining the homeless

Census figures have been used to argue that the geographical distribution of the homeless population across states and territories is uneven, providing a basis for policy considerations concerning the redeployment of SAAP funds. However, the Census approach does contain inherent limitations. These are illustrated by the difficulties it faces in incorporating Indigenous Australians living in remote areas and the marginal residents of caravan parks, which, in turn, require consideration when these counts are considered as the basis for policy review and development.

Furthermore, the three-tiered definition underlying the Census, and the naming of these tiers as primary, secondary and tertiary, carries implications of degrees of disadvantage for people experiencing homelessness. The use of the word 'primary' calls to mind such notions as main, foremost, most important, essential, core, basic and fundamental. The implication is that this type of homelessness—living on the streets, in cars, squats and in improvised dwellings—brings with it the greatest degree of disadvantage, and that secondary and tertiary homelessness imply lesser levels of disadvantage.

The combination of a Census count of the homeless—taking a snapshot of society on 1 day every 5 years—with a hierarchical definition that emphasises structure rather than process, suggests that homeless people are easily slotted into one or another of these increasingly disadvantaged homelessness categories. Policy development can then be predicated on the numbers of people experiencing homelessness in each category, with service provision targeted accordingly, perhaps at those seen as more needy—the secondary homeless rather than tertiary homeless, for example. The question is whether other approaches are available that could complement policy development.

Although Chamberlain and MacKenzie's definition carries an element of temporal dynamics in its characterisation of the secondary homeless and they turn to the notion of process when discussing marginal residents of caravan parks, it is a downward one-way progression through the categories, an assumed linear process leading to a gradual loss of options until only one is left—'the end of the track'. A complementary approach that pays more attention to the temporal dynamics of homelessness arises from recent work on the homelessness experiences of people with a mental illness. In this, Robinson (2003) borrows the term 'iterative homelessness' to describe the repeated moves of people through different types of marginal or tenuous housing (Box 7.3).

> **Box 7.3: Iterative homelessness**
>
> *'It is a term used to refer to the repeated and ongoing loss of, or movement through, accommodation in both the short and long term contexts of homelessness. Iterative homelessness is used . . . to highlight the fact that most homeless people do not sleep rough on the street, though they may do so at times. Many remain tenuously housed at continuous risk of street-homelessness in their cycle through many different forms of tenuous and unacceptable forms of accommodation such as hostels, licensed and unlicensed boarding houses, caravan parks, staying with friends, etc' (Robinson 2003).*

With a focus on the lived experience of ongoing homelessness, this approach seeks to describe the sense of movement and repetition and to answer the question of why people continue to experience homelessness, and which factors contribute to their repeated uprootings and failures to establish a home, both physically and emotionally. The key indicator of homelessness, in this approach, is the movement through different forms of tenuous or marginal accommodation.

Chamberlain and MacKenzie developed a definition of homelessness that outlined the varying degrees of disadvantage, and the ensuing policy implications, for people experiencing homelessness. If the notion of iterative homelessness is utilised, it is no longer such an easy task to pinpoint those people who are experiencing the greatest disadvantage. Furthermore, the continued vulnerability that is experienced by those cycling through tenuous housing, moving from boarding house to friends, to hostels, time on the streets or SAAP accommodation, may not even be visible when viewed through the lens of the Census.

Robinson's development of the notion of iterative homelessness is largely based on her work with people experiencing mental health problems. She uses 'accommodation biographies', longer-term life histories and housing trajectories, to map the constant movement and continued vulnerability that is hidden in changing forms of accommodation. This work is at a relatively early stage of research, and it has not been established how widespread iterative homelessness is or how useful it will be in a broader context. It has, however, already been applied and found useful in the context of Indigenous women's homelessness (Cooper & Morris 2003), while Wensing et al.(2003:49), when investigating young people in caravan parks, reported that 'the typical pathways recounted involve regular movements between friends, hostels, sleeping rough and living in caravans', indicating that it is also useful in this context.

Conjointly with proposing her iterative homelessness definition, Robinson has also suggested that the key need, at least for homeless people with mental health problems, is the need for the healing of cumulative or 'lifestyle' trauma. She uses the notion of a healing framework, introduced by Coleman in a discussion of Indigenous women's homelessness (cited in Robinson 2003:33), which views homelessness as symptomatic of deeper issues and sees that housing is just one aspect of the process of iterative homelessness. Effective responses need to be pitched with the aim of *healing* the individual by equipping them to better cope with accumulated trauma as well as by working towards practical improvements in their immediate situation.

Robinson (2003:42) suggests that such effective responses would include points of stability, such as those that can be provided by SAAP accommodation services, drop-in centres, key workers or support groups and, most likely, by the coincidence of all of these and more. Such points of stability provide care within a framework aimed at developing relationships with clients, addressing their core traumatic experiences and helping them to develop positive and appropriate coping mechanisms. The key point is the capacity of such services to build relationships with their clients. In the context of people suffering mental health disorders, Robinson (2003) claims that housing and mental health management will continue to break down as long as service provision is 'outcome' structured, to be answered by accommodation alone, and that existing

policies and practices may actually squander the opportunities that could be offered by agencies at points of intervention and care.

The understanding of the lived experience of homelessness is not well developed. Robinson's work clearly illustrates how important temporal dimensions of homelessness can easily be overlooked in favour of the more static, easy to measure, dimensions. Homelessness data, of course, are notoriously difficult to collect. However, existing SAAP data can help shed some light on the lived experience of homelessness and the usefulness, or otherwise, of the notion of iterative homelessness.

The definition of homelessness which underpins the SAAP National Data Collection recognises that people experiencing or at risk of homelessness should be eligible for a range of support services besides accommodation that may help them to work through the underlying issues that prevent them from moving into or maintaining sustainable housing (Box 7.4). Furthermore, the SAAP definition acknowledges that a person may be living in their own home, one that meets culturally acceptable standards, but may be considered homeless or at imminent risk of homelessness due to violence in that home. This is particularly pertinent to women and children living with domestic violence who would not have been counted as homeless by the Census.

The next section first introduces the coverage and diversity of SAAP services, illustrating how SAAP provides different service responses to various client groups with different needs. The effect of this diversity on the numbers of people seeking accommodation is canvassed, with figures presented on the number of people seeking accommodation who are unable to find a bed in a SAAP service. Four different client groups are then profiled, comprising about half of the total SAAP population, to investigate what the data can tell us about their lived experiences of homelessness and to test the usefulness or otherwise of the notion of iterative homelessness.

Box 7.4: Homelessness and SAAP: a service delivery definition

The SAAP Act (1994) defines a person as homeless if, and only if, he or she has inadequate access to safe and secure housing. This includes housing situations that may damage health; threaten safety; marginalise a person from both personal amenities and the economic and social support a home normally offers; where the affordability, safety, security or adequacy of housing is threatened; or where there is no security of tenure. A person is also considered to be homeless under the Act if living in SAAP or other emergency accommodation.

The Act also stipulates that 'people who are homeless' include: people who are in crisis and at imminent risk of becoming homeless and people who are experiencing domestic violence and are at imminent risk of becoming homeless.

7.4　Homelessness within SAAP

During 2003–04, 1,300 SAAP agencies were funded. There were 1,291 agencies still operating at the end of the year, and 66 of these agencies (around 5%) did not

participate in the Client Collection. It is estimated that 1 in 130 Australians received SAAP support at some time during the year, with the 1,225 participating agencies supporting 100,200 clients and 52,700 accompanying children. It should be noted that, within the program, only adults and children who do not accompany a parent/guardian are considered as clients in their own right, and the information collected on accompanying children is quite limited (AIHW 2005).

Clients in SAAP during 2003–04 were provided with 187,200 support periods, which is the discrete period of time during which a client receives support from an agency. The greater number of support periods than clients indicates that some clients access SAAP services more than once during the year. The 52,700 accompanying children were provided with 73,200 support periods.
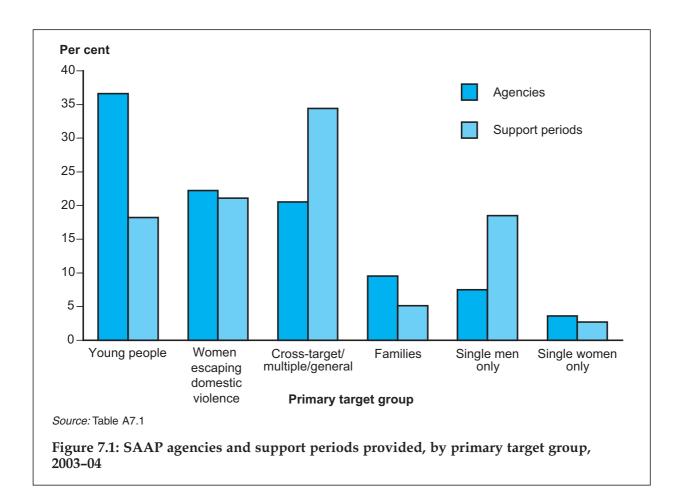
These SAAP clients and accompanying children have enormously diverse characteristics and circumstances, and many SAAP agencies target quite specific client groups, such as single men, single women, women and children escaping domestic violence, young people within particular age ranges, and families. These different SAAP sectors often have quite different histories, with the roots of single men's agencies, for example, stretching back to the early 1900s, while agencies for women escaping domestic violence were initially engendered by the feminist movement in the 1970s.

The largest sector in SAAP, totalling 37% of agencies, comprises agencies targeting young people in nominated age categories, with the next largest group of agencies catering for women and children escaping domestic violence (23%), followed by cross-target or general agencies (19%) (Figure 7.1). Different jurisdictions, however, depart from this national pattern, with the majority of services in both the Northern Territory and Western Australia targeting women escaping domestic violence (AIHW 2003a).

Because of their different histories and the varied needs of their client groups, SAAP sectors also have quite distinct operational procedures. Agencies targeting young people, for example, are often quite small and may have legal requirements to provide intensive 24-hour care to a relatively small number of clients, while those targeting single men often operate with a very high client turnover and less client contact. As a consequence, the proportion of support periods provided, as well as the type, number and length of support, can vary significantly between the sectors.

