

Australian Homelessness Monitor 2018

Launch
HOUSING

Authors: Hal Pawson,
Cameron Parsell,
Peter Saunders,
Trish Hill and
Edgar Liu



About Launch Housing

Launch Housing is a Melbourne based, secular and independent community agency formed in July 2015. Launch Housing's mission is to end homelessness. With a combined history of over 75 years serving Melbourne's community, Launch Housing provides high quality housing, support, education and employment services to thousands of people across 14 sites in metropolitan Melbourne. Launch Housing also drives social policy change, advocacy, research and innovation.

About the authors

The research in this report was conducted by:

Professor Hal Pawson

(City Futures Research Centre, University of New South Wales, Sydney)

Associate Professor Cameron Parsell

(Institute for Social Science Research, University of Queensland, Brisbane)

Professor Peter Saunders

(Social Policy Research Centre, University of New South Wales, Sydney)

Dr Trish Hill

(Social Policy Research Centre, University of New South Wales, Sydney)

Dr Edgar Liu

(City Futures Research Centre, University of New South Wales, Sydney)

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Launch Housing: 68 Oxford Street, Collingwood, Victoria 3066

T: 03 9288 9600 **F:** 03 9288 9601 **launchhousing.org.au**

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Foreword

The Australian Homelessness Monitor 2018 is the first independent analysis examining the changes in the scale and nature of homelessness in Australia, as well as its social, economic and policy drivers.

It is inspired by the ground-breaking UK Homelessness Monitor commissioned since 2011 by Crisis UK and funded by Crisis and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. We are especially grateful to Ligia Teixeira from Crisis UK who was generous with her expertise, time and support in the early stages of planning our own Homelessness Monitor.

Launch Housing is proud to have partnered with the University of NSW and the University of Queensland for this first-of-its-kind authoritative insight into the current state of homelessness in Australia. Drawing on the work of prominent UK researchers such as Fitzpatrick and colleagues, who were involved with the original UK Homelessness Monitor, the report details the complexity of the causes of homelessness, but also demonstrates that sound policy and programs prevent people experiencing or continuing to experience homelessness.

Drawing on statistical analysis, it considers the consequences of the global financial crisis, the growing shortfall of affordable housing, decreases in welfare payments and increases in breaching and sanctions, higher rates of domestic and family violence, increases in older Australians experiencing homelessness, and many of the other difficulties people may face in trying to access or maintain a home. Over the past five years, homelessness has increased nationally by 14%, and rough sleeping by 20%. The past decade also saw an 88% increase in those affected by overcrowding (up to three bedrooms too few to adequately accommodate resident needs).

The Monitor also shows how policies and programs can — and do— make a difference. In Victoria, for example, there was only a 3% increase in rough sleeping whereas NSW saw a 35% increase. The difference is likely related to well-resourced programs targeting rough sleeping like Housing First, Street to Home and Rough Sleepers Initiative. But successful programs only work if there is enough affordable housing available.

I'd like to thank all of the researchers for their hard work on this crucial report: Professor Hal Pawson (City Futures Research Centre, University of New South Wales, Sydney, also one of the lead researchers of the UK Homelessness Monitor); Associate Professor Cameron Parsell (Institute for Social Science Research, University of Queensland, Brisbane); Professor Peter Saunders (Social Policy Research Centre, University of New South Wales, Sydney); Dr Trish Hill (Social Policy Research Centre, University of New South Wales, Sydney); and Dr Edgar Liu (City Futures Research Centre, University of New South Wales, Sydney).

I want to also acknowledge the support provided by the ABS, Housing NSW and Council to Homeless Persons.

Thank you to the Launch Housing Board of Directors, for their vision in supporting the Monitor. I would especially like to acknowledge Professor Tony Dalton whose expertise was invaluable in guiding the project.

I would like to thank the Launch Housing research team for their great work supporting the Monitor. Nicola Ballenden, Launch Housing's former General Manager of Research, Service Development and Advocacy first came across the UK Monitor and was instrumental in bringing the concept to Launch Housing. Dr Andrew Hollows, Launch Housing's current Executive General Manager of Research, Policy and Service Development, has been the key driver in bringing it to fruition. Violet Kolar, Launch Housing's Manager of Research, has also played a vital role in managing the project.

Finally, this work is dedicated to all those at risk of or experiencing homelessness. We hope this tool not only helps explain the complexities of homelessness but more importantly shows that it is not inevitable. With good policy and sound investments, we can end homelessness.

Tony Keenan



CEO, Launch Housing

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List of acronyms

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics	SAHF	Social and Affordable Housing Fund
ACOSS	Australian Council of Social Service	SE	south east
ACT	Australian Capital Territory	SHS	Specialist Homelessness Services
AHC	after housing costs	SIH	Survey of Income and Housing
AHM	Australian Homelessness Monitor	SPP	Single Parent Payment
AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare	SPRC	Social Policy Research Centre (UNSW)
BHC	before housing costs	UK	United Kingdom
COAG	Council of Australian Governments	UKHM	UK Homelessness Monitor
CRA	Commonwealth Rent Assistance	UNSW	University of New South Wales
DSP	Disability Support Pension	VIC	Victoria
GDP	gross domestic product	WA	Western Australia
GFC	global financial crisis		
HA	Homelessness Australia		
HAP	Homelessness Action Plan		
HILDA	Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia		
HNSW	Housing NSW		
ISSR	Institute for Social Science Research (University of Queensland)		
NAHA	National Affordable Housing Agreement		
NDIS	National Disability Insurance Scheme		
NEET	not in employment, education or training		
NHHA	National Housing and Homelessness Agreement		
NPAH	National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness		
NPARIH	National Partnership for Remote Indigenous Housing		
NRAS	National Rental Affordability Scheme		
NSA	Newstart Allowance		
NSW	New South Wales		
NT	Northern Territory		
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development		
QLD	Queensland		
RTA	Residential Tenancies Act		
SA	South Australia		
SA2	Statistical Area 2		

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Executive Summary

Australia's homelessness problem is growing.

116,000

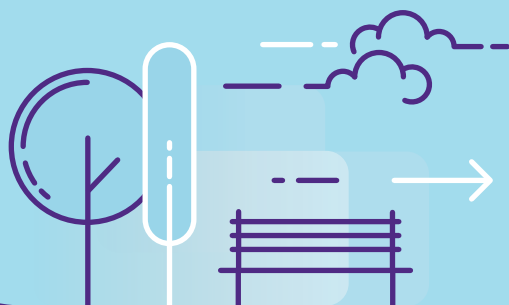
Australians
were homeless
on Census
night 2016.



That's a
14%
increase from
2011 to 2016

8,200

were sleeping rough on Census night 2016,
20% higher than 2011.



This study provides an independent analysis of homelessness in Australia. It analyses changes in the scale and nature of the problem and investigates the incidence of the many social, economic and policy drivers of homelessness.

The findings of this study can be summarised in terms of:

- (1) the changing scope and pattern of homelessness
- (2) the nature of broader social and economic drivers that condition the risk of homelessness, especially for some groups such as low-income households, and
- (3) the particular relevance of policy at federal, state and territory levels in both exacerbating and easing homelessness.

This is especially the case in respect to housing policies, income support policies and policies that support homelessness programs. Attention is also given in the study to Indigenous homelessness with a particular emphasis on remote communities.

We demonstrate how public policies, particularly housing and welfare policies, are firstly, critical drivers of homelessness in Australia, and secondly, areas that represent significant opportunities to demonstrably reduce homelessness. Thus, drawing on the prominent UK researchers such as Fitzpatrick and colleagues, who were involved with the original UK Homelessness Monitor, the report acknowledges the complexity of the causes of homelessness, but it similarly identifies a suite of public policy changes that can improve the housing and life outcomes of people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

ES1: Key findings

The most important findings from our analysis include:

- After a decade to 2011 which saw the rate of homelessness fairly stable, the past five years witnessed a marked increase. ABS Census estimates show the overall national homelessness total rising by some 14% in the five years to 2016. Data on people requesting help from homelessness services indicate a growth rate of 22% over the same period. Even on the lower ABS Census-based estimate, overall homelessness numbers at the national scale ran well ahead of general population increase for the same period.
- Experiencing living conditions in some cases only slightly better than those officially defined as

'homeless', Australia's 'marginally housed' population increased more rapidly than both overall population growth and homelessness between 2011-16. The number of marginally housed people increased by 24% during this time.

- The changing pattern of recent homelessness has been highly variable across Australia:
 - At the state and territory level, ABS Census estimates for the 2011-16 period show numbers grew fastest in New South Wales — by 37% in numerical terms, and 27% after accounting for mainstream population increase. And, while rates of increase were similar to the national average in Victoria and Queensland, growth rates were lower or — in three jurisdictions (ACT, NT, and WA) — slightly below zero.
 - Homelessness has increased the most in capital cities. Overall, homelessness has been increasing fastest in Sydney (up 48% in the five years to 2016), in Darwin (up 36%) and in Brisbane (up 32%). Generally, rates of increase have been highest in the inner areas of the five main cities (e.g. 53% in inner Sydney). However, rises well above the national norm were also seen in the outer suburbs of Sydney (39%), Melbourne (22%) and Brisbane (25%).
- According to the ABS Census, rough sleeping — the most visible and extreme form of homelessness — has risen at a faster rate than homelessness overall since 2011:
 - At the national scale, rough sleeping¹ grew by 20% in the five years to 2016. And although offset by periodic initiatives to provide secure, affordable supported housing for chronic rough sleepers, five-year rates of increase in the cities of Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide exceeded the national norm. This was especially true in Melbourne where the 2016 City of Melbourne StreetCount showed numbers up by more than 200% over this period.
 - At the state and territory level, rough sleeping has recently increased fastest in South Australia (up 50% during 2011-16), in NSW (35%) and the Northern Territory (29%).
- Although there has been a disproportionate rise in rough sleeping, the biggest increase in homelessness over the past few years is attributed to the growing problem of severe overcrowding — that is, people crammed into dwellings with at least four bedrooms fewer than required. The number of people in this situation grew by 23% in the five years to 2016.

1 That is, the ABS homelessness category 'persons living in improvised dwellings, tents or sleeping out'.

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- Rising rates of 'severe overcrowding' are only one element within a broader trend of growing 'residential cramming' at the lower end of the housing market. The past decade saw an 88% increase in those affected by overcrowding to the extent of living in homes with at least three bedrooms too few for resident needs.
- Encouragingly, ABS Census estimates show that, bucking the overall trend, Indigenous homelessness fell by 9% in the five years to 2016. However, the rate of Indigenous homelessness remained 10 times that of the non-Indigenous population, and Indigenous representation in the rough sleeping population rose disproportionately.
- Older people in the 55-74 bracket were the fastest growing age cohort within the overall homeless population. In the decade to 2016, this combined group grew in number by 55% — compared with the 30% increase for all age groups. Similarly, the past three years saw a rise of 26% in homelessness service users where 'old age' was recorded as an 'associated issue' — double the overall increase in homelessness service users (13%) over this period, and the highest growth rate for any of the 'associated issues' listed in the relevant AIHW typology.
- Records kept by homelessness service provider agencies indicate the most widely experienced situations giving rise to homelessness:
 - Domestic and family violence is the most commonly reported 'main reason for seeking assistance' — 27% of service users in 2016-17. There was also a 24% increase in the previous two years.
 - Nearly a quarter of 2016-17 service users (24%) reported their main reason for seeking help as 'housing crisis'. Moreover, recording an increase of 32%, this 'main reason for homelessness' category grew faster than any other over the previous two years.
 - The fastest growing population group among homelessness service users is older people. Their numbers increased by more than a quarter in the two years to 2016-17.
- Although not universally the case, recent government policy initiatives have more often exacerbated rather than ameliorated homelessness:
 - Among homelessness services agencies responding to our online survey, 71% believed that recent Australian Government changes to the welfare benefits system and/or Centrelink practices had aggravated homelessness.
 - Just over a third of survey respondents (36%) believed that recent policy changes or initiatives at the state and territory level had helped to tackle homelessness. At the same time, just over half (53%) reported that the past five years had seen policy changes enacted that had worsened the problem.
- Recent trends in government housing expenditure and in government supported housing provision have been highly problematic:
 - Despite the ageing of the public housing stock and the ongoing intensification of unmet housing need, capital investment in social housing fell by 8% in the four years to 2016-17. Meanwhile, having increased by 29% over the same period (in real terms), annual homelessness services expenditure is on track to exceed \$1 billion by 2020.
 - The past five years has seen the national social housing stock growing by only half the rate needed simply to keep pace with overall population growth.

Table ES1: Homelessness and related trends: Australia 2011-16

Indicator	2011	2016	% change
Homelessness – overall: snapshot total (000s) (1)	102	116	14
Homelessness service users – no. recorded during year (000s) (2)	236	288	22
Rough sleepers – sub-set of homelessness overall (000s) (3)	6.8	8.2	20
Overall national population (millions) (4)	22.7	24.6	8
Social housing provision (dwellings – 000s) (5)	420	433	3
Percentage of low-income tenants paying unaffordable rents (6)	40.7	44.2	9
Govt expenditure: homelessness services (\$M – 2016-17 values) (7)	634	817	29
Govt expenditure: social housing investment (\$M – 2016-17 values) (8)	1420	1319	-7

Sources: (1) ABS Census; (2) AIHW Specialist Homelessness Services statistics — data for 2011-12 and 2016-17; (3) ABS Census; (4) ABS population estimates series; (5) Productivity Commission Report on Government Services — data for 2012 and 2017; (6) ABS Survey of Housing Occupancy and Costs — data for 2012 and 2017; (7) Productivity Commission Report on Government Services — data for 2012-13 and 2016-17; (8) Productivity Commission Report on Government Services — data for 2012-13 and 2016-17.

ES2: Socio-economic trends potentially underlying changing homelessness rates

At the national scale there is little sign of recently rising rates of poverty or unemployment that could feed through into escalating homelessness. At the same time, however, a number of other socio-economic trends that could have this effect have been apparent over the past few years. These most notably include:

- The rising proportion of social security benefit recipients dependent on Newstart Allowance (NSA) which pays out at lower rates than other benefits such as the Disability Support Pension and the (Single) Parenting Payment.
- The fivefold increase in the number of benefit sanctions recorded between 2011 and 2016; these can involve complete cessation of payments when a claimant breaches Centrelink conditions.
- Growing rates of incarceration which are rapidly inflating rates of prisoner discharge — a point at which many are highly vulnerable to homelessness.
- Rising numbers of young people leaving out-of-home care which is a trend with similar implications.
- A rising reported incidence of domestic violence, at least in Victoria where police data show a 20% increase in logged incidents in recent years.

Beyond this, the past few years have seen many parts of Australia in the grip of a property price boom with problematic consequences for lower income groups. Some parts of the country, notably WA, have seen more subdued housing market conditions since 2011. Even here, however, survey evidence shows growing numbers of lower income renters facing unaffordable rents that will increase their risk of homelessness.

A focus on lower income renters is particularly relevant because it puts attention on that part of the overall population more vulnerable to being pushed into homelessness by housing market pressures. Because it is likely to mean having to juggle between paying for housing and for other essential expenditures, a low-income tenant having to contend with an 'unaffordable rent' is at a higher risk of incurring rent arrears that could ultimately lead to tenancy termination.

Moreover, evidence suggests that Australia's private rental market is subject to longer term structural trends that are progressively eroding the scope for lower income households to obtain affordable housing. For example, in keeping with existing national research evidence on the shrinkage of low-rent accommodation in the period 1996-2011 (Hulse & Yates 2017), 2006-16 data for NSW shows a narrowing in the market such that the lower quartile value is moving towards the median value.

ES3: Government policies potentially impacting on homelessness

Consistent with published literature, evidence from our online survey and key stakeholder interviews highlights a range of recent policy moves that have exacerbated homelessness, although some initiatives with the potential to improve the problem have also been identified.

People who rely on social security benefits, particularly Newstart and Youth Allowance, are widely considered at great risk of homelessness and housing stress. The failure to adequately index these payments, as in the case of Commonwealth Rent Assistance, has been progressively increasing the homelessness vulnerability of eligible recipients. Also of significance as a key driver of homelessness is the long-term erosion of social housing. Likewise, for agencies looking to assist people out of homelessness, the intensifying shortage of social housing and affordable private rental properties is making this task increasingly difficult.

On the other hand, although on a scale grossly incongruent with need, recent state government plans to expand social and affordable rental housing in Queensland, Victoria, and New South Wales should be acknowledged. Although extremely limited, these initiatives demonstrate ongoing government commitment to invest in an affordable housing supply as a response to housing needs, rather than focusing available resources solely on temporary and crisis responses which all too often provide no long-term solution, nor even a route to such outcomes.

Short-term funding agreements for homelessness services have negatively affected the sector by undermining the function of the service system. However, plans to institutionalise long-term agreements on Australian Government support for homelessness services through the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement hold promise to achieve better housing outcomes for those experiencing homelessness who are seeking help.

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Also on a more optimistic note, evidence is established on how Housing First, Street to Home, and permanent supportive housing models have created sustainable and immediate housing outcomes for people sleeping rough and with experiences of chronic homelessness. The success of these models has been to demonstrate that long-term rough sleeping exists because we have not changed our systems to enable people to exit homelessness. These models successfully end homelessness for people historically often considered 'too hard to house'. To be effective such programs must:

- be adequately resourced to provide ongoing purposeful street outreach
- have sufficient immediate access to housing, and
- be able to draw on support services for the period required.

Against the backdrop of Housing First, Street to Home, and supportive housing constituting successful Australian models to demonstrably reduce homelessness, the programs are hamstrung by limited social housing stock, a reliance on homelessness accommodation (the antithesis to Housing First), limited resourcing and institutional arrangements to enable the ongoing delivery of support services to people post-homelessness.

ES4: Indigenous homelessness in northern Australia

The 2016 ABS Census results indicate that Indigenous homelessness has decreased since 2011. It would seem this is partly the result of a new, dedicated affordable housing supply funded through the flagship NPARIH program and the Remote Housing Strategy. However, the scale of the homelessness problem affecting many remote Indigenous communities remains huge. The Northern Territory has the highest rate of homelessness in Australia, and this is predominantly explained by the extent of severe overcrowding in remote Indigenous communities. Notwithstanding recent progress, this problem continues to represent a fundamental barrier to the achievement of equity in health, social, and economic domains.

Original fieldwork undertaken within this research also confirms existing evidence on the fluid link between Indigenous people experiencing homelessness in remote Indigenous communities and Indigenous people experiencing homelessness in public spaces and crowded and temporary accommodation in regional towns and cities in northern Australia.

Although many Indigenous people experience street homelessness in regional towns and cities as they temporarily access services, it is wrong to interpret this as a purely temporary discomfort experienced by those concerned. The disproportionate rate of severe overcrowding in remote Indigenous communities means that, for many, travelling to regional towns and cities does not constitute a move from being securely and safely housed to homelessness; rather they have moved from one form of homelessness to another. This has implications for policies such as Return to Country.

ES5: Recorded homelessness trends

Homelessness in Australia has recently increased at a rate considerably in excess of the mainstream population increase. In the last five years for which data was available (2011-16), published ABS Census figures suggest that overall homelessness rose by 14% in absolute terms and by 5% in population-adjusted terms. However, although less commonly cited, data drawn from administrative sources suggest that homelessness numbers may have grown by 22% over a comparable period. These figures come from the Australian Institute for Health and Welfare (AIHW) Specialist Homelessness Services collection, a repository of records on people seeking/receiving services provided by these agencies across the country.

Triangulation of ABS and AIHW statistics at a state and territory level shows a degree of consistency in the trends over time apparent from the two systems. However, a discrepancy between the two data sources regarding Indigenous homelessness numbers might possibly suggest that the 2016 ABS Census statistics have understated the true increase in homelessness seen in the 2011-16 period.

While it has undoubtedly risen significantly at the national scale, recent change in the incidence of homelessness has varied substantially by state and territory, and by settlement type. ABS Census-based 2011-16 estimates suggest that homelessness fell in three of Australia's eight jurisdictions (ACT, NT and WA) while increases in the other five jurisdictions varied from 6% in Tasmania to 37% in NSW. Even accounting for mainstream population growth, ABS Census-enumerated homelessness increased in NSW by 27%. Meanwhile, in terms of settlement type, rising homelessness rates have been substantially concentrated in capital cities. In Sydney and Brisbane rates grew most significantly in inner suburban areas, although in Melbourne the fastest increases were registered in outer suburbs.

Overall, capital city homelessness rates remain highest in Darwin, although Sydney's 48% increase in raw numbers was the largest of any state or territory capital.

In terms of the distinct forms of homelessness, as defined by the ABS, most of the increase in overall numbers 2011-16 arose from rising rates of 'severe overcrowding'. While this increased in all jurisdictions barring NT and WA, the most serious increases were in Victoria (48%) and NSW (74%). However, overcrowding at this extreme level (the shortfall of at least four bedrooms in a home) is only one facet of a wider problem of growing overcrowding that meets the ABS definition of 'homelessness' or falls within the ABS category 'marginal housing' (the shortfall of at least three bedrooms). Combining these two cohorts, the number of people experiencing serious overcrowding has increased by 77% in the past decade.

Another important homelessness sub-category that has seen a recently disproportionate increase, according to ABS Census data, is rough sleeping — in ABS terminology 'persons living in improvised dwellings, tents, or sleeping out'. ABS Census numbers indicate rough sleeping has grown by 20% in the five years to 2016. Again, rates of increase vary substantially by jurisdiction — Tasmania is at the lower end of the range (an 11% reduction) and South Australia is at the top (a 50% increase). In contrast with their declining recorded representation in the overall homelessness total, Indigenous rough sleepers increased disproportionately over the 2011-16 period, according to ABS Census data.

Homelessness services user data suggest that recent increases in overall homelessness have been substantially driven by rising numbers of (primarily) women in need of accommodation or other help due to domestic violence, due to the 'housing crisis' or due to 'housing affordability stress'.

Overcrowded accommodation is on the rise.

51,000+

Australians were living in severely overcrowded housing on Census night 2016.



That's a
23%
increase from
2011 to 2016



In severely overcrowded housing there's no personal living space or privacy.

Cramped living negatively affects wellbeing and outcomes.

Executive Summary

ES6: Conclusion

The rising number of people without homes across large parts of the country over the past five years represents an injustice and reflects a failure to follow through on a visionary policy aspiration from our recent past. Many will recall that 10 years ago the Australian Government partnered with the states and territories and collectively set out to radically overhaul homelessness and affordable housing policy across the country. Key commitments included the setting of headline goals to achieve measurable reductions in homelessness through a strategy aimed at early intervention; improving the nature, effectiveness, and connectivity of the service system, and breaking the cycle of homelessness (Australian Government 2008). Exemplified by the launch of affordable housing programs — the National Rental Affordability Scheme (NRAS) and the National Program for Remote Indigenous Housing (NPARIH) — at that time homelessness was recognised as a systemic problem that called for strategic investment in long-term affordable housing as well as enhanced provision of emergency housing services.

Regrettably, these policy priorities have been downgraded by successive governments. The rise in homelessness is substantially a product of policy inaction. This has seen, on the one hand, stalled growth in systematic change to increase the supply of housing affordable to low-income people; and on the other, increasing expenditure on homelessness services. This policy stance is underpinned by an abiding but misplaced belief that market forces can be relied upon to provide suitable and affordable housing for disadvantaged Australians, just as much as for all other citizens.

