



## Domestic & family violence & homelessness 2011-12 to 2013-14

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### Citation

AIHW

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## About

Domestic and family violence causes considerable disruption to the lives of Australian families, with many affected seeking alternative accommodation; this puts them at an increased risk of falling into homelessness. The report, Domestic and family violence and homelessness 2011-12 to 2013-14, is the first of its kind to examine multiple years of homelessness data. The report describes the characteristics of clients of specialist homelessness services who sought assistance for domestic and family violence, the services requested, outcomes achieved, and unmet requests for services between 2011-12 and 2013-14.

Cat. no: WEB 109

### Findings from this report:

- Around 520,000 Australians accessed SHS, with 36% seeking assistance due to DFV
  - Indigenous women had the greatest number of support periods (3.4 on average) for DFV
  - On average, DFV clients received more days of support (136 days) than other SHS clients (92 days)
  - 3 in 10 men experiencing DFV identified mental health as a reason for seeking assistance
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## Summary

Domestic and family violence is a major cause of homelessness in Australia.

It increases vulnerability to homelessness in two primary ways: firstly, violence removes the sense of safety and belonging associated with the home; and secondly, leaving a violent situation usually requires leaving the family home (Chamberlain & Johnson 2013).

People who leave their home because of domestic and family violence often experience severe social and personal disruption, poorer housing conditions and financial disadvantage (Spinney & Blandy 2011). In recognition of this, federal and state/territory governments have introduced programs which aim to break the link between domestic and family violence and homelessness by focusing on ways in which those victims of domestic and family violence can safely remain in their family home.

People who experience domestic and family violence can come from a range of socioeconomic groups and can have vastly different life experiences and situations. The analysis presented in this web report explores for the first time the various characteristics of those people experiencing domestic and family violence who presented to specialist homelessness services in Australia during in the 3-year period from 2011-12 to 2013-14.

**If you are experiencing domestic or family violence or know someone who is, please call 1800RESPECT (1800 737 732) or visit the [1800RESPECT](#) website.**

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## The intersection of domestic violence and homelessness

Almost 2 million Australians aged over 15 years have experienced partner violence, and 1 million have experienced physical or sexual violence from another family member in their lifetime [1].

Domestic and family violence causes considerable disruption to the lives of Australian families, with many affected seeking alternative accommodation and often falling into homelessness. The majority of victims of domestic violence are women and their children, although men may also be victims. Domestic and family violence makes women and children vulnerable to homelessness in two major ways: firstly, violence removes the sense of safety and belonging associated with the home; and secondly, leaving a violent situation usually requires leaving the family home [3].

In situations where people experiencing domestic and family violence need to leave their home, Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) can provide:

- crisis and emergency accommodation
- income support
- counselling
- referrals to legal services
- connections to social housing providers
- other specialised support or referrals to specialist providers.

### Policy framework to support victims of family and domestic violence experiencing homelessness

Responses to homelessness are outlined in the National Partnership Agreement of Homelessness (NPAH), a partnership agreement funded by the [National Affordable Housing Agreement \(NAHA\)](#). The NPAH contributes to the NAHA outcome 'people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness achieve sustainable housing and social inclusion'. In March 2015, the Commonwealth Government committed to extending the NPAH until 2017, providing \$230 million in funding (to be matched by states and territories). The funding prioritises front line services and assistance focused on women and children experiencing domestic and family violence [5].

The [National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and Children 2012-2022](#) provides a framework to coordinate Commonwealth and State and Territory governments to reduce violence against women and children. The plan highlights the need to ensure services meet the needs of women and their children experiencing violence. This includes providing appropriate services at the right time and catering to the specific needs of client groups such as young women, older women, Indigenous women and women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (COAG 2011). Each state and territory has complementary plans in place to respond to domestic violence and support those affected.

The Specialist Homelessness Services Collection (SHSC) began on 1 July 2011, replacing the previous Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP). The collection has been designed to collect data from homelessness agencies that are funded under the NAHA and the NPAH. Clients who access Specialist Homelessness Services are described in this report using data from the SHSC.

Over the three years to 2013-14, AIHW was able to identify around 520,000 Australians who accessed specialist homelessness services. Of these, just over 187,000 were adults and children seeking assistance for reasons of domestic and family violence.

#### Key findings

- Of all SHS clients (including children), almost 150,000 females and just over 40,000 males indicated experiencing domestic and family violence.
- For those adult clients experiencing domestic and family violence, just over 10% indicated they had experienced both mental health issues and problematic drug or alcohol use, compared with 8% for those adult clients *not* experiencing domestic and family violence.
- Of all SHS client groups experiencing domestic and family violence, most were women with children (45,400), followed by young women presenting alone (23,800), and Indigenous women (19,600).

### How do domestic and family violence clients compare to non-domestic and family violence clients?

The table below examines the differences in demographics of clients who sought assistance for domestic and family violence with those that sought assistance for other reasons.

While SHS agencies mainly assist people who are victims of family and domestic violence, they may also assist perpetrators of violence who are seeking assistance and therefore may appear within the data in this report. The SHSC is not able to separately identify these clients.

Overall, there were almost 150,000 female clients and just over 40,000 male clients who indicated experiencing domestic and family violence. Of these, nearly 113,000 were adult females and almost 14,000 were adult males (aged 18 or over). For females, the greatest proportion were those in the 25-34 year age group (25%) followed by 35-44 years (21%). Males, however, reported the greatest proportion of domestic and family violence clients in the 0-9 year age group (47%), followed by 10-14 years (13%).

Female clients experiencing domestic and family violence were more likely to be 'sole parents' (40%), whereas male clients were more likely to be a 'lone person' (42%). The majority of female clients were not in the labour force (52%) or unemployed (30%). This was also the case for male clients, where 48% were unemployed and 38% were not in the labour force.

**Table 1: Client Demographics—at a glance**

	Female clients experiencing domestic and family violence	Other female clients	Male clients experiencing domestic and family violence	Other male clients
<b>How many?</b>	144,710	159,736	42,507	173,624
<b>Age (years)</b>				
0-9	13%	15%	47%	15%
10-14	4%	6%	13%	5%
15-17	5%	8%	8%	6%
18-24	16%	19%	10%	16%
25-34	25%	18%	8%	18%
35-44	21%	16%	8%	18%
45-54	11%	10%	4%	13%
55-64	3%	5%	1%	6%
65+	2%	3%	1%	3%
<b>Indigenous status</b>				
Indigenous	23%	23%	27%	19%
Non-Indigenous	77%	77%	74%	81%
<b>Country of birth</b>				
Australian-born	75%	79%	86%	78%
Overseas-born	25%	21%	14%	22%
<b>Usual living arrangement</b>				
Lone person	21%	29%	42%	55%
Sole parent	40%	33%	15%	8%
Couple with child/ren	15%	13%	13%	10%
Couple without child/ren	8%	7%	8%	6%
Other family	11%	12%	13%	9%
Other group	5%	7%	9%	11%
<b>Education enrolment</b>				
Enrolled	12%	14%	28%	10%
Not enrolled	88%	86%	78%	90%
<b>Labour force status</b>				
Employed	19%	11%	14%	9%
Unemployed	30%	38%	48%	51%
Not in the labour force	52%	51%	38%	41%

Source: AIHW Specialist Homelessness Services Data Repository.

Notes

1. Data are excluded where age, Indigenous status, country of birth, usual living arrangement, educational enrolment or labour force status is unknown or not stated.
2. Usual living arrangement, education enrolment and labour force status excludes clients aged less than 15 years.
3. Age, country of birth, usual living arrangement, educational enrolment and labour force status is assigned at the client's first presentation to a specialist homelessness agency.
4. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

### Do these clients have other vulnerabilities? (Client comorbidities)

Substance misuse and mental health issues have both been identified as pathways into homelessness (Chamberlain and Johnson 2011). Clients who experience family and domestic violence are more likely to experience additional comorbidities than those who have not experienced family and domestic violence.

For those adult clients experiencing domestic and family violence, over the 3 years from July 2011 to June 2014:

- 65% had experienced no additional comorbidities.
- Around 1 in 3 (31%) reported that they had experienced a mental health issue.
- Over 1 in 10 (13%) indicated they had experienced problematic drug or alcohol use.
- Just over 10% indicated that they had experienced both mental health issues and problematic drug or alcohol use.