Consequentially, while agencies targeting young people make up 37% of all SAAP agencies, they provided only 19% of the 187,200 SAAP support periods in 2003–04. In contrast, single men's agencies accounted for 8% of SAAP agencies, but 19% of the support periods. General agencies provided 34% of all support periods, and domestic violence agencies 21% (Figure 7.1).

The length of support generally provided to clients, and the availability of SAAP services that cater to particular client groups, determine to a large extent the number of people that are supported by SAAP, and what the characteristics and circumstances of the overall SAAP population will be. These are also some of the factors that constrain the number of people able to access SAAP services when in need of accommodation—not all people who seek accommodation at SAAP agencies are successful.

Source: Table A7.1

Figure 7.1: SAAP agencies and support periods provided, by primary target group, 2003–04

The National Data Collection Agency attempts to measure both met and unmet requests for accommodation, as well as the capacity at which SAAP services are operating, through the Demand for Accommodation Collection, which runs for 2 separate weeks during the year. Because of seasonal factors, and because people can have several unmet requests in a year, extrapolating from these data to annual figures is not possible. Furthermore, from the perspective of planning for service delivery, annual data do not inform planners of the extent to which additional funds are required to cater for excess demand each night.

This collection indicated that, on an average day in 2003–04, of the 399 people requesting immediate accommodation, 213 (53%) were unable to be accommodated by the end of the day, mainly because there was insufficient accommodation at the SAAP agency where the request was made. The turn-away rate for accompanying children was even higher. Of the 195 children who required accommodation with their parent/ guardian on an average day during the 2003–04 collection, 125 were not accommodated (a turn-away rate of 64%). This suggests that SAAP is more able to provide accommodation for individual(s) who present without children, with these people having the lowest national daily turn-away rate (AIHW 2005).

The 213 potential clients who were turned away represent just 3% of the total number of clients that SAAP was accommodating on that average day, which seems to suggest that a 3% increase in bed capacity could satisfy reported unmet demand for accommodation.

However, this assumes both that all those who needed SAAP accommodation were approaching SAAP agencies and that demand was consistent across target groups and geographical locations. There is sufficient evidence to suggest that neither of these is the case. Furthermore, of the large number of homeless people counted by the Census, only 14% were accommodated in SAAP, suggesting a significant level of hidden need—although exactly what services are needed by this homeless population is unknown.

The SAAP program, then, has distinct and diverse sectors that cater to different groups of homeless people. The next section begins by establishing the differences in the SAAP interventions between four of these client populations, who are largely but not solely drawn from three distinct SAAP sectors: single men's agencies, agencies targeting women escaping domestic violence, and youth agencies.

Differences between SAAP clients

The four client groups encompass single older men aged 45 and over, comprising 8% of SAAP clients, women escaping domestic violence aged 20 years and over, comprising 26%, and young men and women aged 15–19 years, comprising 7% and 10%, respectively (Table 7.6). The client population of women escaping domestic violence was drawn from female clients aged 20 years and over who requested assistance from SAAP due to domestic violence, or who needed, were provided with, or were referred on for counselling and support. As all groups are scoped to be mutually exclusive, young women aged between 15 and 19 who are escaping domestic violence—less than 10% of all women escaping domestic violence—will be excluded from the women escaping domestic violence client group.

Table 7.6: SAAP clients and length of support and accommodation periods provided, by client group, 2003–04

	Male clients 15–19	Female clients 15–19	Women escaping DV 20+	Single men 45+	Other	Total
Clients	6,600	10,500	26,000	7,800	54,400	100,200
Mean length of closed support periods (days)	57	68	56	25	38	44
Median length of closed support periods (days)	15	17	9	1	3	4
Mean length of accommodation periods (days)	41	50	39	29	35	37
Median length of accommodation periods (days)	11	10	6	4	6	6

Notes

1. Number excluded due to errors and omissions for length of support (weighted): 100 closed support periods.

2. Number excluded due to errors and omissions for length of accommodation (weighted): 7,200 closed support periods.

3. Number of clients within a Subpopulation relate to clients who ever presented with the criteria used to form the group. Since a client may have presented with varying characteristics and consent, Subpopulation figures do not sum to the national figure.

4. Figures have been weighted to adjust for incomplete coverage.

Source: SAAP Client Collection.

The cultural and linguistic profiles of these four client groups are quite diverse (Table 7.7). Indigenous Australians are over-represented in SAAP—although only 2% of the Australian population identify as Indigenous, over 16% of all SAAP clients were Indigenous.

This over-representation is most exaggerated for women escaping domestic violence (DV), with over 21% of these clients identifying as Indigenous. These figures are influenced by the composition of SAAP agencies. At the national level, services for women escaping domestic violence comprise the second largest SAAP sector (see Figure 7.1), but in the Northern Territory and Western Australia, both jurisdictions with large Indigenous populations, this sector forms the largest proportion of SAAP services (AIHW 2003a).

The overrepresentation of Indigenous Australians influences the relative proportions of other cultural and linguistic groups in SAAP. People born overseas in the English proficiency group 1 comprised 4% of the total SAAP population, compared to 10% of the Australian-born population. (Group 1 countries are Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, South Africa, the UK and the USA.) This group was well represented among older single men, with 9% from this background. People born in countries grouped as English proficiency groups 2–4 (predominantly non-English-speaking countries) comprised 16% of women escaping domestic violence and 12% of single older men but only 10% of the overall SAAP population compared to 16% of the overall population.

Table 7.7: SAAP clients, by cultural and linguistic diversity and client group, 2003–04 (per cent)

	Male clients 15–19	Female clients 15–19	Women escaping DV 20+	Single men 45+	Other	Total	Australian population aged 10 and over Per cent	Australian population aged 10 and over Number
Indigenous Australians	13.0	19.1	21.1	8.0	16.4	16.5	2.0	345,000
Australian-born non-Indigenous people	79.2	74.7	58.3	71.5	70.7	68.9	71.8	12,220,500
People born overseas, English profic. group 1	2.7	1.9	4.5	8.5	4.2	4.3	10.2	1,730,700
People born overseas, English profic. groups 2–4	5.2	4.3	16.1	11.9	8.7	10.4	16.0	2,727,500
Total	*100.0*	*100.0*	*100.0*	*100.0*	*100.0*	*100.0*	*100.0*	*. .*
Total (number)	**6,300**	**10,100**	**25,200**	**7,600**	**52,100**	**96,500**	**. .**	**17,023,700**

Notes

1. Number excluded due to errors and omissions at national level for cultural and linguistic diversity (weighted): 3,700 clients.

2. Number of clients within a subpopulation relates to clients who ever presented with the criteria used to form the group. Since a client may have presented with varying characteristics and consent, subpopulation figures do not sum to the national figure.

3. 'Australian population 10+' refers to the estimated resident population aged 10 years and over at 30 June 2002. The figures for Indigenous Australians are from experimental estimates based on the 2001 Census produced by the ABS. The number of 'Australian-born non-Indigenous people' is derived from the Australian-born population minus the number of Indigenous Australians.

4. Figures have been weighted to adjust for incomplete coverage.

Sources: SAAP Client Collection; ABS 2004b, 2004c.

As SAAP clients, these groups are provided with a variety of services during their support periods, which may or may not include accommodation. A support period is the discrete period of time during which a client receives support from an agency, with a closed support period being one which finished before the end of the reporting year. An accommodation period is the time during which a client had a bed at an agency, which will always be as part of their support period. During a support period with accommodation, clients will also receive other services such as meals, counselling or health and medical services.

Young female clients, on average were both supported and accommodated for longer periods than the other client groups, at 68 days and 50 days, respectively (Table 7.6). The average length of support and accommodation for young men was shorter, at 57 and 41 days, respectively. The clients with the shortest average length of support and accommodation were the older men (25 and 29 days, respectively). The median length of support for this group was just a single day, indicating that many are using SAAP just for an overnight stay. Note that in this table the mean and median length of accommodation excludes accommodation that starts and ends the same day.

The male client groups, both the single older men and the young males, were more likely to be accommodated by SAAP services (in 65% and 62% of support periods, respectively) than young female clients or women escaping domestic violence (51% each) (Table 7.8). Single older men were also the most likely to receive drug and alcohol services, in 31% of support periods. Young men were the next most likely to receive these services, in 10% of support periods. However, single older men were less likely than any other group to receive other broad types of services such as general support/advocacy (in 70% of support periods), counselling (in 34%), or financial or employment assistance (in 26%).

The types of services that women escaping domestic violence were most likely to receive were general support/advocacy and counselling (both in 82% of support periods), followed by basic support (56%). All four client groups accessed health and medical services fairly equally (10% to 13%).

Table 7.8: Support periods provided to SAAP clients, by type of service and client group 2003–04 (per cent)

Broad type of service	Male clients 15–19	Female clients 15–19	Women escaping DV 20+	Single men 45+	Other	Total
SAAP accommodation	61.5	51.1	51.2	65.4	47.3	51.5
Assistance to obtain/maintain non-SAAP/CAP accommodation/housing	37.2	39.7	31.7	17.8	27.2	28.9
Financial/employment	39.3	39.5	40.6	26.2	32.9	34.9
Counselling	46.8	58.9	81.6	33.6	38.7	47.9
General support/advocacy	77.7	77.5	82.2	69.8	68.9	72.5
Health/medical services	9.9	12.7	13.0	12.9	9.1	10.6
Drug/alcohol support or intervention	10.2	5.8	4.6	31.1	12.5	12.3
Other specialist services	8.0	14.2	21.1	5.0	8.7	11.0
Basic support	66.5	56.4	56.0	73.3	56.3	58.9
No services provided directly	2.5	2.2	0.9	1.7	3.1	2.5
Total (number)	11,100	17,000	38,400	17,900	107,300	180,400

Notes

1. Number excluded due to errors and omissions (weighted): 7,000 (including cases with no information on service requirements or provision).

2. Clients were able to receive multiple services, so percentages do not total 100.

3. Figures have been weighted to adjust for incomplete coverage.

Source: SAAP Client Collection.

These profiles indicate that the four client groups presented have different experiences with their SAAP interventions. The lengths of support and accommodation differ markedly between the groups, the use of particular sectors of SAAP by Indigenous Australians varies, and the types of support received are different. The next section introduces SAAP data which can give insight into some of the temporal dimensions of the homelessness being experienced by these four client groups. The data are used to develop two indicators of iterative homelessness in order to examine the groups for indications of ongoing tenuous housing cycles, before turning to investigate the nature of homelessness within each group in turn.