More positively, the past couple of years have seen tentative indications of the Australian Government's re-commitment to an active role in enabling the expansion of affordable rental housing. As announced in the 2017 Budget, plans to establish a new National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA) between the federal, state and territory governments intimated a possible new Canberra-initiated drive to expand affordable housing and to reduce homelessness.

However, especially given the multi-dimensional causation of homelessness, reversing current national trends will be a highly challenging objective, even for a government with an unqualified commitment to pursue such a goal. This research demonstrates that many social, economic and housing market trajectories have been trending in directions likely to increase — not ameliorate — the scale of the problem. This highlights the policy challenge facing all governments across Australia and the need for a concerted and aligned effort on housing policy, income support measures, and policies that support homelessness programs such as those directed towards rough sleepers and domestic violence.

Looking to the future, the prospect of demonstrably reducing the incidence of homelessness requires the Australian Government to:

- re-confirm recognition of homelessness as a social ill that cannot be ignored
- re-engage with the problem through a coherent strategic vision to reduce the scale of homelessness by a measurable amount within a defined period
- re-commit to government support sufficient to ensure that provision of social and affordable housing, at the very least, keeps pace with growing need.

01

Introduction

1.1 Aims and origin of the research

This study provides an independent analysis of homelessness in Australia. It analyses the changing scale and nature of the problem and investigates the incidence of the many social, economic and policy factors that potentially drive homelessness.

In analysing trends in the extent and complexion of homelessness across the country, the report draws on a range of statistical sources, both official and otherwise. These include official statistics collected by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), rough sleeper enumerations undertaken by local councils as well as data collated by advocacy bodies. Central to the report's assessment of the changing pattern of homelessness are the statistics generated by the 2016 ABS Census, published in early 2018. With such data being produced on the five-yearly census cycle, the main focus of the study is the pattern of change observable in the period from 2011 to 2016.

The study is strongly inspired by the United Kingdom Homelessness Monitor (UKHM) project, initiated in 2010 and funded by Crisis UK and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. Australian Homelessness Monitor research team leader, Professor Hal Pawson, was a UKHM co-founder and has co-authored all of the 15 UKHM reports on England and the other three UK nations subsequently published by Crisis UK². Although adapted to accommodate important dissimilarities in social, economic, and policy contexts³, the Australian Homelessness Monitor emulates the UKHM model in its remit and aims, as well as in its research methods and reporting structure.

2 See: <https://www.crisis.org.uk/ending-homelessness/homelessness-knowledge-hub/homelessness-monitor/>

3 Key features of the Australian context differing from that in the UK include the absence of a statutory homelessness framework, the more limited provision of rental assistance for lower income earners and the highly disproportionate incidence of economic disadvantage and housing stress affecting Indigenous Australians. Also, while many Commonwealth social security benefit rates are set at relatively low levels and some entitlements have recently experienced reform, there has been no Australian equivalent to the successive waves of 'austerity' benefit cuts rolled out in the UK since 2010.

1.2 Policy context

Far from being a marginal issue in what is usually considered a very well-housed country, homelessness is a significant and — as illustrated by this report — a growing social problem for Australia. As a rule, homelessness evokes only episodic public and media concern. While anxieties around housing affordability are rarely far from the headlines, stories are all too often couched as worries about constrained access to tax-advantaged property ownership and all too rarely stress the link between inadequate affordable rental provision and the numbers lacking any place to call home.

As a political issue, homelessness has had little visibility since its brief prominence under Prime Minister Kevin Rudd around the time of his 2008 flagship Homelessness White Paper, *The Road Home* (Australian Government, 2008). This report's publication comes a decade after *The Road Home* and its associated pledge to halve homelessness numbers by 2020 (see Chapter 3). The new thinking and policy programs embodied in *The Road Home* represented a watershed social and policy progression in Australia. Moving beyond a paradigm that saw homelessness as an individual crisis distinct from structural forces, the contemporary policy consensus recognised that achieving measurable reductions in homelessness would require an expanded supply of affordable housing, along with other policy and structural changes to address inequalities, promote economic and social inclusion, and directly address the causal factors.

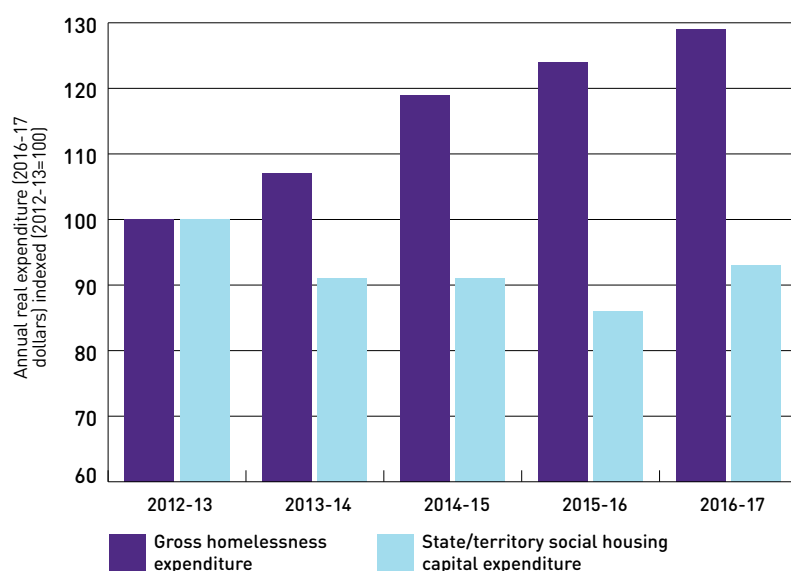
Important funding pledges resulted from *The Road Home*. In particular, the Australian Government commitment to an additional \$800 million on homelessness services over four years which represented a 55% increase on pre-existing funding levels. This was termed a 'down payment' on the plan's 12-year reform agenda. Subsequently, through the National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA) and the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH) the Australian Government has continued to commit significant resources to homelessness alleviation efforts, although the treatment of NPAH as a non-permanent program has resulted in chronic instability for the homelessness services sector.

Introduction

Official statistics on homelessness services expenditure by federal and state governments show a rising trend in recent years. Allowing for inflation, the national total rose from \$634 million in 2011-12 to \$817 million in 2016-17 (2016-17 dollars) (Productivity Commission 2018). Continuation of recent trends will see annual expenditure on such 'emergency services' provision topping \$1 billion (in 2016-17 dollars) by 2020.

Problematically, this trend has coincided with declining capital investment in the social housing sector, see Figure 1.1. Thus, while expenditure on 'emergency services' rose by 29% in the four years to 2016-17, investment fell by 8% in longer-term accommodation that can, for many, provide a lasting solution. Associated with this suppressed level of investment, the slight growth in Australia's social housing provision in the period since 2012 has equated to less than half the rate of population growth (see Figure 3.3, Chapter 3).

Figure 1.1 Recent change in homelessness services expenditure and social housing capital investment - indexed



Source: Productivity Commission Report on Government Services 2018.

Programs associated with the 2008 policy impetus such as A Place to Call Home and Street to Home successfully enabled many people to exit homelessness and achieve sustainable affordable housing. Latterly, though, efforts to achieve lasting progress have been hampered by the disappearance of clear policy ambition at the national level — as embodied in the lack of response to calls for federal government re-commitment to the Rudd homelessness reduction target or something like it (O'Neill 2013; Cooper 2015).

In its initial form, the government that took power in 2013 under Prime Minister Tony Abbott strongly advocated a view that housing and homelessness were primarily state and territory matters and that policy leadership role in these areas was therefore no part of the federal administration's proper function. More recently, however, there have been signs of revived federal interest; for example, in association with the framing of a new federal and state and territory funding agreement to replace the NAHA. As announced in late 2017, eligibility for continued federal resources will be dependent on the state or territory concerned having 'a current, credible homelessness strategy in place' (Parliament of Australia 2017 p7).

1.3 Homelessness conceptualisation and causation

1.3.1 Defining homelessness

In common with the official conception of 'homelessness' embodied in ABS Census definitions, this report adopts a broad interpretation of the term. Thus, while rough sleepers form a prime focus of our attention we also recognise that homelessness extends to a broader population of those occupying insecure or otherwise unsatisfactory housing. As discussed more fully in Section 5.2, the ABS definition (ABS 2012) recognises 'homelessness' as a term applicable to anyone who:

- is entirely roofless, or occupies a dwelling that:
 - is physically inadequate
 - provides no tenure, or only a short and non-extendable tenure
 - enables the resident no control of, and access to, space for social relations.

This broadly scoped definition is consistent with the concept of primary, secondary, tertiary homelessness developed by Chamberlain and MacKenzie (1992). However, the formal ABS definition draws on Shelley Mallett's (2004) important work to extend the Chamberlain and MacKenzie definition by explicitly conceptualising homelessness as the absence of physical resources that enable people to feel at home.

1.3.2 Conceptualising homelessness processes and causation

As noted above, a prime purpose of this report is to chart changing levels of homelessness, and to identify and analyse the factors that underlie such observed trends. In framing our exploration of the research evidence that directly addresses these issues (see Chapters 2-4) we first need to rehearse our understanding of homelessness as a social problem.

Like many other social issues, homelessness is complex and results from a variety of factors including structural, systemic and individual causes. For an individual, loss of suitable accommodation may result from the coincidence of several problematic life events although it may be triggered by a single catastrophic event. It can be viewed in aggregate as a problem that needs to be quantified and addressed, or at the level of an individual person as a process that reflects (and results from) extreme stress, often accompanied by vulnerability and disadvantage.

In this report we draw on the seminal theorising of homelessness articulated by Suzanne Fitzpatrick (2005) and developed as a framework driving the analysis of Homelessness Monitors in the United Kingdom. The recent UK Homelessness Monitor states:

Theoretical, historical and international perspectives indicate that the causation of homelessness is complex, with no single 'trigger' that is either 'necessary' or 'sufficient' for it to occur. Individual, interpersonal and structural factors all play a role — and interact with each other — and the balance of causes differs over time, across countries, and between demographic groups.

With respect to the main structural factors, international comparative research, and the experience of previous UK recessions, suggests that housing market trends and policies have the most direct impact on levels of homelessness, with the influence of labour-market change more likely to be lagged and diffuse, and strongly mediated by welfare arrangements and other contextual factors.

The individual vulnerabilities, support needs, and 'risk-taking' behaviours implicated in some people's homelessness are themselves often, though not always, rooted in the pressures associated with poverty and other forms of structural disadvantage. At the same time, the 'anchor' social relationships which can act as a primary 'buffer' to homelessness, can be put under considerable strain by stressful financial circumstances. (Fitzpatrick et al., 2018: 21)

Other authors concur noting that research on determinants of homelessness has moved toward a general consensus that individual and structural explanations are not mutually exclusive, and theoretical models have been developed that integrate the two types of factors (Byrne et al, 2013).

In subsequent chapters we demonstrate how public policy, particularly housing and welfare policy, are firstly, critical drivers of homelessness in Australia, and secondly, areas that represent significant opportunities to demonstrably reduce homelessness. Thus, drawing on Fitzpatrick and colleagues, the report acknowledges the complexity of the causes of homelessness, but it identifies a suite of public policy changes that can improve the housing and life outcomes of people who are experiencing or are at risk of homelessness.

Introduction

1.4 Research methods

1.4.1 Secondary data analysis

Mainly embodied in Chapters 2 and 5, this research is substantially based on a secondary data analysis focused mainly on published data about (a) homelessness and (b) the wide range of social, economic, and housing market factors that we argue constitute potential drivers of (or risk factors for) homelessness.

As regards the incidence and character of homelessness we rely in the main on the ABS Census and the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) specialist homelessness services series. In terms of potential causal factors the net is much wider, drawing on a range of other ABS and AIHW collections, as well as Melbourne University's Housing, Income and Labour Dynamics Australia (HILDA) survey and administrative data from state, territory and federal governments.

1.4.2 Primary research

The research also involved two primary research components, as elaborated further below:

- in-depth interviews with a wide range of policymakers, service provider representatives and advocacy organisations
- an online survey of service provider organisations (see Appendices 2-4).

We conducted in-depth interviews with 21 key participants across Australia. The interview participant sample was selected to achieve a nation-wide perspective, including participants from Far North Queensland and the remote areas of the Northern Territory as well as inner urban centres. The sample was also identified to capture a wide range of perspectives from both within and outside of government. Table 1.1 presents some detail on interview participants. In Table 1.1 and throughout the report we have selectively concealed organisations and professional roles to maintain anonymity.

Table 1.1: Key stakeholder interviewees

Location	Government	Non-government organisation
Victoria	II	III
New South Wales	II	II
Queensland	I	II
South Australia	I	I
Tasmania	I	I
Western Australia		I
Northern Territory	I	I
Australian Capital Territory		I
Commonwealth of Australia	I	

Sixteen of the interviews were conducted by telephone, while five were face-to-face meetings. The purpose of the in-depth interviews with key actors was to gain on the ground insights into:

1. the nature and extent of homelessness in given locations of Australia
2. changes in nature and extent of homelessness between approximately 2011 and 2017, and
3. policy, economic, and social conditions that have contributed to homelessness, including increasing and reducing the extent of homelessness, as well as changing the nature of homelessness.

To extend the reach of the research, an online survey was used to probe front line service provider perspectives on recent changes in the nature and scale of homelessness across Australia. Here we took our cue from the UKHM (England) research which has, since 2014, included an annual online survey of local authority housing options managers (Fitzpatrick et al., 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018).

Emulating the roughly equivalent UKHM surveys, the AHM questionnaire (see Appendix 3) was designed to tap into service provider organisation's perceptions of:

- recent changes in the scale, nature and causality of homelessness and
- recently enacted or proposed policy developments (whether at the state or national level) potentially significant for homelessness (either in exacerbating or ameliorating the problem).

With the assistance of Homelessness NSW (the state-level peak body for homelessness service provider organisations), the draft questionnaire was piloted with four NSW homelessness services provider organisations.

Organisations suitable for inclusion in the main survey were selected with assistance from the Homelessness Australia (HA) national network of state and territory homelessness sector peak bodies and/or jurisdiction representatives. HA contacts were asked to recommend a selection of service providers in their jurisdiction, with a preference for 'larger agencies with a significant role in assisting people seeking help with housing'. Beyond this, state and territory contacts were advised that survey participants should ideally include a diverse mix of organisations in terms of their metro/non-metro location, and in terms of their specialisation on particular homelessness client groups — e.g. youth, family violence, Indigenous people, and so on.

Through the approach described above, a national dataset of 174 organisations was established. Although not scaled systematically according to the relative population of each jurisdiction, the size of the sample in each state and territory bore some relation to this.

HA contacts were then requested to email the listed organisations in their jurisdiction, on behalf of the research team, to invite their participation in the survey. Email recipients were requested to click on a link to complete the online survey via the UNSW website. Two rounds of survey invitation emails were sent to each state and territory cohort.

With 70 of the 174 invited organisations taking part in the survey, the overall national response rate was 40.2%. Further details on response rates and on the profile of responding organisations are set out in Appendix 3-4. Although participation rates varied somewhat across the country, the two most populous states — NSW and Victoria — recorded rates close to 50%. Given that responding organisations from jurisdictions other than NSW and Victoria were relatively small in number, it was decided that the main geographical framework for survey analysis should group these other states and territories together under the heading 'Rest of Australia'.

1.5 Report structure

Following on from this introduction, Chapter 2 reviews recent social, economic and housing market trends with a possible bearing on homelessness. This chapter is entirely based on our secondary data analysis as detailed above. Next, in Chapter 3, we investigate the federal, state and territory policy developments with a possible bearing on changing levels of homelessness. The primary sources are the key stakeholder in-depth interviews discussed above, complemented by online survey findings.

Next, in Chapter 4, we explore the special factors that affect Indigenous homelessness and assess the effectiveness of the policy measures specifically designed to address the problem as it manifests in remote communities. Chapter 5 analyses data on the changing nature and extent of homelessness across Australia. This is sourced mainly from the ABS Census, from the AIHW specialist homelessness services collection and from local council rough sleeper counts. Finally, in Chapter 6, we draw brief conclusions from our analysis and findings.

02

Recent economic, social and housing market trends

2.1 Chapter overview and structure

As argued in Section 1.3.2, the changing level of homelessness in aggregate is an outcome of socio-economic and housing market trends that influence the numbers of people liable to become homeless, and which also affect the scope for those in this situation to regain suitable accommodation. The main purpose of this chapter is to examine trends in the broad distal (and aggregate) factors that affect the overall economic, social and housing market context in which the other more proximate determinants of homelessness may emerge or reach crisis point. This is not to suggest that every variable examined will have an impact on the scale of homelessness, but rather to review the main economic, social and housing market factors that could potentially do so.

It is important to remember as discussed more fully in Chapter 3 that these economic, social and housing market factors do not operate in a policy vacuum. Rather the operation of housing markets, responses to labour market changes and social issues, such as the incidence of domestic and family violence, are shaped by policy and require a policy response to help mitigate the likelihood of homelessness.

Some restrictions are imposed by data availability, especially in relation to the socio-economic analysis. Where such gaps are problematic, they are identified. In its temporal scope, the analysis focuses especially on the 2011-16 period, since this coincides with the inter-censal period which forms the centre of attention for our analysis of homelessness data in Chapter 5. Where possible, however, we also document medium-term changes since 2005 so that the analysis covers the pre- and post- global financial crisis (GFC) period.

The chapter is structured in three main sections. Firstly, in Section 2.2 we look at the socio-economic drivers of housing insecurity. This begins with an overview of the economic and labour market trends that have been witnessed in Australia over the past 10-15 years. Secondly, in Section 2.2.2 we focus more specifically on the various manifestations and measures of poverty and disadvantage. Thirdly, in Section 2.3, we review relevant social trends — those relating to a range of population groups likely to be particularly vulnerable to homelessness. Finally, in Section 2.4, the main component of the chapter, we present an analysis of recent housing market trends in terms of their potential implications for homelessness pressures in different parts of the country. The chapter's main findings are drawn together in a brief concluding section.

Policy inaction on housing affordability is responsible for increasing homelessness.

29%

increase in spending on homelessness services.



but a
7%

drop in investment in affordable and social housing (2011-2016)

Social housing:

4%

of all dwellings in Australia



18%

of all dwellings in the UK



The rising cost of housing is a key contributor to poverty.

613,000

people have fallen below the poverty line due to high housing costs...

229,000

of whom are children.



Growing pressure on lower income renters paying over

30%

of their income is placing many at increased risk of homelessness.



Recent economic, social and housing market trends

2.2 Socio-economic drivers of housing insecurity

2.2.1 The broad economic and labour market context

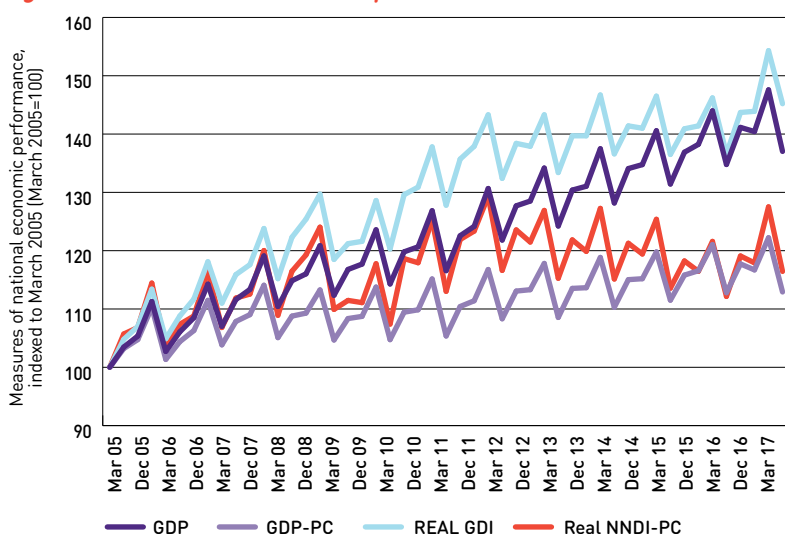
The performance of the economy can affect the emergence and severity of many social problems because it provides the employment opportunities that determine the main source of income (wages and salaries) for the vast majority of people in the working-age population. In an economic downturn jobs become scarcer, unemployment and under-employment rise and more people face financial pressures that can increase their risk of homelessness.

The most commonly cited measure of overall economic performance is gross domestic product (GDP): the total value of all measured output produced in any period. However, only a part of the value of this output is received by households and some part of the increase will reflect the impact of rising prices and a growing population. It is only higher levels of real output that contribute to higher living standards for most people. For these reasons, it is common to examine trends in narrower measures of GDP that focus on the income received by households and take account of the impact of rising prices and increased population size.

Economic growth

Figure 2.1 presents trends in four common measures of economic performance (ABS, 2017a). The quarterly movements in all series since the beginning of 2005 are shown, with each series set equal to 100 in the initial quarter to highlight trends over time. Although it is common to focus on the seasonally adjusted figures since these provide a clearer indication of the underlying trends, interest here focuses on what is actually happening in the economy in the short-term when episodic crises may emerge and therefore the original (not seasonally adjusted) figures are shown.

Figure 2.1: Measures of economic performance 2005-17



Source: ABS Catalogue no 5206.0 Australian National Accounts: National Income, Expenditure and Product. Table 1 Key National Accounts Aggregates. GDP: Gross Domestic Product Series ID A2302459A. GDP-PC: Gross Domestic Product Per Capita Series ID A2302460K. Real GDI: Real Gross Domestic Income, Series ID A2302463T (2014-15 Prices). Real NNDI- PC Real Net National Disposable Income Per Capita Series ID A2302466X (2014-15 Prices). [Accessed 17/08/2017]

Aggregate labour market trends

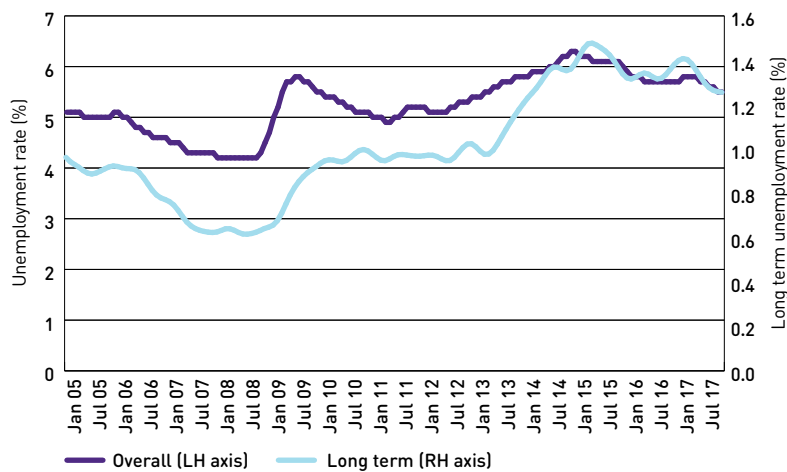
Figure 2.2: Labour force participation rate and employment to population ratio, 2005-17



023

Recent economic, social and housing market trends

Figure 2.3: Unemployment rates, 2005-17



Sources: ABS Catalogue No. 6202.0 Labour Force Australia Table 1 Labour Force Status by Sex Australia, Trend, Seasonally adjusted and Original. Unemployment Rate: Trend Series IDA84423134K. [Accessed 14/11/17]; and 6291.0.55.001 Labour Force, Australia, Detailed - Electronic Delivery Table 14b. Unemployed persons by Duration of job search and Sex - Trend Seasonally adjusted and Original Series ID - A83903912R: the long-term unemployment rate is calculated as the number of persons unemployed for 52 weeks or more divided by the number of persons in the labour force for that period. ABS Catalogue No. 6202.0 Labour Force Australia Table 1 Labour Force Status by Sex Australia, Trend, Seasonally adjusted and Original. Trend series ID, A84423131C [Accessed 15/11/17]

Here, the focus is on short-run movements in unemployment and long-term unemployment since these are likely to be most closely related to the risk of homelessness. Figure 2.3 indicates that both series show a sharp increase following the GFC, followed by a steady rise between 2010 and the end of 2014 since when there has been a slight decline.