For those adult clients *not* experiencing domestic and family violence, over the 3 years from July 2011 to June 2014:

- 7 in 10 (70%) experienced no other comorbidities.
- Over one quarter (26%) reported that they had experienced a mental health issue.
- Over 1 in 10 (12%) indicated that they had experienced problematic drug or alcohol use.
- Around 8% indicated that they had experienced issues for both mental health and problematic drug or alcohol use.

### Indigenous clients

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people comprise 3% of the Australian population [2]; however, they are over-represented as users of specialised homelessness services for all domestic and family violence clients, with around 1 in 4 (24%) identified as Indigenous. Indigenous domestic and family violence clients were more likely than non-Indigenous clients to be female (74%) and live in a sole parent household (41%). Indigenous clients experiencing domestic and family violence were also more likely to be children than non-Indigenous clients, with 38% being under the age of 15 (compared with 31% for non-Indigenous domestic and family violence clients).

### Specific client groups of interest

This analysis examines six key client groups, within the domestic and family violence SHS client population. These include:

- Women with children
- Young women presenting alone (under 15-24 years)
- Indigenous women
- Women from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB)
- Older women (55+ years) and
- Males.

Of all client groups experiencing domestic and family violence, most were women with children (45,400), followed by young women presenting alone (23,800), and Indigenous women (19,600). Males comprised just over 15,000 clients (Table 2).

Table 2: Clients of interest—Demographics—at a glance

	Women with children	Young women presenting alone (15-24)	Indigenous women	Women from NESB	Older women (55+)	Males
<b>How many?</b>	45,404	23,805	19,601	17,021	7,126	15,361
<b>Age (years)</b>						
15-24	13%	100%	33%	15%	—	42%
25-54	85%	—	64%	78%	—	53%
55+	2%	—	3%	8%	100%	5%
<b>Indigenous Status</b>						
Indigenous	18%	25%	100%	1%	12%	20%
Non-Indigenous	82%	75%	—	99%	89%	80%

Country of birth						
Australian-born	70%	81%	97%	—	58%	80%
Overseas-born	30%	19%	3%	100%	42%	20%
<b>Living arrangement</b>						
Lone person	—	30%	21%	20%	38%	45%
Sole parent	72%	23%	37%	38%	13%	11%
Couple with child/ren	28%	9%	13%	20%	7%	13%
Couple without child/ren	—	8%	7%	9%	22%	8%
Other family	—	21%	17%	8%	16%	13%
Group family	—	10%	5%	5%	4%	9%
<b>Education enrolment</b>						
Enrolled	8%	31%	8%	16%	2%	18%
Not enrolled	92%	69%	92%	84%	98%	82%
<b>Labour force status</b>						
Employed	20%	13%	8%	23%	17%	14%
Unemployed	24%	39%	39%	27%	19%	49%
Not in the labour force	56%	48%	54%	50%	64%	37%

#### Notes

1. Data are excluded where age, Indigenous status, country of birth, usual living arrangement, educational enrolment or labour force status is unknown or not stated.
2. Age, country of birth, usual living arrangement, educational enrolment and labour force status is assigned at the client's first presentation to a specialist homelessness agency.
3. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.
4. Groups are not mutually exclusive, clients may belong to more than 1 group.

#### Comorbidities among groups of interest

Males experiencing domestic and family violence were the most likely to report having a mental health issue (47%) or experiencing substance misuse (35%), compared with other domestic and family violence cohorts.

Older women experiencing domestic and family violence were the least likely to report having a mental health issue (21%) and women from non-English speaking backgrounds were the least likely to be experiencing substance misuse, with only 3% indicating problematic drug or alcohol use.

**If you are experiencing domestic or family violence or know someone who is, please call 1800RESPECT (1800 737 732) or visit the [1800RESPECT website](#).**

#### References

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5. Morrison, the Hon. S 2015. Coalition reverses Labor's funding cuts on homelessness with \$230 million commitment prioritising victims of domestic violence. Media release by Minister for Social Services. 23 March. Canberra.
6. Southwell J 2002. Family Violence and Homelessness: Removing the perpetrator from the home, Domestic Violence and Incest Resource Centre, Discussion Paper No. 3. Melbourne.

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## What are the reasons clients seek assistance?

The reasons people seek assistance from specialist homelessness services are many and varied. While family and domestic violence may be a reason for people to seek assistance, it may not be the only reason, nor is it necessarily identified as the main reason.

Whilst the majority of domestic and family violence clients sought assistance for that specific reason from specialist homelessness services, there were often additional reasons that led to them seeking assistance. These vary greatly in terms of the reasons why clients may be homeless or at risk, as well as the level and type of support they require to overcome barriers to stable housing.

Clients may seek support due to a lack of affordable housing options. Others may be experiencing housing crises such as an eviction or other personal circumstances, such as mental health issues or problematic drug and alcohol use making finding and/or retaining housing difficult.

In this analysis, we examine the reasons clients experiencing family and domestic violence, and those who have not, sought assistance from homelessness services.

### Key findings

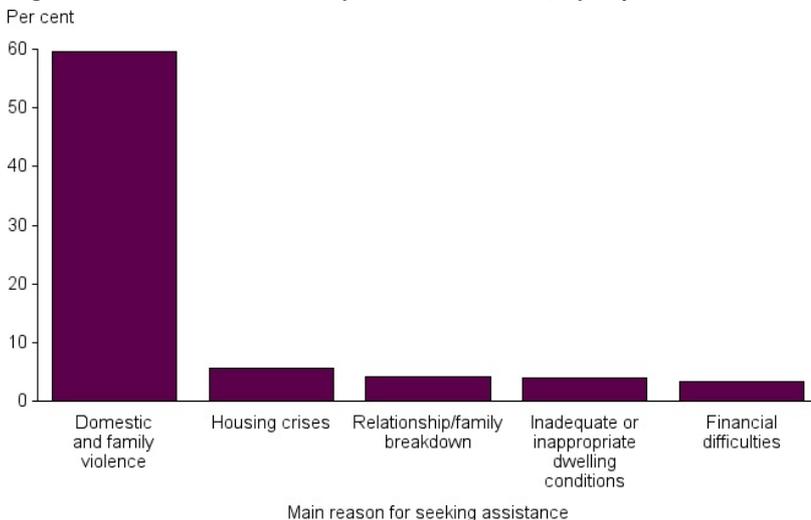
- Of those clients experiencing domestic and family violence, approximately 60% identified this as the main reason for seeking assistance from specialist homelessness services, followed by 'housing crises' (6%).
- Comparatively, of those clients *not* experiencing domestic and family violence, approximately 1 in 5 identified 'financial difficulties' as the main reason for seeking assistance, followed by 'housing crises' (16%).
- Among domestic and family violence client groups, young women presenting alone, Indigenous women and men were the most likely to identify housing affordability issues as a reason for seeking assistance.

### Do reasons for seeking assistance differ?

The pathways into homeless can be many and diverse, and the reasons clients seek assistance from homelessness agencies can highlight those groups who may be at increased risk of falling into homelessness.

Of those clients who reported experiencing domestic and family violence, approximately 60% identified this as the main reason for seeking assistance from specialist homelessness services. 'Housing crises' was the next highest main reason for seeking assistance (6%), followed by 'relationship/family breakdown' (4%) (Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Domestic and family violence clients, by top five main reasons for seeking assistance, 2011-12 to 2013-14**

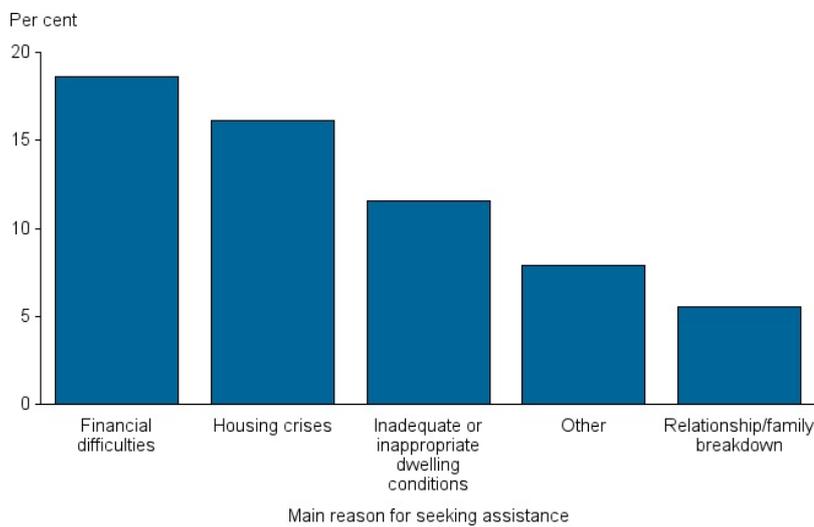


Source: AIHW Specialist Homelessness Services Data Repository.

