1 Introduction

The Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) was established in 1985 to consolidate a number of Commonwealth, State and Territory government programs designed to assist people who are homeless or at risk of being homeless, including women and children escaping domestic violence. The current program (SAAP III, and SAAP IV from 16 December 1999) is governed by the *Supported Accommodation Assistance Act 1994*. The Act specifies that the overall aim of SAAP is to provide transitional supported accommodation and related support services to help homeless people achieve the maximum possible degree of self-reliance and independence.

In 1999–2000, 1,207 non-government, community or local government organisations were funded nationally under the program (AIHW 2000b:6). These organisations range from small stand-alone agencies with single outlets to larger auspice bodies with multiple outlets. The agencies provided an estimated 90,000 people with accommodation and/or support lasting more than an hour, with 35% of these people receiving more than one period of support during the year (AIHW 2000b:23). This translates into over 17,000 people receiving substantial support on a daily basis (Table 4.1). In addition, agencies provided one-off assistance lasting less than an hour—such as meals, showers or information—around 2,300 times a day (Table 4.1).

Although agencies assist many people on a daily basis, there are still times when an agency cannot provide the support or accommodation requested by people in crisis. This report gives an overview of the total demand for SAAP assistance in 1999–2000 and the extent to which that demand was met, particularly the demand for accommodation.

In past years the information on unmet demand was presented in the annual reports (see Chapter 5, AIHW 1997; AIHW 1999; AIHW 2000a). Now, for the first time, information on unmet demand and one-off assistance is being presented in parallel with information about the levels of substantial support that could be provided by SAAP agencies on an ongoing basis. In this way the current report provides an overall picture of the demand for SAAP services and how this demand is being met.

The analysis in this report is divided into three sections. Chapter 2 contains an overview of accommodation and other substantial assistance provided to SAAP clients throughout 1999–2000. In Chapter 3 the demand for accommodation is examined in more detail; particular attention is paid to unmet requests for immediate accommodation, and the provision of SAAP accommodation is compared with unmet requests for immediate accommodation on a daily basis. To complete the analysis of assistance provided under SAAP, Chapter 4 examines the total provision of assistance, including one-off assistance; here also some analysis of provision of assistance on a daily basis is presented.

A number of key terms used throughout this report are defined in the Glossary. A general guide to interpretation of the tables is provided in Appendix 2; specific rules used when deriving a particular table are described in the notes to that table.

1.1 The data

The main source of data about the provision of services through SAAP is the SAAP National Data Collection (NDC). This consists of a number of distinct components, each of which can

be thought of as a separate collection. Currently, five components exist: the Client Collection; the Unmet Demand Collection; the Casual Client Collection; the Administrative Data Collection; and Special Issue Collections. This report is based on analysis of the first three of these, details of which are provided in Appendix 2. A brief description of the three collections follows:

- The Client Collection consists of information about all clients receiving SAAP support lasting more than 1 hour. The information is collected throughout the year, and includes basic socio-demographic data, data on services required by and provided to each client, and information about clients' situations before and after receiving SAAP support. The main findings from this collection are published in the national and State and Territory SAAP NDC annual reports (see, for example, AIHW 2000b).

- The Unmet Demand Collection operates over 2 weeks; in 1999–2000 it was conducted from 11 to 24 November. This collection measures the level of unmet demand for SAAP services by collecting information about requests for substantial support or accommodation that could not be provided by SAAP agencies.