Importantly, the statistics charted here show unemployment rates. Australia's growing working age population means that constant rates indicate rising numbers. Thus, between the point at which higher unemployment kicked in post-GFC and the 2017 figures, the gross number of unemployed people rose from around 700,000 to around 800,000. Long-term unemployment numbers — affected by a notable rise in rates around 2013 (see Figure 2.3) — rose from around 120,000 in the 2009-12 period to around 175,000 subsequently. These numbers reveal the extent to which the Australian labour market has been unable to generate sufficient numbers of jobs to absorb the available labour supply.

The aggregate trends shown in Figures 2.2 and 2.3 are the net outcomes of gross flows between the different labour force states and thus conceal a great deal of short-term movement (or flows) between these different states. Understanding the extent of these flows is important because they provide a better indication of how many people are affected (positively or negatively) by short-run changes in the labour force.

Table 2.1 summarises this information for two recent months (May and June 2017) as reflected in the 'matched sample' for these months constructed by the ABS (2017b). Over this month the level of unemployment declined slightly, from 549,400 to 536,900 or by 12,500. However, there was considerable movement between the different categories, with 113,700 of those unemployed in May 2017 employed by June and a further 122,100 of them leaving the labour force.

Between May and June 2017, an additional 233,300 people became unemployed, 78,200 (34%) of them having lost their job and a further 145,100 (62%) having joined (or re-joined) the labour force. A total of 313,600 remained unemployed in both months, this represented just over half (57%) of all persons unemployed in May. Clearly, the labour force flows are substantial even over a short period and highlight how labour market changes can have volatile but profound effects on large numbers of workers and their families.

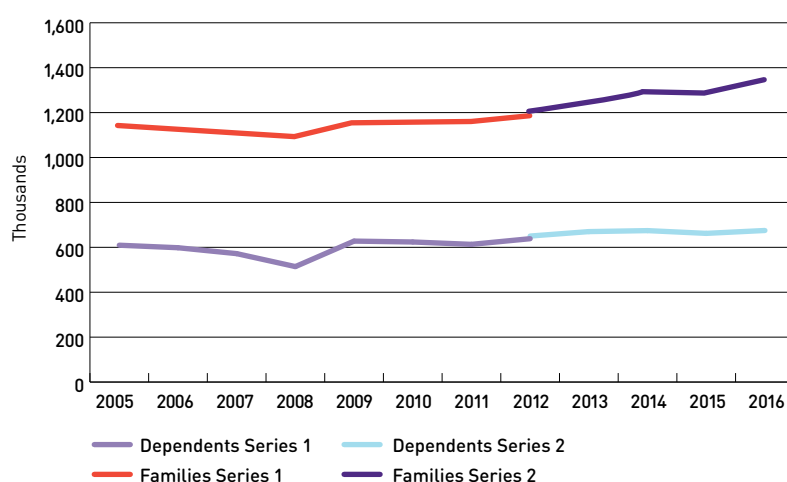
Table 2.1: Gross labour market flows between May and June 2017 (thousands of persons)

Labour force status May 2017	Labour force status June 2017			
	Employed	Unemployed	Not in labour force	Total
Employed	9,584.3	78.2	264.9	9,927.4
Unemployed	113.7	313.6	122.1	549.4
Not in labour force	202.0	145.1	4,946.0	5,293.0
Total	9,899.9	536.9	5,333.1	15,769.9

Source: ABS, The Labour Force Australia June Quarter 2017 [Catalogue 6202.0]: Table 17

Figure 2.4 shows recent trends in a leading indicator of the impact of unemployment on families, the incidence of joblessness. It mirrors the unemployment trends shown earlier highlighting the fact that in 2016, more than 1.4 million families containing close to 700,000 dependants (mainly dependent children) had no adult member in paid work.

Figure 2.4: Numbers of jobless families and dependents in jobless families, 2005-16



Source: Series 1 ABS Catalogue No. 6224.0.55.001 Labour Force, Australia: Labour Force Status and Other Characteristics of Families, June 2012, Table 4. Series 2: ABS Catalogue No. 6224.0.55.001 Labour Force, Australia: Labour Force Status and Other Characteristics of Families, June 2016, Table 4.1.

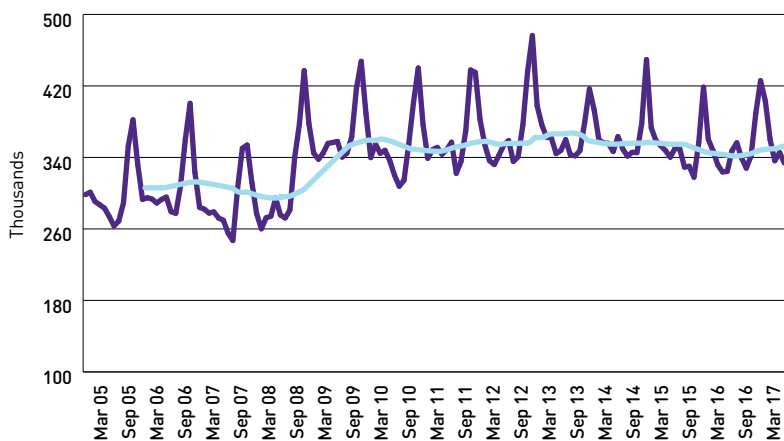
Young people out of the labour force

A focus of considerable attention among labour market and social policy analysts has been on younger people who are not engaged in either employment, education or training (NEET). This failure to connect with the main systems that influence future economic prospects is of concern because it can lead to disadvantages that are long-term or permanent.

Recent economic, social and housing market trends

Figure 2.5 shows trends in the numbers of young people (aged 15-24 years) who are not attending full-time education and are either unemployed or not in the labour force⁵. The overall trend in NEET numbers has been upwards, although this mainly reflects a rise following the GFC (between 2008-09) that has not been reversed. In June 2017, there were around 334,000 young people in this category, divided equally between males and females, which is still above the 2010 level. Not included in Figure 2.5, but of significance for the key findings of this report, is the disproportionate rate at which Indigenous young people were not in employment, education and training. The 2018 Closing the Gap Report shows that 42% of Indigenous 15-24 year olds were not in education, employment, or training (Commonwealth of Australia 2018). This rate is higher than for non-Indigenous Australians, and these rates of exclusion 'deteriorated somewhat over the past decade' (Commonwealth of Australia 2018: 80). Throughout the report we make reference to the links between the disproportionate rates of Indigenous homelessness and other key areas of Indigenous exclusion. We present the disproportionate rates of Indigenous disadvantage to substantiate the assertion in Chapters 4 and 5 that disproportionate rates of Indigenous homelessness are inseparable to their high rates of unemployment, exclusion from education and training, mandated engagement with the child protection system, family violence, and engagement with the criminal justice system, including incarceration. Reflecting the model of causation adopted in this report, the high rates of Indigenous disadvantage interact with the housing market and drive the disproportionate extent to which Indigenous people experience homelessness in Australia compared to non-Indigenous Australians.

Figure 2.5: Young people (aged 15-24 years) not attending full-time education and unemployed or not in the labour force, 2005-17 (thousands)



Source: ABS catalogue no. 6202.0 Labour Force, Australia July 2017, Table 15 Labour force status for 15-24 year olds by educational attendance (full-time) and Sex. Persons Sum of series ID A84424348K and A84424350W. [Accessed on 31 August 2017] Trendline based on 12 period moving average.

⁵ It should be noted that Figure 2.5 includes some young people who are studying part-time and unemployed or not in the labour force and thus produces numbers that are somewhat higher than those in the traditional NEET category that covers only those who are not in any form of employment or study. For example, in May 2017, the number of NEET young people totalled 311.7 thousand compared to the 345.5 thousand shown for this period in Figure 2.5.

2.2.2 Poverty and social disadvantage

The association between poverty, disadvantage and homelessness has been the subject of debate with some arguing that such misfortunes ‘can happen to anyone’ (see Bramley and Fitzpatrick, 2017) but since the vast majority of those who are or become poor do not end up homeless, the idea of a causal relation between the two is problematic. Against this, a recent contribution by Bramley and Fitzpatrick examines the links between poverty and homeless using a series of UK data sets. They conclude that:

Our analysis also emphatically underlines the centrality of poverty to the generation of homelessness ... The longitudinal data ... enables two particularly pertinent points to be made in this regard. First, experience of (childhood) poverty very often predates, and is a powerful predictor of, (adulthood) homelessness. This provides strong grounds for arguing that the primary direction of causation is most likely to be from poverty to homelessness, without of course discounting the possibility that the experience of homelessness itself will then reinforce vulnerability to (adult) poverty ... Second ... while a range of health and support needs and behavioural issues, particularly in the teenage years, do significantly contribute to the risks of homelessness in young adulthood, their explanatory power is less than that of poverty (Bramley and Fitzpatrick, 2017: 18).

This powerful conclusion challenges those who have downplayed the link between poverty and homelessness, while contributing to the growing evidence that shows the long-term harmful effects of poverty on children, in particular.

The main source of Australian evidence on the relationship between poverty and homelessness is the Journeys Home project funded by the Department of Social Services and conducted by the Melbourne Institute (see Scutella et al 2012). It produced evidence that showed a positive association between several indicators of financial stress and homelessness (see Scutella et al., 2012: Table 18). The incidence of five out of six financial stress indicators is higher for those whose current status was homeless than among those who were not homeless, although the differences were not large in several instances.

The incidence rates of financial stress tend to rise as the duration of homelessness increases. The authors note that where this is not the case (e.g. in relation to ‘asking for financial help from friends or family’) it may reflect the disconnection from social support networks that affects those who remain homeless for extended periods. It might also be a reflection of the stigma felt by those who are homeless that prevents them from asking for help even when it is urgently needed. Either way, it is hard to dispute the general conclusion that those experiencing

homelessness are exposed to severe financial stress and are also likely to experience deep social exclusion.

These kinds of studies suggest that no analysis of the determinants of homelessness can ignore evidence on the extent and nature of poverty and other forms of social disadvantage. These effects may operate directly because poverty reduces the ability to finance an adequate level of accommodation. Or they may operate indirectly because poverty can lead to an increase in the prevalence of the factors identified by Chamberlain and Johnson as representing pathways into homelessness, including: housing crisis, family breakdown, domestic violence, substance abuse, and mental health issues⁶.

However, those unable to cushion any decline in living standards through these options will be forced to experience poverty or other forms of social disadvantage that may, in turn, trigger extreme economic distress or precipitate homelessness. This will not be an outcome for everyone affected but it is important to examine the total numbers involved as this will represent the total population at risk of homelessness. Many of the relevant estimates are only available intermittently, making it difficult to discern either the long-term trend or the short-term fluctuations that are of primary interest here. Others are only available after a considerable delay, making it hard to establish the most recent picture.

Income poverty

Poverty rates are commonly used to estimate the size and composition of the most disadvantaged in society, and have particular appeal in a country like Australia that relies heavily on the income (and assets) testing of social security payments. Whiteford (2017) shows that while Australia spends less than the OECD average on cash benefits (Ibid: Figure 13), the proportion of expenditure directed to the lowest income quintile is the highest in the OECD (Ibid: Figure 24) and has the largest redistributive impact (Ibid: Figure 25). These findings provide an important background for the detailed assessment of poverty and other forms of social disadvantage that follows⁷.

6 It also needs to be emphasised that changes in aggregate economic performance will not all automatically translate into corresponding changes in poverty and/or social disadvantage. Some of those affected by income loss or unemployment will find ways or have access to the social supports needed to fill the gaps created and not experience any decline in their standard of living. Others will cut back on non-essentials to see them through any short-term crisis, while others will have savings to draw on or will be able to rely on other forms of economic and social support — at least in the short-term.

7 Although it does not follow automatically from Whiteford’s analysis that poverty will be lower in Australia than elsewhere because the greater targeting may not outweigh the lower level of spending (and hence of benefits) that exists.

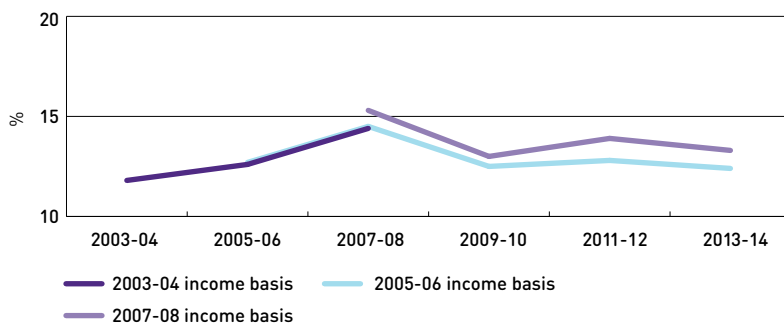
Recent economic, social and housing market trends

Recent trends in poverty, gauged according to conventional methods, are contained in a series of reports commissioned from the UNSW Social Policy Research Centre (SPRC) by the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS). These estimates, summarised below, form the basis of three reports published by ACOSS (2012, 2014, 2016) that describe recent trends and indicate which groups are most at risk of experiencing poverty.

Identifying the trend in Australian poverty has been complicated by changes to the measurement of income introduced in stages by the ABS over the last decade or so. These changes affect the scope of income captured in the *Survey of Income and Housing* (SIH) (ABS, 2015) that forms the basis of the reported estimates, as can be seen in Figure 2.7 which shows changes between 2003-04 and 2013-14 using each of the available income measures for each year. The estimates refer to poverty after housing costs and are derived by deducting housing costs from disposable income, setting the poverty line at 50% of the median of that distribution and then comparing each household's income after housing costs with the poverty line for that family type. Further details of the methodology used to produce the poverty estimates discussed in this section can be found in Saunders, Wong and Bradbury (2016)⁸.

As can be seen from Figure 2.6, each change in the income measure has resulted in a small increase in measured poverty⁹. Whichever series is used, there is a clear tendency for poverty to rise between 2003-04 and 2007-08 but to decline between 2007-08 and 2009-10 due to the one-off measures introduced in response to the GFC in 2008 and the pension increase awarded in 2009. The poverty trend since 2009-10 has been largely flat.

Figure 2.6: Trends in poverty after housing costs, 2003-04 to 2013-14 (persons)



Highlighting the role that housing costs play in income poverty estimates, Table 2.2 compares poverty before housing costs (BHC) and after housing costs (AHC)¹⁰. It is clear that housing costs are an important contributor to poverty, leading to an increase in the overall poverty rate of 3.3 percentage points, to 13.3%. The increase is particularly stark for children, indicating that housing cost is a major issue for many families (in contrast to many older people who own their homes outright and thus incur relatively low housing costs). The numbers in poverty indicate that housing costs cause an additional 613,000 people to fall below the poverty line, of whom almost 229,000 are children.

⁸ The latest SIH was conducted in 2015-16 and summary results were released by the ABS in September — see ABS, 2017c — although the household-level (unit record) data had not been released at the time of writing (October 2017). The poverty rates shown in Figure 6 have been estimated after removing from the full sample for each year those who report either zero or negative income and those whose labour force status is reported as self-employed (further details are provided in Saunders, Wong and Bradbury, 2016).

⁹ Although the SPRC research suggests that the most consistent series can be obtained by splicing together the 2003-04 base year series and the 2005-06 base year series and using the former in 2003-04 and the latter thereafter.

¹⁰ In both cases using the latest income measure (referred to in Figure 2.7 as the 2007-08 basis).

Table 2.2: Comparing 2013-14 income poverty before and after adjusting for housing costs (persons; based on poverty line at 50% of median income)

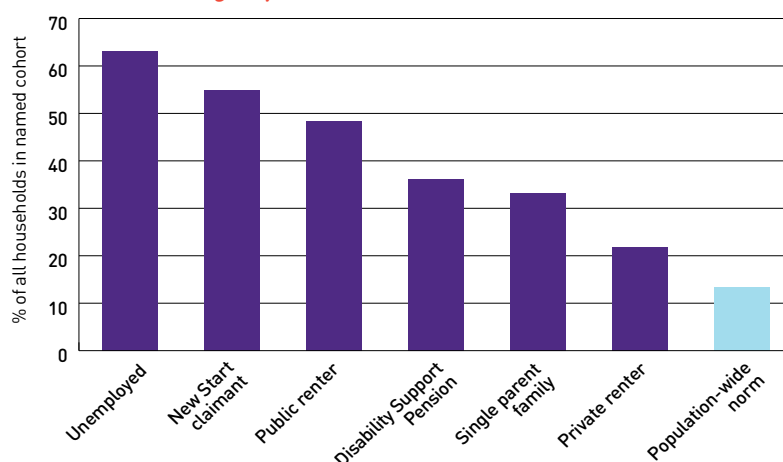
	Poverty Before Housing Costs (BHC)	Poverty After Housing Costs (AHC)	Difference
Poverty rates (%)			
Adults	9.8	12.3	+ 2.5
Children	10.9	17.4	+ 6.5
Persons	10.0	13.3	+ 3.3
Numbers poor ('000)			
Adults	1,511.2	1,895.4	+ 384.2
Children	384.8	613.6	+ 228.8
Persons	1,896.0	2,509.0	+ 613.0

Source: SPRC poverty estimates, prepared for ACOSS; see text.

Taking this analysis one step further to compare poverty rates for different socio-economic groups Appendix 1 and Figure 2.7 highlight that poverty rates vary considerably between groups defined in terms of family type, labour force status, and housing tenure. Thus, for example, the AHC poverty rates for sole parent families (33%), unemployed families (40%) and public renter families (48%) are around 2½ times, 3 times and 3½ times the national rate of 13%¹¹.

There are also substantial poverty rate differences between those mainly reliant on a social security payment according to the type of payment received. The incidence of poverty is much higher among Newstart recipients (55.0%) than among Disability Support Pension recipients (36.2%). Relevant here is the impact of recent changes in jobseeker compliance requirements and associated penalties (discussed further below) and in stakeholder perception of sustained Centrelink action to transition DSP claimants onto Newstart (discussed in Chapter 3), a dynamic which — if accurately perceived — can be expected to have expanded claimant numbers 'in poverty' and therefore vulnerable to homelessness.

Figure 2.7: Incidence of income poverty (after housing costs), 2013-14 – selected groups



Source: ACOSS (2016) Table 4, supplemented by SPRC calculations

Notes: 1. Percentages of individuals in households below poverty lines are set at 50% of median BHC and AHC income, 2007-08 basis. 2. Identified groups are not mutually exclusive.

¹¹ These estimates might be regarded as conservative since they are based on a poverty line that is low by OECD standards, where most European countries use a line set at 60% of the median rather than the 50% threshold used here.

Recent economic, social and housing market trends

The poverty rate estimates presented above provide an important first insight into who faces the greatest risk of poverty, and can be regarded as also at risk of homelessness. However, the estimates are only as reliable as the concepts and data on which they are based; there are limitations with both that suggest a need to supplement estimated poverty rates with other indicators of financial stress.

Poverty dynamics

One such indicator is related to the dynamics of poverty and the extent to which those identified with incomes below the poverty line in 'snapshot' surveys like ABS Survey of Income and Housing (SIH) are in poverty only temporarily, and the extent to which the poverty pool expands as new entrants arrive. As with those people who experience long-term unemployment, those who experience long-term poverty will face far more stringent financial pressures (and will thus be more exposed to the risk of homelessness) than those whose poverty is more temporary. This kind of issue can only be explored with longitudinal data that tracks the changing economic and social circumstances of the same people over time. In Australia the only survey that does this is the Melbourne Institute's HILDA survey.

Recent estimates from the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey indicate that over the period 2001-15 around 68% of men and 63% of women aged 18 and over were poor for none of the 15 years, 19% (men) and 21% (women) were poor for 1-2 years, around 8% of both men and women were poor for 3-5 years, and 5% of men and 7% of women were poor for at least six years (Wilkins, 2017: Figure 3.6 & p. 36). Thus, while many of those who were poor in any one year escaped relatively quickly, for a fairly large group poverty was a recurring event, sometimes long-lasting to the point of permanence.¹²

Indigenous people are more likely than non-Indigenous people to experience entrenched poverty. The Australian Productivity Commission (Commonwealth of Australia 2014) reports that for the majority of the first decade of 2000, the median income for Indigenous households was just over half the median income for non-Indigenous households. Although recent years have seen a slight narrowing of the income gap, Indigenous people remain financially more vulnerable and at greater risk of entrenched poverty compared to non-Indigenous people. In 2014-15, for

example, the median income for Indigenous households was just under two-thirds the median income for non-Indigenous households (Commonwealth of Australia 2016).

It is important for current purposes to complement the types of study described above with those that examine the short-term poverty in-flows and out-flows directly. An earlier HILDA study indicates that the in-flow into poverty in the second of two sequenced adjacent waves covering the period 2000-10 fell between 5.5% and 6.3% of all individuals, the authors concluding that:

'approximately 5 to 6% of persons typically enter poverty in any given year, a similar proportion exit poverty each year, and a further 6 to 8% are in poverty in both years' (Melbourne Institute, 2013: 25).

Focusing on those entering poverty in any given year, if we assume the dynamics of poverty have remained stable since 2010, it follows that the estimates produced in the HILDA study will remain relevant today (when the overall poverty rate is at a similar level to the period covered in the study). The average in-flow into poverty over the six two-year periods studied was equal to 5.8%, and if this percentage is applied to the total population estimated for the ABS SIH survey in 2013-14, it produces an absolute number of new poverty entrants of 1.306 million, over the course of the year or a monthly average of 108,800.

Financial stress and material deprivation

Another criticism of the conventional approach to measuring poverty on the basis of reported income levels is that low-income may not always translate into poverty if those affected can draw on other resources (e.g. accumulated savings) to meet their needs, or if they face lower needs than others. Against this, there may be families with incomes above the poverty line who experience poverty because of outstanding financial commitments (e.g. credit card or other debts) or they face high needs, for example a family member with a disability.

To capture these kinds of situations, it is argued that there is a need to examine living standards more directly to establish whether they conform with prevailing notions of community acceptability, rather than inferring that such situations always exist when incomes fall below a poverty line.¹³

The first fully-fledged application of the living standards approach to poverty measurement is the concept of 'relative deprivation' that was first articulated and implemented in the UK by Townsend (1979). The approach

¹² Although these HILDA-based poverty estimates are derived from a similar approach to that used in the (BHC) SPRC research described earlier, they may be more unreliable because the HILDA survey suffers from problems of attrition that may affect those in the most disadvantaged situations, leading to a downwards bias in the estimated poverty rate if this is not adjusted for in the data (e.g. by some form of re-weighting or sample expansion).

¹³ A step in this direction was taken when the ABS Household Expenditure Survey (HES) began collecting information on the incidence of financial stress and hardship over the previous 12 months and similar questions have been included in HILDA since its inception.