The numbers of clients citing a range of financial and housing affordability reasons for seeking assistance is also substantial.

Comparatively, where clients did not report experiencing domestic and family violence, approximately 1 in 5 (19%) identified 'financial difficulties' as the main reason for seeking assistance from specialist homelessness services, followed by 'housing crises' (16%), and 'inadequate/inappropriate dwelling conditions' (12%) (Figure 2).

**Figure 2: Other clients, by top five main reasons for seeking assistance, 2011-12 to 2013-14**



Source: AIHW Specialist Homelessness Services Data Repository.

### Do reasons for seeking assistance differ across domestic and family violence cohorts?

Domestic and family violence was the main reason for seeking assistance for the majority of women with children, women from non-English speaking backgrounds and older women. Young women presenting alone, Indigenous women and men were less likely to identify domestic and family violence as their main reason for seeking assistance and more likely than the other domestic and family violence cohorts to indicate housing crisis as their main reason for seeking assistance.

Table 1 illustrates that just over 7 in 10 (72%) women with children, 3 in 4 (76%) women from non-English speaking backgrounds and almost 4 in 5 (78%) older women sought assistance from specialist homelessness services primarily because of domestic and family violence. Around half (54%) of Indigenous women, just under half (49%) of young women presenting alone and only 30% of men identified family and domestic violence as their main reason for seeking assistance.

Housing crises was the next highest reason for seeking assistance among the family and domestic violence cohorts. A housing crisis may occur where a person has been formally evicted from their accommodation, or has been asked to leave their accommodation by house mates or other people they are currently living with. After family and domestic violence, men and young women presenting alone were the most likely to report a housing crisis as their main reason for seeking assistance (14% and 8% respectively). For both these groups, relationship breakdown also factored more strongly as a main reason for seeking assistance (10% and 12% respectively) than for the other groups examined.

When all reasons for seeking assistance are considered, housing crisis features quite strongly across all groups examined as reason for seeking assistance, as does housing affordability. Almost half of men (47%), around one-third of young women presenting alone (35%) and Indigenous women (33%) identified a housing crisis as being a reason for seeking assistance. These 3 groups are also more likely than others to identify housing affordability as a reason for seeking assistance, with just over 1 in 4 men (27%) and just over 1 in 5 (22%) young women presenting alone and Indigenous women indicating this as being an issue.

Seeking assistance for problematic drug and alcohol use was relatively low among the female cohorts; however, 23% of men identified problematic drug use as a reason for seeking assistance and 17% identified problematic alcohol use as a reason for seeking assistance. For problematic drug use, this equated to more than double the proportion of Indigenous women, just under double the proportion of young women presenting alone and almost 6 times the proportion of women with children who sought assistance for this reason. For problematic alcohol use, this was over 3 times the proportion for young women presenting alone and almost 6 times the proportion for women with children.

Table 1: Domestic and family violence cohorts, main and all reasons for seeking assistance, 2011-12 to 2013-14

Presenting reasons	Women with children	Young women presenting alone	Indigenous women	NESB women	Older women	Men
How many?	45,404	23,805	19,601	17,021	7,126	15,361
MAIN presenting reason—Domestic violence	72%	49%	54%	76%	78%	30%
MAIN presenting reason—Housing crisis	6%	8%	7%	4%	3%	14%
ALL presenting reasons—Housing crisis	23%	35%	33%	18%	10%	47%
ALL presenting reasons—Housing affordability	18%	22%	22%	14%	7%	27%

ALL presenting reasons— problematic drug use	4%	12%	10%	1%	1%	23%
ALL presenting reasons— problematic alcohol use	3%	5%	10%	1%	2%	17%
ALL presenting reasons—mental health issues	11%	18%	15%	8%	9%	30%

Note: Groups are not mutually exclusive, clients may belong to more than 1 group.

Source: AIHW Specialist Homelessness Services Data Repository.

## What does this tell us?

For those clients that indicated experiencing domestic and family violence on presentation to specialist homelessness services, it is expected that the majority would seek assistance for reasons of domestic and family violence. In comparison, for those clients who did not indicate experiencing domestic and family violence, financial difficulties was the most common main reason for seeking support.

Across all cohorts that indicated experiencing domestic and family violence, older women, women from non-English speaking backgrounds, and women with children were the most likely to indicate domestic and family violence as their main reason for seeking assistance (78%, 76% and 72%, respectively). For those least likely to indicate this as the main reason for seeking assistance, (men and young women presenting alone) there were other primary reasons for these groups to seek help, indicating a higher likelihood of comorbidities being present.

For men and young women presenting alone, housing crises and affordability issues factor strongly as reasons for seeking assistance. These groups are also the most likely to be living without tenure on presentation. This indicates that their housing is precarious and that housing is their primary concern at the time of presentation.

Problematic drug and alcohol use factors strongly as a reason men seek assistance. This is also reflected in the needs identified for men, with one fifth (20%) expressing a need for drug and alcohol services, the highest of all domestic and family violence cohorts and double the proportion of the next highest group, Indigenous women.

To sustain adequate housing tenure, young women presenting alone who have experienced domestic and family violence must rely on a stable family or relationship environment. Relationship and family breakdown was the main reason for seeking assistance from SHS for 1 in 10 young women presenting alone.

**If you are experiencing domestic or family violence or know someone who is, please call 1800RESPECT (1800 737 732) or visit the [1800RESPECT](#) website.**

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## Are there patterns of service use?

Specialist homelessness service agencies provide assistance to many clients experiencing domestic and family violence. Service use varies widely between those clients experiencing domestic and family violence and other clients, as well as between the different cohorts experiencing domestic and family violence.

Those who approach specialist homelessness services for assistance do so for a variety of reasons. While they all share the same basic needs (a lack of suitable housing, or being at risk of losing that housing), their characteristics and circumstances can differ significantly. A 2014 report *Housing outcomes for groups vulnerable to homelessness: 1 July 2011 to 31 December 2013* by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) found that it can take considerable support by agencies to assist a person into stable housing. This can be more difficult when the personal circumstances of the individual are complex. Exiting or preventing homelessness can be very difficult for those experiencing domestic violence, young people leaving home because of family conflict, those suffering from a mental illness, or those who have problematic drug and alcohol use. These complexities can mean that, despite considerable support from specialist homelessness agencies, some clients remain in unstable or inadequate housing.

Those experiencing domestic and family violence may be more likely to cycle in and out of specialist homelessness services due to the difficulty in either staying away or leaving the family home altogether after incidents of violence [2]. This difficulty is often financial in nature, but also relates to established relationships with family, friends and the community. Another factor resulting in a client returning to the family home may be that stays in refuges or emergency accommodation are often short and unlikely to result in longer term housing solutions, nor increased financial independence. Clients experiencing domestic and family violence would therefore be likely to be repeat service users. This analysis seeks to examine whether this is indeed the case. The use of three years of data provides an opportunity to more reliably identify those who are likely to be experiencing persistent and recurring homelessness, compared to a single year or snapshot analysis. This is important from a policy perspective, as entrenched homelessness requires a different policy response to temporary homelessness.

Agencies report data on the duration of support periods, or episodes of assistance provided to clients. Many clients had multiple support periods during the period July 2011 to June 2014. As the process of assisting some clients into stable housing may take considerable time and intensive caseworker support, the duration (in days) of this support provides a general indication of this effort. For this analysis, service use includes the number of client support periods, the total days of support received, and, where accommodated, nights of accommodation provided. Information on how support days and nights of accommodation are calculated can be found in the glossary.

### Key findings

- On average, domestic and family violence clients received more days of support than other SHS clients (136 days compared with 92 days of support, respectively).
- Almost 1 in 4 domestic and family violence clients recorded more than 300 days of support between first and last support periods, compared with almost 1 in 5 of other clients. This indicates that the complexity of domestic and family violence situations requires support spanning longer periods of time, on average.
- Domestic and family violence clients recorded more periods of support on average than other clients. Almost twice the proportion of domestic and family violence clients received 4 or more support periods compared with other clients.
- Indigenous women experiencing domestic and family violence accessed specialist homelessness services over the longest time period, with almost 40% receiving support services spanning more than 300 days.