7.5   Iterative homelessness in the client groups

Iterative homelessness refers to the repeated and ongoing movement through tenuous and marginal types of accommodation. One indicator of this movement that can be derived from the SAAP data is the incidence of being marginally housed prior to SAAP: This can be indicated by clients sleeping rough or in improvised dwellings, by being in SAAP, a rooming house, hostel, hotel or caravan, being in an institution, or by living rent-free in a house or flat prior to their SAAP intervention. It could be argued that not all these options necessarily indicate tenuous housing and without knowledge of the previous housing trajectory of clients this can never be clear—the data cannot tell us for how long, if at all, clients have been moving between different forms of housing. In all these types of accommodation, however, security of tenure is lacking, creating circumstances where housing is more tenuous.

Of all four client groups, young men and single older men experienced the most marginal housing conditions prior to SAAP support. Young men were previously marginally housed in 74% of their support periods (Table 7.9) and single older men in 71%. Younger women were previously marginally housed in 63% of their support periods while women escaping domestic violence were housed marginally in only 31% of support periods. Note that this indicator, consisting as it does of previous housing that had no tenure, cannot capture the incidence of emotionally tenuous housing conditions which women coming from situations of domestic violence have lived through.

For both young men and young women, the most common form of prior housing was living rent-free in a house of flat (in 28% and 32% of support periods, respectively), for single older men it was sleeping rough outside or in improvised dwellings (23%) and for women escaping domestic violence, private rental was the most common form of housing prior to SAAP (25%).

For both young men and single older men, the second most common form of prior housing was another SAAP service. Young male clients were previously housed in emergency accommodation in 26% of their support periods, and single older men in 21%. The second most common form of prior housing for young women was boarding in a private house (in 19% of support periods) and for women escaping domestic violence it was public or community housing (in 22%).

Table 7.9: Closed support periods provided to SAAP clients, by type of accommodation immediately before support and client group, 2003–04 (per cent)

Type of accommodation	Male clients 15–19	Female clients 15–19	Women escaping DV 20+	Single men 45+	Other	Total Per cent	Total Number
Marginal housing							
Living in a car/tent/park/street/squat	8.3	4.0	2.4	23.4	15.3	11.9	18,200
SAAP or other emergency housing	25.7	19.4	15.1	21.4	15.8	17.1	26,100
Rooming house/hostel/hotel/caravan	5.5	4.9	4.1	17.1	12.2	9.9	15,100
Institutional	6.6	2.9	1.4	5.3	5.3	4.3	6,600
Living rent-free in house/flat	27.6	32.0	7.5	3.4	9.9	11.8	18,000
Subtotal	*73.7*	*63.2*	*30.5*	*70.6*	*58.5*	*55.0*	*84,000*
Non-marginal housing							
Boarding in a private home	15.9	18.7	9.9	4.0	10.3	10.7	16,300
Public or community housing	2.9	5.9	21.6	14.3	12.3	13.3	20,400
Private rental	5.1	9.4	24.7	7.8	14.3	14.8	22,600
Own home	0.6	0.7	11.6	1.3	1.4	3.4	5,200
Subtotal	*24.5*	*34.7*	*67.8*	*27.4*	*38.3*	*42.2*	*64,500*
Other	1.8	2.1	1.6	2.1	3.3	2.6	4,000
Total	*100.0*	*100.0*	*100.0*	*100.0*	*100.0*	*100.0*	*100.0*
Total (number)	**9,200**	**13,900**	**32,100**	**15,500**	**81,900**	..	**152,600**

Notes

1. Number excluded due to errors and omissions (weighted): 16,600 (clients).

2. Figures have been weighted to adjust for incomplete coverage.

Source: SAAP Client Collection.

Another source of insight into the temporal dimensions of homelessness of SAAP clients is the number of times a client returns to SAAP services in any one year. The time during which a client is given support by an agency is called a support period, and this finishes when the relationship between the client and an agency ends. Later, however, clients may return again to either the same agency or another one for another support period. This repeat use rate is measured by the number of support periods the client has in the year.

Clients with high repeat rates are sometimes described as 'churning' through the system, with the implication that they go in and out of the revolving SAAP door without any noticeable change in their circumstances. It is just as possible, however, to interpret high repeat rates as a positive experience for clients. Using the paradigm supplied by the notion of iterative homelessness, SAAP services can be viewed as providing points of stability for clients where, over time, they may establish trust and rapport with workers and begin to work through the underlying issues that prevent them moving into sustainable housing options.

The same groups who experienced the most marginal housing tenure prior to their SAAP interventions also had the highest repeat rates of SAAP usage. In the 2003–04 year, 5.2% of the older single men and 3.5% of younger men had 6 or more support periods (Table 7.10), in line with their relatively high rates of being previously

accommodated in a SAAP service (Table 7.9). In contrast, 91% of women escaping domestic violence had only 1 or 2 support periods last financial year. For young women the corresponding figure is 87%, while 86% of young men and 84% of older single men had just the 1 or 2 support periods.

Table 7.10: SAAP clients, by number of support periods provided per client and client group, 2003–04 (per cent)

Number of support periods per client	Male clients 15–19	Female clients 15–19	Women escaping DV 20+	Single men 45+	Other	Total
1	71.9	72.6	78.0	68.6	73.2	71.6
2	14.2	14.8	13.0	15.0	13.9	14.4
3	5.9	6.1	4.7	6.3	5.2	5.9
4	2.6	2.7	2.1	3.3	2.5	2.8
5	1.9	1.4	1.0	1.7	1.6	1.7
6 or more	3.5	2.3	1.3	5.2	3.7	3.6
Total	*100.0*	*100.0*	*100.0*	*100.0*	*100.0*	*100.0*
Mean number of support periods per client	**1.77**	**1.69**	**1.50**	**2.33**	**1.85**	**1.87**
Total (number of clients)	**6,600**	**10,500**	**26,000**	**7,800**	**54,400**	**100,200**

Notes

1. Number of clients within a subpopulation relate to clients who ever presented with the criteria used to form the group. Since a client may have presented with varying characteristics and consent, subpopulation figures do not sum to the national figure.

2. Figures have been weighted to adjust for incomplete coverage.

Source: SAAP Client Collection.

These two measures of iterative homelessness, then, have been useful in showing up the differences between the temporal dimensions of homelessness as experienced by the four client groups. In particular, they have highlighted the likelihood of previous marginal housing conditions and of ongoing cycles of SAAP interventions being experienced by young men and older single men. Each of these client groups will now be investigated in more detail.

Single older men

Single older men are very often clients at men's shelters, that is, SAAP agencies with very high client turnover. Historically, these agencies have collected a limited amount of information about their clients and, for this reason, detailed information about this client group, including presenting reasons and changes in situations before and after support, are not complete. This will change as at July 2005, and complete information will be available after the 2005–06 Demand for Accommodation Collection.

Homeless men often have physical disabilities and health problems more often seem in people 10 or 20 years older than themselves, and many 'view their lives as over' (FaCS 2003a). For such reasons, conventional chronological classification of the elderly as 65 years or over is not applied to homeless men, who are often classed as elderly at 50 years of age. Premature ageing is even more pronounced for Indigenous men who, with life expectancies of around 17 years less than non-Indigenous men, are often classed as elderly when aged 45 and over. This is the age at which we will begin this

analysis of older men. These older men are more likely to access SAAP services than women of the same age; 21% of male SAAP clients over the age 45 in 2003–04 and only 13% of female clients (AIHW 2005).

Reflecting the high level of disabilities in this client group, the main source of income for these clients in 2004–04 was the Disability Support Pension, in 61% of support periods, compared with 17% for the remaining SAAP clients (see Table A7.2). This was true for all ages below those eligible for the Age Pension. The Age Pension was the main source in 70% of support periods for the 65–74 year olds, and, interestingly, in only 57% of support periods for those aged 75 and over. However, this older age group also received other types of pensions in a further 12% of their support periods.

The best indicator currently available as to why this client group is accessing SAAP is provided by looking at the types of services they receive, as the three services most often provided to single older men were SAAP accommodation (in 65% of support periods), laundry or shower facilities (61%) and meals (60%) (Table A7.3). Single older men were far more likely than other SAAP clients to have their belongings looked after (in 40% of support periods compared to 19%). They were also far more likely to need drug or alcohol support or intervention (31% compared with 10%), indicating that underlying many of the physical disabilities and health problems experienced by this client group are significantly high levels of drug and/or alcohol abuse and/or mental health issues.

The small group of men using SAAP who are aged 75 years or older have a very different pattern of service provision. For this group, the services most often provided were advice and information and SAAP accommodation, both in just 45% of support periods, and laundry and shower facilities, in 40%. Compared to the younger age groups of men, they received less emotional support (in 26% of support periods), were provided with less retrieval, storage or removal of belongings (26%) and had fewer meals provided (36%). They also received less drug and alcohol support (in 17% of support periods), which may be influenced by earlier mortality rates for chronic abusers. On the other hand, they were provided with more financial assistance (in 25% of support periods).

There is evidence that some men in this client group have difficulties in even accessing SAAP services. In 2003–04, a review of the exclusion policy and procedures of SAAP agencies undertaken by the Community Services Commission in New South Wales showed how eligibility policies prevent potential clients from gaining access. It also highlighted how exclusion can operate through practices such as early exiting, banning, blacklisting, eviction, time-out and background checks (NSW Ombudsman 2004). In this review, single men's agencies, far more than any other type of agency, indicated that not wanting to abide by rules was a sufficient reason to deny access to clients. Further, more than any other sector, previous experience with the person was a more likely factor in denying them access. The most common characteristic of people turned away from single men's agencies was that of having a drug and alcohol problem—there were an estimated 130 men turned away for this reason in the 6 months prior to the survey (AIHW 2003a:427), again highlighting the underlying issues of many of these clients.

This tallies with a survey carried out in 2002 in Sydney which identified upwards of 100 people barred from one or all SAAP services for periods ranging from a few days to life (Robinson 2002, cited in Hurni 2004). In a similar vein, a Queensland survey in 2001 found that the behaviours for which clients were most frequently excluded, in order of response rate, were violence (past or present), intoxication or substance abuse (past or present) and perception of mental illness (Jeanneret 2004).

