



## **YOUTH HOMELESSNESS IN AUSTRALIA**

**Approximately 44,000 young Australians under 25 years are homeless on any given night.**

When thinking about young people who are experiencing homelessness, we often hear the term “street kids” and “runaways” but this is not the reality. Most young people experiencing homelessness are hidden from view and aren’t homeless by choice.

Every day in our “lucky country”, disadvantaged young people as young as 12 years become homeless. It’s a grave misconception that young people become homeless by choice. The reality is vastly different. A young person may experience many harms in their life, such as the breakdown of family relationships, mental illness, domestic violence, unemployment and parental drug and alcohol abuse. When this is combined with a severely overcrowded home it leaves young people without the physical and emotional space needed to deal with the effects of their experiences.

The issues that lead someone to become homeless are complex and varied. For at-risk young people, their lives have become emotionally and often, physically unbearable. Their home life may be burdened by the disadvantages of poverty, neglect, abuse, unemployment, substance abuse, health complications, disability and mental illness. This cycle of events cause some young people to feel there is no other option, but to leave. They are not ready, have nowhere to go and become isolated from mainstream society.

### **Why is it so important to resolve youth homelessness?**

Research has shown that those who first experience homelessness at a young age are more likely to experience persistent homelessness in adulthood. Homelessness has large costs to the Australian community in terms of health, justice and community services and this cost (of parents working, with some young people born into a fourth generation of poverty and unemployment).

The rising costs of housing, both in terms of the purchase price and private rental, means generations are facing the prospect of being locked out of home ownership. We need to increase the supply of affordable rental and home purchase dwellings to ensure young people can continue to access the housing market. Young people can face greater discrimination in the housing market than other groups due to a lack of rental references and fewer financial resources, making accessing private rental housing more difficult. Private rental liaison programs can be an important solution.

## Homelessness - the data

On any given night around 1 in 200 people are homeless. 42% of those who are homeless are under the age of 25.

Approximately 44,000 young Australians under 25 are homeless on any given night. The breakdown of young people who are homeless by age group and State and Territory is as follows:

	NSW	VIC	Qld	ACT	NT	SA	TAS	WA	National
<b>19 to 24</b>	4,277	3,834	2,627	255	1,947	824	202	1,346	15,312
<b>12 to 18</b>	2,642	2,283	2,025	211	2,000	626	193	934	10,914
<b>Under 12</b>	3,632	3,638	3,432	289	4,183	939	236	1,493	17,842

2011 Census of Housing and Population conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### Why do some people say 'people experiencing homelessness'?

People working in the homelessness sector often say "people experiencing homelessness" instead of the homeless or homeless people. This is because for most people homelessness is an experience (often short term) not a life sentence. Saying "experiencing homelessness" is one of the first steps to changing the perception of homelessness and recognises that the person comes before the situation.

### Why are young people homeless?

There is no one reason; homelessness is often a result of a number of complex issues which can include:

- The chronic shortage of affordable and available rental housing
- Domestic and family violence
- Intergenerational poverty
- Severe and persistent mental illness and psychological distress
- Exiting state care
- Severe overcrowding/housing crisis
- Living in 'severely' crowded dwellings
- Supported accommodation for the homeless
- Staying temporarily with other households
- Staying in boarding houses
- Living in improvised dwellings, tents or sleeping out
- Staying in other temporary lodging.

### Where can the young homeless go?

- Living in 'severely' crowded dwellings
- Supported accommodation for the homeless
- Staying temporarily with other households
- Staying in boarding houses
- Living in improvised dwellings, tents or sleeping out
- Staying in other temporary lodging.

## What is being done to help? What is the federal government doing?

Most federal government funding for the homelessness sector is provided through the states and territories under two agreements:

- The National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA); and
- The National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH)

Both the NAHA and the NPAH are in place to achieve sustainable housing and social inclusion for people who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness. However, the two agreements structure and purposes are quite different. There are around 1,300 organisations around Australia funded under these two agreements.

## What are the state/territory governments doing?

The federal government provides the state and territory governments with funding (under the NAHA and NPAH). The states and territories manage this funding. State and territory governments can also use their own funds. The NPAH requires joint funding from the states/territories, whereas the NAHA does not.

## What are not for profit organisations doing?

Not-for-profit organisations play a very important role in helping people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. There are a large number of charitable organisations supported by the Property Industry Foundation which provide a range of services to help youth homelessness:

- accommodation services
- collection of food, clothing and essential needs
- advocacy services
- advice
- financial support
- skills and employment services
- health services

### References

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