### How does service use pattern vary by domestic and family violence status?

Specialist homelessness services provided 428,400 support periods, totalling over 24 million days of support and over 9 million nights of accommodation to clients experiencing domestic and family violence from 2011-12 to 2013-14.

On average, domestic and family violence clients required a greater amount of support than non-domestic and family violence clients over the three years to 2013-14. Domestic and family violence clients received an average of 2.4 support periods, 136 days of support and 111 nights of accommodation from 2011-12 to 2013-14 (Table 1). In contrast, other clients required an average of 1.9 support periods, 92 days of support and 105 nights of accommodation over the three years to 2013-14.

Table 1: Service use, by domestic and family violence client type, various characteristics, 2011-12 to 2013-14

Service use characteristic	Domestic and family violence clients	Other clients
<b>Support periods</b>		
Number	428,000	585,000
Average per client	2.4	1.9
<b>Days of support</b>		

Number	24,251,000	28,830,000
Average per client	136	92
Median per client	46	27
<b>Nights of accommodation</b>		
Number	9,286,000	10,424,000
Average per client accommodated	111	105
Median per client accommodated	39	36

Source: AIHW Specialist Homelessness Services Data Repository.

Note: 47% of family and domestic violence clients were accommodated over the collection period, compared with 32% of other SHS clients.

Additionally, domestic and family violence clients were more likely than other clients to receive more than 1 support period (47% compared with 34%) over the three years (Table 2). The disparity is clearest when examining clients who required 4 or more support periods over the 3 year collection period, with almost twice the proportion of domestic and family violence clients receiving 4 or more support periods compared with other clients (17% for domestic violence clients and 9% for other clients).

**Table 2: Service use, by domestic and family violence client type, number of support periods, 2011-12 to 2013-14 (per cent)**

Number of support periods	Domestic and family violence clients (%)	Other clients (%)
1	53	66
2	20	18
3	10	7
4+	17	9

Source: AIHW Specialist Homelessness Services Data Repository.

### What is the span of service use?

Over the period 2011-12 to 2013-14, domestic and family violence and other clients who did not have an open support period at the end of the three years were examined to determine how many days were reported between the start of their first and the end of their last support period/s. As such, this analysis examines the total time that clients who at any point indicated domestic and family violence issues, were in need of services. This provides an indication of the persistence of housing issues for these clients. For many it may also indicate ongoing violence; however, the Specialist Homelessness Services Collection (SHSC) does not have a measure of repeat incidents of violence.

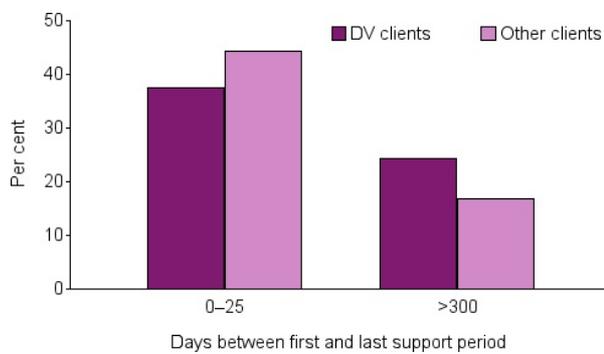
When comparing domestic and family violence clients to those who did not indicate experiencing domestic and family violence, there is no significant difference in the span of service use, ranging between 26 and 300 days between first and last support periods. That is, both client groups have people with long term persisting homelessness issues.

However, the proportion of clients who reported between 0 and 25 days between first and last support periods was higher for those clients who did not indicate experiencing domestic and family violence (44%), compared with domestic and family violence clients (37%). Conversely, clients who reported greater than 300 days between first and last support periods were more likely to be domestic and family violence clients (24%), than other clients (17%) (Figure 1). Among the reasons for this would be lack of appropriate housing alternatives, ongoing complex issues surrounding clients affected by domestic and family violence, requiring support over longer periods of time, and potentially, ongoing issues with violence.

Overall, it is evident that finding satisfactory housing outcomes is not easy for many domestic and family violence clients; 43% of these clients were still being supported, or had sought further assistance, more than 100 days after first seeking assistance in the period (compared with 34% of other clients).

Indigenous women appear to access specialist homelessness services over a greater span of time than other domestic and family violence clients. Almost 2 in 5 Indigenous women (38%) accessed services over greater than 300 days, compared with 24% of clients overall. This may indicate that Indigenous women are not getting all their needs around housing stability addressed or were supported over an extended time period in an attempt to do so. Older women, on the other hand, were the least likely of all other domestic and family violence cohorts to persist in service use over long periods of time, with only 13% supported over greater than 300 days after their first support period. Almost two-thirds of these older women presenting to services were living in private rental or social housing, and they had the lowest level of need identified for drug and alcohol services, potentially indicating higher levels of housing stability and a lower need for support over an extended period.

**Figure 1: Number of days between first day of first support period and last day of last support period, by domestic and family violence client status, 2011-12 to 2013-14**



Source: AIHW Specialist Homelessness Services Data Repository.

### Do some domestic and family violence clients need more support than others?

There were three groups of clients within the domestic and family violence population who required a higher number of support periods and days of support, on average, than the overall domestic and family violence group. They were:

- Indigenous women (3.4 support periods and 170 days of support)
- Males (3.3 support periods and 167 days of support) and
- Young women presenting alone (3.0 support periods and 173 days of support).

The relatively high average number of support periods for Indigenous women is greater also than for non-Indigenous women seeking assistance for domestic violence, who over the three years to 2013-14, had an average of 3.4 support periods per client (Table 3).

Despite requiring the greatest average number of support periods, Indigenous women experiencing domestic and family violence who needed accommodation received the lowest average number of accommodation nights (77 nights) of all the domestic and family violence cohorts. This trend is also reflected in the services requested by Indigenous women, with just over 7 out of 10 (72%) requesting short term accommodation. Non-Indigenous women were less likely to request short term accommodation, with just over 4 in 10 (41%) identifying this as a need.

Women from non-English speaking backgrounds, young women presenting alone and males received the highest average number of nights of accommodation out of the overall domestic and family violence population (149 nights, 129 nights and 122 nights, respectively). This correlates with what we know about the precarious housing circumstances of young women presenting alone and men upon presentation, with both these groups more likely to be couch surfing (see [Housing outcomes](#) for further information).

Older women received fewer support periods (1.8) and days of support (73), on average, from specialist homelessness services than any other cohort experiencing domestic and family violence.

Table 3: Service use, by domestic and family violence cohorts, various characteristics, 2011-12 to 2013-14

Service use characteristic	Women with children	Young women presenting alone	Indigenous women	NESB women	Older women	Males
<b>Support periods</b>						
Number	107,000	69,000	63,000	37,000	12,000	48,000
Average per client	2.5	3.0	3.4	2.3	1.8	3.3
Median per client	2	2	2	1	1	2
<b>Days of support</b>						
Number	5,995,000	3,928,000	3,176,000	2,402,000	496,000	2,437,000
Average per client	139	173	170	149	73	167
Median per client	49	59	64	55	13	71
<b>Nights of accommodation</b>						
Number	1,871,000	1,362,000	983,000	977,000	114,000	967,000
Average per client accommodated	114	129	77	149	92	122
Median per client accommodated	41	48	18	62	22	51

Source: AIHW Specialist Homelessness Services Data Repository.

*Note:* Groups are not mutually exclusive, clients may belong to more than 1 group.

## What does this tell us?

This analysis suggests that individuals experiencing domestic and family violence require more support from specialist homelessness services than other clients, and there is evidence to suggest that they cycle in and out of homelessness services at a higher rate than other clients. Domestic and family violence clients received, on average, a higher number of support periods, days of support and nights of accommodation than other SHS clients. Domestic and family violence clients were also almost twice as likely to receive 4 or more support periods from 2011-12 to 2013-14 than other clients (17% compared with 9%). Spinney [2] suggests that there are many possible reasons for the repeat use of homelessness services by these clients, including:

- community attitudes, particularly for those who are Indigenous and those that live in rural/remote areas
- lack of availability of longer term accommodation services
- returning to remorseful spouse after a violent incident
- the presence of comorbidities such as mental health and substance use issues
- violent partners ignoring police or court orders to leave the family home, making refuge accommodation the only safe option
- the often short term nature of accommodation, not allowing enough time for the client to gain financial independence for themselves and their children.