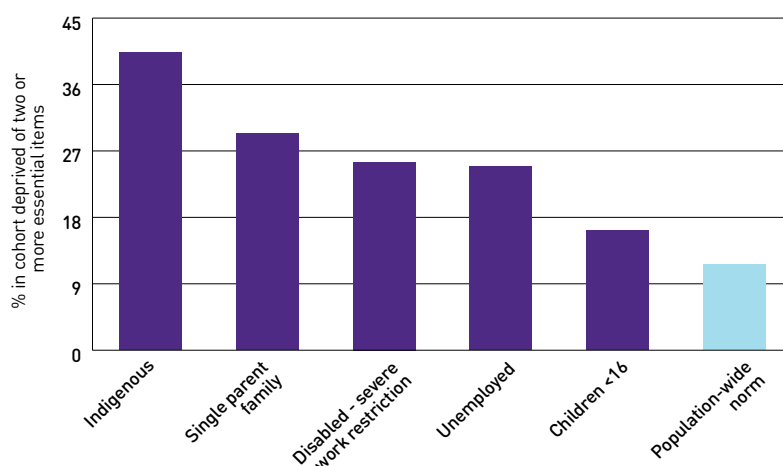
was initially subject to extensive criticism although it has been modified to address the main limitations and the 'consensual approach', as it is now called, forms the basis of most modern assessments of poverty, particularly in Europe.

The approach has been tailored to Australian conditions in studies conducted in 2006 and 2010 by Saunders and colleagues at the SPRC (Saunders, Naidoo and Griffiths, 2007; Saunders and Wong, 2012) and has resulted in the inclusion in the 2014 HILDA survey of a module on material deprivation that provides important new information about this issue (see Saunders and Wilkins, 2016).

The HILDA deprivation module includes 26 items, about which respondents are asked three questions: (1) Is it essential for all Australians? (2) Do you have it? and (3) If not, is this because you cannot afford it? The items (26 in total) are based on the findings of the SPRC studies but the analysis is restricted to those items regarded as essential 'for all Australians' by at least a majority (50%) of the community. This reduces the list from 26 to 22 items, of which six relate to dwelling conditions and contents¹⁴.

Deprivation is defined to exist when people do not have and cannot afford each of the 22 essential items and a measure of deprivation can be derived as a simple sum-score index (which ranges from 0 to 22), or the percentage that is deprived of a minimum number of items¹⁵.

Figure 2.8: Material deprivation: differences between demographic groups, 2014



Source: HILDA survey as reported in Saunders and Wilkins (2016) Tables 8.2 and 8.3.

Most of the groups with a high incidence of material deprivation also experience above-average poverty rates (see Appendix 1). However, the overlap between income poverty and material deprivation varies. For example, 8% of those who experience no deprivation are in relative (income) poverty, while 79% of those deprived of at least two items are not in income poverty. This evidence indicates that poverty and deprivation are different and suggests that both should be taken into account when assessing people's overall status and, in the current context, determining whether or not they are at risk of homelessness.

¹⁴ They are: 'Furniture in reasonable condition'; 'A decent and secure home'; 'A roof and gutters that do not leak'; 'Home contents insurance'; 'A home with doors and windows that are secure'; and 'When it is cold, able to keep at least one room of the house adequately warm'.

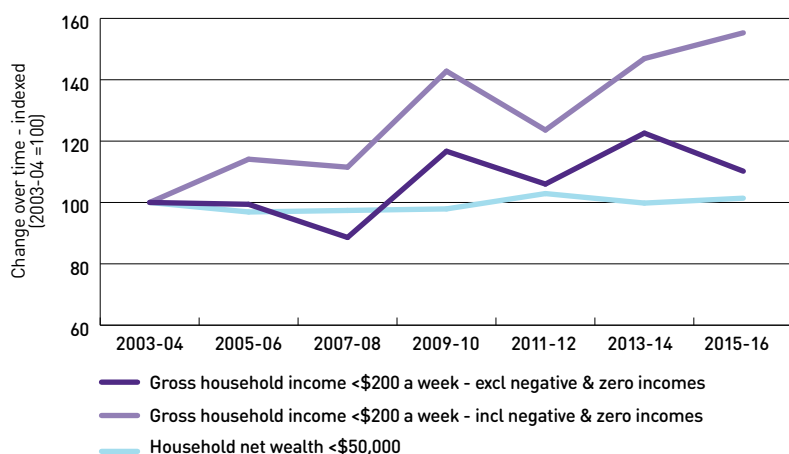
¹⁵ Individual item deprivation rates are low on many instances but are highest for 'a week's holiday away from home each year' (16.5%), 'At least \$500 in savings for an emergency' (12.2%), 'Home contents insurance' (8.3%) and 'New school clothes for school-age children every year' (6.8%).

Recent economic, social and housing market trends

Extreme financial precariousness

Once again returning to conventional measures of economic status (based on reporting of levels of household income and net wealth) another poverty calibration approach is to focus on those who report very low levels of each — so low as to raise questions about how those involved are surviving. The source for these estimates is the SIH used earlier to estimate poverty, although Figure 2.9 has been updated to include the most recent estimates (for 2015-16) where these are available in the published tabulations. The statistics on which this graphic draws indicate that in 2015-16 more than 160,000 households had a weekly income of \$200 or less, and more than 1.14 million households had a net wealth of less than \$50,000. Even for an outright home-owner bearing minimal routine housing costs, a weekly income of less than \$200 is almost certainly below subsistence level.

Figure 2.9: Households with very low levels of gross income and net wealth, 2003-04-2015-16



Source: ABS, Household Income and Wealth, Australia, 2015-16, Catalogue No. 6523.0: Tables 1.3 & 2.3. Notes from ABS: (a) Estimates presented for 2007-08 onwards are not directly comparable with estimates for previous cycles due to the improvements made to measuring income introduced in the 2007-08 cycle. Estimates for 2003-04 and 2005-06 have been recompiled to reflect the new measures of income, however not all components introduced in 2007-08 are available for earlier cycles.

2.3 Specific groups vulnerable to homelessness

This section draws together a range of available evidence on the size of groups facing specific forms of vulnerability or social disadvantage that might trigger exposure to homelessness. It is important to emphasise that the link between the variables examined and homelessness has not been established, but the intention is to highlight the broad extent of potential impacts rather than provide precise quantifications¹⁶.

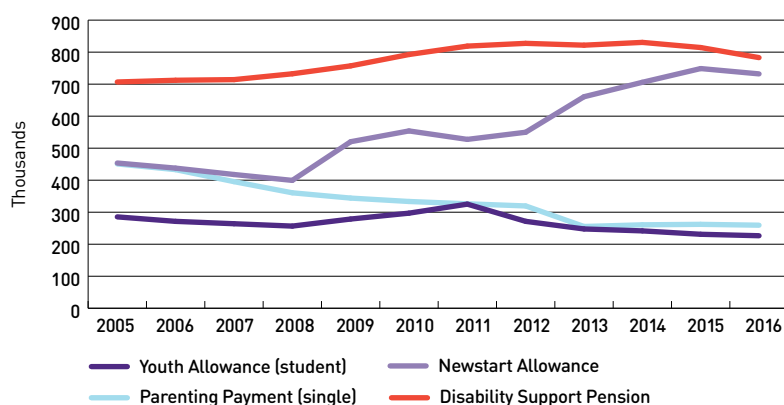
¹⁶ Again, it is important to bear in mind that the groups identified below are not mutually exclusive and some individuals will belong to a number of groups, leading to potential cumulative effects.

Newstart Allowance claimants and recipients

Reference was made earlier to changes in the compliance requirements facing those receiving or applying for income support payments, particularly those receiving or applying for Newstart Allowance (NSA). The administrative nature of these changes is complex as is estimating their impact on recipients and the data required to conduct such analyses is not easy to access. For these reasons, a degree of caution should be applied to the following analysis, although the issues discussed are assuming growing importance as a potential contributor to homelessness among those affected. This is discussed further in Chapter 3.

Figure 2.10 shows trends in the numbers receiving different forms of income support payments since 2005¹⁷. The most striking features are the sharp rise in the numbers receiving Newstart Allowance (NSA) and the plateauing and then decline in the numbers receiving the disability support pension (DSP) and the decline in the number of (Single) Parenting Payment recipients. These two trends are inter-related since successive government policies have tightened eligibility for DSP, with many recipients transferred to the lower payment (and more stringent requirements) associated with the receipt of NSA. However, the rise in the numbers receiving Newstart since the GFC more than offsets the decline in DSP numbers so there are clearly other factors at play here — specifically the failure to make in-roads into the overall level of unemployment (Figures 2.2 and 2.3).¹⁸

Figure 2.10: Number of recipients of selected income support payments, 2005 -16



Source: 2005-13 DSS (2013) Statistical Paper No 12 Income support customers: a statistical overview 2013. Table 1: Summary of income support recipients by payment type, 2003 to 2013. DSS Demographics June 2014, June 2015, and June 2016 from totals column in table: payment recipients by payment type, by state and territory and by sex. Accessed [21/08/17].

There is little doubt that specific social security policies directed to the recipients of working-age payments (often referred to as 'welfare recipients') have contributed to the increased numbers receiving NSA shown in Figure 2.10. These include the tightening of eligibility of (Single) Parenting Payments associated with lowering of the age of the youngest child and the reduction in

¹⁷ Note that since the population size has been steadily increasing, some of the trends shown in Figure 2.10 would be even more pronounced if the numbers were expressed as percentages of the relevant population group.

¹⁸ A similar policy-driven trend applies to shifts between parenting payment (single) and NSA and although the numbers involved are much lower in this case, the social effects may be more serious given the exposure to poverty of sole parent and unemployed families identified earlier – see Appendix 1.

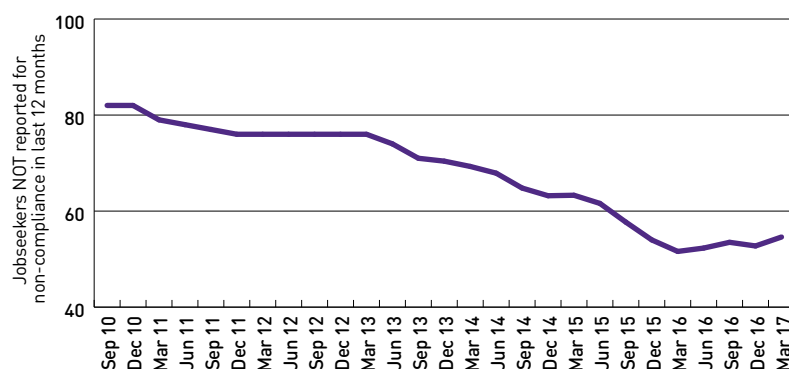
Recent economic, social and housing market trends

the capacity to work threshold for DSP recipients in 2006. Further tightening of DSP eligibility rules were introduced in 2012 and 2014, all of which will have shifted at least some existing recipients (and many more new applicants) onto NSA (Australian Government, 2017b; Buckmaster, 2014). The significance of these developments is that NSA payments are at a considerably lower rate than either DSP or Parenting Payments, leaving NSA recipients at even higher risk of homelessness. Private rental properties within reach of NSA recipients are extremely few in number. In Anglicare's 2017 survey of some 68,000 advertised rental homes, for example, it was found that fewer than 2% were affordable for a couple with two children and in receipt of NSA. For single childless NSA recipients, the figure was 0.03% (21 of 67,751) (Anglicare 2017).

Social security claimants subject to benefit sanctions

Under the banner of 'mutual obligation', governments have imposed increasingly stringent conditions on those receiving the NSA, in particular, and harsher penalties on those who fail to comply with their job-seeker requirements (see Davidson and Whiteford, 2011, for a discussion of the earlier changes). Following significant changes to the job-seeker compliance regimes in 2006, 2009 and 2011, further changes were introduced in 2015 and a further tightening of mutual obligation requirements in the 2017-18 federal Budget (Thomas 2017). These changes have affected the proportion of job-seekers judged non-compliant. As shown in Figure 2.11, the percentage of job-seekers not reported for non-compliance in the previous 12 months declined from just over 80% in September 2010 to around 50% since 2016, although not all non-compliance reports lead to financial penalties.

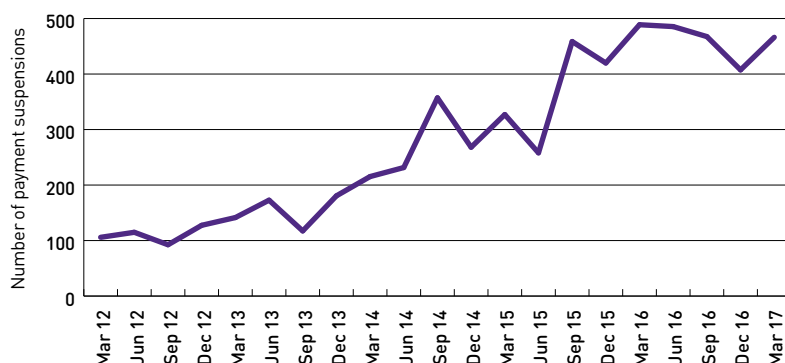
Figure 2.11: Jobseekers not reported for non-compliance in previous 12 months, 2010-17



Source: Job seeker compliance data, Department of Employment, data.gov.au website. Table: "Number of Compliance Reports Submitted per job seeker over past 12 months (as at end of quarter)". Non-compliance reports include Participation Reports, Non-attendance Reports and Provider Appointment Reports.

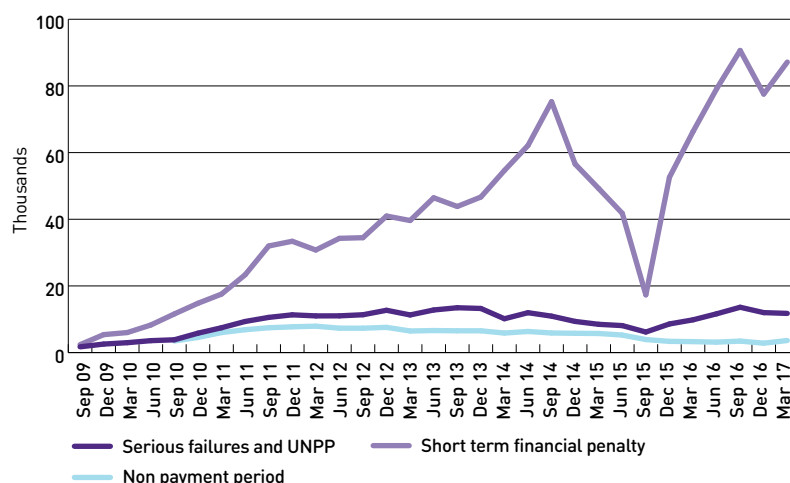
Figure 2.12 shows that payment suspensions increased between March 2012 and March 2017 from just over 100,000 per quarter to around 466,000. Figure 2.13 shows the estimated number of financial penalties actually applied. While the number of longer-term penalties applied (non-payment periods) has remained relatively stable since 2009, there has been an upward trend in short-term financial penalties applied so that by March 2017, around 87,000 such penalties had been applied. The information available does not indicate the value of these short-term penalties or the numbers of people involved. For people on low incomes, such penalties are likely to have a significant negative impact on their finances.

Figure 2.12: Number of quarterly payment suspensions, 2012-17



Source: Job seeker compliance data, Department of Employment, data.gov.au website. March 2012 to March 2017. Table: Income support payment suspensions for non-attendance at appointments/activities. Notes: Shift from Job Services Australia to jobactive on 1 July, 2015. Numbers refer to suspensions rather than persons. In March 2012: 'This table includes all participation payment suspensions as a result of non-attendance at JSA and DES provider appointments applied under the new compliance arrangements introduced from 1 July, 2011'. In March 2017: 'This table is a count of all participation payment suspensions applied as a result of providers submitting: (1) non-attendance reports for non-attendance at a provider appointment and (2) participation reports for non-attendance at a third-party appointment (such as an initial appointment with a Work for the Dole host or Skills for Employment and Education provider) or disengagement from an activity. Where an income support payment suspension has started it will continue until it is lifted, which is usually when a job seeker attends the appointment.

Figure 2.13: Number of short-term financial penalties, serious failures and unemployment non-payment periods (UNPPs), 2009-17



Source: Job Seeker Compliance Data, Department of Employment, data.gov.au website: September 2009 to March 2017. Tables: Sanctions for serious failures and financial penalties, connection failures, income support payment suspensions and CCAs by gender. Non-payment periods are the author's calculation of the total NPPs minus serious failures where the financial penalty is waived for compliance activity or financial hardship. Note: 'Serious failures' are for refusing to accept or commence a suitable job, and for persistent non-compliance following a Comprehensive Compliance Assessment. Unemployment non-payment periods (UNPPs) are for voluntarily leaving employment or unemployment due to misconduct and are usually for 8 weeks, but may be 12 weeks if a person has received relocation assistance. Short-term financial penalties are for reconnection and no show no pay penalties and the length depends on the delay in attending required appointments or activities. Changes to compliance requirements and penalty framework occurred in July 2009, July 2011, January 2015, July 2015. There was a shift from Job Network to Job Services Australia on July 2009 then to jobactive on 1 July, 2015. The numbers refer to penalties rather than persons.

Recent economic, social and housing market trends

People in contact with the criminal justice system

There is a longstanding appreciation that release from prison is a form of 'institutional discharge' which brings with it a significant risk of homelessness (Scottish Executive Homelessness Task Force 2002). Major obstacles to securing housing for released prisoners often include unemployment, poverty, discrimination and stigmatisation, family breakdown, poor literacy, as well as problems of accessing information (Baldry et al., 2003).

Recent Australian research using the Journeys Home data has confirmed that 'across every measure, homelessness is higher among respondents who have prior or current contacts with the criminal justice system, especially incarceration' (Bevitt et al., 2015: 65). The study found that the prevalence and duration of homelessness is greater for those with prior and recent contact with the criminal justice system. The report also highlighted the churn between homelessness and the criminal justice system. The report stated there was a need for 'properly designed and resourced post-release programs to break the link between homelessness and reoffending' (Bevitt et al., op cit.: 75).

Significantly, Australia's prison population has risen in recent years. In the period 2006-16 the national total rose by more than 50% to 38,845 (ABS, 2016). The increased incarceration rate affects Indigenous more than non-Indigenous people. In 2015, Indigenous Australians were 15 times more likely to be imprisoned than non-Indigenous Australians (2016). Moreover:

Between 2000 and 2015, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adult imprisonment rate increased by 77.4 per cent, while the non-Indigenous rate remained fairly constant until 2013 before increasing by 15.2 per cent in the two most recent years (Commonwealth of Australia 2016: 4.110).

All other things being equal, rising prisoner numbers mean rising rates of prisoner discharge. AIHW data confirms such a trend, as shown in Table 2.3. These statistics reveal that 31% of the 51,000 prisoners released in 2014 expected to be homeless on release. While this was a lower percentage than the equivalent figure for 2012, the rising number of released prisoners means the likely number of homeless ex-prisoners was also rising over this period.

Table 2.3: Number and characteristics of prisoners released annually, 2012 and 2014

	2012	2014
Number of prisoners released	33,571	51,309
Percentage who, on release, expected they are going to be homeless*	43%	31%
Percentage expecting to receive govt payment through Centrelink on release	88%	79%

Sources: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) (2013). *The health of Australia's prisoners 2012*. Cat. no. PHE 170. Canberra: AIHW. Table 2.1 p10, 26, 28. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) (2015). *The health of Australia's prisoners 2015*. Cat. no. PHE 207. Canberra: AIHW. Table 2.1 p, 12, 26, 29.

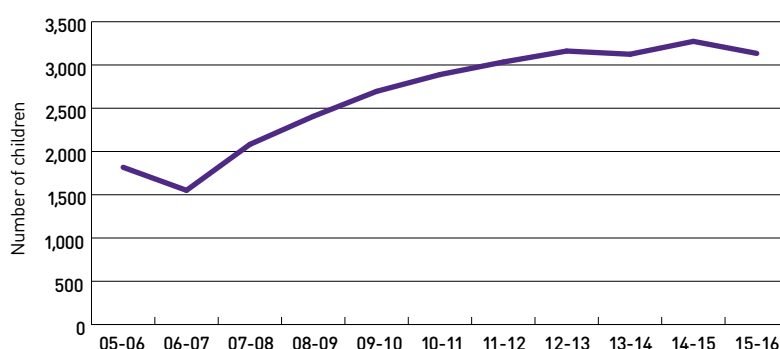
* Including short-term or emergency accommodation

Children in, and young people leaving, out-of-home care

Young people leaving out-of-home care are a second group for whom such 'institutional discharge' creates a clear risk of homelessness. Research shows that young people 'ageing out-of-care' have to manage multiple transitions — moving into independent accommodation, leaving school, and trying to find work or other means of support and becoming financially independent — in a shorter time, at a younger age, and with fewer resources and supports than their peers. Housing is an important dimension in the experiences of care leavers and there is an over-representation of care leavers among those experiencing homelessness (Johnson et al., 2009).

As in the case of prisoners, this is another instance where a rising institutional population is adding to national homelessness pressures. The number of children in out-of-home care almost doubled over the decade to 2016, from around 24,000 in 2005 to more than 46,000 in 2016 (AIHW 2009, 2017). As shown in Figure 2.14, annual discharges rose by 57% between 2007-08 and 2012, although numbers have subsequently levelled out.

Figure 2.14: Children aged 15-17 discharged from Out of Home Care, 2005-06 to 2015-16



Sources: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare publications Child Protection Australia 2005-6 to 2015-16. Note: Data for 2006-7 are missing numbers for Queensland so are below the true national figure.

Indigenous people are especially affected by the child protection system, and their disproportionate rates of mandated inclusion in the child protection system is increasing at a significantly higher rate than non-Indigenous people. For example:

The rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged 0-17 years on care and protection orders increased from 11.3 to 49.3 per 1000 children from 2003-04 to 2012-13. The rate for non-Indigenous children increased from 2.6 to 5.7 per 1000 children over the same period, leading to a widening of the gap, from 8.7 to 43.6 care and protection orders per 1000 children (Commonwealth of Australia 2014: 4.77).

Domestic and family violence and homelessness

Chamberlain and Johnson (2011) note that domestic violence is a pathway into homelessness for many. This is likely to become of growing concern because of the increase in the reported incidence of domestic violence in recent years.

Recent economic, social and housing market trends

Domestic violence statistics are not maintained by the ABS or any other national agency. In some states, however, such information is collected via criminal justice services. Drawing on such statistics, Figure 2.15 graphs a number of somewhat disparate trends in NSW, Queensland, and Victoria. As indicators of domestic violence incidence, those relating to 'breached orders' are possibly less meaningful than the others because they will be affected by the number of orders issued — something that will be in turn subject to administrative actions. Perhaps especially notable in Figure 2.15 is the trend in the rate of 'police-recorded family incidents' for Victoria. Here, the graph shows a 22% increase over the three-year period for which data is available. In terms of actual *numbers* of incidents, this represents a 35% rise, from 61,000 to 78,000. In NSW, the recorded trend in 'domestic violence-related assault' has been virtually flat over this period (see Figure 2.15).