This client group has been characterized as largely the chronic, repeat, incipient, prolonged, or long-term homeless, or as having adopted homelessness as a way of life (Hurni 2004). This ongoing homelessness is captured by the group's repeat use of SAAP services (Table 7.11), which reports the average number of support periods clients have in any one year. In 2003–04, single older men had an average of 2.3 support periods compared to a 1.8 average for the rest of the SAAP population. However, as this client group ages, they tended to have less support periods in the year, with 67% of the men aged 45–54 having only one support period, compared to 80% of those aged 75 and over. Five per cent of the 45–54 year olds, and 6% of the next age group, had 6 or more support periods in the year, dropping to 2% of those aged 75 and over.

Table 7.11: Single male SAAP clients aged 45 and over, by number of support periods provided per client and age group, 2003–04 (per cent)

| Number of support periods per client | Single men aged 45 and over | | | | | | Other SAAP clients | |
| | | | | | Total | | | |
	45–54	55–64	65–74	75+	%	Number	%	Number
1	67.4	68.5	70.4	80.1	68.6	5,400	72.0	66,800
2	14.9	15.5	14.6	13.2	15.0	1,200	14.3	13,300
3	7.0	5.4	6.0	3.6	6.3	500	5.8	5,300
4	3.6	3.2	2.6	0.6	3.3	300	2.8	2,600
5	1.8	1.6	1.7	0.3	1.7	100	1.6	1,500
6+	5.2	5.8	4.7	2.1	5.2	400	3.5	3,200
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	. .	100.0	. .
Mean number of support periods per client	2.35	2.31	2.54	1.68	. .	2.33	. .	1.82
Total (number)	**4,700**	**2,000**	**700**	**400**	**. .**	**7,800**	**. .**	**92,700**

Notes

1. Number of clients within a subpopulation relate to clients who ever presented with the criteria used to form the group. Since a client may have presented with varying characteristics and consent, subpopulation and other SAAP figures do not sum to the national figure.

2. Figures have been weighted to adjust for incomplete coverage.

Source: SAAP Client Collection.

We reported previously (see Table 7.9) that single older men, together with young men in the 15–19 age group, were experiencing the most vulnerable housing conditions before their SAAP support periods. These clients were previously marginally housed in 71% of support periods, compared to 53% of support periods for the remaining SAAP clients (Table 7.12). Different age groups of single older men, however, showed a lot of variation in the incidence of previous marginal housing. The highest incidence was in the 45–54 age group, who were previously marginally housed in 72% of support periods.

In the 55–64 age group, the incidence dropped to 68%, largely due to a decrease in the incidence of clients sleeping rough before their SAAP intervention (from 25% of support periods for the 45–54 year olds to 20% for the next age group).

The proportion of these clients living in rooming houses, hostels and caravan parks decreased with increasing ages, from a high of 18% of support periods in the 55–64 age group, to 15% in the oldest age group. In contrast, the percentage of support periods in which this client group was previously living in a SAAP or other emergency accommodation was greatest for the oldest age group (a quarter of all support periods). The percentage of support periods in which these clients were previously living in an institution was also greatest for those aged 75 and over, increasing from 5% of support periods for the other age groups to 7% of support periods. Although these figures cannot illuminate how often these clients are moving between different types of tenuous housing, they do highlight the difficulties they face in maintaining sustainable housing options.

Table 7.12: Closed SAAP support periods provided to single men aged 45 or over, by type of accommodation immediately before support and age group, 2003–04 (per cent)

Type of accommodation	Single men aged 45 and over					Other SAAP clients
	45–54	55–64	65–74	75+	Total	
Marginal housing						
Living in a car/tent/park/street/squat	25.4	19.7	23.1	14.1	23.4	10.7
SAAP or other emergency housing	20.9	22.1	20.5	25.4	21.4	16.6
Rooming house/hostel/hotel/caravan	17.0	17.8	16.3	14.6	17.1	9.1
Institutional	5.4	4.9	4.8	6.8	5.3	4.2
Living rent-free in house/flat	3.6	3.5	2.1	3.3	3.4	12.8
Subtotal	*72.3*	*68.0*	*66.8*	*64.2*	*70.6*	*53.4*
Non-marginal housing						
Boarding in a private home	4.3	3.9	3.0	2.5	4.0	11.4
Public or community housing	12.4	16.0	19.9	19.6	14.3	13.2
Private rental	7.7	7.9	7.1	10.2	7.8	15.6
Own home	1.1	1.8	1.3	0.9	1.3	3.7
Subtotal	25.5	29.6	31.3	33.2	27.4	43.9
Other	2.1	2.3	1.9	2.6	2.1	2.7
Total	*100.0*	*100.0*	*100.0*	*100.0*	*100.0*	*100.0*
Total (number)	**9,400**	**4,100**	**1,500**	**500**	**15,500**	**137,100**

Notes

1. Number excluded due to errors and omissions (weighted): 16,600.

2. Valid data for 'Other SAAP' include records with errors and omissions in age.

3. Figures have been weighted to adjust for incomplete coverage.

Source: SAAP Client Collection.

As well as accessing SAAP services more often than other clients, this client group also had generally shorter interventions, with an average length of support of 25 days, compared with the 46 days for the rest of the SAAP population (Table 7.13). Their median length of support was just 1 day, compared with 5 for other SAAP clients,

suggesting that in a majority of support periods they are using the SAAP services as day drop-in centres. Unlike the average length of support, which does not vary between the ages, the average length of accommodation steadily rises with age from 27 days in the 45–54 age group to 40 days in the 75 and over age group. The median length, at 4 days, is not very different from that of other SAAP clients.

Combined with information on the relatively shorter lengths of support and accommodation for these clients (see Table 7.6), it seems that single older men tend to have a unique pattern of SAAP usage, with shorter and more frequent support periods. In Robinson's parlance, this could be interpreted as offering points of stability in these men's lives, thereby providing opportunities for developing trust so that deeper issues, such as those underlying their substance abuse, which are reflected in their service provision and preventing their sustainable and ongoing housing, could be addressed.

Table 7.13: Closed SAAP support periods provided to single men aged 45 and over, by length of support and accommodation periods and age group, 2003–04

	Single men 45 aged 45 and over					Other SAAP clients
	45–54	55–64	65–74	75+	Total	
Mean length of support (days)	25	27	26	27	25	46
Median length of support (days)	1	1	1	—	1	5
Mean length of accommodation (days)	27	32	33	40	29	38
Median length of accommodation (days)	4	3	3	6	4	7

Notes

1. Number excluded due to errors and omissions for length of support (weighted): 100.

2. Number excluded due to errors and omissions for length of accommodation (weighted): 7,200.

3. Figures have been weighted to adjust for incomplete coverage.

Source: SAAP Client Collection.

Women escaping domestic violence

It has been argued strongly that many of the current definitions of homelessness have a gendered terrain: 'homelessness, particularly single homelessness, is seen as a male problem, the image of the male tramp on the park bench, the zipless torn trousers, the laceless shoes, is a dominant one. Women's homelessness takes different forms and finds different "solutions"' (Watson 1988, cited in Beer et al. 2003:15). In the previous section the SAAP data revealed more about this traditional subject of the homelessness debate, and how men's experiences of homelessness and SAAP changed as they aged. In this section we see what the data can tell us about women escaping domestic violence, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, and their children.

As has been said, homelessness is most often identified with men found sleeping rough, a point of view supported by the Census, where over 60% of the 'primary' homeless were men (Chamberlain & Mackenzie 2003:4). The many women and children living with domestic violence in their own homes are not classed as homeless by the Census, and this and other forms of homelessness experienced by women is often unseen and as a result undercounted, with the consequence that women's needs are marginalised. This notion of hidden homelessness is congruent with the types of tenuous housing trajectories described by Robinson, with the cycles of marginal housing described by her

often being invisible under such homelessness measurements as that supplied by the Census. If a woman and her family, for example, have been sharing accommodation with another family for longer than 3 months, she is not counted as homeless in the Census.

If this is true for non-Indigenous women, then it is probably even more relevant for Indigenous women. As discussed earlier, for example, some Census concepts may be less appropriate in an Indigenous context, raising the potential for the marginalisation and cultural misrepresentation of Indigenous homelessness. Indeed, the lived homelessness experiences of homeless Indigenous women, together with their views on home and community, are only just starting to be given a voice (e.g. Cooper & Morris 2003). The SAAP data may shed more light on such experiences, for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous women.

In the SAAP population, women consistently outnumber men. In 2003–04, 58% of clients were women, 42% men (AIHW 2005), with Indigenous women considerably over-represented, comprising over 21% of all women escaping domestic violence (see Table 7.7). Such figures are influenced by the proportion of SAAP services that target women or, more specifically, women escaping domestic violence. This sector is the second largest nationally (see Figure 7.1).

The proportion of women who attended SAAP agencies in 2003–04 accompanied by children was very similar both for Indigenous and non-Indigenous women: about 60% of support periods in both cases (see Table A7.4). In around one-half of their support periods, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous women escaping domestic violence cited physical and emotional abuse as an additional reason for seeking assistance and both also commonly cited relationship and family breakdown (in 30% and 37% of support periods, respectively), indicating the high levels of violence and emotional uprooting faced by this large proportion of SAAP clients.

There were differences between these Indigenous and non-Indigenous clients. Indigenous women more often reported seeking assistance for having time out from family and other situations (in 25% of support periods compared to 13% for non-Indigenous women) and were also more likely to cite problems with drug, alcohol or substance abuse as a reason for seeking assistance (in 15% and 8% of support periods, respectively), although it is unclear whether this refers to their own substance abuse or that of members of their family.

In this context, the importance of home and family in an Indigenous context can be clearly seen in the data on living situations before and after accessing SAAP services (see Table A7.5). Indigenous women were living with parents or relatives before accessing SAAP in 24% of support periods and in 30% afterwards, compared with just 10% of support periods, both before and after SAAP for non-Indigenous women. Both Indigenous and non-Indigenous women were more likely to be living alone with their children after leaving SAAP. The percentage of Indigenous women living alone rose from 16% of support periods to 30%, while for non-Indigenous women the increase was from 23% to 43%.