While it appears that domestic and family violence can lead to precarious housing situations and therefore higher specialist homelessness service use, there are groups within the domestic and family violence population that are particularly impacted. Across all groups examined in the family and domestic violence cohort, Indigenous women, young women presenting alone and men were the most likely to be repeat service users. These groups appear to have more difficulty accessing stable housing, despite support from specialist homelessness agencies.

Indigenous women received 3.4 support periods, on average, over the three year reporting period. These results support research that suggests Indigenous women may be more likely to return to the family home potentially using homelessness services as respite from an abusive partner (Tually, Faulkner, Cutler & Slatter 2008). A lack of available culturally appropriate services in remote locations may also be a contributing factor. Additionally, Indigenous women were the least likely of all domestic and family violence groups examined to be employed, with only 8% reporting having any form of employment, indicating a lack of financial resources available to access long term, stable housing.

On average, young women presenting alone accessed 3.0 support periods per client from 2011-12 and 2013-14. The higher rates of service use amongst these clients may be indicative of young women having less established financial resources and the priorities of specialist homelessness services to find longer-term solutions where children are involved. These young women were also more likely than other groups to be couch surfing when they first accessed services, indicating a precarious housing situation.

A male's experience of domestic and family violence and homelessness is likely to be different from a woman's experience. While women are most likely to be the victims of domestic violence [1], and this is often carried out by their male partners, it is important to note that there are several different types of violence that may occur. For example, children may be violent toward parents or siblings and same sex couples may also experience violence in the home. As current perpetrators of domestic and family violence who may be receiving assistance from a homelessness agency are not identifiable in the data, we are not inferring whether the men examined here are a victim or perpetrator, but rather examining the circumstances under which they seek help. Males experiencing domestic and family violence received 3.4 support periods, on average, over the three years to 2013-14. This may be a reflection of the additional comorbidities present in this population, with males reporting the highest rates of both mental health issues and substance use issues out of all of the domestic and family violence cohorts (47% and 35% of males, respectively). These additional comorbidities can make accessing and maintaining stable housing difficult. In addition, services targeted at single men may be more likely to prioritise men that are sleeping rough or who have complex needs over those that leave accommodation following an abusive episode.

Young women presenting alone, Indigenous women and males were also more likely than the other domestic and family violence groups examined to be living with no tenure at the end of the 3 years examined. Males and Indigenous women were also more likely than other domestic and family violence clients to be living without shelter or sleeping rough. See [Are housing outcomes for domestic and family violence clients improved over the long term?](#) for further information.

Additionally, when data on unmet requests for services are interrogated, young women alone and males have the most unmet requests for services out of the domestic and family violence cohorts examined. Young women presenting alone were the least likely of all domestic violence cohorts to have requests for 'long term accommodation', 'assistance to sustain housing tenure', 'mental health services' and 'drug/alcohol services' provided by specialist homelessness services. Similarly, males were the least likely to have requests for 'family services', 'disability services' and 'domestic violence services' met. Young women presenting alone and men were equally least likely to be provided with 'short term accommodation' or 'legal/financial services', with 16% of all requests for 'short term accommodation' not met and 18% of requests for 'legal/financial services' neither provided nor referred. For further information, see [What services do domestic and family violence clients need and what are they not receiving?](#). Combined, these data indicate that young women presenting alone and men are the most overlooked when it comes to service provision. This could be a result of more 'in need' groups, such as women with children and older women, receiving priority to obtain these services.

Older women were the least likely to be repeat service users across all of the groups examined in the domestic and family violence cohort, with an average of 1.8 support periods and 73 days of support over the three years to 2013-14. In contrast to the males in this study, older women were the least likely of all the domestic and family violence cohorts examined to report a mental health issue (21%) and a very close

second to being the least likely to report substance use issues (4%) of all domestic and family violence cohorts. Only women from a non-English speaking background were less likely to report an issue with substance abuse (3%). These lower rates of comorbidities may indicate better prospects of maintaining housing, and therefore requiring fewer repeat support periods.

When examining persistence of service use over the 3 years examined, more than half of domestic and family violence clients appeared to have their issues resolved within 100 days (57%, or around 90,000). However, a further 1 in 4 clients (24%) accessed services for longer than 300 days, a higher proportion than those who did not indicate experiencing domestic and family violence (17%). This seems to suggest that the complexity of domestic and family violence situations require support spanning longer periods of time. Repeat episodes of domestic and family violence may also be driving this trend.

Of the cohorts examined within the overall domestic and family violence population, Indigenous women were the most persistent in their service use, with almost 40% receiving support services spanning greater than 300 days during the 3 years examined. This suggests that for groups with lower levels of housing stability on presentation, a greater number of support periods and high levels of need for short term and emergency accommodation, as well as an increased level of service persistence, is observed. The data in this area present an exciting opportunity for further research.

**If you are experiencing domestic or family violence or know someone who is, please call 1800RESPECT (1800 737 732) or visit the [1800RESPECT](#) website.**

## References

1. ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics) 2015. Recorded Crime - Victims, Australia, 2014. ABS cat no. 4510.0. Canberra: ABS.
2. Spinney A 2012. Reducing the need for women and children to make repeated use of refuge and other crisis accommodation. Swinburne Institute for Social Research, Melbourne.
3. Tually S, Faulkner D, Cutler C, & Slatter M 2008. Women, domestic and family violence and homelessness: a synthesis report. Flinders Institute for Housing, Urban and Regional Research, Adelaide.

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## What services do clients need and what are they not receiving?

People experiencing domestic and family violence often require a wide range of support, and homelessness service agencies strive to provide these clients with the specialist services they require. These can range from accommodation provision, such as a bed in a shelter, to specialised facilities, such as domestic violence refuges. These services can either be provided by the presenting agency, or the client may be referred to another service agency. In some cases, services may not be provided or referred, and the client's needs goes unmet. This may be due to a lack of available resources, or an absence of support for specialised needs.

### Key findings

- Family and domestic violence clients were more likely than other clients to request accommodation services. Where short term accommodation was requested, family and domestic violence clients were more likely to have that request met than other clients (82% compared with 61%).
- One of the greatest difficulties homelessness services face is finding long term housing solutions for clients. Over 90% of requests by domestic and family violence clients for long term accommodation were unable to be met when first requested.
- Men were the most likely among all cohorts experiencing domestic and family violence to request services to address problematic drug or alcohol use (20%). This is double the proportion of the next most likely group, Indigenous women (10%).
- Young women presenting alone were the least likely of all domestic and family violence clients to have requests met for short term accommodation (73%).

### Do services needed, provided, and not provided or referred, differ across groups?

'General services' was the most identified need among clients who reported experiencing domestic and family violence to specialist homelessness services between 2011-12 and 2013-14, with almost all (95%) clients requesting this kind of assistance. 'General services' encompasses a wide range of services and may include family/relationship assistance, assistance for incest/sexual assault, legal information, and child care. For a full list of services that fall under 'general services', see the glossary. Almost all clients who requested general services were provided with them (over 99%).

Family and domestic violence clients were more likely than those not experiencing family and domestic violence to request accommodation services (Table 1). Where short term accommodation was requested, family and domestic violence clients were more likely to have that request met than other clients. Only 11% of requests for short term accommodation for those experiencing family and domestic violence were not met, compared with 26% for those not. This reflects the priority given to housing those fleeing from violence.

However, only 9% of clients who requested long term accommodation between 2011-12 and 2013-14 received it, with 48% of requesters referred to another agency, and 43% neither receiving a service nor being referred to another agency for this service.

Among clients who did not report experiencing domestic and family violence, 'general services' was also the most identified, by 9 in 10 clients between 2011-12 and 2013-14. Once identified, the majority of clients were provided with this service (98%).

The need for 'long term accommodation provision' was also the need least provided by specialist homelessness services over the three years to 2013-14. Only 8% of clients who requested this service received it, with a further 37% being referred to another agency and over half (56%) not being provided with this service nor being referred to another agency for this service.