While noting that reported incidences of domestic violence and associated domestic violence service use had increased, some of our key stakeholder informants considered that this was partly the result of increased reporting. People reasoned that recorded statistical trends could in part reflect growing social recognition of domestic violence as a social problem that should not be tolerated:

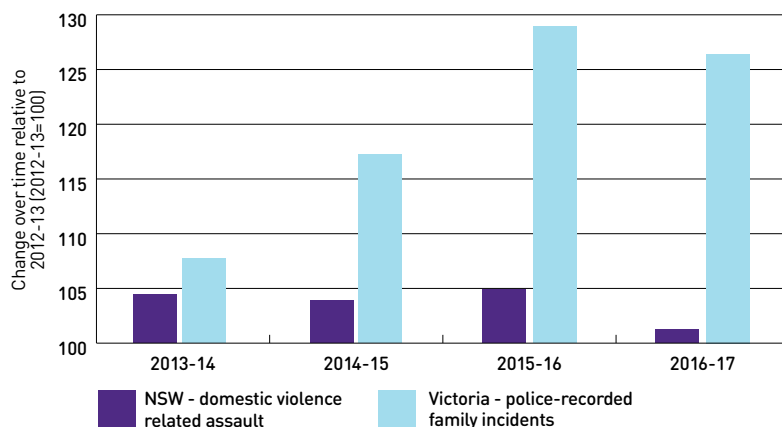
More awareness means that police are more likely to follow through with [a] child protection report and more women leaving violence into homelessness.
(Victorian stakeholder)

In addition to a greater use of domestic violence services following greater social awareness and more formalised institutional responses, another stakeholder commented on the potential link between elder abuse and increased housing unaffordability:

Often you see financial abuse to older people, and I always wonder whether the unaffordability of the housing market is a bit of a driver of violence toward older people ... a lot of the violence is around the parent's property, and their assets. I do wonder whether there is a correlation between the increasing unaffordability of the housing market and adults ... try[ing] to gain access to that asset. (Victorian stakeholder)

The above comment is tentative in tone and recognises the lack of direct evidence on the possible link between elder abuse and housing unaffordability. However, focusing on families living in multi-generational households, Petersen and Parsell (2015) showed that elder abuse does contribute to first-time homelessness in later life among older Australians.

Figure 2.15: Changing incidence of recorded domestic/family violence in NSW and Victoria, 2012-17 (indexed: 2012-13 = 100)



Sources: NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics Analysis and Research (2017); Victoria Crime Statistics Agency (2017).

As with the previously identified domains of disadvantage that Indigenous people experience at greater rates than non-Indigenous people, available data indicates that Indigenous people experience family violence at higher rates than non-Indigenous people. The Productivity Commission (Commonwealth of Australia 2014: 4.88) reports:

Between 2004-05 and 2012-13, after adjusting for differences in population age structures, for NSW, Victoria, Queensland, WA, SA and the NT combined, hospitalisation rates for family violence-related assault for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians were between 25.1 and 32.8 times the rates for [non-Indigenous Australians].

2.4 Housing market analysis

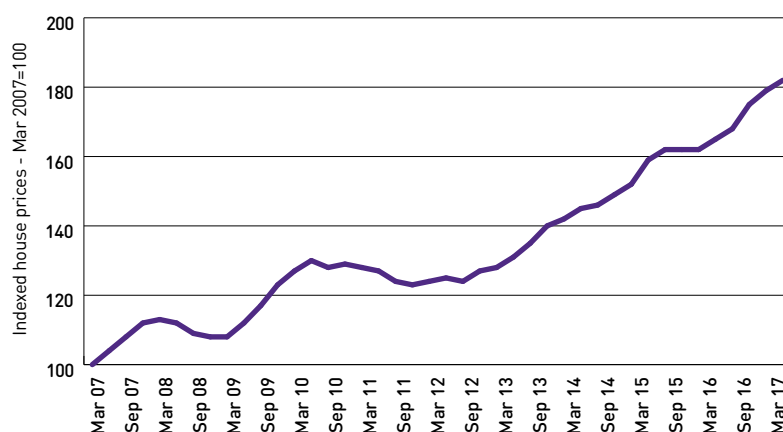
As suggested by UK evidence, changes in housing market conditions are liable to have a stronger and more immediate impact on homelessness rates than economic trends (Fitzpatrick et al., 2017). For example, while rising unemployment may increase homelessness risks across a population, declining availability of affordable housing can have a more direct implication. In Australia, where only a small proportion of the low-income population is housed in the social rental sector, the main focus is on changing conditions in the private rental market.

2.4.1 The house sales market

To contextualise our rental sector analysis, however, we first briefly review recent trends in the house sales market. As shown in Figure 2.16 (a) and (b) the past decade has seen a considerable real increase in property prices at the national scale with median values up by 80% over the period. At the same time, it is apparent that trends have varied substantially in different parts of the country. Sydney and Melbourne prices more than doubled over the period, with most of this increase taking place during the 2011-16 time-frame that is the particular focus of this research. In Perth, by contrast, prices were barely any higher at the end of the period than at the start. To contextualise these trends it is relevant to note that in the decade to 2016 median household incomes rose by 40% (ABS Census Quickstats), while the consumer price index increased by 26% (ABS Cat 6401.0).

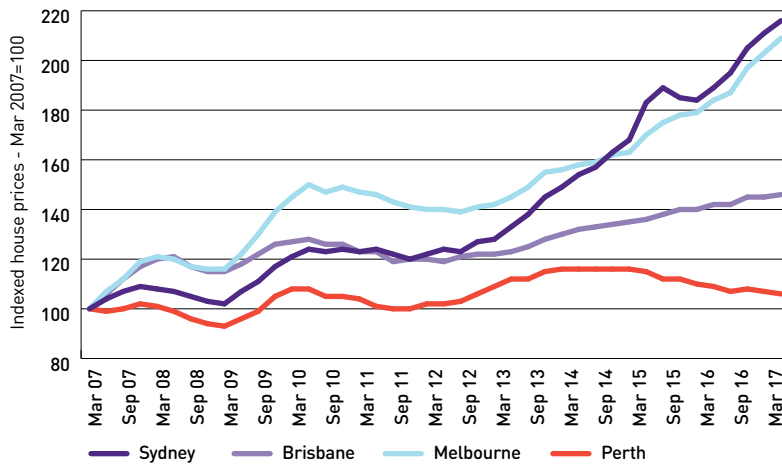
Figure 2.16: Residential property price change 2007-17

(a) Australia-wide (eight capital cities, weighted average)



Recent economic, social and housing market trends

(b) Selected capital cities



Source: ABS 2017e: Table 1.

It should also be acknowledged that the variation in house price trends shown in Figure 2.16(b) will have been equally marked across regional Australia — especially in terms of the contrast between some coastal resort areas (for example in northern NSW and south-east Queensland) and some inland settlements which have experienced a boom and then a slump associated with the vicissitudes of the mining industry.

In those parts of the country where house prices have been rising faster than household incomes, ease of entry to home ownership will have been increasingly compromised, at least in terms of the time required to save for a mortgage deposit. While the reduction in interest rates to historically low levels has expanded borrowing capacity, this has no equivalent moderating impact on the mortgage deposit barrier to home ownership. Recent figures show that, at the national scale, a 20% deposit for a typically priced home equated to almost 100% of average disposable income in 2015 compared with only 65% in 2000 (Irvine and Wade 2017). That implies a 50% increase in the number of years of saving required for aspirant home owners lacking access to parental financial assistance.

This rising 'wealth threshold' for access to home ownership contributes to the growing size of the population cohort dependent on rental — predominantly private rental — housing. Moderate income earners with a prospect of attaining home ownership have been needing to spend longer and longer periods awaiting the point at which this becomes financially feasible. This, in turn, puts upward pressure on that residential market sector that also accommodates most of Australia's lower income population. Likewise, in booming markets rental investors are more likely to trade their properties (to realise capital gains), placing renters at risk of landlord-initiated tenancy termination.

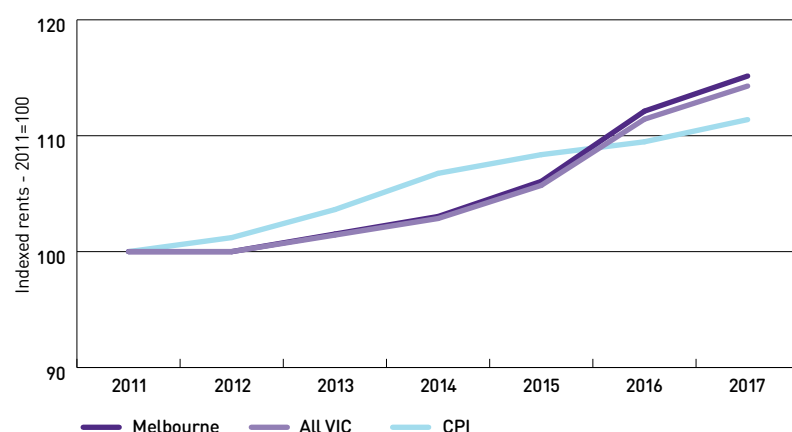
2.4.2 Private rent trends

Freely published private rental data is a scarce commodity in Australia — especially in terms of data on 'entry rents', the amounts charged for privately-owned properties being newly let in any given period¹⁹. The trends graphed in Figures 2.17 and 2.18

¹⁹ It should be noted that the ABS national trend over time series on rents (CAT 6401) is problematic because it fails to differentiate between rents paid in social housing (where the overwhelming majority of tenants pay a 'rebated rent' fixed according to their — usually very low — income) and those paid in the private rental market. Consequently, this series will significantly understate the true increase in private market rents over the past 10-20 years.

are therefore included to illustrate changing market conditions in two states as an illustration of the broader picture. Some marked contrasts are apparent when these two states are compared. While rents have risen in both states, NSW appears to have experienced substantially larger increases over this period. Moreover, while the market has been moving at a similar pace in capital city and regional areas within Victoria this has been less true for NSW²⁰.

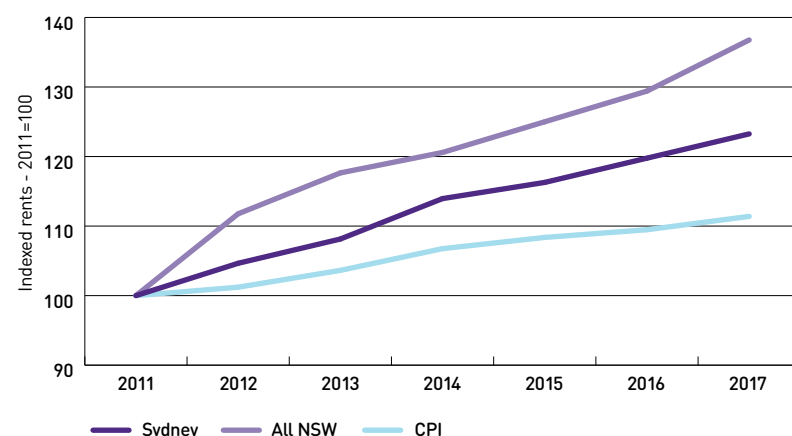
Figure 2.17: Private rent trends, 2011-17 – Victoria



Sources: 1. Victoria State Government Rental Report series <http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/about-the-department/documents-and-resources/research,-data-and-statistics/current-rental-report>. 2. ABS Cat 6401 Consumer Prices Index <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/6401.0Mar%202017?OpenDocument>

Note: Data relates to rents for all newly lodged rental bonds in the March quarter of each year.

Figure 2.18: Private rent trends, 2011-17 – New South Wales



Sources: 1. NSW Govt Rent and Sales Report series <http://www.housing.nsw.gov.au/about-us/reports-plans-and-papers/rent-and-sales-reports>. 2. ABS Cat 6401 Consumer Prices Index <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/6401.0Mar%202017?OpenDocument>

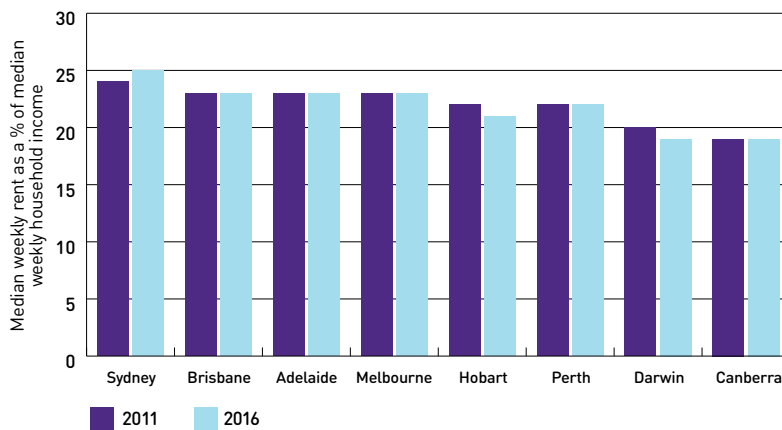
Note: Data relates to rents for all two-bed properties with newly lodged rental bonds in the March quarter of each year.

²⁰ It should be emphasized that the metrics graphed here depict change over time, not absolute rent levels. In 2017, the median rent for two-bed properties in Sydney (\$530) remained substantially higher than the state-wide comparator (\$465).

Recent economic, social and housing market trends

As indicated by ABS Census data, however, rents more broadly have continued to closely track incomes over the past few years. As shown in Figure 2.19, 2016 median rents as a proportion of median incomes were arrayed in a narrow band ranging from 19-25% across Australia's major cities. The only very slight changes seen between 2011 and 2016 belie any general decline in 'rental affordability' in terms of rents running ahead of incomes.

Figure 2.19: Rents as a percentage of incomes, 2011 and 2016

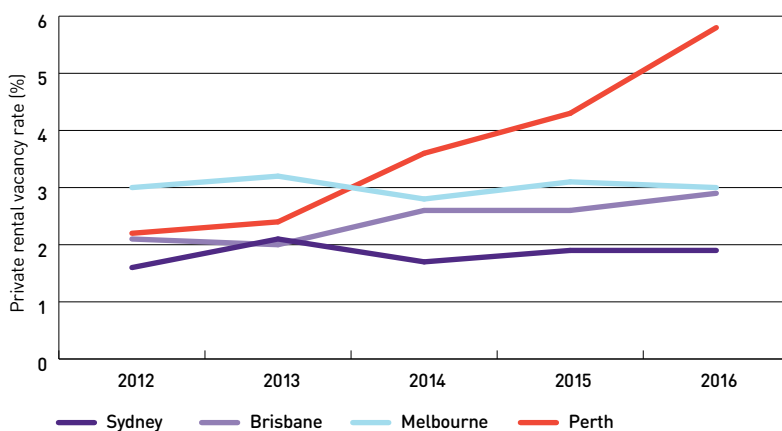


Source: ABS Census 2011 and 2016 – statistics extracted via ABS Quickstats portal.

Note: Median weekly rents as shown here incorporate both private sector and social sector tenancies.

A more direct indicator of rental market pressure is rental property vacancy rates (Figure 2.20). This gauges the number of properties available to let as a proportion of the total stock of rental properties at any given time. Consistent with the state of the wider housing market (see Figure 2.16(b)), the trend for Perth contrasts markedly with those of the other cities included in Figure 2.19. Vacancy rates in Sydney and Melbourne have been generally flat over the past few years, while there was a slight upward trend in the Brisbane market.

Figure 2.20: Private rental vacancy rates, selected capital cities, 2012-16



Source: Productivity Commission Report on Government Services 2017 Table G.A10 (original data from Real Estate Institute of Australia).

2.4.3 Housing affordability stress for lower income renters

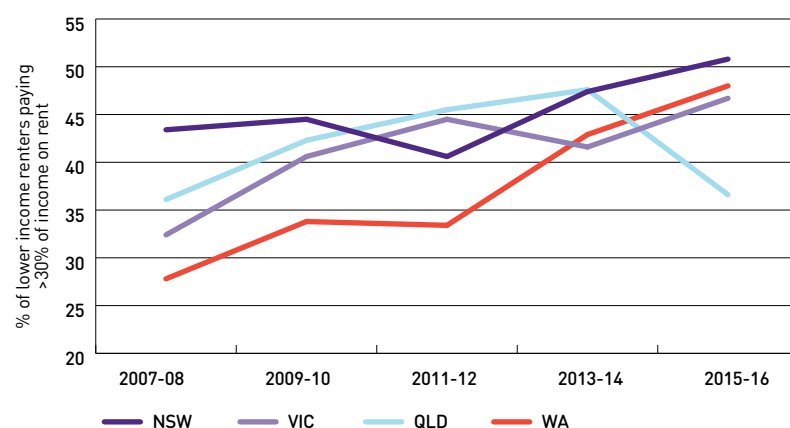
Finally, in this section we look at recent trends in the incidence of financial stress experienced at the lower end of the rental housing market. A focus on lower-income renters is particularly relevant to the central purpose of this chapter in concentrating attention on that part of the overall population more vulnerable to being pushed into homelessness by housing market pressures. Because it likely means a juggle between paying for housing and for other essential costs, a low-income tenant having to contend with an 'unaffordable rent' is at a higher risk of incurring rent arrears that could lead to tenancy termination.

Figure 2.21: Lower-income renters paying unaffordable rents

(a) Australia-wide



(b) Selected states



Source: ABS Survey of Housing Occupancy and Costs, Cat 4130.0

Recent economic, social and housing market trends

Drawing on ABS survey data, Figures 2.1(a) and (b) illustrate that the past decade has seen growing pressure on lower-income renters — calibrated in terms of the proportion of this group paying ‘unaffordable rents’²¹. This refers to renters in the lowest two quintiles of the income spectrum reporting rents equating to more than 30% of gross household income.

As illustrated by Figure 2.21(a) housing affordability stress among lower-income renters has increased much more in capital cities than in regional Australia — although this may be a ‘Sydney/Melbourne’ effect to some extent.

A particularly notable trend among those shown in Figure 2.21(b) is the steeply continuing rise in the incidence of rental stress among lower-income renters in Western Australia. Across the state, in less than a decade, the incidence of low-income rental affordability stress has risen from just over a quarter to almost half of all lower-income renters. This belies any implication that might be drawn from Figure 2.20 that the weak rental market recently experienced in Perth might have eased housing affordability stress for this group.

The generally rising incidence of low-income tenants paying unaffordable rents (Figure 2.21) seems paradoxical considering that, as shown in Figure 2.19, there is little sign of significant recent change in the relationship between median incomes and median rents. The likely explanation for this apparent inconsistency is ongoing change in the structure of Australia’s private rental market as the provision of lower-rent housing continues to dwindle. ABS Census analysis by Hulse and Yates (2017) focused on the 1996–2011 period during which private rental housing provision expanded by 41%. However, despite a large increase in the number of income quintile 1 private tenants, rent quintile 1 provision contracted during the period.

Consistent with the long-term trends identified by Hulse and Yates is the gradual ‘narrowing’ of the market seen in Sydney where, between 2006 and 2017, both the lower quartile and upper quartile rents moved (in relative terms) closer to the median. Thus, as shown in Table 2.4, the lower quartile rent in 2017 was only 22% below the median rent whereas in 2006 it was 25% lower. Again, this indicates a shrinking supply of lower-price rental properties.

Table 2.4: Private market rents in Greater Sydney: relationship between quartile and median rents

	Lower quartile rent		Median rent		Upper quartile rent	
	Weekly rent (\$)	Rent as % of median	Weekly rent (\$)	Rent as % of median	Weekly rent (\$)	Rent as % of median
2006 Q3	200	75	265	100	350	132
2016 Q3	350	78	450	100	590	131
2017 Q3	365	78	470	100	605	129

Sources: 2006 and 2016 — NSW Family and Community Services special tabulation; 2017 NSW Family and Community Services Rent and Sales Report.

²¹ It should be noted that these statistics relate to all tenants; that is, those renting from both social and private landlords. The percentages shown in the graphs would be substantially higher if the data related only to the latter group. For example, whereas around 35% of all lower-income renters were paying unaffordable rents in 2007–08 (see Figure 2.1(a)), the proportion of all lower-income private renters in this position would have been substantially higher.

2.5 Chapter conclusion

The statistics collated for this chapter reveal little sign of rising rates of poverty or unemployment that directly feed through into escalating homelessness. Enduring forms of poverty and financial deprivation expose many groups to a heightened risk of homelessness. At the same time, however, a number of other socio-economic trends that could have this impact have been apparent over the past few years. These most notably include:

- The rising proportion of social security benefit recipients dependent on Newstart Allowance (NSA) which pays out at lower rates than some other benefits such as the Disability Support Pension and the (Single) Parenting Payment.
- A fivefold increase in the number of benefit sanctions recorded between 2011-16; these can include payments stopped after a breach of Centrelink conditions.
- Growing rates of institutional discharge, involving young people leaving out-of-home care, and ex-offenders being released from prison.
- A rise in reported incidences of domestic violence, at least in Victoria where police statistics show a 20% increase in recent years.

Beyond this, the past few years have seen many parts of Australia in the grip of a property price boom with problematic consequences for lower-income groups. Some parts of the country — notably WA — have seen more subdued housing market conditions since 2011. Even here, however, survey evidence shows growing numbers of lower-income renters facing unaffordable rents that will increase their risk of homelessness.

Moreover, evidence suggests that Australia's private rental market is subject to longer-term structural trends that are progressively eroding the scope for lower-income households to obtain affordable housing. In particular, recent research highlights the way that more affordable rental housing is increasingly occupied by middle-income households and, while there has been an increase in the overall housing supply (generally in line with population growth) there is an intensifying shortage of housing for those at the greatest risk of homelessness — very low-income households (Ong et al 2017).

Government policies potentially impacting on homelessness

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter we draw on the 21 key stakeholder qualitative interviews, the national survey, and published literature to examine government policies with implications for homelessness. Of particular interest are recent or ongoing policy developments that could affect the incidence of homelessness. This chapter identifies policy changes that are problematic, that may be part of the explanation for the rising rates of homelessness in Australia. Also of interest, are policy measures that could moderate or directly address the problem.

We consider policies at federal, state and territory levels, recognising that state and territory policies are often designed and funded in partnership with the Australian Government through the Council of Australian Governments (COAG). Beyond the consideration of policies enacted or implemented, we also comment on the *absence of measures* that are arguably required in the circumstances of market failures that are all too apparent in the housing realm. Indeed, we argue that policy inaction to, firstly, demonstrably increase the supply of housing that is affordable and secondly, increase the income of Australia's poorest citizens, are the key drivers of homelessness in Australia.

As argued in Chapter 1, homelessness is caused by an interaction of myriad social conditions. It is clear that policy directions are both causes of and solutions to homelessness. Often not explicitly considered in debates on this topic, it is important to note that policies affecting homelessness contain critical normative questions about the sharing and withholding of societal resources. Although homelessness can be considered a wicked policy problem, an emphasis on the complexity of the issue can distract from the recognition that the current conditions that make homelessness complex are a product of policy choices we make and condone (Head and Alford, 2015). The fundamental, relevant policy question is not: 'Do we have the technical knowledge to end homelessness?' Rather, it is: 'How can the knowledge we already have about how to end homelessness drive social policy reform so that housing justice is achieved for those excluded from housing?' (Parsell, 2017).

The chapter is structured in two main sections. The first, Section 3.2, focuses on the Australian Government's policy realm. While the most important aspect of this concerns social security policies, we also consider the Australian Government's potentially significant role in expanding the provision of social and affordable rental housing. Finally, in this section we consider federal policies on funding support for homelessness services.