There were large differences in the length of support and of accommodation, depending both on the Indigenous status of the women and whether they were accompanied by children. Non-Indigenous women were supported for longer (a median of 15 days) and

had longer accommodation periods (13 days) than did Indigenous women, whose median length of both support and accommodation was 3 days (Table 7.14). The average length of accommodation for non-Indigenous women with children was 59 days, compared to 22 days for Indigenous women with children. Stays without children were generally much shorter, on average 40 days for non-Indigenous women and just 9 days for Indigenous women.

Table 7.14: Closed SAAP support periods provided to women aged 20 and over escaping domestic violence, by length of support and accommodation, whether accompanied by a child and Indigenous status, 2003–04

	Indigenous			Non-Indigenous		
	With accompanying child(ren)	Without accompanying child(ren)	Total	With accompanying child(ren)	Without accompanying child(ren)	Total
Mean length of support (days)	35	21	29	74	51	65
Median length of support (days)	4	2	3	21	9	15
Mean length of accommodation (days)	22	9	17	59	40	52
Median length of accommodation (days)	3	2	3	15	9	13

Notes

1. Number excluded due to errors and omissions for length of support and Indigenous status (weighted): 800.

2. Number excluded due to errors and omissions for length of accommodation and Indigenous status (weighted): 900.

3. Figures have been weighted to adjust for incomplete coverage.

Source: SAAP Client Collection.

The SAAP services received by women escaping domestic violence also varied considerably depending on Indigenous status (see Table A7.6). For Indigenous women, the three broad types of services most likely to be received were basic support (in 77% of support periods), SAAP accommodation (in 76%) and counselling (in 71%). For non-Indigenous women, it was general support and advocacy (in 86% of support periods), counselling (in 85%) and basic support (in 50%). Non-Indigenous women accessed accommodation in just 44% of support periods overall, indicating that Indigenous women were far more likely to use SAAP services for accommodation. For Indigenous and non-Indigenous women alike, accessing SAAP agencies without accompanying children generally meant receiving fewer types of services.

The data so far for women escaping domestic violence indicate that the SAAP experiences are quite different, depending on clients' Indigenous status. Indigenous women are likely to have much shorter lengths of support and accommodation, most commonly just 3 days for either, and are more likely to be accommodated during their SAAP interventions. SAAP data also provide insight into the importance of Indigenous ties to community, with Indigenous women far more likely to be staying with family, including relatives, either before or after their SAAP support, and also more likely to use SAAP services for time out from family.

Women escaping domestic violence had the lowest incidence of previous marginal housing of all four client groups in 2003–04 (in 31% of support periods, see Table 7.9). Indigenous women were marginally housed prior to 34% of their support periods while non-Indigenous women were marginally housed prior to 30% (Table 7.15). Both showed

a similar increase in the incidence of marginal housing after receiving SAAP support, rising to 36% of support periods for Indigenous women and 32% for non-Indigenous women.

Table 7.15: Closed SAAP support periods provided to women aged 20 and over escaping domestic violence, by type of accommodation immediately before and after support and Indigenous status, 2003–04 (per cent)

Type of accommodation	Indigenous		Non-Indigenous	
	Before support	After support	Before support	After support
Marginal housing				
Living in a car/tent/park/street/squat	3.9	2.0	2.0	0.8
SAAP or other emergency housing	15.9	18.8	15.0	20.9
Rooming house/hostel/hotel/caravan	3.1	3.4	4.5	3.6
Institutional	1.7	2.2	1.3	1.4
Living rent-free in house/flat	9.1	9.5	7.2	5.6
Subtotal	*33.7*	*35.9*	*30.0*	*32.3*
Non-marginal housing				
Boarding in a private home	11.0	10.7	9.5	9.5
Public or community housing	43.7	42.9	14.6	18.3
Private rental	9.6	8.6	29.8	27.4
Own home	1.0	0.8	15.2	11.4
Subtotal	*65.3*	*63.0*	*69.1*	*66.6*
Other	1.0	1.1	0.9	1.1
Total	*100.0*	*100.0*	*100.0*	*100.0*
Total (number)	**7,600**	**6,000**	**22,500**	**19,200**

Notes

1. Number excluded due to errors and omissions before support (weighted): 3,600.

2. Number excluded due to errors and omissions after support (weighted): 8,600.

3. Table excludes high-volume records because not all items were collected on the high-volume form.

4. Figures have been weighted to adjust for incomplete coverage.

Source: SAAP Client Collection.

However, as already said, this indicator cannot capture the incidence of emotionally tenuous housing and emotional uprootings which women in domestic violence live with. This is better indicated by the prevalence of domestic violence and concurrent high levels of physical and emotional abuse in this client group. In fact, the grouping of housing into marginal and non-marginal hides very significant differences in the types of non-marginal housing experienced by Indigenous and non-Indigenous women.

While public and community housing was the most common type of accommodation for Indigenous women (in 44% of support periods before SAAP and 43% after), private rental was the most usual for non-Indigenous women (30% before and 27% after). Non-Indigenous women were living in their own home in 15% of support periods before accessing SAAP, dropping down to 11% afterwards, while private ownership was virtually unknown among the Indigenous women using SAAP (in 1% or less of support periods) (Table 7.15).

In summary, then, it has proved more difficult to pull out information from the SAAP data indicating whether or not iterative homelessness is a useful concept for these clients. Further confounding this issue are the mobility patterns of many Indigenous women, deriving from factors such as kinship obligations (Memmott et al. 2004a:14–15), indicating that cross-cultural indicators of iterative homelessness will need further thought. What these SAAP data have shown, however, is that the SAAP experiences of women escaping domestic violence are quite distinct for Indigenous and non-Indigenous, and should be analysed separately.

Young people aged 15–19 years

This section provides an overview of young females and males who have accessed SAAP services as clients in their own right, that is, when not accompanying a parent or guardian. Young people in SAAP are of particular interest, in part because it is thought that 'those who experience marginalisation and homelessness during young adulthood have a greatly diminished chance of finding a stable and productive role in the community in the longer term' (CACH 2001:57).

The young people examined here are primarily those between the ages of 15 and 19 years, although some information on clients under the age of 15 will also be presented. Nationally, the largest proportion of SAAP agencies target people under 25 years of age (see Figure 7.1), so it is not surprising that clients in the 15–19 age group comprised 17% of all SAAP clients in 2003–04 (AIHW 2005:84).

In the 2003–04 year there were 1,700 young people aged 15 years who used SAAP services (see Table A7.7). This number swelled to 4,200 for 17 year olds, and then slowly decreased to 3,600 young people aged 19 years. For each of these age groups there were more young women, with 61% of clients aged 19 and under being female. The least disparity between the sexes was for those clients aged 15 years and under. For young men this group comprised 4% of all clients, or 11% of all young men using SAAP, indicating that although boys access SAAP less than girls, they tend to utilise these services at an earlier age. Furthermore, as shown earlier, young men were more likely to be marginally housed prior to their SAAP intervention (in 74% of their support periods, compared to 63% for young women). High repeat rates of interventions were also more likely for young men, with 4% having 6 or more support periods, and only 2% of younger women (see Tables 7.9 and 7.10).

Taken together, these data support Wensing's observation (2003) about young people, and especially young men, having housing trajectories which typically involved regular movements between friends, hostels, sleeping rough and living in caravans. The SAAP data presented here indicates that young men are moving into these cycles of tenuous housing at an earlier age than young women.

Supporting this assertion are the differences between the sexes in the broad types of services received from SAAP (see Table A7.8). Young men were consistently more likely than young women to be accommodated as part of their SAAP intervention (in 61% versus 50% of support periods, overall). The pattern of SAAP accommodation differed between the sexes too, with a peak of accommodation being received by males, in 66% of support periods, at 16 years old. For young women, accommodation peaked at 57% of support periods for 15 year olds.

The sexes also differed in the services received for substance abuse issues, with young men consistently receiving more support or intervention (in 10% of support periods for young men, 6% for young women). For young men, this type of intervention peaked with the 18 year olds (12% of support periods). Young men were also more likely than young women to be provided with basic support services, including meals, showers and laundry (66%). Young women received such services in 61% of support periods (see Table A7.8).

Overall, the two types of services most likely to be received by both young men and young women were general support/advocacy (in 77% of support periods for both sexes) and basic support (in 66% and 61%, respectively). SAAP accommodation was the next most likely type of service to be received by young men (in 61% of support periods), while counselling was the next most likely for young women (in 57%). An interesting trend, and one that is contrary to the policy implications of the iterative homelessness approach, is that as the clients got older there was a decrease in the likelihood of receiving counselling. Both young men and young women were most likely to receive counselling when under 15 years of age, in 64% of support periods for young men and 71% for young women. At 19 years of age, young men were receiving counselling in just 41% of support periods and young women in 58%.

Some of the results of SAAP interventions for young people are outlined in Table 7.16, which compares their housing prior to and post their SAAP support. This indicates that, for both sexes, there was a decrease in the incidence of marginal housing after SAAP intervention: for young men from 73% of support periods to 64%, and for young women from 62% to 52%.

Most of this decrease is attributable to a drop in the incidence of living rent-free, often called 'couch surfing', from 28% to 23% of support periods before and after support for young men, and from 29% to 21% before and after support for young women. There was also a drop for both sexes in the incidence of sleeping rough, from 8% to 3% of support periods for young men, and from 4% to 2% for young women. At the same time, there was a rise in the incidence of young men and women achieving housing with more secure tenure, with increases in the likelihood that they would be living in either public or community housing or renting privately after SAAP support.

Over the last few years there has been an increasing emphasis on the role of case-management in SAAP as the preferred 'early intervention' strategy. Such strategies are generally deemed to be especially appropriate in those services that target young people as it is often assumed that, as these clients are in the 'early' stages of homelessness, the issues they face are more tractable and so more amenable to SAAP interventions.

Given this emphasis, it is interesting to examine the effects that being case-managed had on young men and young women. Table 7.17 examines where young men and women were living after their SAAP intervention, as in the previous table, but presented according to whether or not a support plan was agreed to by the young clients—a support plan being one of the major tools of case-management, whereby the client and the agency set out the agreed goals of the young person and the steps that need to be taken to meet those goals. Case-management, of course, may not always be an option for a SAAP service as when, for example, the SAAP client has a truncated support period, or does not agree to participate in the case-management process.