**Table 1: Domestic and family violence client type, by need for services and service provision status, 2011-12 to 2013-14**

Service	Domestic & family violence clients	Other clients
Total clients	187,314	333,457
<b>Domestic violence services</b>		
Need identified as % of clients	77	-
Need provided (%)	92	-
Need referred only (%)	3	-
Not provided or referred (%)	5	-
<b>Short term accommodation provision</b>		
Need identified as % of clients	48	38

Need provided (%)	82	61
Need referred only (%)	7	13
Not provided or referred (%)	11	26
<b>Medium term accommodation provision</b>		
Need identified as % of clients	28	27
Need provided (%)	47	34
Need referred only (%)	24	22
Not provided or referred (%)	29	44
<b>Long term accommodation provision</b>		
Need identified as % of clients	32	37
Need provided (%)	9	8
Need referred only (%)	48	37
Not provided or referred (%)	43	56
<b>Other specialist services</b>		
Need identified as % of clients	34	17
Need provided (%)	73	68
Need referred only (%)	20	23
Not provided or referred (%)	7	9
<b>Assistance to sustain housing tenure</b>		
Need identified as % of clients	28	35
Need provided (%)	87	83
Need referred only (%)	5	5
Not provided or referred (%)	9	12
<b>General services</b>		
Need identified as % of clients	95	91
Need provided (%)	99	98
Need referred only (%)	<1	1
Not provided or referred (%)	<1	1

Source: AIHW Specialist Homelessness Services Data Repository.

#### Notes

1. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.
2. The denominator for the proportions need provided, need referred only, and not provided or referred, is the number of clients that identified a need for the service.
3. Groups are not mutually exclusive, clients may belong to more than 1 group.

#### Do needs vary within the domestic violence cohorts?

As their name would indicate, 'Domestic violence services' were one of the most requested services across all of the domestic and family violence cohorts. Around 4 in 5 women with children, older women and women from non-English speaking backgrounds, and around 7 in 10 young women presenting alone and Indigenous women, required these services. Most were provided with these services at the time of the request (Table 2).

Short term accommodation, such as that provided by shelters and boarding houses, was most frequently requested by Indigenous women (over 7 in 10). Males and young women presenting alone were also more likely than other groups examined to request short term accommodation (61% and 50% respectively). Indigenous women were the most likely to be accommodated, with 87% of these needs met. In

general, short term accommodation needs were met in the majority of cases. However, young women presenting alone and men were the most likely to have their need for short term accommodation go unmet (16% for both groups).

Other services were less commonly provided, particularly long term accommodation provision. Males, Indigenous women and young women presenting alone were the most likely to request long term accommodation. As for clients overall, this need was only provided for around 10% of family and domestic violence clients between 2011 and 2014, with around half referred to another agency and many (between 40% and 47%) not provided with or referred to another agency for this service.

Drug and alcohol services were not often identified as being needed by women experiencing family and domestic violence. Around 1 in 10 Indigenous women, 9% of young women presenting alone and just 4% of women with children identified a need for drug or alcohol services. However, one-fifth (20%) of men experiencing family and domestic violence needed assistance to address problematic drug or alcohol use.

Legal and financial services were most frequently requested by women from non-English speaking backgrounds, with around 1 in 5 having this need identified.

**Table 2: Domestic and family violence cohorts, by need for services and service provision status, 2011-12 to 2013-14**

Service	Women with children	Young women presenting alone	Indigenous women	NESB women	Older women	Males
<b>Total Clients</b>	45,404	23,805	19,601	17,021	7,126	15,361
<b>Domestic violence services</b>						
Need identified as % of clients	80	73	72	83	83	49
Need provided (%)	94	88	92	95	95	77
Need referred only (%)	2	3	3	3	2	7
Not provided or referred (%)	4	8	6	3	3	15
<b>Short term accommodation provision</b>						
Need identified as % of clients	40	50	72	43	20	61
Need provided (%)	79	73	87	81	77	74
Need referred only (%)	9	11	6	8	9	10
Not provided or referred (%)	13	16	7	10	14	16
<b>Medium term accommodation provision</b>						
Need identified as % of clients	24	39	35	27	10	44
Need provided (%)	44	44	40	48	36	40
Need referred only (%)	23	24	29	24	26	28
Not provided or referred (%)	32	32	32	28	38	33
<b>Long term accommodation provision</b>						
Need identified as % of clients	31	40	42	30	16	47
Need provided (%)	10	10	9	9	11	9
Need referred only (%)	47	43	51	49	46	45
Not provided or referred (%)	43	47	40	42	43	46
<b>Other specialist services</b>						
Need identified as % of clients	34	36	43	38	23	40

Need provided (%)	73	73	74	75	74	71
Need referred only (%)	21	18	19	19	19	20
Not provided or referred (%)	6	9	7	6	8	8
<b>Assistance to sustain housing tenure</b>						
Need identified as % of clients	32	33	35	24	15	42
Need provided (%)	88	86	87	86	88	88
Need referred only (%)	4	3	4	5	4	3
Not provided or referred (%)	8	10	9	9	8	8
<b>Legal/financial services</b>						
Need identified as % of clients	18	15	18	21	9	19
Need provided (%)	52	57	55	55	56	60
Need referred only (%)	35	25	29	34	33	22
Not provided or referred (%)	13	18	17	10	12	18
<b>Immigration/cultural services</b>						
Need identified as % of clients	14	11	25	46	11	9
Need provided (%)	89	84	85	92	93	75
Need referred only (%)	7	9	11	4	4	14
Not provided or referred (%)	4	8	5	3	3	11
<b>Drug/alcohol services</b>						
Need identified as % of clients	4	9	10	2	2	20
Need provided (%)	51	54	53	57	59	60
Need referred only (%)	23	19	22	21	23	18
Not provided or referred (%)	26	27	26	22	19	22
<b>General services</b>						
Need identified as % of clients	96	96	98	96	93	95
Need provided (%)	99	99	100	98	99	99
Need referred only (%)	1	<1	<1	1	1	<1
Not provided or referred (%)	<1	<1	<1	<1	<1	<1

Source: AIHW Specialist Homelessness Services Data Repository.

Notes

1. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.
2. The denominator for the proportions need provided, need referred only, and not provided or referred, is the number of clients that identified a need for the service.
3. Groups are not mutually exclusive, clients may belong to more than 1 group.

## What does this tell us?

While the vast majority of need for services such as 'general services' and 'domestic violence services' were met, there were certain provisions that were beyond the capacity of specialist homelessness service agencies to provide to clients.

For both SHS clients experiencing and clients *not* experiencing domestic and family violence, the highest proportion of services that were requested and went unmet, or were referred elsewhere, was 'long term accommodation provision' (91% and 93%, respectively). This illustrates the difficulty specialist homelessness services face in providing clients with accommodation other than short term or emergency accommodation in times of crisis. This lack of safe and stable accommodation may lead to increased cycling in and out of temporary accommodation, and a lack of 'settling down' of clients in one place.

Of all cohorts experiencing domestic and family violence, women with children were the most likely to have their needs provided when requesting services. This is likely to reflect the priority given to parents/carers who present to services with children.

To further understand the uniqueness of Indigenous women who are domestic and family violence clients, comparisons can be made with all non-Indigenous women who sought assistance for domestic and family violence. Interestingly, Indigenous women were much more likely over the three years to 2013-14 to request short term accommodation provision than non-Indigenous women (72% and 41%, respectively). This may be because, as research suggests, Indigenous Australians who are experiencing domestic violence may be more likely to use homelessness services as respite from the perpetrator, as they do not intend on leaving their home and community permanently [1].

Of all cohorts experiencing domestic and family violence, young women presenting alone and men were the least likely to have their needs for a range of services met. Young women presenting alone were the least likely of all the domestic and family violence cohorts examined to have requests for long term accommodation, specialist services and assistance to sustain housing tenure met.

Men were the most likely to have requests for domestic violence services and immigration/cultural services unmet. Both men and young women were least likely of all the domestic and family violence cohorts to have received short term accommodation where requested. This could be a reflection of service priorities, where individuals with children are prioritised over those without. These two groups are also the most likely to be living alone on presentation.

Young women presenting alone and men were also among the highest repeat users of specialist homelessness services, with young women receiving an average of 3 support periods and men receiving an average of 3.4 support periods over the three years to 2013-14. Young women presenting alone also had the highest proportion of couch surfers on presentation (43%), and men were the most likely to be sleeping rough (15%). At the end of the 3 years examined, only 48% of young women and 38% of men were housed in either private rental or social housing. Combined, these data indicate that young women presenting alone and men who seek assistance from specialist homelessness services due to domestic and family violence had the least housing stability from 2011-12 to 2013-14, perhaps due to limited availability within specialist homelessness services to cater to their needs.