- The Casual Client Collection is also run over 2 weeks each year and consists of information about all people receiving SAAP support lasting less than 1 hour, termed 'one-off assistance'. For each casual contact the types of one-off assistance provided are recorded. In 1999–2000, the collection ran from 18 to 31 May.
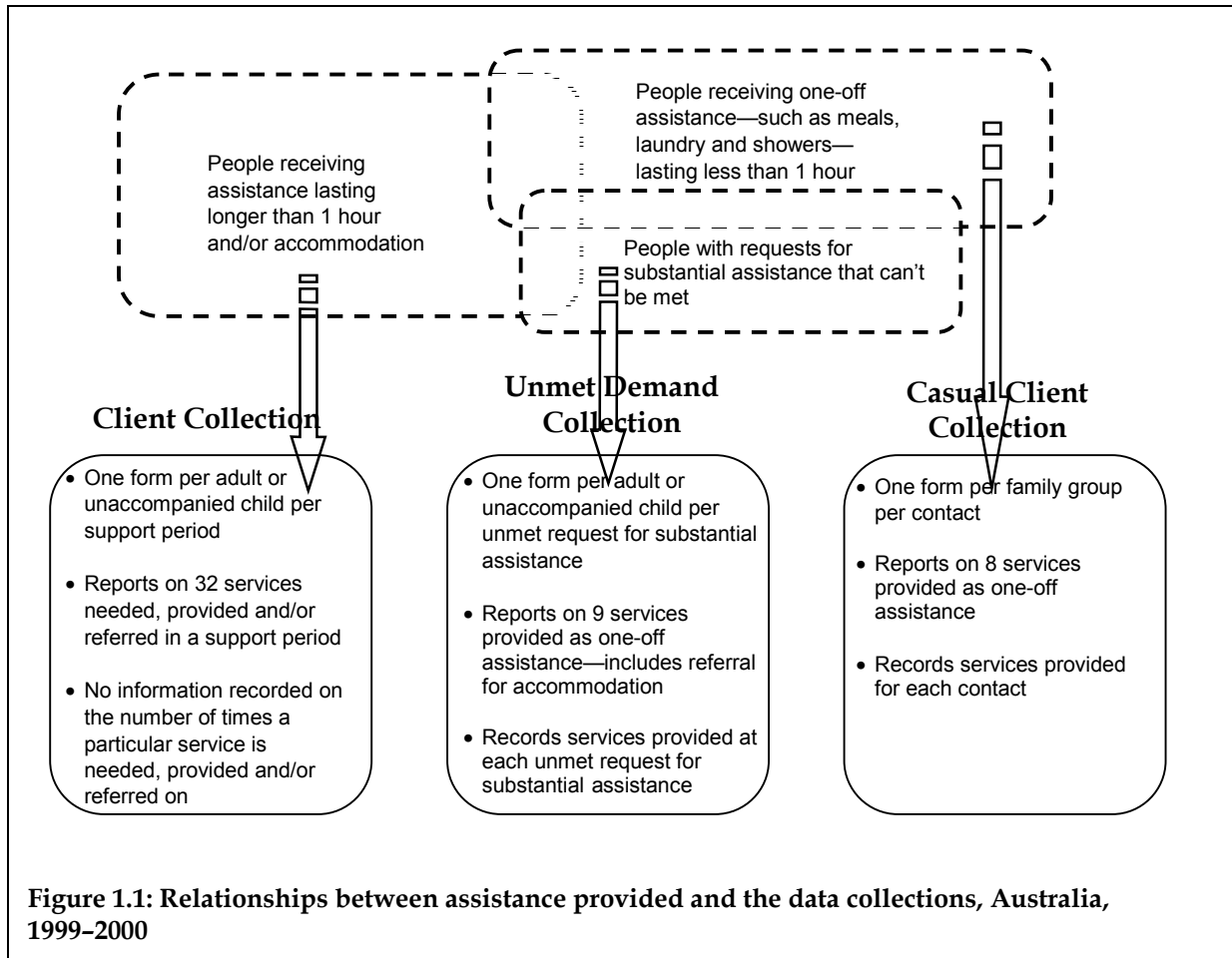
The forms used in each of these collections are shown in Appendix 3.