Furthermore, although a support plan may be developed by an agency working with a client, this does not guarantee that any of the agreed goals will be met.

From the previous table we found that SAAP intervention was followed by a fall in the number of young people living in marginal housing, and that a large proportion of that decrease was attributable to a drop in the incidence of living somewhere rent-free. The following table shows that this decrease, for both sexes, was influenced by whether a support plan was in place. For young men, though, this difference was quite small, from 28% of support periods prior to SAAP to 22% after SAAP when a support plan was in place and to 24% where a plan was not in place. For young women, the existence of a case plan had a larger effect, from 29% of support periods prior to SAAP to 19% after SAAP with a support plan, but 25% without a support plan (Table 7.17).

Note that this measure is very rough as it does not take into account how well, if at all, such plans were implemented. However, the smaller effect for young men is consistent with previous data showing that these clients are more likely to have been in tenuous housing at a younger age and to have more substance abuse issues. Under the approach outlined by Robinson, case-management would still be considered a useful tool for SAAP agencies, but one that would be developed over time as trust grew between the agency and the client, and a tool that set goals to deal with the issues underlying clients' inability to sustain tenable housing, rather than a tool dealing with the clients presenting issues.

Table 7.16: Closed SAAP support periods for young people aged 15–19, by type of accommodation immediately before and after support and gender, 2003–04 (per cent)

Type of accommodation	Males		Females	
	Before support	After support	Before support	After support
Marginal housing				
Living in a car/tent/park/street/squat	8.2	3.3	4.2	2.0
SAAP or other emergency housing	24.8	25.1	20.2	21.3
Rooming house/hostel/hotel/caravan	5.5	6.8	5.1	4.7
Institutional	6.4	5.4	3.1	2.8
Living rent-free in house/flat	28.3	22.9	29.2	21.1
Subtotal	*73.2*	*63.5*	*61.8*	*51.9*
Non-marginal housing				
Boarding in a private home	16.5	17.2	20.1	18.8
Public or community housing	2.7	5.3	6.1	10.6
Private rental	5.2	10.9	9.2	15.4
Own home	0.6	0.5	0.7	0.7
Subtotal	*25.0*	*33.9*	*36.1*	*45.5*
Other	1.8	2.6	2.1	2.8
Total	*100.0*	*100.0*	*100.0*	*100.0*
Total (number)	**8,800**	**6,700**	**12,700**	**10,300**

Notes

1. Number excluded due to errors and omissions before support (weighted): 1,900.
2. Number excluded due to errors and omissions after support (weighted): 6,400.
3. Table excludes high-volume records because not all items were collected on the high-volume form.
4. Figures have been weighted to adjust for incomplete coverage.

Source: SAAP Client Collection.

Table 7.17: Closed SAAP support periods provided to young people aged 15–19, by type of accommodation immediately after support, existence of support plan and gender, 2003–04 (per cent)

	Males			Females		
Type of accommodation	Support plan in place	No support plan or not applicable	Total	Support plan in place	No support plan or not applicable	Total
Marginal housing						
Living in a car/tent/park/street/squat	2.0	5.6	3.2	1.4	3.2	2.0
SAAP or other emergency housing	24.8	25.3	25.0	21.4	20.4	21.1
Rooming house/hostel/hotel/caravan	5.9	9.0	6.9	4.2	6.0	4.8
Institutional	5.3	5.6	5.4	2.5	3.0	2.7
Living rent-free in house/flat	22.0	24.0	22.7	19.3	24.5	21.0
Subtotal	*60.0*	*69.5*	*63.2*	*48.8*	*57.1*	*51.6*
Non-marginal housing						
Boarding in a private home	18.7	14.5	17.3	20.0	16.3	18.8
Public or community housing	6.1	3.5	5.3	11.5	8.5	10.5
Private rental	12.1	8.9	11.0	16.8	12.9	15.5
Own home	0.3	0.8	0.5	0.6	1.0	0.7
Subtotal	37.2	27.7	34.1	48.9	38.7	45.5
Other	2.7	2.7	2.7	2.2	4.1	2.8
Total	*100.0*	*100.0*	*100.0*	*100.0*	*100.0*	*100.0*
Total	**67.1**	**32.9**	**100.0**	**67.9**	**32.1**	**100.0**
Total (number)	**4,200**	**2,100**	**6,300**	**6,700**	**3,100**	**9,800**

Notes

1. Number excluded due to errors or omissions (weighted): 7,300.
2. Table excludes high-volume records because not all items were collected on the high-volume form.
3. Figures have been weighted to adjust for incomplete coverage.

Source: SAAP Client Collection.

7.6   SAAP data from 1996–97 to 2003–04

This section begins by presenting time series data from the SAAP program, including funding levels, the number of clients and support periods, and the average number of support periods per client. This is followed by a discussion of some new developments in the SAAP National Data Collection.

Recurrent funding for SAAP has risen by 46% over the 8 years of the collection, from $219.8 million in 1996–97 to $321.4 million in 2003–04 (Table 7.18). When adjusted for inflation, in real terms funding increased by 19%. Funding levels in real terms remained similar between 1996–97 and 1999–2000, except for a 5% increase in 1998–99. Funding increased by 8% in real terms in 2000–01, 3% in 2001–02 and 4% in 2002–03, before falling by 2% in 2003–04.

Recurrent funding to SAAP agencies followed a slightly different pattern. From 1996–97 to 2003–04 actual recurrent funding to agencies increased by 54%, from $200.5 million in 1996–97 to $308.7 million in 2003–04. In real terms, this represented an increase of 26% over the 8 years, with relatively large annual increases in 1998–99 (6%), 2000–01 (8%)

and 2002–03 (6%). However, funding to agencies in real terms decreased by almost 2% in 2003–04. Interestingly, the number of agencies 'in scope' to participate in the Client Collection increased from 1,202 in 2002–03 to 1,225 in 2003–04 (AIHW 2005: table 9.9). However, 8 new agencies were funded late in the financial year and did not report any client data.

Table 7.18: SAAP funding to agencies and mean funding per support period and client, 1996–97 to 2003–04

	Total recurrent funding	Funding to agencies	Funding per support period	Funding per client
Current $				
1996–97	219,771,000	200,539,000	1,280	2,410
1997–98	223,661,000	212,768,000	1,300	2,260
1998–99	229,889,000	220,328,000	1,350	2,430
1999–00	245,511,000	231,717,000	1,470	2,570
2000–01	268,537,000	251,367,000	1,470	2,700
2001–02	285,039,000	268,960,000	1,520	2,810
2002–03	310,359,000	296,635,000	1,680	3,040
2003–04	321,413,000	308,749,000	1,650	3,080
Constant 2003–04 $				
1996–97	269,276,000	245,712,000	1,570	2,950
1997–98	267,946,000	254,895,000	1,550	2,710
1998–99	281,672,000	269,958,000	1,650	2,980
1999–00	282,194,000	266,339,000	1,690	2,960
2000–01	306,047,000	286,478,000	1,680	3,080
2001–02	314,536,000	296,793,000	1,680	3,100
2002–03	328,346,000	313,827,000	1,780	3,220
2003–04	321,413,000	308,749,000	1,650	3,080

Notes

1. Funding per support period and funding per client are based on recurrent allocations to agencies.

2. 'Total recurrent funding' for 1999–00, 2000–01 and 2001–02 includes relatively small amounts provided through the Partnerships Against Domestic Violence Program.

3. 'Recurrent allocation' includes state-only recurrent allocations provided by Vic, Qld, WA and the ACT which are in addition to the SAAP agreement between each of those jurisdictions and the Australian Government.

4. Support period and client figures have been weighted to adjust for incomplete coverage.

Source: AIHW 2005.

There were 156,500 support periods in 1996–97, increasing to 164,300 in 1997–98 but dropping back over the next 2 years, returning almost to 1996–97 levels in 1999–00 (Figure 7.2). In 2000–01 there was a sharp rise to 170,700 support periods, mainly caused by the introduction of a new large agency, with another increase in 2001–02 to 177,000. Changes in reporting practices of the new agency caused a decrease in the number of support periods reported in 2002–03 to 176,300. In 2003–04, however, there was a sharp increase to 187,200 support periods, due to the reinvolvement of another large agency. These variations highlight the possible effects on the data collection of inconsistencies in the application of the definition of support period by large agencies.
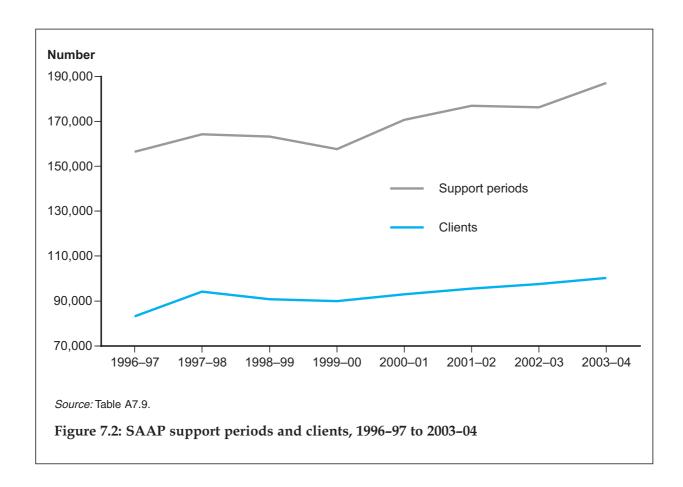
It is planned that the introduction of the Core Data Set, reported on in the next section, with its refined definitions, supported by training opportunities, will minimise these inconsistencies.

Source: Table A7.9.

Figure 7.2: SAAP support periods and clients, 1996–97 to 2003–04

Trends in the number of clients provided with SAAP services showed a pattern similar to that for support periods over the 8 years, although the changes were less pronounced in the last 5 years (Figure 7.2). In 1996–97 an estimated 83,200 clients were provided with support; the figure rose to 94,100 in 1997–98 and then fell to 90,000 in 1999–00. In 2000–01 the number of clients increased again to 93,000 and has continued to increase each year since then. The highest number of clients of any of the 8 years was recorded in 2003–04, with 100,200 clients provided with SAAP services.