**If you are experiencing domestic or family violence or know someone who is, please call 1800RESPECT (1800 737 732) or visit the [1800RESPECT](#) website.**

## References

1. Spinney A & Blandy S 2011. Homelessness prevention for women and children who have experienced domestic and family violence: innovations in policy and practice. Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, Melbourne.

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## Are housing outcomes for domestic and family violence clients improved over the long term?

Specialist homelessness services offer many options for those experiencing family and domestic violence that lack the resources or support to cope with a housing crisis. These clients present with a variety of housing circumstances: some clients are at imminent risk of losing their housing and others are already homeless when they seek support.

Between 2011-12 and 2013-14, housing outcomes for specialist homelessness services clients were recorded. A 'housing situation' is recorded at a client's first presentation to a specialist homelessness service agency, and then again at last presentation over this time period. Housing situations of clients may fluctuate, and a client may have multiple or even overlapping support periods, over the 3 year period. This analysis does not examine the variances in housing situations over the 3 years; rather, it looks at the housing situations of clients when first presenting to a specialist homelessness service in the 3 year period, and at the cessation of their last period of support. Housing outcomes can only be analysed when a period of support has ended; for this reason, only those clients who had ceased receiving support from an agency (that is, those with closed support periods) are included in this analysis.

Clients were assessed as being homeless or at risk of homelessness based on their dwelling type, tenure type and conditions of occupancy when first presenting to a homelessness agency and again when their support had ended. A client is considered homeless if they fall into one of three categories: no shelter or improvised dwelling, short term accommodation, and couch surfing or no tenure. A client is considered at risk of homelessness if they reside in public or community housing, private housing or institutional settings. The exact derivations are available in the glossary.

There are many factors which can increase a person's vulnerability to homelessness. A 2014 report *Housing outcomes for groups vulnerable to homelessness: 1 July 2011 to 31 December 2013* by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) found that those who are more socially and economically disadvantaged had poorer housing outcomes. While domestic and family violence is a key driver of homelessness, not all are forced to leave their homes and there is considerable variation in life experiences and housing circumstances within this group.

### Key findings

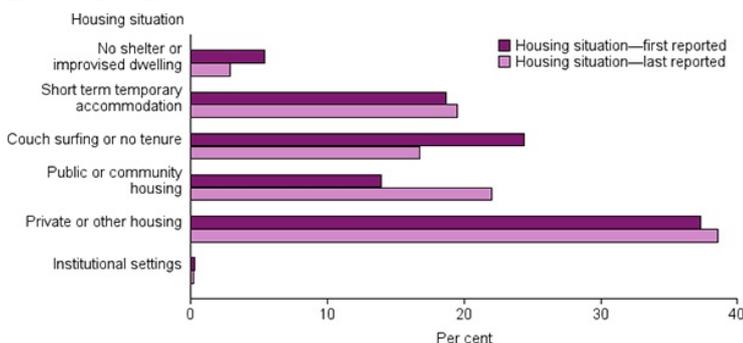
- At the end of the three years examined, following support, most clients experiencing domestic and family violence were living in stable accommodation (private rental/owning or social housing).
- Domestic and family violence clients groups with higher proportions of couch surfing or rough sleeping at the start of support, are less likely to be housed in private rental or social housing at the end of the three years examined.
- Adult male domestic and family violence clients were the most likely to be sleeping rough at the end of support (9%).
- Indigenous women experiencing domestic and family violence were the most likely to be living in social housing on last presentation (37%).

### Which groups fare better or worse?

Specialist homelessness services were successful in reducing the proportion of clients considered homeless and increasing the proportion living in public or community housing at the end of support. This reflects the priority given to those experiencing domestic and family violence when it comes to a safe and stable housing outcome.

Over the three years to 2013-14, just under half (48%) of domestic and family violence clients were considered homeless ('no shelter or improvised dwelling', 'short term accommodation', and 'couch surfing or no tenure') on presentation (Figure 1). This is lower than the proportion for clients who have not experienced family and domestic violence over the 3 years examined, with over half of these clients considered homeless on presentation (55%) (Figure 2).

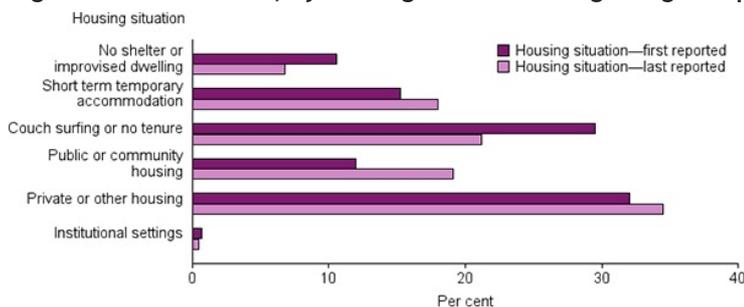
**Figure 1: Domestic and family violence clients, by housing situation at beginning of support and at end of support, 2011-12 to 2013-14**



Source: AIHW Specialist Homelessness Services Data Repository.

The proportion of homeless ('no shelter or improvised dwelling', 'short term accommodation', and 'couch surfing or no tenure') clients was reduced by 9 percentage points in both groups to 39% for family and domestic violence clients and to 46% for non domestic and family violence clients at the end of the 3 years examined. The largest reductions for those experiencing domestic and family violence were in the proportion who reported that they were 'couch surfing or no tenure', falling from around 1 in 4 (24%) at the start of support to just 1 in 6 (17%) at the end.

**Figure 2: Other clients, by housing situation at beginning of support and at end of support, 2011-12 to 2013-14**



Source: AIHW Specialist Homelessness Services Data Repository.

### Homeless domestic and family violence clients

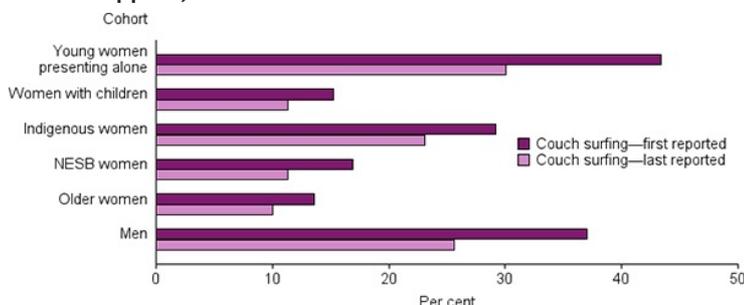
While family and domestic violence clients were less likely than other SHS clients to be homeless on presentation, there were 3 groups of clients within this cohort who were more likely than the overall group to be couch surfing or have no tenure when presenting to homelessness services.

These were:

- Young women presenting alone (43% at the start of support, falling to 30% at the end)
- Males (37% at the start of support, falling to 26% at the end) and
- Indigenous women (29% at the start of support, falling to 23% at the end).

Specialist homelessness services were successful in reducing the proportion of clients 'couch surfing or no tenure'. However, the groups above were still more likely to be living without tenure at the *end* of the 3 years examined than older women, women with children and women from non-English speaking backgrounds were *prior* to receiving support (only 14% of older women, 15% of women with children, and 17% of women from non-English speaking backgrounds presented with couch surfing or no tenure) (Figure 3).

**Figure 3: Domestic and family violence clients, by couch surfing or no tenure, by cohort at beginning of support and at end of support, 2011-12 to 2013-14**



Source: AIHW Specialist Homelessness Services Data Repository.

Those who are living in 'no shelter or improvised dwellings' or rough sleeping made up only a small proportion of the domestic and family violence clients, at around 5%. However, they are in the most unsafe and unstable circumstances. Certain client groups were more likely than the overall group to be in no shelter or improvised dwellings on presentation to a service.

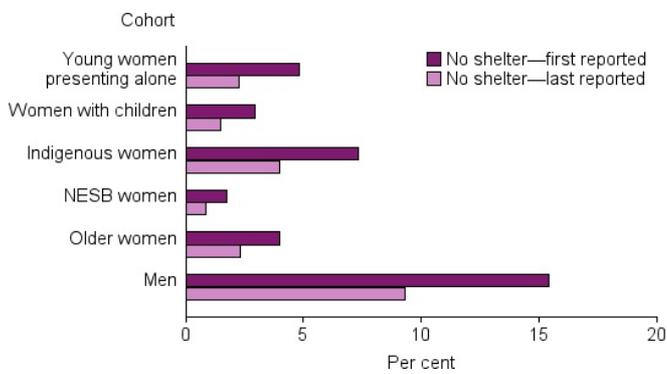
These were:

- Males (15% at the start of support, falling to 9% at the end) and
- Indigenous women (7% at the start of support, falling to 4% at the end).