The second main component of the chapter, Section 3.3, concentrates on policy realms relevant to homelessness within the remit of state and territory governments. This includes the Street to Home initiatives, social and affordable housing, and tackling domestic violence. This chapter's focus on welfare, housing, key homelessness and domestic violence policies is not an exhaustive list of all relevant policies. We developed this focus driven by the existing literature, the model of causation outlined in Chapter 1, and our empirical research with survey and interview respondents. It is also a recognition that policy action (or inaction) on housing, income support and homelessness programs (including domestic violence initiatives) are critical in shaping the scale and nature of homelessness in Australia.

This is not to under-emphasise the impact of other policy areas such as state-based responses to child protection and the out-of-home care systems which, as discussed in Chapter 2, help shape the process of institutional discharge. Likewise, the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) is a policy area worthy of closer study. Following its national roll-out it will be important to see how the housing needs of people with a disability are met and how these measures (along with the income circumstance of these persons) reduce or increase the risk of homelessness. This question reinforces the primary policy focus in this current study on housing, income support measures and homelessness programs. Finally, in Section 3.4, we draw together some of the main themes of the chapter.

3.2 Australian Government policy realm

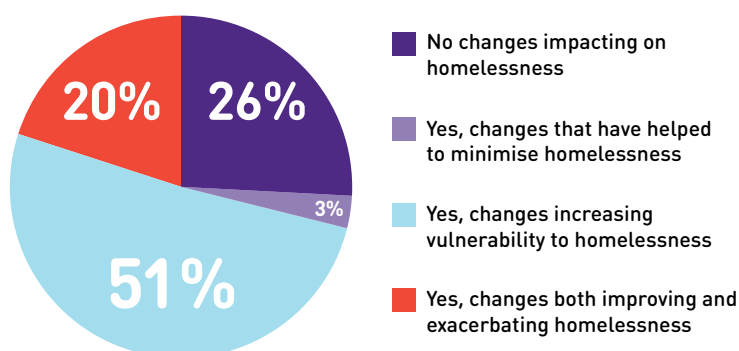
3.2.1 Social security

Perhaps the most important federal policy levers directly affecting homelessness are those relating to welfare benefits or social security. Government pensions and allowances form the main source of income for some 2.2 million Australian households. And while this equates to 24% of all households (ABS 2017c), the corresponding proportion for the component of the population at risk of homelessness would be much higher. Therefore, policy (or practice) change in this area can substantively enlarge or reduce the numbers in danger of becoming (or remaining) homeless.

In Chapter 2, reference was made to changes in policies and practices of social security payments. Some of these are discussed in more detail below. Firstly, however, in Figure 3.1, we summarise the informed opinions of homelessness service providers on the possible connection between such developments and the incidence of homelessness. Just over a quarter of respondents (26%) did not consider that there had been any such moves. However, 71% of respondents took the view that changes of this kind had exacerbated homelessness — including 20% who brought to mind both 'positive' and 'negative' changes in this context. Just 3% believed that there had only been positive changes.

Government policies potentially impacting on homelessness

Figure 3.1: Thinking about the past five years, would you say there have been any significant changes to the welfare benefits system and/or Centrelink practice that have impacted on homelessness?



Source: Online survey of homelessness service provider agencies (N=70).

In elaborating the survey responses summarised in Figure 3.1, research informants highlighted three specific changes that had negatively affected homelessness in recent years:

- rule changes restricting eligibility for Single Parent Payments
- displacement of Disability Support Pension recipients onto Newstart, and
- increased benefit sanctioning.

The first of these concerns a key change to Single Parent Payment (SPP) eligibility as enacted in 2013. This pushed all single parents onto Newstart when their youngest child turned eight. The effects of this policy can be seen in Figure 2.10 (Chapter 2). According to the Social Policy Research Centre (2016: 19) the push from Single Parent Payment to Newstart 'resulted in a typical loss of income for the poorest lone parent families of \$60 per week and affected 80,000 lone parents'. Many of our research informants identified this change as exacerbating homelessness risk. One commented:

Changes to Newstart allowance for clients who were previously on a parenting payment. Massive issue. (Victorian non-metro provider)

Respondents explained that being moved from SPP to Newstart is problematic because, as demonstrated by Anglicare's annual 'available rental properties' survey (e.g. Anglicare 2017), Newstart recipients are 'excluded most from private rental unless they are participating in shared housing' (Queensland metro and non-metro provider).

The second problematic development seen in recent years had been the displacement of Disability Support Pension (DSP) recipients onto Newstart (or the increased likelihood that a DSP applicant would be awarded Newstart only). This arises from a 2012 Australian Government move under which new impairment tables were imposed, restricting the range of DSP-qualifying conditions. This change was compounded after 2013 by the introduction of government-approved medical assessments. Again, Figure 2.10 indicates the aggregate impact of the change. For the individuals concerned, at 2015 rates, Newstart recipients qualified for \$341 per fortnight less than the equivalent DSP payment. Many homelessness service providers participating in our study

cited these changes as a factor exposing more people to loss of accommodation. Comments included:

Getting approval for Disability Support Pension has been increasingly harder. (NSW metro provider)

[Recent benefit changes exacerbating homelessness include] stricter criteria for DSP. Changes to Newstart. Restriction of parenting payment. Much more paperwork required for submission. (WA metro and non-metro provider)

Reflecting press reports (e.g. Jabour 2015) some respondents highlighted the particular exposure of people with intellectual disability or mental ill health:

Tightening of access to the Disability Support Pension particularly for people at the lower severity of intellectual disability. (NSW non-metro provider)

Sometimes [Centrelink award of Newstart rather than DSP] is [now] happening with women who are very psychiatrically unwell and this was different five years ago. (NSW metro provider)

A related issue, out of scope for this study, is the need for effective employment programs that support the transition of Newstart recipients (including those experiencing homelessness) to the labour market and help sustain participation in the paid workforce over time.

The third recent 'homelessness-generating' social security development widely cited by research participants was the perceived increase in benefit sanctioning. This includes Centrelink practices of using demerit points and 'three strikes' to engage with welfare recipients to ensure they meet obligations (Whiteford 2017), or cease payments for a prescribed period for recipients who are assessed as not compliant with their obligations. While the official data on the incidence of benefit sanctioning are far from ideal, the statistics graphed in Figures 2.12 and 2.13 provide some indication of recent national trends.

Whiteford (2017) concludes that the proposed increased welfare conditionality measures are not evidence-based, are unlikely to improve the lives of recipients or save the government money. Rather, they are symbolic. ACOSS (2017) goes further, arguing that the proposed conditions and penalties to welfare recipients would 'increase financial hardship already faced by people on inadequate incomes'. Similarly, respondents in our research observed:

Since ... 2014 ... there has been a noticeable increase in [benefit condition] 'breaches'. (NSW metro and non-metro provider)

Clients have their payments suspended if they fail to attend an appointment which is difficult for those who are homeless as they do not receive mail. (NSW non-metro provider)

Punitive approach to income support, people are often left without payments, or waiting for payments. People who don't comply [with Centrelink requirements] are cut off from payments. (Victorian metro and non-metro provider)

Related to the above issue but raising a wider concern, one respondent commented:

'Clients often don't have access to internet, have reading and writing difficulties. These difficulties often lead to clients having payments cut and doing nothing about it'. (SA metro provider)

The past few years have seen considerable political, media, and public focus and debate about changing Australia's welfare system, particularly the demands on and expectations of recipients. Some of the most contentious reform proposals emanated from the 2014 federal Budget. Discussion has also referenced the recommendations of the McClure Review of the Welfare System (Commonwealth of Australia 2015).

Significant contemporary changes, some of which have been enacted and some only proposed, include:

- The introduction of a six-month waiting period for Newstart claimants aged under 30 — officially justified by the need to 'set the clear expectation that young people must make every effort to maximise their chances of successfully obtaining work' (Thomas, 2015).
- Demerits points for recipients which can lead to a loss of benefits.
- Drug testing of people receiving benefits which, in turn, would lead to the mandatory management of benefits.

Key stakeholder participants were acutely aware of proposed increases in welfare conditions that could have a big impact on homelessness. While recognising that some of these faced parliamentary challenges, many interview participants expressed concerns about the continuing threat posed by such measures. If enacted, these would place even more people at risk of homelessness and lock more of those already homeless into this situation:

Breaching people, if increased conditionality occurs, will push people into homelessness. (Tasmanian stakeholder)

We do have an issue with drugs, but cutting people off benefits because of a failed drug test would mean that it is actually impossible for them to live somewhere. We need more money and resources into drug treatment programs. The conditional approach punishes people with a problem. (Tasmanian stakeholder)

Government policies potentially impacting on homelessness

[Increased welfare sanctioning] has not been an issue because we have not been chosen as an income management scheme. If the proposal to cut young people off benefits had of passed, we certainly would have been affected. (ACT stakeholder)

Conditionality just brings additional misery to people who are already doing it tough and find it difficult to comply. (Victorian stakeholder)

Notwithstanding the negative homelessness impacts of recent social security changes, a few survey respondents cited recent changes in Centrelink practices that have positively impacted on homelessness:

Centrelink more able to recognise 'no fixed address' and can be flexible to person's situation. (Victorian metro provider)

Community engagement officers — extremely helpful resource with direct access to Centrelink but have to cover a huge geographic area. (Victorian non-metro provider)

Homelessness workers [co-located] in ... Centrelink offices to support ... customers at risk of becoming homeless. (Victorian metro provider)

While we might not describe it as a 'recent policy change', the cumulative impact of an embedded orthodoxy — benefit indexation rates — was highlighted by many research participants as a social security policy matter of concern. This applies, in particular, to Newstart allowance and Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA). While most households reliant on Newstart already live below the poverty line, their predicament is likely to deteriorate still further over time if rates remain indexed to general price inflation, not wages (SPRC, 2016). Similarly, CRA — also indexed according to prices — has seen a long run decline in its value in relation to the rents it is intended to support. According to the Productivity Commission, its value has fallen more than 15% behind the level of rent increases since the millennium (Productivity Commission, 2017).

The Age Pension, by contrast, is indexed to wages allowing it to increase over time in line with community standards.

Stakeholders operating across a wide range of housing market contexts voiced related concerns:

Youth Allowance and Newstart are too low. It is not possible for people to survive in the market on Youth Allowance and Newstart. Even with rent assistance, people cannot afford housing. (Tasmanian stakeholder)

For people on Newstart and DSP the rental market is quite unaffordable. (ACT stakeholder)

Nobody on Newstart could afford private rental. (Regional Victoria stakeholder)

The housing stress and the unaffordability of private market housing experienced by people reliant on benefits is well known and disturbing. This is not just a Sydney and Melbourne problem. Stakeholders across Australia identified the profound challenges people reliant on benefits face paying rents in the private market.

3.2.2 Social and affordable housing

While the delivery of social and affordable housing is primarily a state and territory responsibility, the Australian Government can play an important role in terms of policy leadership and funding for new supply.

However, in terms of facilitating the development of additional affordable housing, the past five years saw a major setback in the premature termination of the National Rental Affordability Scheme (NRAS), in the process ending Commonwealth-funded rental housing supply funding.²² In return for building new homes to be rented out at sub-market rates for at least 10 years, NRAS developers were entitled to an annual subsidy (or tax deduction) funded by the Australian Government. However, the scheme was cancelled in 2014 when only 38,000 of the intended 50,000 homes had been approved and before any consideration could be given to the suggested 50,000-home follow-on program.

Since 2016, however, there has been tentative policy progress in the form of Australian Treasury development work on the establishment of an affordable housing 'bond aggregator' mechanism, to be backed by a government guarantee (Lawson et al., 2017). By enabling affordable rental housing developers to access private finance on substantially improved terms, this innovation could provide important institutional architecture to underpin a renewed supply program. At the time of writing, however, and notwithstanding the potential availability of 'cheaper long-term debt', there is no Australian Government commitment to providing the additional support needed to bridge the remaining funding gap (Martin and Pawson, 2017). There is a broader concern that the bond aggregator, once in operation, may assist in expanding the supply of 'affordable rental housing',²³ but not necessarily social housing.

²² Noting that routine annual payments to the states and territories through the National Affordable Housing Agreement are entirely accounted for in supporting the operational costs of public housing and homelessness services.

²³ That is, rental housing discounted to market but only to the extent that it is within the means of low to moderate income workers — rather than very low-income earners.

3.2.3 Funding agreement on homelessness services

A central element of the new National Housing and Homelessness Agreement, under negotiation between the federal, state and territory governments at the time of writing, is the intention to institutionalise long-term funding agreements for homelessness service providers. Beginning in 2009 and up until 2018, the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH) has been the dominant form of funding for homelessness programs in Australia. NPAH is a COAG initiative, whereby the federal, state and territory governments co-fund homelessness programs. In recent years, the NPAH and the programs, and hundreds of thousands of people supported, have lacked security about the continued federal commitment. In 2015 the NPAH was extended for two years; and in late 2016, the Australian Government announced that it would extend the NPAH until June 2018. We strongly support the plan to increase the duration of homelessness funding and to create security and predictability in homelessness policy and programs.

Recent practices of funding homelessness services through short-term agreements, often for one year, and decisions about renewing the short-term agreement made with insufficient notice to create programs, service delivery and job security, significantly undermine the effective operation of homelessness service providers.

Not surprisingly, many of our interviewees and online survey respondents expressed concern about the detrimental consequences of this approach:

The 12-month funding cycle is causing extreme staffing and future program development challenges: we are losing staff. The staff are very skilled and committed, but we are losing staff because of insecurity.
(Regional Victorian stakeholder)

On the other hand, participants identified the intention to move to long-term funding agreements as a positive policy progression that is likely to reduce homelessness:

Promise of NPAH funding spanning more than 12 months at a time. (Victorian stakeholder)

We know we have ongoing funding. The state of play now is much rosier than it has been over the past five years.
(South Australian stakeholder)

In a representative 2012 study of the homelessness workforce (funded by the Australian Government), Bill Martin and colleagues noted that an effectively skilled workforce was central to achieving the government's homelessness policy reforms (Martin et al., 2012). They identified the altruism and sense of purpose that drove the homelessness workforce, while highlighting staff dissatisfaction with the security of their employment contracts, and the risk that workers under less secure employment contracts will leave the organisation. The capacity of the sector to achieve positive outcomes is reliant on a skilled workforce that has the confidence in knowing that the funding for their service will continue.

3.3 State and territory policy realm

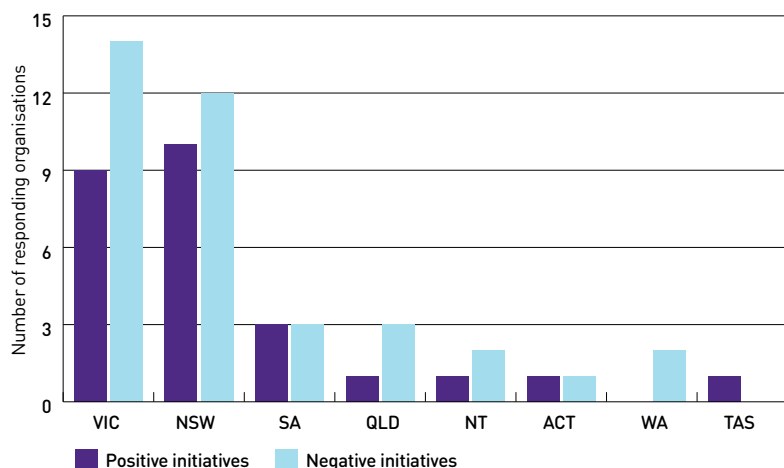
3.3.1 Perceptions of policy change impacting homelessness

Reflecting the complex debates involved, our informants articulated diverse perspectives on the impact of recent policy changes at the state and territory (or local) level on homelessness. Just over a third of respondents (36%) in our homelessness service provider survey acknowledged recent policy changes or initiatives at this level that had helped. But just over half (53%) of respondents considered that the past five years had seen policy changes that had exacerbated homelessness.²⁴ Moreover, and as shown in Figure 3.2, negative policy changes outnumbered positive in most jurisdictions.

²⁴ Although in a few instances it was clear from their answers to the follow-up question that respondents were mistakenly citing 'negative' policy changes initiated by the national government.

Government policies potentially impacting on homelessness

Figure 3.2: State and territory recent policy reforms and initiatives perceived as having a bearing on homelessness



Source: Online survey of homelessness service provider agencies. (N=70)

3.3.2 Street to Home initiatives

Housing First, Street to Home and supportive housing initiatives are the most direct forms of state and territory government-supported interventions that aim to tackle rough sleeping and chronic homelessness. In the recent Australian policy context, the central elements of such approaches were popularised in the Australian Government's 2008 White Paper. Subsequently, they have been rolled out in many cities across the country.

Crucially, the Housing First model provides those experiencing homelessness with immediate access to housing, and links with ongoing multidisciplinary support services to assist in tenancy sustainment (Johnson et al., 2012). Housing First was developed in the United States with a specific focus on people with diagnosed psychiatric illnesses. The precise programmatic elements do not neatly transfer to Australia's diverse contexts, but the principles of providing *housing* rather than *homelessness accommodation*, enabling people to exercise choice, and the linking of support services with housing are all elements that can, and in some examples do, constitute sound policy and practice in Australia.

Street to Home programs in Australia, in some models, contain assertive and purposeful street outreach, immediate access to housing, and the provision of ongoing support services to people after they exit homelessness. In these ways, and specifically as articulated through formal policy documents, Street to Home programs can embody the principles and practice elements of Housing First.

First initiated in South Australia (2005), and then funded in Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane through the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness from 2009, Street to Home initiatives have achieved measurable success in:

- identifying and engaging people sleeping rough with social and health problems
- assisting people to immediately exit homelessness, and
- supporting people with chronic histories of homelessness to sustain housing.

Evidence from Melbourne (Johnson and Chamberlain 2015), from Sydney (Parsell, Jones and Tomaszewski 2013a) and from Brisbane (Parsell, Jones and Tomaszewski 2013b), shows that people with long histories of homelessness and associated health and social problems can immediately exit homelessness and sustain housing. Australian evidence demonstrates that people living on the streets otherwise believed to be 'not housing ready' can be housed when three critical policy and program features are achieved:

- purposeful street outreach
- direct provision of secure and affordable housing, and
- voluntary and ongoing support.

The nature and delivery of the Street to Home, Housing First, and supportive housing programs (and whether they are even named as such) varies across Australia. Variations include the mode of street outreach, mechanisms for accessing and funding housing, and the support provided, including whether health support is integrated with the delivery and management of housing, or whether support is provided on site in congregate form or whether support is delivered through outreach. In Sydney, for example, when the Way2Home model was unable to quickly access social housing to enable people sleeping rough to immediately access secure housing, the Platform 70 initiative was developed to enable outreach workers to access housing stock head-leased from the private rental market. Although Platform 70 was a pilot initiative that did not disrupt the fundamental housing market failures that kept people excluded from housing (Parkinson and Parsell 2017), it proved a successful means of engaging the market that enabled those experiencing long-term homelessness to immediately access housing.

Common Ground supportive housing is a particular model of a Street to Home project imported from the USA (Parsell et al., 2014). Although initially criticised due to concerns around congregate living and scalability, it has generated a modest increase in affordable, secure housing in the five cities where projects were established. Much of this provision has been for people exiting chronic homelessness and rough sleeping (Parsell et al., 2016).

Despite the diversity in how initiatives operate, the above-cited research shows that when the three critical ingredients (see above) are present, 85-90% of assisted people sustain their housing for more than one year. The extent to which such projects can reduce rough sleeping depends on how well they are resourced and whether their access to suitable long-term housing is sufficient to enable them to interrupt the flow of new rough sleepers.

When governments adopt a Housing First policy they are able to reduce homelessness, rather than managing people through homelessness accommodation and

insecure temporary arrangements (Johnson et al., 2012). In Queensland, a stakeholder argued that the reduction of Brisbane's rough sleeping from 300 people 10 years ago to currently 188 people, could in part be explained by the success of the Street to Home program adopting a Housing First approach. Overall, this represents a 37% reduction in rough sleeping in inner city Brisbane identified between the 2006 and 2016 ABS Censuses (ABS 2018a). Similarly, a South Australian stakeholder attributed a reduction in Adelaide rough sleeping to the state committing to a Housing First policy:

We have a real Housing First policy. We have a stock of about 80 houses that we have taken out of the public housing system and we have given to our street work team in Adelaide. We literally are able to get people off the street and put them straight into housing. The 30 or 40 people we have housed from the streets over the past couple of months have been allocated one of these properties. (South Australian stakeholder)

As acknowledged here, the Housing First policy requires a commitment to make affordable and secure housing available to people on the streets. However, an analysis of NPAH-funded programs found that while governments have increasingly identified with the language and evidence base of Housing First, the housing resources and ongoing support integral to the model were often absent (Parsell et al., 2013).

Although Australia's Housing First and Street to Home models often allude to the provision of ongoing support to those exiting homelessness, this is rarely sustained in practice. Australia needs to develop a permanent supportive housing policy. Notwithstanding bespoke policy initiatives across the country where support is closely integrated with housing, at a system level we deliver housing distinct from the provision of support and, as such, we achieve poor outcomes for many people with support needs who exit homelessness:

We also lack sufficient funding and support for families that are struggling. So it is not just a lack of stock, but a lack of resources to assist families that lead to problems that in turn lead to homelessness. (Tasmanian stakeholder)

In our human service system, we do not have a mobile ongoing support system that goes with people who won't be able to sustain housing without support. We could save bucket loads and sustain tenancies if we had systems that enabled people to be supported over the long term. (Victorian stakeholder)

Government policies potentially impacting on homelessness

Without ongoing support, tenancies may be at risk. Stakeholder interviewees recognised that there are models that provide support, but rarely is this linked with the provision of housing, and frequently there is no funding for the continuation of support for the period required. Even when tenants who have exited homelessness do access ongoing support — such as, through state-funded mental health services — the delivery of support is disconnected from the provision of housing. Recent Queensland evidence revealed social housing tenants, who were patients of mental health services, were being evicted for displaying symptoms of their mental illness. In practice, the state mental health provider knew nothing about, much less took into account, their patients' housing needs. The social housing provider was likewise ignorant of the tenants' mental health support needs (Jones et al., 2014).

Notwithstanding the widespread tendency for a disconnected relationship between housing and support, online survey respondents cited numerous examples where service integration efforts have positive impacts in reducing homelessness:

Homestay programs that support people to maintain their tenancies. (Queensland provider)

Trialling the Homelessness Action Plan (HAP) [was] a great improvement leading into the reforms as brokerage. The new No Wrong Door policy has also assisted clients ... all services are now accredited services with the new quality assurance system ... Link2Home is another good initiative. (NSW provider)

The Housing Connect shared database has increased the capacity of services to share information and reduced the need for clients to repeat their story. (Tasmanian provider)

Many of the cited examples above are consistent with the aspirations outlined in the 2008 White Paper. As we have noted in relation to other forms of homelessness intervention, however, much depends on the simple availability of permanent affordable housing:

The system can be as slick as you like, but if people are not leaving social housing and the [available] stock [therefore] does not exist [homeless] people will not be able to access housing no matter how well our processes, systems, and integration is. (Tasmanian stakeholder)

We can provide great case management for three years, but if we don't have housing the case management will be pointless. (South Australia stakeholder)

The significance of support and an enhanced service system is widely acknowledged as a critical factor to reduce homelessness, but this recognition is balanced against the understanding that an absence of secure and affordable housing is the primary issue:

It does not matter how much support dollars are provided, if there is no housing, the support will have limited impact. I think support has been prioritised as the cheap option. We have welcomed support traditionally, but we are now saying unless you tackle structural housing problems you are wasting our time. (Victorian stakeholder)

The effectiveness of system enhancements will always be moderated by the availability of affordable housing.