Figure 1.1 shows the relationships between assistance provided by SAAP agencies and the data collected on this assistance. As is apparent, there are overlaps between the Unmet Demand Collection and both the Client Collection and the Casual Client Collection. An Unmet Demand Collection form is filled out by agencies each time a homeless adult or unaccompanied child requests assistance, either for accommodation or substantial support, during the collection period and that assistance cannot be provided by an agency. Often in such cases agencies may be able to provide one-off assistance, and information is also collected about this. An Unmet Demand Collection form may also be filled out for an existing client of a SAAP agency if that client also had an unmet request for ongoing support or accommodation at another SAAP agency. Furthermore, a Casual Client Collection form may be filled out for an existing client if that client also receives one-off assistance from another agency—a soup kitchen, for example.

When examining the extent of assistance provided and demand unmet, two main points concerning the data need to be noted:

- Among other things, the Client Collection obtains information on assistance that was needed and whether that assistance was provided and/or referred on for existing clients. Such requested services can be reported only once for a client: the total number of times a particular service is requested, provided or referred is not recorded. For example, a client may receive financial assistance three times in a support period, but the collection shows only that financial assistance was provided, not that it was provided three times. The computer-based data-collection tool has the potential to overcome this limitation on recording data.

- The Casual Client Collection collects information on all cases where one-off assistance is provided, irrespective of whether the person receiving that assistance requests more substantial support or accommodation. Consequently, one-off help provided to those who sought more substantial assistance is recorded in both the Casual Client Collection and the Unmet Demand Collection. Note, however, that the methodology and the

reference period for the Casual Client Collection differ from those for the Unmet Demand Collection—the former obtains information about services provided to each family group in May, whereas the latter obtains information about unmet requests for each adult or unaccompanied child in November.

People receiving assistance lasting longer than 1 hour and/or accommodation

People receiving one-off assistance—such as meals, laundry and showers— lasting less than 1 hour

People with requests for substantial assistance that can't be met

Client Collection

- One form per adult or unaccompanied child per support period

- Reports on 32 services needed, provided and/or referred in a support period

- No information recorded on the number of times a particular service is needed, provided and/or referred on

Unmet Demand Collection

- One form per adult or unaccompanied child per unmet request for substantial assistance

- Reports on 9 services provided as one-off assistance—includes referral for accommodation

- Records services provided at each unmet request for substantial assistance

Casual Client Collection

- One form per family group per contact

- Reports on 8 services provided as one-off assistance

- Records services provided for each contact

Figure 1.1: Relationships between assistance provided and the data collections, Australia, 1999–2000

When examining unmet demand in this report, analysis of unmet requests for substantial assistance is restricted to instances in which individuals approached an appropriate agency (that is, the individual fitted the agency's target group and the requested service was offered by that agency) and where the individual *did not refuse* an offer of support. Only unmet requests that meet these criteria are considered *valid* and so can be included in the analysis (see Glossary). This approach assumes that requests at an inappropriate agency are redirected to an appropriate one. While this may generally be the case, not all approaches to inappropriate agencies can be redirected—for example, an appropriate agency may, for reasons such as distance or occupancy rates, be inaccessible. Consequently, the number of valid unmet requests is underestimated to the extent that invalid requests cannot be redirected. In the November 1999 collection it is estimated that 5,420 of the 7,390 reported unmet requests were at appropriate agencies and did not involve a refusal of assistance (Tables 3.1 and 4.4).

As mentioned, a proportion of people who make an unsuccessful request for assistance might subsequently receive that assistance from another SAAP agency. Alternatively, people may have their needs met by other means and no longer require SAAP assistance. How often

this happens cannot at present be measured. Further, a person can make several requests for the same assistance. This range of possibilities means that it is very difficult to measure the level of overall unmet demand and the number of people involved and that it is currently not possible to estimate a turn-away rate for SAAP agencies.

Because of these difficulties, various estimation techniques are applied to data from the Unmet Demand Collection to improve the estimates. The methods used to derive the number of valid unmet requests for assistance and the number of potential clients that made these requests are described in Appendix 2. Changes to the collection aimed at resolving some of these problems are being implemented and will allow better examination of unmet demand in the future.