Proportions of clients living with no shelter or in an improvised dwelling reduced at the end of the 3 years examined, with the largest percentage point reduction experienced by men (6 percentage points) in the cohort. Indigenous women and young women presenting alone has the second highest reduction in proportions sleeping rough at 3%.

Clients with higher proportions of 'couch surfing or no tenure', such as young women presenting alone, or 'no shelter or improvised dwellings', such as men, at the start of support, were less likely to be housed in social or private housing at the end of support. At the cessation of their last period of support, only 48% of young women and 38% of men were housed in either private rental or social housing. This is compared with 74% of women with children, 78% of older women and 68% of women from non-English speaking backgrounds (Figure 4).

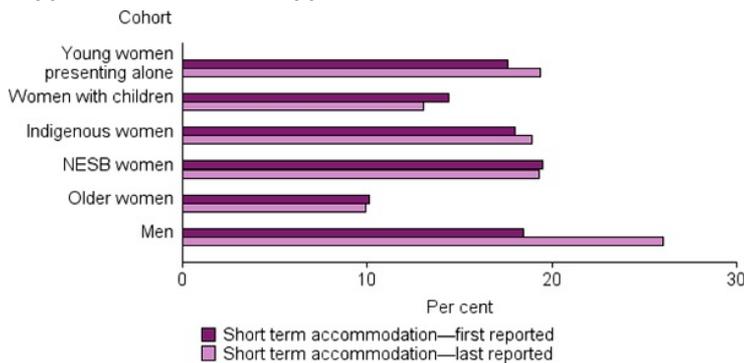
**Figure 4: Domestic and family violence clients, by no shelter or improvised dwelling, by cohort at beginning of support and at end of support, 2011-12 to 2013-14**



Source: AIHW Specialist Homelessness Services Data Repository.

'Short term and temporary accommodation' rates generally remained steady among the domestic and family violence groups examined. However, the proportion of males ending support in short term or temporary accommodation rose from 18% to 26% (Figure 5).

**Figure 5: Domestic and family violence clients, by short term temporary accommodation, by cohort at beginning of support and at end of support, 2011-12 to 2013-14**



Source: AIHW Specialist Homelessness Services Data Repository.

### Domestic and family violence clients at risk of homelessness

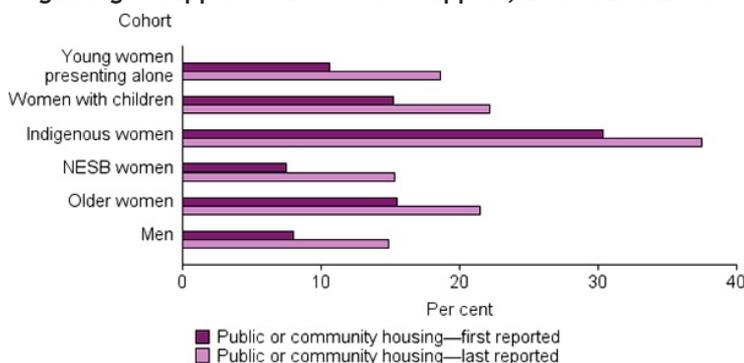
Those experiencing domestic and family violence were more likely than those not to be living in social housing, private rental/owning on presentation (51% compared with 44% of non-domestic and family violence clients). This proportion increased by 10 percentage points to 61% at the end of the 3 years examined. This compares with 54% following support in the non-domestic and family violence cohort.

Homelessness agencies play a key role in liaising with both public and community housing providers to assist people into more stable housing situations. There was an overall increase of 8 percentage points, from 14% on first presentation to 22% at the end in those living in social housing, as well as a 2 percentage point increase to 39% in those living in private rental/owning properties at the end of support.

Indigenous women experiencing domestic and family violence were the most likely of all the groups to be living in social housing both before (30%) and after support (37%) and the least likely of all groups to be living in private rental/owning accommodation both before (15%) and after support (16%) (Figure 6). This is consistent with AIHW research released in 2014 which found that in 2013, Indigenous households were 6 times as likely as other Australian households to live in social housing (rates of 31% and 5%, respectively) [2].

Just over 1 in 5 (22%) women with children ended support in social housing, rising from 15% at the start of support. The proportion of non-English speaking women and young women presenting alone who ended support in social housing almost doubled, from 8% to 15% for non-English speaking women and from 11% to 19% for young women presenting alone. Males were also assisted in obtaining social housing with 15% at the end of support, up from 8% at the beginning.

**Figure 6: Domestic and family violence clients, by public or community housing (renter or rent free), by cohort at beginning of support and at end of support, 2011-12 to 2013-14**



Source: AIHW Specialist Homelessness Services Data Repository.

The proportion of domestic and family violence clients living in private rental/owning accommodation remained steady from beginning to the end of support. Over half of older women (57%), women with children (52%) and non-English speaking women (54%) presented to services while living in the private rental market and these proportions remained consistent. This may indicate that homelessness services are successful in assisting women to remain in their homes following a violent incident. The NSW program *Going Home, Leaving Violence* is

an example of a program which assists women to remain in their homes following a violent incident. These types of programs are being implemented across the country to challenge the assumption that when violence occurs, it is the women and children that must leave the home.

### What does this tell us?

Across all groups examined in the domestic and family violence cohort, the proportion of clients moving in to public and community housing increased, representing a safe and sustainable housing outcome at the end of the 3 years examined. Domestic and family violence clients overall were also more likely than other SHS clients to be living in social housing following support (22% compared with 19%). This appears to reflect the high priority that those experiencing domestic and family violence and Indigenous families are given in the social housing systems nationally. Almost 4 in 10 Indigenous women experiencing domestic and family violence ended support in social housing: a safe, stable and sustainable outcome.

For groups with relatively high proportions of clients living with no tenure (males, Indigenous women and young women presenting alone) the reality of couch surfing or movement between friends' and relatives' houses is reflected. These people appear to be more likely to have exhausted all available options before presenting to a homelessness service. While this may be the case for the men studied, it could also be that they have been required to leave the family home following a violent incident. This analysis appears to indicate that males, young women and Indigenous women are at the greatest risk of falling into homelessness as they are more likely than other groups examined to be living without tenure upon presentation.

Older women and women with children experienced the smallest percentage point reduction in the proportion of no shelter or improvised dwellings. This could indicate that accommodation options for older women and those with children who were without shelter is harder to find, or that there is simply not enough availability of suitable accommodation for these groups.

Short term and temporary accommodation rates remained steady across all groups; however males experienced an 8 percentage point increase in the proportion housed temporarily from beginning to the end of support, from 18% to 26%. This could be a reflection of men being housed temporarily after being removed from their home following a violent incident.

Housing outcomes for those experiencing domestic and family violence over the 3 year period examined show that most clients end up either in private rental or social housing. Around 3 in 4 women with children, almost 8 in 10 older women, and almost 7 in 10 non-English speaking women are housed either in social housing or private rental.

However, for those with higher proportions of couch surfing or no tenure or no shelter or improvised dwellings at the start of support, being housed in private rental or social housing is much less likely at the end of the three years examined. Young women presenting alone had the highest proportion of couch surfing or no tenure on first presentation (43%), and males were the most likely to be sleeping rough (15%). At the end of the 3 years examined, less than half of young women and males were housed in either private rental or social housing (48% and 38%, respectively). These 2 groups also have amongst the highest average number of support periods over the 3 years, with young women presenting alone receiving 3 support periods and males receiving 3.3 support periods (see the 'What are the patterns of service use among domestic and family violence clients?' snapshot for further information). This appears to indicate greater levels of housing instability, requiring specialist homelessness service intervention and assistance. This instability over the long term appears to result in these groups being the least likely to obtain a private rental or social housing tenancy.

**If you are experiencing domestic or family violence or know someone who is, please call 1800RESPECT (1800 737 732) or visit the [1800RESPECT](#) website.**

### References

1. AIHW (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare) 2015. *Exploring transitions between homelessness and public housing: 1 July 2011 to 30 June 2013*. Cat. no. HOU 277. Canberra: AIHW.
2. AIHW 2014. *Housing assistance for Indigenous Australians*. Cat. no. IHW 131. Canberra: AIHW. Viewed 24 September 2015.

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