3.3.3 Erosion of social and 'affordable private rental' housing provision

The relative contraction in Australia's already small social housing sector over the past 20 years means that most low-income households must rely on a private rental market where, as shown in Section 2.3, the cost of housing has outpaced welfare benefits and entry-level employee wages. The increasingly inadequate level of key social security benefits is a strong argument for expanding the provision of social rental housing in which the traditional income-based rent model protects tenants from housing unaffordability:

Income is the primary reason why we need a good public housing system to avoid homelessness. Even when people are assisted ... into private rental, the unaffordable rents mean that they leave the housing and are again seeking assistance. In the absence of social housing people on benefits cannot secure affordable and safe housing. (Queensland stakeholder)

At federal, state and territory levels a policy stance that reflects a complacent reliance on market-provided affordable housing has arguably constituted a key driver of rising homelessness. Rather than contemporary policy initiatives that have weakened the protective function of social housing to provide secure, long-term and affordable housing, as in England (Fitzpatrick et al., 2017), in Australia it is affordable housing policy inaction that has been a critical contributor to the problem. The limited supply of housing within the means of Australia's lower-income population places many at risk of homelessness and erodes the capacities of already homeless people to recover from their situation. As a Queensland stakeholder concisely observed, 'if we are going to break the cycle of homelessness we need much more social housing'.

Similarly in the ACT, there was reportedly no clear policy strategy to social housing system scale and capacity:

We do not have a growth strategy for community housing ... We do not plan how community housing could contribute to addressing homelessness. This is not driving homelessness, but it is just not clear that there are plans and mechanisms in place for the community housing sector to alleviate homelessness. (ACT stakeholder)

In Victoria, where capital city median house prices rose by 47% in the five years to 2017 (Figure 2.16b), and rough sleeping in inner city Melbourne has become visible and a politically contentious issue, stakeholders argued that government inaction in countering housing market stress has amounted to a major driver of homelessness:

There is no doubt that we are seeing rough sleeping on a scale ... never seen before. This is driven by the housing market first and foremost: that governments have systematically got out of providing social housing and are relying on the market which is completely uninterested in the bottom end. (Victorian stakeholder)

The picture of limited social housing stock offering little salvation for homelessness was also described in Tasmania, a state where market-provided affordable housing has been historically more plentiful. Here, however, provision was significantly failing to expand in line with need, as evidenced by an expansion in the social housing waitlist from the historically normal 2000 applicants to currently 3000:

People are turning up to shelters, and it is not because they have a whole lot of problems, it is just that they can't get hold of affordable rental ... they cannot afford housing available in the market ... but the problem is with more and more people coming to social housing, is that the stock has not increased to meet the increased demand, the overall stock has actually shrunk. We do not get enough funding so we sell our properties to run the show. (Tasmanian stakeholder)

Across Australia stakeholders widely coupled effective long-term disinvestment in social housing with rising demand for homelessness services. In contrast to stereotypes of the homeless as different and deficient with the implicit assumption that their individual problems explain their housing need (Parsell 2010), many stakeholders reported that growing numbers presenting to homelessness services do not exhibit so-called complex needs. For those concerned, the primary problem is an inadequate supply of social housing, not inadequate individuals unable to access and hold down a tenancy.

The pressures on social housing can only be considered in a wider context of the housing system. As one stakeholder pointed out, the increased demand that highlights the paucity of social housing sits within the larger housing system that includes the increasingly stressed private rental market and a home ownership sector for many receding ever further out of reach. Perversely, housing system limitations and associated homelessness drivers are products of economic growth and policy failure to capitalise on the economic conditions to expand affordable housing:

We have lost about 600 or 700 units of low-cost accommodation in Melbourne in the last two years. The stock has been taken away, and now [homeless] people are visible. (Victorian stakeholder)

Caravan parks and low-cost accommodation are closing down throughout the suburbs as land becomes more valuable. People who have lived in this accommodation for years are seeing it sold off to development, and they are finding themselves homeless. It is very hard for councils to come up with solutions. (Victorian stakeholder)

Homelessness and housing insecurity is being driven by increased land values and the resultant pressure on affordable housing in well-located places. Melburnian stakeholder testimony on this point is consistent with reports from key stakeholders in other capital cities across the country. Moreover, the perceived contraction of the marginal rental housing market was not only an urban problem. These problems are also experienced in regional locations where rising land values have created economic and development conditions that diminish the supply of properties accessible to low-income groups:

Caravan parks in our area no longer take longer-term residents, they cater to 'grey nomads'. Pubs that previously housed clients are now changed to more boutique pubs. (Victorian non-metro provider)

Less chance of getting clients into motels, caravan parks or temp accommodation. (Victorian non-metro provider)

Stakeholders recognised that developers and property owners would be motivated by financial considerations:

It is quite appropriate to expect that the private sector will think about profits. That is what it is there for. It is hard to fathom why we would expect the private market to look after people on the lowest incomes. (Victorian stakeholder)

Government policies potentially impacting on homelessness

The absence of [affordable housing] stock is the key driver of increased homelessness. The market focuses on middle and higher end, not the lower end. (Tasmanian stakeholder)

Concern was expressed, however, about the limited policy intervention to ensure that the profits and tax revenue gained through development were sufficiently deployed to create affordable housing for those pushed out when development occurs. As one Victorian stakeholder noted, we are seeing state governments ‘addicted to stamp duty’.

Referring to a Darwin construction boom associated with the recent development of a major gas plant, a Northern Territory stakeholder reported the resulting closure of a 200-room boarding house in Darwin; at the same time, and reportedly linked with same project, ‘the private rentals were filling with executives’.

As argued above, the upward pressure on homelessness seen across much of the country in recent years reflects the combination of strong economic performance and the lack of action to expand the provision of below-market housing. This is compounded by the insecurity experienced by tenants in Australia’s lightly regulated private rental markets. Thus:

The [Residential Tenancies] Act is outdated and favours private rental owners. (Victorian stakeholder)

[The private rental market is] precarious and unaffordable for older people. Their income cannot keep up with the rising rents; the private rental sector does not provide people with the security they require. (Tasmanian stakeholder)

However, while the approach to private rental regulation is fairly similar across all states and territories (Hulse et al., 2012) the affordability and accessibility of the housing market varies substantially. While such areas are exceptions to the norm, there are certain regional settings where the past few years have seen the private rental sector becoming a more feasible option for those experiencing homelessness:

Five or six years ago lots of regional Queensland was very unaffordable, that is not the case now. There is now much more affordable housing available in the regions: vacant housing, less pressure on the social housing system. (Queensland stakeholder)

Having experienced a housing boom in the first decade of the 2000s in line with mining and construction for new mining ventures, the subsequent mining downturn has left some regions of Queensland and Western Australia with high vacancy rates alongside much reduced rents (and house prices).

3.3.4 Social and affordable housing growth initiatives

Albeit against the general backdrop of affordable housing policy inaction, some small-scale progressive policy moves in this realm must be acknowledged.²⁵

The New South Wales Government, for instance, has recently established two social and affordable housing construction initiatives:

- the NSW Social and Affordable Housing Fund (SAHF), and
- the Communities Plus public housing estate renewal program.

From its first two funding rounds (in 2016 and 2017) the SAHF is expected to generate 3400 social and affordable rental homes constructed over several years (NSW Government 2017). Of these, 75% will be social rental homes targeted at very low-income households. Communities Plus, meanwhile, aims to construct 23,000 new social housing units and 500 new affordable rental homes over 10 years in place of 17,000 existing public housing dwellings to be demolished.

Although welcomed by state peak bodies, academics and others, the annual net increase in social and affordable housing generated through these programs will total, at best, little more than a quarter of the output required to meet NSW’s projected need for 100,000 social and affordable rental homes over the next 20 years (Yates 2016). This is especially the case since open market sales have continued to erode the NSW public housing stock in recent years. While the disposal of 300 homes at Millers Point has generated extensive public debate, this constitutes only a very small fraction of the wider sales program that has seen 4000 dwellings sold off since 2011 (Robertson, 2017).

²⁵ At the same time, it should be noted that the following accounts of ‘positive developments’ in NSW, Victoria and Queensland should not be regarded as an exhaustive account of all recently announced or currently ongoing state/territory-initiated social/affordable housing programs. Since this section draws mainly on the stakeholder interviews and online survey of homelessness services providers, it is reliant on this testimony – albeit backed by easily accessible online sources.

Similarly, after years of affordable housing stasis, the Victorian Government announced in 2017 three social housing construction initiatives:

- the Social Housing Growth Fund (SHGF)
- the Public Housing Estate Renewal Program, and
- the Social Housing Pipeline Program.

Under the SHGF, the aspiration is to 'support up to 2200 new social housing places' over five years through construction and rental support (Victorian Government, n.d.). The public housing estate renewal program aims to replace 2500 existing dwellings over four years, yielding a net increase of 250 dwellings. Meanwhile, the public housing pipeline budget allocation is expected to generate 913 homes over four years (Victorian Government, 2017). These announced programs were preceded in 2016 by a \$152 million 'housing blitz' budget allocation for additional crisis and longer-term housing targeted towards domestic and family violence survivors.

Again, the gross impact of these programs will fall well short of what would be needed even to stabilise the state-wide proportion of social housing at its existing very low level. As in NSW, however, the initiatives have been acknowledged as producing limited affordable housing that should enable more people to quickly exit homelessness (Council to Homeless Persons, 2017). Similarly, a Victorian stakeholder in our study commented:

We are supportive of the government having a go in this area. It will not result in a huge increase in stock, but we will take any increase. (Victorian stakeholder)

In its 2017-27 housing strategy, the Queensland Government (2017) projects the construction of 5600 social and affordable dwellings. Again, however, considered within the context of an expected overall increase in population and dwelling stock of 380,000 over the period, this must once again be judged a very modest program — being far smaller than what would be required to maintain the state's existing low level of social housing provision.

While on a scale quite incongruent with need, the recent state government initiatives to expand social and affordable rental housing in Queensland, Victoria, and New South Wales are welcomed. In principle, at least, they arguably demonstrate ongoing government commitment to invest in housing supply as a response to housing need, rather than focusing available resources solely on temporary and crisis responses which could potentially entrench people in homelessness. Relevant to this concern, a Victorian stakeholder reflected on the activities of a provider to deliver a sleep bus in Melbourne as a response to homelessness, a response that the stakeholder described as 'very, very concerning', also explaining that:

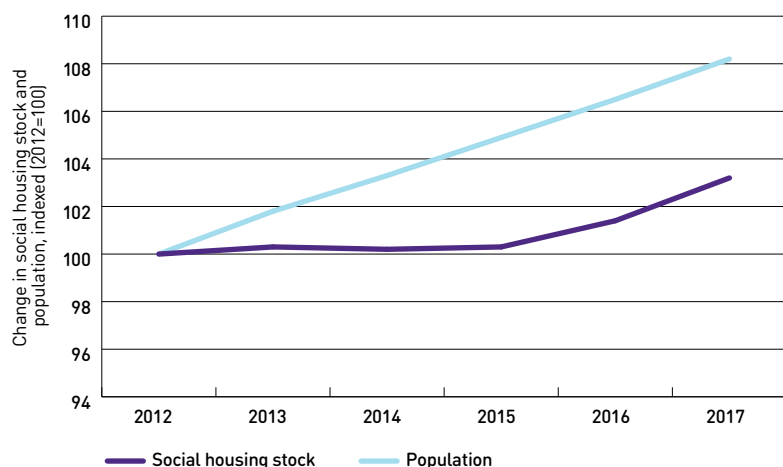
To this point we have been successful at tempering some government sponsorship [of the sleep bus]. We are committed to long-term housing outcomes. (Victorian stakeholder)

In Queensland, on the other hand, under a policy referred to as Dignity First, the State Government has directly funded organisations to provide mobile washing machines, mobile showers and mobile haircuts to people who are homeless (Parsell and Watts 2017). We argue elsewhere that this is un-evidenced and regressive policy which problematically normalises homelessness and sends the message that homelessness is a social fact that policy ought not endeavour to address (Parsell and Watts 2017). It is the function of the state to ensure that citizens can access suitable, affordable and secure housing; not to fund charities to provide minimal cleaning services to people living on the streets.

Unless governments bring forward new programs to ramp up supply well in excess of what is currently committed, the next decade will continue the trend where marginal growth in social housing provision falls well short of what is needed even to keep pace with population growth. As shown in Figure 3.3, while Australia's population grew by 8% during the period 2012-2017, social housing expanded by less than half this amount.

Government policies potentially impacting on homelessness

Figure 3.3: Relative change in population and social housing provision, 2012-17



Sources: Productivity Commission Report on Government Services 2018 (Table 18A.3); ABS Cat 3101.0.

3.3.5 Responding to domestic and family violence

As highlighted in Chapter 5, domestic violence is a major catalyst for homelessness. More broadly, the past five years has seen growing public and political recognition of domestic violence as a major social and cultural problem. Governments across Australia have responded with major domestic violence policy announcements and in Victoria, a Royal Commission into Family Violence.

The contemporary policy focus on domestic violence has made a significant contribution to Australian society. It has helped the community to understand that domestic violence is driven by gendered and structural inequities, and the power between women and men (Victoria State Government, n.d.). In this section we examine some of the key ways that contemporary domestic violence policy is likely to affect homelessness.

A clear way that contemporary domestic violence policy plays a positive role in reducing homelessness is through increased resources made available through initiatives across Australia. Premised on domestic violence as a problem of gender inequities, some such initiatives have sought to directly address the inequitable access to resources.

A stakeholder with deep experience in Victoria lauded the important contribution that the rapid re-housing initiative through head-leasing had achieved for women and children leaving violence (ABC News 2016). Commenting on the recent Victorian Government's initiatives in this area another commented:

Doing the foundational work; a huge investment across everything that needs to be done. They are doing it properly. We are putting numbers to how much social housing we need in Victoria to respond to domestic violence. Working across the whole system. (Victorian stakeholder)

Initiatives that require the perpetrator of violence to leave the home while providing safety measures to keep victim survivors in the house are also playing a role in preventing homelessness (although potentially not for the perpetrator, see below). These Safe at Home measures were described by research participants as significant, not only for averting an immediate entry into homelessness for victim survivors needing to escape violence, but also in enabling women to think through and organise their next moves:

... very often those women won't stay in the home long term... for a range of reasons. If there is a mortgage on the home she won't be able to afford it ... What we are finding that [Safe at Home] is really great for, she might stay at home for six months or a year, and that buys her time. She can be supported through brokerage programs to cover costs. But it buys her time to work through what to do next in life ... This is very different from having to flee in the middle of the night.
(Victorian stakeholder)

Domestic and family violence has been a pathway into homelessness for many women and children.

40%

of cases reported to service providers cited domestic violence as a significant factor for homelessness 2014-15 - 2016-17.



24%

increase in domestic violence as the primary cause of homelessness 2014-15 to 2016-17.



Government policies potentially impacting on homelessness

Observations noted about the appropriateness of policy models that require the perpetrator to leave the home are predicated on the linked policy, judicial, and enforcement mechanisms in place to ensure that the victim survivors are safe. As Spinney (2012) observed, Safe at Home interventions are effective only when they are integrated within a broader system. Another stakeholder highlighted the significance of new technologies that show promise in keeping women and children safe; for example, video recording devices that provide direct information to, and evidence for, the criminal justice system if the perpetrator breaches an order and attends the property.

While concurring with other positive appraisals of contemporary domestic violence policy as putting downward pressure on homelessness (Spinney 2012), we see a need to develop additional policy mechanisms to firstly, change the behaviour of perpetrators of violence and secondly, to ensure that perpetrators have access to housing. Even under successful models where perpetrators are rightly required to leave the home, if they do not change their violent behaviour the net effect may be only to displace the problem. Moreover, if perpetrators lack access to housing, as one Victorian stakeholder explained, they will ‘go back and stay with family, and then they perpetrate against family’.

Referring to the Victorian Royal Commission, an initiative widely praised, stakeholders observed policymaker silence on this subject. If the perpetrator is excluded, ‘we are just creating another homelessness problem’. The issue is not simply about providing housing to perpetrators, but actively intervening to change their behaviour. The focus on perpetrators taking responsibility for their actions needs to be coupled with intervention to enable change. Where a criminal act has been committed, a perpetrator should be held to account by judicial services. However, imposing an additional penalty in terms of refusing housing assistance is likely to be counter-productive. Crucially, there must be a priority on therapeutic interventions to change behavior. On this, a stakeholder described the need for policy to maintain a dual focus:

That both holds people accountable for their behaviour and [mandates] therapeutic interventions to change their behaviour. (Victorian stakeholder)

Another Victoria stakeholder supported the recent policy focus on ‘the side of policing and protecting women’, but they, too, lamented the limited focus on properly managing perpetrators. If policy and practice energy neglected the perpetrator — with the clear premise of the perpetrator changing — then the ambitious justice objectives would not be realised. Developing this theme, a stakeholder reported evidence that more than half of the men staying in a Melbourne homelessness shelter had perpetrated domestic violence. Therefore, the homelessness accommodation services in particular, and homelessness accommodation more widely, need to provide support services to change perpetrator behaviour.

Notwithstanding the argument for an increased focus on properly managing domestic violence perpetrators, we are optimistic that recent domestic violence policy holds potential to help in moderating homelessness and to achieve positive housing and life outcomes for women and children. Nevertheless, fully realising the potential of domestic violence policy initiatives (regarding both violence reduction and homelessness prevention) is highly dependent on the enhanced availability of permanent social and affordable housing. While acknowledging the significance of the Victorian Government’s recent investment here, a local stakeholder observed:

But it is just useful around the edges. The new initiatives do not disrupt fundamental structures of housing market. (Victorian stakeholder)

Our analysis of the Australian housing market, increases in homelessness, and a broad array of policy measures concur. We are encouraged by current domestic violence policies which will help in limiting homelessness arising from domestic and family violence, but we are conscious that these positive policy initiatives are unable to produce the supply of affordable housing that is also vital. Parkinson and Parsell (2017) make a similar point about successful supportive housing policies. They work very well for those who get benefit from programs and resources flowing from the policy, but the specific policies leave unchanged the market failures that leave people excluded from housing.

3.4 Chapter conclusion

Building on published literature, the online survey responses and key stakeholder interview data presented in this chapter highlight a range of recent policy moves that have exacerbated homelessness, albeit some initiatives with the potential to ameliorate the problem have also been identified. Most significantly, we have argued that people reliant on social security benefits, particularly Newstart and Youth Allowance, are widely considered to be at great risk of homelessness and housing stress. The failure to adequately index these payments, as in the case of Commonwealth Rent Assistance, has been progressively increasing the homelessness vulnerability of eligible recipients. The long-term erosion of social housing across Australia is also a key driver of homelessness. Likewise, the intensifying shortage of social housing, and affordable private rental properties, is making it increasingly difficult for agencies to assist people to exit homelessness.

On the other hand, and albeit on a scale grossly incongruent with need, recent state government plans to expand social and affordable rental housing in Queensland, Victoria, and New South Wales are welcomed. In principle, at least, they demonstrate an ongoing government commitment to invest in housing supply as a response to housing need, rather than focusing available resources solely on temporary and crisis responses which all too often provide no long-term solution, nor even a route to such an outcome.

In this chapter we have also shown significant links between homelessness and contemporary domestic violence policy across Australia. Domestic violence policy has, for instance, placed housing as a key feature to enable women to leave violence. The benefits notwithstanding, domestic violence policy could be enhanced by placing more emphasis on therapeutic and housing interventions for perpetrators of domestic violence to ensure that current policy does not inadvertently displace homelessness.

Short-term funding agreements for homelessness services have negatively impacted the sector by undermining the function of the service system. However, the intention to institutionalise long-term funding agreements for homelessness services through the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement holds promise to achieve better housing outcomes for people who are homeless.

Also on a more optimistic note, we have shown how Housing First, Street to Home and permanent supportive housing models have created sustainable and immediate housing outcomes for people sleeping rough and with chronic experiences of homelessness. The success of these models has been to demonstrate that long-term rough sleeping exists because we have not changed our systems to enable people to exit homelessness. These models successfully end homelessness for people often assumed to be 'too hard to house'. The evidence demonstrates that these broad models are effective when programs have the resources to provide ongoing purposeful street outreach, immediate access to housing, and when ongoing support services are available for the period required.

Against the backdrop of Housing First, Street to Home, and supportive housing, constituting successful Australian models to demonstrably reduce homelessness, the programs are challenged across Australia by limited social housing stock, a reliance on homelessness accommodation (the antithesis to Housing First), and limited resourcing and institutional arrangements to enable the ongoing delivery of support services to people post-homelessness.

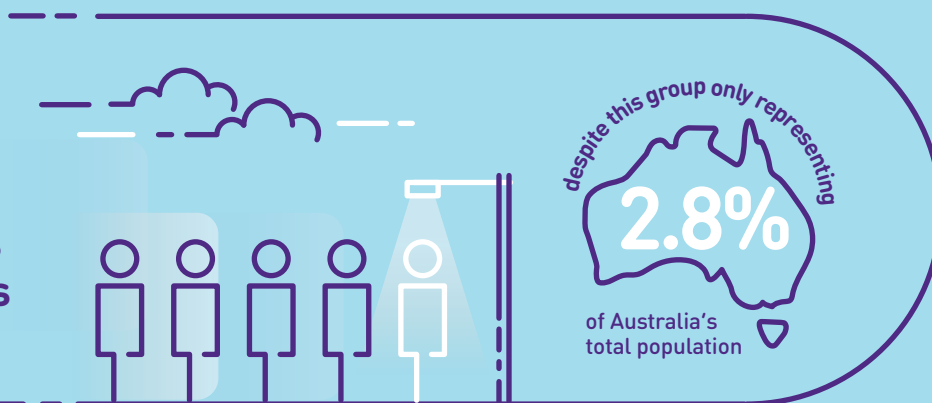
04

Indigenous homelessness in northern Australia

Indigenous Australians are nearly 10x more likely to experience homelessness.

22%

of Australians experiencing homelessness are Indigenous Australians



35%

increase in Indigenous Australians sleeping rough 2011-2016.



4.1 Chapter background and remit

Indigenous people are 10 times more likely to experience homelessness compared to non-Indigenous Australians. Although the 649,171 people who identified as Indigenous make up only 2.8% of the Australian population, Indigenous people represent 22% of Australia's homeless population. The extent of Indigenous homelessness and the disproportionate rates by which Indigenous Australians experience homelessness compared to non-Indigenous Australians represent a continued pattern of housing exclusion throughout Australian history.

This chapter focuses specifically on homelessness that is experienced by Indigenous people largely driven by an inadequate supply of affordable housing in remote Indigenous communities, particularly in the Northern Territory. The Northern Territory has the highest rate of homelessness in Australia, and the rate is predominantly explained by the rate of severe overcrowding in Indigenous communities. This is not to ignore the over-representation of Indigenous in homelessness in other parts of the country, as will be shown in Chapter 5. Indigenous scholar Jenine Godwin-Thompson (2014) has outlined some of the myriad social and housing policies that have undermined Indigenous people's wellbeing and contributed to inadequate housing and homelessness. Memmott and Nash (2014), likewise, show how the historic forces of colonisation and dispossession from land continue to have direct impacts into Indigenous homelessness. We recognise, but in this report do not engage with, colonisation and the many public policies that contribute to housing exclusion and homelessness among Indigenous Australians. Drawing on the experiences of our key stakeholder informants and recent literature, in this section we focus our analysis specifically on how Indigenous housing in remote Indigenous communities contributes to the disproportionate rate of Indigenous homelessness in Australia.