Nationally since 1997–98, the rate of SAAP use was highest in 2003–04, when 58 people out of every 10,000 aged 10 years and over became SAAP clients (Table 7.19). The lowest rate was in 1999–00, when 55 people per 10,000 aged 10 years and over used SAAP services at some time during the year. Nationally, the number of support periods that clients received in a reporting period has remained relatively stable over time, ranging between 1.8 and 1.9 support periods per client across the years (Table 7.20). In 2003–04 the number of support periods per client was relatively high, at 1.9.

Table 7.19: SAAP client rates, by state/territory, 1997–98 to 2003–04

	1997–98	1998–99	1999–00	2000–01	2001–02	2003–03	2003–04
	Clients per 10,000 population aged 10 and over (age-standardised)						
NSW	54	50	47	46	47	44	43
Vic	71	73	70	68	69	71	81
Qld	56	51	52	58	58	58	54
WA	52	49	52	59	53	54	49
SA	70	60	61	61	70	74	75
Tas	97	90	90	91	97	110	116
ACT	79	72	74	72	63	58	54
NT	180	183	170	167	169	166	172
Australia	**59**	**56**	**55**	**56**	**56**	**57**	**58**

Notes

1. Since a client may have support periods in more than one state or territory, national numbers of clients per 10,000 population are not the simple mean of the state and territory figures.

2. 'Clients per 10,000 population aged 10+' shows how many people out of every 10,000 aged 10 years and over in the general population became clients of SAAP. The rate is estimated by comparing the number of SAAP clients aged 10 years and over with the estimated resident population aged 10 years and over at 30 June just before the reporting period. Age-standardised estimates have been derived to allow for different age distributions in the various jurisdictions. The Australian estimated resident population at 30 June 2003 (final estimates) has been used as the reference population.

3. Figures have been weighted to adjust for incomplete coverage.

Sources: SAAP Client Collection; ABS 2004a.

Table 7.20: Mean SAAP support periods per client, by state/territory, 1998–99 to 2003–04

	1998–99	1999–00	2000–01	2001–02	2002–03	2003–04
NSW	2.02	1.98	1.90	1.81	1.88	1.94
Vic	1.53	1.50	1.54	1.54	1.60	1.92
Qld	1.68	1.63	2.15	2.25	1.96	1.58
WA	1.57	1.54	1.57	1.63	1.61	1.63
SA	1.46	1.42	1.44	1.63	1.50	1.52
Tas	1.60	1.64	1.44	1.57	1.55	1.46
ACT	1.51	1.43	1.38	1.37	1.41	1.81
NT	1.72	1.54	1.69	1.56	1.44	1.50
Australia	**1.80**	**1.75**	**1.83**	**1.85**	**1.81**	**1.87**

Notes

1. Since a client may have support periods in more than one state or territory, national numbers of support periods per client are not the simple mean of the state and territory figures.

2. The method used to calculate the support periods per client was adjusted in 2002–03 and has been applied to all data on support periods per client presented in this table.

3. Figures have been weighted to adjust for incomplete coverage.

Source: SAAP Client Collection.

Future directions

Since SAAP was established in 1985 it has been through periodic reviews and four extensive national evaluations. During the previous 5-year agreement, SAAP IV, a review identified a need to improve the timeliness, relevance and accessibility of program information, while streamlining data collection processes and maximising cost

effectiveness. This resulted in the development of the Information Management Plan. The SAAP IV Agreement finished in September 2005 after a 3-month extension to finalise negotiations for SAAP V.

Following on from SAAP IV, the SAAP Core Data Set was developed and introduced in July 2005. It reduces the original SAAP Client Collection, which had not been substantially changed since its introduction in July 1996. One of the most far-reaching changes in its implications is the introduction of a Statistical Linkage Key which will enable cross-program data analysis of clients using SAAP and other community services and health services. This will enable better analyses of the pathways that people who are experiencing homelessness, take into and out of SAAP, and their interaction with other services. Protocols governing the potential use of this linkage key are being developed.

All States and Territories signed the SAAP V Multilateral Agreement with the Australian Government by the end of September 2005.

Under the SAAP V Agreement, the Australian Government will contribute approximately $932 million and the State and Territory governments approximately $878 million over the 5 years of the agreement (i.e. until 30 September 2010). Change in funding arrangements between state/territory and the Australian Governments will see a transition over the life of SAAP V to a minimum 50% funding from the states and territories.

The SAAP V Agreement will include an Innovation and Investment Fund totalling almost $120 million. The fund is directed at improving the outcomes for SAAP clients by achieving more targeted, effective and efficient service models. It aims to address the 3 strategic priority areas for SAAP V, namely to:

• increase involvement in early intervention and prevention strategies;

• provide better assistance to people who have a number of support needs; and

• provide ongoing assistance to ensure stability for clients post crisis.

This fund will be resourced through the combination of Australian Government, State and Territory cash contributions and some approved state-only funded SAAP services that meet the strategic priorities for SAAP V.

7.7   Australian Government initiatives

There are many Australian Government initiatives that have been implemented to assist the homeless and those at risk of becoming homeless. These include the National Homelessness Strategy, Housing Assistance programs, the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy and programs that target specific groups, such as youth and migrants. All of these programs have evolved in tandem to increase understanding of the complexities of the many issues faced by the homeless. These programs also aim to build and maintain strategic ways of preventing and dealing with homelessness across circumstantial diversity. The Australian Government has provided funding for the continuation of existing programs, as well as the research and development of new initiatives to assist the homeless (See for example, FaCS 2005a, Howard 2004, and Patterson 2004a).

National Homelessness Strategy (NHS)

The NHS brings together targeted homelessness programs, such as the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP), Reconnect and JPET and other non-targeted programs, which address issues of particular significance to homeless people.

Specific initiatives funded under the NHS include:

- Complex Demonstration Projects to develop innovative ways to prevent and respond to homelessness;
- The Commonwealth Advisory Committee on Homelessness (CACH), an advisory body to the Commonwealth Minister for Family and Community Services on issues relating to homelessness; and
- Dissemination of the extensive NHS knowledge base to raise awareness of homelessness issues and best practice around Australia.

Information derived from the demonstration projects and other research and evaluation will be used to develop programs and policies to address the complex needs of the homeless and those at risk of homelessness.

Household Organisational Management Expenses (HOME) Advice Program

The HOME Advice Program is an early intervention program for families at risk of becoming homeless. Community agencies are funded to help families stabilise their housing and financial circumstances, and assist them with access to community services, labour market programs and employment. These agencies work closely with Centrelink social workers to ensure seamless service delivery for families. The HOME Advice Program extends the Family Homelessness Prevention Pilots (FHPPs), an initiative of the 2001–02 Budget, for a further 4 years, with the eight existing FHPP services continuing to be funded and is expected to help around 400 families per year.

Stronger Families and Communities Strategy (SFCS)

As of April 2004, the government announced the continuation of the program for a further 4 years. The focus on early childhood outcomes has intensified since the original SFCS was launched. Consultations during 2003 on the National Agenda for Early Childhood confirmed the need for action to improve outcomes for children. These results are reflected in the new SFCS, which now has more emphasis on community-based early intervention, using and recognising existing community resources and networks, and providing ways of sharing new, best-practice approaches. The new SFCS has four components:

- *Communities for Children*—will target around 35 disadvantaged communities, providing local early childhood initiatives;
- *Early Childhood—Invest to Grow* will expand proven early childhood intervention programs and resources;
- *Local Answers*—will provide communities with the opportunity and capacity to develop their own solutions to local problems; and
- *Choice and Flexibility in Child Care*—will continue to provide parents with flexible and innovative child care solutions (FaCS 2004a).

Box 7.4: NHS Demonstration Projects completed in 2004–05

Development of Training Materials for Use in Rural and Remote Regions: This project is run by the Australian Federation of Homelessness Organisations (AFHO) and aims to provide training on recognising and dealing with homelessness to agencies, hospitals, health centres and schools. The AFHO will develop materials to support this training, which will be delivered by experts from the homelessness sector in rural and remote regions around Australia. There will be a strong Indigenous component in this project.

A New Approach to Assisting Young Homeless Job Seekers (Vic): This project aims to provide integrated support services to homeless job seekers in relation to housing, health and personal development, with employment being the key goal. The project has been implemented by a consortium of community agencies, including Hanover Welfare Services, Melbourne City Mission, Brotherhood of St Laurence and Loddon Mallee Housing Services.

Traditional Living Transitional Lifestyle Project (SA): This project aims to help traditional living Aboriginal families in moving to urban centres by providing early intervention and prevention services to help these families to support their tenancies, so that they do not become homeless.

Family & Community Network Initiative (Mission Australia): Clients from Campbell House crisis accommodation facility for single men experience complex issues such as mental illness, substance abuse, gambling, family breakdown and poverty. This project will fund the development and implementation of a new service delivery model for these clients aimed at providing early intervention and extensive case-management. The project will also investigate and implement strategies to provide the most appropriate services to Indigenous men.

Homeless Persons' Legal Service: This project will be run through a partnership between private legal firms and community agencies and aims to identify the legal issues faced by homeless people and recommend how these can be resolved.

Best-practice Report on Sentencing Alternatives for Homeless People (Qld): This project will examine the ways in which jurisdictions around Australia respond to the 'offending' behaviour of homeless people, in order to identify best-practice strategies to deal with infringements of summary offences law.

Uniting Families Project: This project is run by Uniting Care Harrison Community Services and aims to reduce youth homelessness by stabilising young people within their families. Families will be offered mediation in their own homes, parenting courses and family therapy.

Family Makeover Project (NSW): This project is run by Wesley Mission and will work with families at risk of homelessness and will assist them to develop independent living skills. Specialist teams will provide medical and psychiatric, counselling and family support services.

Youth homelessness

There are several Australian Government initiatives that specifically target homeless young people and those at risk of homelessness. These include: Towards Independent Living Allowance, Innovative Health Services for Homeless Youth, the Reconnect Program and the Job Placement Employment and Training Program. These multifaceted programs aim to prevent youth homelessness and help young people start on pathways back to their families, their communities, education and employment.

Reconnect

There are currently 98 Reconnect services across Australia that work towards improving the level of engagement of young people with family, work, education, training and the community. Following positive outcomes highlighted in a recent program evaluation, funding for Reconnect has been extended for a further 4 years (FaCS 2004b).

Job Placement and Employment Training (JPET)

As of 1 February 2005, the JPET program has been extended for a further 4 years. There are currently 135 agencies around Australia that will continue to operate and it is expected that 10 new 'multifunctional' services will be established to provide both Reconnect and JPET services. These new services will be located in areas where there are high levels of settlement by young, newly arrived migrants. The continuation of the Reconnect and JPET programs is expected to provide assistance to over 1,000 newly arrived young migrants each year.

This new focus on providing assistance to young migrants is a result of the findings of the Review of Settlement Services for Migrants and Humanitarian Entrants. The review found that people who have recently arrived in Australia are having difficulty accessing mainstream government services and recommended that early intervention strategies at a whole-of-government level recognise and support schoolchildren and young people at risk of not making successful transitions due to their pre-migration experiences, low English language proficiency and recent arrival in Australia (FaCS 2005b).

7.8   State and territory government initiatives

New South Wales

The New South Wales 'Partnership Against Homelessness' strategy aims to: help homeless people access services; coordinate support services; improve access by homeless people to temporary or crisis accommodation; and facilitate the move to long-term accommodation. As part of its commitment to these aims, the partnership has introduced a number of new initiatives, including:

• The Inner City Homelessness Action Plan—an integrated set of strategies involving state, local and non-government agencies working together to address homelessness. Achievements under the Plan in 2004 include two Support and Outreach Services for rough sleepers; two pilot projects to assist older people and people with disabilities who are living in insecure housing or squalor; and 30 additional leases for homeless

clients under the My Place initiative, which provides leased accommodation and is managed by the Office for Community Housing.

- The After Hours Temporary Accommodation Line—this service is available on weekday evenings and weekends across New South Wales and provides temporary accommodation in low-cost motels, caravan parks and similar accommodation for people who are in housing crisis or are homeless.

- The Signpost—a homelessness assessment and referral pilot service managed by Mission Australia that aims to improve integrated service provision for homeless people in the Hunter region. The Signpost has recently been evaluated and the Partnership is reviewing the evaluation report in order to develop and improve this service (NSW DoH 2004).

Victoria

Funding of about $107 million was provided by the Victorian Government for homelessness assistance in 2004, $8.8 million dollars of which was allocated to the Youth Housing Action Plan, a part of the Victorian Homelessness Strategy, in the 2003–2004 budget (AFHO 2004).

A series of pilot projects were funded for a 2-year period, until June 2005, as a direct outcome of the *VHS Action Plan and Strategic Framework—Directions for Change*, to test new approaches to assisting people who are homeless and particularly at severe risk of homelessness. The intention is to inform any future investment, but also to emphasise the need for improved connectedness between services and integration, better understanding of clients' needs and achieving long-term outcomes for users of the Homelessness Service System.

The pilot projects were as follows:

- Supporting at Risk Tenancies in Public Housing;

- Assisting Older People in Tenuous Private Rental;

- Preventing People with a Mental Illness Being Discharged into Homelessness;

- Indigenous Tenants at Risk of Eviction; and

- Housing Options for Women Experiencing Family Violence (FaCS 2003b; Newman 2003).

Queensland

In addition to funding directed through core homelessness responses, the Queensland Government will direct an additional $235.52 million over the next 4 years to enhance existing and implement innovative responses to homelessness. The aim of these new initiatives is to create an integrated service system accessible by homeless people and, over time, to reduce the number of people without shelter. The $235.52 million will:

- provide more accommodation and support;

- connect people with services;

- respond to public space issues, including substance misuse;

- provide more support and services, including mental health services, to address the health needs of homeless people;

- provide more support and services to address the needs of homeless people in the legal system; and

- help residential services, including boarding houses, to stay open.

Funds for the new initiatives will be directed through seven Queensland Government agencies: Department of Communities, Department of Housing, Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy, Queensland Health, Department of Justice and Attorney-General, Department of Tourism, Fair Trading and Wine Industry Development through the Office of Fair Trading, and the Queensland Police Service.

Western Australia

By the end of 2005, an evaluation of the impact and outcomes of the State Homelessness Strategy (implemented in 2002) will be undertaken. The Department of Housing and Works commenced the construction of 53 durable housing dwellings for Indigenous people during 2004. There are plans to construct a further 224 dwellings during 2005, with the majority being located in remote communities.

During 2004, the In House Practical Support Program operated from five locations, providing support and skills development to Indigenous families in conventional housing. Negotiations are continuing for the program to service Indigenous families during 2005 that are located in Newman, Halls Creek, Bidyadanga and Warburton. A pilot project was funded in 2003–04 at the Koolbardi Aboriginal Corporation in Queens Park. The project is currently being reviewed which will include a report on outcomes (WA DHW 2004).

South Australia

The South Australian Government established an Action Plan focusing on homelessness which has been funded through to 2008 (AFHO 2004). The Action Plan included recommendations and actions to be taken across government to:

- address the structural factors that lead to homelessness;

- prevent homelessness among people who are perceptibly at risk;

- minimise the length of time people spend in homelessness;

- integrate and coordinate responses; and

- prioritise the needs of Indigenous people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness (SA Social Inclusion Unit 2003).

Funding of $23 million over the 5 years was allocated to a series of project initiatives to support implementation of the plan. These initiatives tackle homelessness on a range of fronts, from supporting people who are at risk of social and private housing tenancies, through to preventing people being discharged from hospital to homelessness (Rann 2005). Linked to the action plan is the State Housing Plan which identifies strategies to increase affordable and high-need housing.

Tasmania

In September 2003 Tasmania launched the Enhanced Assessment Training Course for staff working in SAAP-funded agencies. This course, delivered in seven modules, incorporates the requirements of the SAAP IV strategic framework and nationally accredited units in case-management and assessment of clients' needs linked with the new Community Services Training Package. The course is being delivered by TAFE Tasmania and most SAAP services are participating (Tasmania Department of Health and Human Services, pers. comm.).

In December 2003, the Affordable Housing Strategy was launched. It aims to ensure that there is safe, adequate housing for Tasmanians receiving low incomes, including those with special needs. The first stage of the program has been funded for $45 million for 2004–08 (AFHO 2004).

Australian Capital Territory

In April 2004, the ACT Government published *Breaking the Cycle — the ACT Homelessness Strategy* which addresses homelessness through a range of practical strategies to effectively support people at risk of homelessness. The strategy also provides the means for people who are homeless to access appropriate supports to decrease the impact and occurrence of homelessness.

Four key themes and objectives establish the framework for the strategy:

• integrated and effective service responses;

• client focus and client outcomes;

• access to appropriate housing and housing assistance; and

• supporting and driving innovation and excellence (AFHO 2004).

Northern Territory

The Home Territory 2010 Strategy will provide coordination and direction for a whole-of-government and community-based response to homelessness. A taskforce comprising key stakeholders from across Government and the community has been established to develop a homelessness framework. Community consultations and collaboration will be facilitated through the taskforce and a report is expected to reach Government in early 2006 (NT Department of Community Development, Sport & Cultural Affairs 2004a).

The Community Harmony Strategy has two over-arching objectives:

• A significant reduction in the incidence of anti-social behaviour by 'itinerants' in urban areas;

• The delivery of infrastructure, intervention programs and health services responding to identified needs of 'itinerants'.

The strategy's rationale is to provide opportunities and pathways for 'itinerants' to move away from destructive lifestyles towards either a return to home community or living a more productive lifestyle in permanent and appropriate accommodation in town (NT Department of Community Development, Sport & Cultural Affairs 2004b).

7.9   Summary

This chapter has brought together two complementary approaches to homelessness, distinguished by their differing emphasis on the temporal dynamics of homelessness, and has contrasted their ensuing policy implications. The Census count of homelessness, and its underlying hierarchical cultural definition, was introduced first. Some of the difficulties of defining and counting people experiencing homelessness under this approach, including counting Indigenous residents of improvised dwellings, were covered. It also suggested that if the cultural definition was uniformly applied across all population groups, long term residents of caravan parks should also be included in the count of people experiencing homelessness. This would raise the count of homeless people on Census night to at least 122,770.

Under this approach, the three tiers of homelessness carry the implication of degrees of disadvantage, with those people experiencing secondary and tertiary homelessness experiencing decreasing levels of disadvantage relative to the primary homeless. Ensuing policy development can then be predicated on the numbers of people experiencing homelessness in each category, with service provision targeted accordingly.

A complementary approach to understanding homelessness—iterative homelessness— was introduced next. This approach arises from recent work on the homelessness experiences of people with a mental illness. Rather than emphasising the housing circumstances of people at some point in time, it pays attention to the repeated moves of people through different types of marginal or tenuous housing. The approach makes the claim that, for interventions to be successful, they need to address the underlying trauma that prevents clients from maintaining ongoing sustainable housing, and the notion of a healing framework was introduced.

Research into iterative homelessness is at a relatively early stage, so SAAP data was used to test the usefulness of this approach in a wider context. Four different client groups were discussed, younger men and younger women, older single men, and women escaping domestic violence. Some indicators of iterative homelessness derived from SAAP data, capturing previous marginal housing and ongoing SAAP usage, were applied to these groups.

The SAAP data examined suggested differences between the housing trajectories of the four client groups, and the notion of iterative homelessness was found particularly useful for the single older men who use SAAP services. It was noted that, for this client group, the policy implications of defining the role of SAAP services as points of stability—that allowed trust to develop so that healing work could proceed—are very different from the policy implications of the view that repeated movements of clients through SAAP is simply "churning".

The notion of iterative homelessness, however, were not found as useful for women escaping domestic violence, whose previous tenuous housing may have involved emotional uprootings rather than physical ones. The Indigenous and non-Indigenous women in this group were found to have distinctly different experiences in SAAP, which could be influenced by the strong family and community ties of Indigenous women which were indicated by the data. Younger men and women, although

generally accessing the same SAAP sector, nevertheless were found to have quite distinct homelessness experiences. Young men had many characteristics in common with the single older men, and the indicators of iterative homelessness were also useful for this group.

In general, the SAAP data vividly demonstrated the different experiences of various client groups experiencing homelessness in SAAP, but it also highlighted the difficulties in capturing the course of this homelessness. The final section of the chapter presented time series data from the SAAP program, along with information on the directions in which SAAP is now heading. Finally, some other government programs were reported, both federal and state and territory initiatives, targeted at working with the homeless in Australia.

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