Currently, 79% of Indigenous people live in urban areas (ABS 2017d). Moreover, the Indigenous population is becoming increasingly urban. Between 1996 and 2016 the proportion of Indigenous people living in urban areas rose from 73% to 79%, with the increase largely driven by Indigenous people moving to capital cities: in 1996, 30% of Indigenous people lived in capital cities, whereas the proportion had increased to 35% in 2016 (ABS 2017d). Thus, only a minority of Indigenous people live in remote Indigenous communities and the majority of this group live in the Northern Territory. The Northern Territory has, by far, the largest proportion of Indigenous citizens in the country. Whereas Indigenous people make up less than 1% of Victoria's population, Indigenous people constitute 26% of the Northern Territory population (ABS 2017).

For many Indigenous people living in Northern Territory's remote Indigenous communities, an absence of adequate housing is a dominant feature of life (Habibis et al., 2016).

Developing the argument outlined in Chapter 3 about policy failure to invest adequately in the supply of affordable and social housing across Australia, our principal objective here is to illustrate how the insufficient supply and quality of housing in remote Indigenous communities manifest in two linked forms of homelessness. Firstly, and as the ABS Census demonstrates, through the very high incidence of Indigenous people being officially classified as homeless because they are living in severely crowded dwellings. Secondly, because of myriad factors — some of which are inseparable from the conditions of living in severely crowded dwellings (Memmott, Long, and Thomas 2006) — Indigenous people move from severely crowded dwellings in remote Indigenous communities and experience homelessness when they live in severely crowded housing, temporary accommodation, and public spaces in capital and regional cities of Australia.

The chapter is structured in two main sections. Next, in Section 4.2 we look at the nature of and relevant policies for homelessness as manifest in severely crowded dwellings in remote Indigenous communities, particularly in the Northern Territory. Drawing on the stark figures consistently identified in ABS Census enumerations in many remote Indigenous communities, there is a massive shortfall of housing stock driving homelessness, on the one hand, and linked social, economic, and health problems, on the other. Against this backdrop, in Section 4.3 we focus on how the deprived housing conditions provided in remote Indigenous communities acts as a platform for people to move, both temporarily and permanently, into regional towns and cities in northern Australia where they often experience homelessness through rough sleeping and staying with visitors. Finally, in Section 4.4 we draw together the chapter's main findings in a brief concluding section.

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4.2 Homelessness as severely crowded dwellings in remote Indigenous communities

In both the 2011 and 2016 ABS Census the Northern Territory recorded an incidence of homelessness that was, by far, the highest in the country. The vast majority of this involves Indigenous people living in severely crowded dwellings in remote Indigenous communities. The lack of adequate housing stock in remote Indigenous communities is a significant cause of homelessness for thousands of Indigenous people. For example, of the 13,717 people who were homeless in the Northern Territory, 81%, or 11,065, were living in severely crowded dwellings (ABS 2018a). This number is astounding. While there are more people who experience homelessness through severely crowded dwellings in the Northern Territory than there are people in severely crowded dwellings in Victoria (Victoria recorded 8930 people in severely crowded dwellings), the State of Victoria has an overall population 26 times greater than that of the Northern Territory. Moreover, when the numbers of people experiencing homelessness due to severely crowded dwellings are examined, we see that the vast majority are Indigenous: 10,710 Indigenous people in the Northern Territory were homeless because of severely crowded dwellings; in Victoria, however, only 109 of the 8930 people homeless because of severely crowded dwellings were Indigenous (ABS 2018a).

The supply, quality, and appropriateness of remote Indigenous housing has long been recognised as a significant social and policy problem. In partnership with the Australian Government, over the past 10 years state and territory governments have firstly, acknowledged the extreme need for additional suitable housing in remote Indigenous communities and secondly, designed and funded programs that aim to contribute additional housing in remote Indigenous communities.

Established in 2008 through the Council of Australian Governments, the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing (NPARIH), later re-named the Remote Housing Strategy, is a \$5.4 billion initiative that by 2018 will reportedly deliver 11,500 'more liveable homes' in remote Australia, including 4000 new homes and 7500 refurbishments (Commonwealth of Australia 2017).

Reflecting on the evidence which shows the Northern Territory has a greater need for additional housing in remote Indigenous communities than other Australian jurisdictions (Habibis et al., 2016), nearly 40% were designated for the Northern Territory. The new housing initiatives were also supported by other cognate policy initiatives. For instance, between 2012-18, \$230

million was allocated to the Northern Territory to upgrade housing through the National Partnership Agreement on Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory (Commonwealth of Australia 2017). In 2017, the Northern Territory Government committed to a \$1.1 billion 10-year housing program for remote Indigenous communities (Northern Territory Government 2017).

The 2017 Northern Territory policy does not specify how many houses will be built in remote Indigenous communities over the coming 10 years; instead, the policy states that its objectives prioritise people over assets (Northern Territory 2017). However, in a recent federal review (Commonwealth of Australia 2017:2), it was estimated that:

An additional 5500 homes are required by 2028 to reduce levels of overcrowding in remote areas to acceptable levels. Half of the additional need is in the Northern Territory alone — a jurisdiction with the lowest capacity to meet this pressure.

Moreover, the review concludes that the inadequate supply of quality housing in remote Indigenous communities causes homelessness (Commonwealth of Australia 2017: 19). The evidence from the review and the data outlined in policy documents were supported and extended by interviews with key stakeholders.

Our two NT stakeholder interviewees described the new \$1.1 billion policy as '*helpful, but barely touching what is needed*', or '*not enough*'. The Central Australian Aboriginal Congress (2017) acknowledged the new housing built in NT remote Indigenous communities in recent years, but concluded that available housing remains far short of what is needed, and that current plans to supplement this stock still fall short of projected need (a need exacerbated by population growth in remote Indigenous communities).

The interview participants from the NT observed that housing construction has failed to keep up with population growth. Further, their reports from within this region indicate that the levels of housing need and severely crowded households officially enumerated in remote Indigenous communities are likely under-estimates:

There are a lot more people living in the remote dwellings than what is formally recorded on tenancy management systems. The official rate of severe overcrowding is an under-estimate. [This is] among other reasons, because people will not disclose to housing authorities the true extent of overcrowding because they are concerned that their rents will increase accordingly. [Northern Territory stakeholder]

When I visit [remote Indigenous communities] we see tents in people's yards, or even a tent in the lounge room for privacy. The tent actually gives the family

privacy. I've even seen them sleeping in old car bodies. Sometimes there is 20 to 30 people in the one house. One family in a bedroom and a fridge in the bedroom.
(Northern Territory stakeholder)

It should be noted that the observations above are not only from outside of, but also inside, government. The observations about the extreme level of crowding, and people's reluctance to report the level of crowding to authorities, is consistent with research from Paul Memmott and colleagues. In a detailed case study of Tennant Creek, they found an average of 10 Indigenous people in each household, whereas the 2011 ABS Census only reported on average 2.9 people in each household (Memmott et al., 2013).

To grasp the meaning of the housing shortage affecting remote Indigenous communities we must first acknowledge, as emphasised by a Northern Territory interviewee, many Indigenous people want to live 'on country'. Living 'on country' is fundamental to Indigenous identity, belonging, and wellbeing (Ganesharajah 2009). Public policy solutions to the shortage of Indigenous housing in remote communities must provide sufficient levels of appropriate housing for those Indigenous people who want to live on country.

Social housing is the only viable option for most Indigenous people living in remote Indigenous communities in the NT and elsewhere in Australia. Although increasing opportunities for home ownership was an objective of the NPARIH and the Remote Housing Strategy (Commonwealth of Australia 2017), planning, financing and policy barriers hinder significant increases in home ownership in remote Indigenous communities. The Remote Housing Strategy (Commonwealth of Australia 2017) demonstrates extremely low numbers of home ownership in remote Indigenous communities throughout Australia, including: 16 in NSW, 15 in the NT, and 37 in QLD.

A Northern Territory stakeholder explained that there are almost no market or land tenure arrangements that allow for anything except public housing. The stakeholder remarked that in the Northern Territory, the land is owned by land trusts; there are only three out of 73 communities that have potential for people to purchase land on community. Further, with very low incomes and huge costs to build and maintain housing in remote Indigenous communities, the NT stakeholder observed that even if private housing ownership is theoretically possible it is completely unaffordable. Thus, home ownership or private rental, under current land arrangement and economic conditions, is not a realistic option to immediately address the dire housing need causing homelessness.

Moreover, it is not only the number of dwellings, or the shortage of them, in remote Indigenous communities that is significant. Instead, the management of Indigenous housing, and the extent to which housing is managed and maintained by Indigenous people in the community with cultural knowledge, is strongly associated with the maintenance, adequacy, and livability of the housing (Habibis et al., 2016). The research shows that in order to achieve the housing change that will demonstrably reduce homelessness in remote Indigenous communities, local Indigenous people need to be involved in the design, construction, and ongoing delivery of housing. One interviewee questioned the meaningful engagement of Indigenous people in housing design, construction, and ultimately ownership:

They need to upskill. They need to give building back to the community. The Indigenous people would make houses that they want to live in. It creates conditions for Indigenous people to have ownership over their houses.
(Northern Territory stakeholder)

Policy inaction that has created massive overcrowding in remote Indigenous communities vis-à-vis an inadequate supply of housing drives Indigenous homelessness. In addition to an absence of housing which means that people live in severely crowded dwellings and are thus enumerated as homeless, the conditions of life in severely crowded dwellings directly contribute to the health, economic, and social marginalisation experienced by Indigenous people in remote Indigenous communities.

Australian Government policy aspirations to 'close the gap' on Indigenous disadvantage, including life expectancy, infant mortality, education, unemployment, and incarceration (Commonwealth of Australia 2017), will be impossible to achieve as long as disproportionate numbers of Indigenous people in Indigenous communities lack access to adequate housing. As Habibis et al., (2016) explain, just about everything to do with the construction and servicing of housing in remote Indigenous communities is more expensive and challenging; however, when the government partners with local Indigenous people and the latter have the capacity to develop skills and play active roles in all aspects of housing then positive housing and other outcomes can be achieved.

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4.3 From severely crowded in remote communities to other forms of homelessness elsewhere

In addition to living in severely crowded dwellings constituting a form of homelessness in and of itself — and in addition to the health and social costs of living in severely crowded dwellings — living in severely crowded dwellings in remote Indigenous communities constitutes a launch pad into other forms of homelessness, outside of remote Indigenous communities. Both the published literature and our stakeholders (from the NT and Far North Queensland) demonstrated that the high rates of rough sleeping or public place dwelling in northern cities of Australia (especially Darwin, Cairns, and Townsville) can be attributed, in part, to people leaving deplorable conditions in severely crowded dwellings in remote Indigenous communities.

Augmenting the literature on Indigenous cultural mobility as well as the realities that people temporarily leave remote Indigenous communities and travel to urban centres to access services (Memmott, Long, and Thomson 2006), our key stakeholder informants emphasised that Indigenous people sleep rough or experience other forms of homelessness in northern cities such as Cairns, Townsville, and Darwin because the housing available in remote communities is inadequate to accommodate them. People therefore move from homelessness in remote Indigenous communities into homelessness, as experienced as rough sleeping, in urban centres. Indeed, the rough sleeping in Australia's northern cities, largely involving Indigenous people, is viewed as a problem of antisocial behaviour (Parsell and Phillips 2016) rather than one of homelessness. Moreover, Indigenous people sleeping rough are more likely to be targeted for police intervention than non-Indigenous people sleeping rough (Walsh 2011).

The literature also suggests that Indigenous people temporarily and sometimes permanently leave remote Indigenous communities, and stay in crowded and severely crowded dwellings with family and friends in regional centres and cities. Paul Memmott refers to this as circular mobility. When Indigenous people move from severely crowded dwellings in remote Indigenous communities to stay temporarily with family and friends in their housing outside of remote communities, it does not only represent moving from one form of homelessness into another, but it can cause significant stress and problems for the host households (Memmott et al., 2013). Indeed, part of the stress can be attributed to the tenancy problems that the visitors from remote Indigenous communities create by staying and crowding the housing of family and friends in regional towns and cities.

Rather than public perceptions that see Indigenous homelessness as a cultural choice (Holmes and McRae-Williams 2009), media and political commentary that views Indigenous rough sleeping as anti-social behaviour (Zillman 2017), or a simple problem of people requiring transport from northern cities back to their remote Indigenous communities (i.e. return to country policy), the deprived and severely crowded housing in remote Indigenous communities must be understood to contextualise the high numbers of Indigenous people who experience homelessness in regional towns and cities in Australia's north.

4.4 Chapter conclusion

In this chapter we have focused on homelessness that is experienced by Indigenous people largely driven by an inadequate supply of affordable housing in remote Indigenous communities, particularly in the Northern Territory. The Northern Territory has the highest rate of homelessness in Australia, and the rate is predominantly explained by the rate of severe overcrowding in Indigenous communities. The disproportionate rate of homelessness in the Northern Territory is evidence of sustained failure to provide Indigenous people living in remote communities with housing commensurate with their needs. We acknowledge that housing conditions, including a modest increased supply, have improved in the past 10 years with funding through the flagship NPARIH and the Remote Housing Strategy.

Despite some improved outcomes in remote Indigenous communities, the data clearly reveals a current and projected shortfall in the supply of housing that is required to address homelessness for Indigenous people living in remote communities. The chapter has argued that the rates of homelessness in remote Indigenous communities represent a fundamental barrier for Indigenous people to achieve equity in health, social, and economic domains.

The chapter has also demonstrated the fluid link between Indigenous people experiencing homelessness in remote Indigenous communities, and Indigenous people experiencing homelessness in public spaces and crowded and temporary accommodation in regional towns and cities in northern Australia. Although Indigenous people do experience homelessness in regional towns and cities as they temporarily access services, we have cautioned against seeing these overt forms of homelessness as a temporary response to service accessibility or cultural mobility. The disproportionate rates of severe overcrowding in remote Indigenous communities means that when people travel to regional towns and cities, they have not moved from being securely and safely housed to being homeless, rather they have moved from one form of homelessness to another. This has implications for policies such as return to country.

The changing scale of homelessness

5.1 Overview

This chapter reviews the latest data on recorded levels of homelessness across Australia, together with quantitative evidence about the profile of the 'homeless population' and about factors precipitating a loss of accommodation. Two main data sources are utilised here: firstly, the ABS Census of population and housing, and secondly, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) Specialist Homelessness Services dataset. In addition, reference is made to local council-instigated rough sleeper counts regularly implemented in a small number of Australian cities.

The chapter is structured in five main sections. First, in Section 5.2, we discuss our three main data sources and their respective merits in helping to gauge the changing scale and nature of homelessness. Next, in Section 5.3, we focus on rough sleeping as the most clearly visible manifestation of the problem. Then, in Section 5.4, we widen the focus to examine and interpret overall homelessness numbers and trends. Section 5.5 then analyses the spatial pattern of recent homelessness changes, as indicated by the 2016 ABS Census. This leads to the final substantive section which examines the statistical evidence on the nature and causes of homelessness in Australia as revealed by the AIHW data, in particular.

5.2 Data sources

5.2.1 ABS Census

Historically, since 2001, the ABS Census of population and housing has formed the prime data source used to chart the changing nature and scale of homelessness in Australia. As seen by the ABS itself, this is 'the best source to get a prevalence estimate of the number of homeless Australian people at any one point in time' (ABS 2018a). However, rather

than being based on self-perceptions of enumerated people (e.g. a direct question such as 'are you currently homeless'), the ABS Census statistics on this topic are built up from the ways that 'housed' Census respondents describe their living situation and also from direct enumeration of people lacking accommodation of any kind (i.e. rough sleepers – or, in ABS terminology, 'Persons living in improvised dwellings, tents, or sleeping out') (ABS 2012).

Importantly, the ABS Census definition of homelessness therefore is informed by 'an understanding of homelessness as 'homelessness', not 'rooflessness' (ABS 2012 p7). This takes inspiration from the ground-breaking work of Chris Chamberlain and David McKenzie who developed a definitional framework encompassing 'primary', 'secondary', and 'tertiary' forms of homelessness (Chamberlain and McKenzie 1992). Building on this thinking, the ABS (2012) conceptualises homelessness as a broader phenomenon incorporating six 'operational groups'. Under this thinking a person is 'homeless' if without accommodation alternatives, their current living arrangement:

- is in a dwelling that is inadequate; or
- has no tenure, or if their initial tenure is short and not extendable; or
- does not allow them to have control of, and access to, space for social relations.

The six operational groups themselves — as enumerated in the ABS Census — are:

- Persons living in improvised dwellings, tents, or sleeping out
- Persons in supported accommodation for the homeless

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- Persons staying temporarily with other households
- Persons living in boarding houses
- Persons in other temporary lodgings
- Persons living in 'severely' crowded dwellings.

In its reliance on the ABS Census as a periodic 'survey-based' approach, Australia has been in step with certain other countries such as New Zealand. In certain other comparator countries, however, headline homelessness numbers have been traditionally derived from administrative records. In the UK, for example, cited homelessness statistics are usually drawn from local authority statistical returns that relate to those seeking help with housing on the grounds of homelessness. An important quality of such administrative data is that it calibrates a flow (homelessness applications over a time period) rather than, as in survey-based approaches, a stock (Fitzpatrick et al., 2017, 2018).

5.2.2 AIHW Specialist Homelessness Services statistics

With the recent release of 2016 ABS Census data, there have now been four five-yearly sets of homelessness statistics generated in this way. Since the publication of the 2011 ABS Census statistics, however, Australia has seen the establishment of a new national homelessness data source drawn from administrative records. This system, run by the Australian Institute for Health and Welfare (AIHW), collects, collates and analyses data sourced from Specialist Homelessness Service (SHS) providers. These are organisations (1482 of them in the 2015-16 data collection round) 'that receive government funding to deliver accommodation-related and personal services to people who are homeless or at imminent risk of homelessness' (AIHW webpage). SHS organisations periodically submit to AIHW data on recent applications for assistance, including: the nature of the help sought and provided; the applicant household characteristics, and the immediate housing situation of the person/s concerned. Drawing on this source, AIHW publishes an annual statistical report and makes available a wealth of data for further analysis.

In tracking and understanding homelessness in Australia, the AIHW SHS statistics provide a highly valuable resource, complementary to ABS Census figures. Being published annually rather than every five years is a prime asset. Beyond this, the facility to drill down into the profile of people subject to (or threatened with) homelessness is an important strength, as is the associated data about the immediate housing problem that has sparked the application for assistance (see Section 5.5).

However, the SHS statistics will not capture the situation of people whose situation may be (e.g. as defined in ABS Census terms) effectively 'homeless' but who do not seek housing-related assistance from a service provider within the AIHW system.²⁶ Moreover, being collected by a huge and diverse array of service provider organisations primarily focused on assisting service users rather than statistical recording, the resulting statistics have limitations or ambiguities (e.g. in terms of consistency of practice (or not) in relation to handling 'repeat applications' or applications where no help could be provided). The AIHW SHS system has a facility to record details on applications for help where the service provider was unable to assist. However, while statistics on such applications are published, the vast bulk of the analysis published in the AIHW annual digest relates to 'assisted applicants' and there is a general assumption that such applications can be treated as a proxy for 'expressed demand'.

5.2.3 Rough sleeper counts

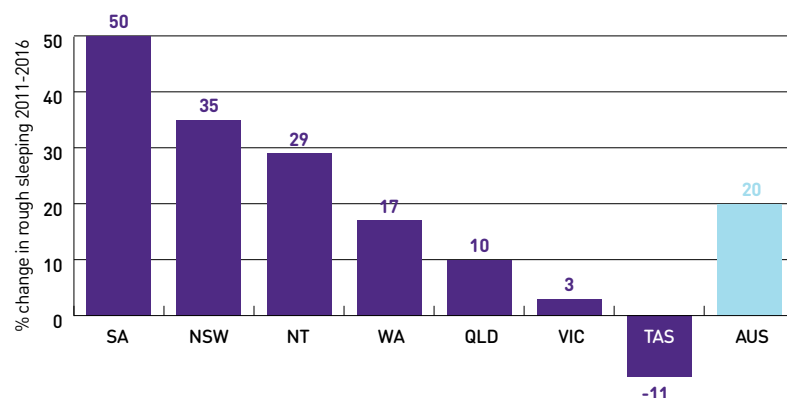
Over and above the five-yearly national enumeration of people 'living in improvised dwellings, tents, or sleeping out' in the ABS Census, local rough sleeper counts have been organised in a number of places in Australia over the past decade. From the homelessness monitoring perspective, statistics drawn from such initiatives have the virtue of being potentially made available more frequently than the equivalent ABS Census numbers. The reliability of such data is, however, of course open to question in terms of the effectiveness of enumeration techniques, especially in terms of consistency within and between surveys. Discussion of such considerations forms a major theme within the voluminous literature on the definition and quantification of homelessness (Pawson and Davidson 2006; Fitzpatrick et al., 2012: p63-64).

In the Australian context, local rough sleeper counts have tended to be instigated by local councils in major cities. However, while a larger number of councils have undertaken one or more such surveys over recent years, only four are believed to have done so on a regular and consistent basis — namely the City of Sydney, the City of Parramatta, the City of Melbourne and the City of Adelaide. Data from each of these city-based series is cited in Section 5.3.

²⁶ According to General Social Survey, Australia, 2014 [ABS cat no 4159.0] we know that two-thirds of people who had a previous experience of homelessness did not seek assistance. AIHW's SHS data collection would not have captured these persons.

5.3 Rough sleeping trends

Figure 5.1: Change in enumerated rough sleepers, 2011-16



Source: ABS Census. Notes: 1. ABS category: 'Persons living in improvised dwellings, tents, or sleeping out' treated as proxy for 'rough sleepers'. 2. ACT excluded on account of small absolute numbers – albeit a large percentage increase over the period: from 28 to 54 people.

Across Australia the 2016 ABS Census enumerated 8200 people living in improvised dwellings, tents or sleeping out — or 'rough sleeping'.²⁷ This, the starkest form of homelessness, saw a 20% increase over the 2011 figure at the national scale. As shown in Figure 5.1, with the exception of Tasmania, increases were recorded in all states and territories. Representing almost half of the entire national increase, the largest rise was in NSW where numbers grew from 1924 to 2588 (up 35%).

As acknowledged above, rough sleeper statistics are often controversial, frequently criticised as problematically under-stating the true problem. This may be accurate. However, providing that consistent count methodologies are employed from one count to the next, such statistics can be fairly portrayed as a reasonable indication of the underlying pattern of change. As far as the 2011-2016 ABS Census-derived trend is concerned, this can be triangulated against other data sources. Perhaps significantly, the AIHW SHS statistics suggest a scale of increase that is not dissimilar to that indicated by the ABS Census. As shown in Figure 5.2, in the four years to 2016-17 this series showed an increase of 14% in 'assisted clients' who had recently slept rough, that is a rate of increase slightly lower than for 'all assisted clients' but not dissimilar to that indicated by the ABS Census statistics.

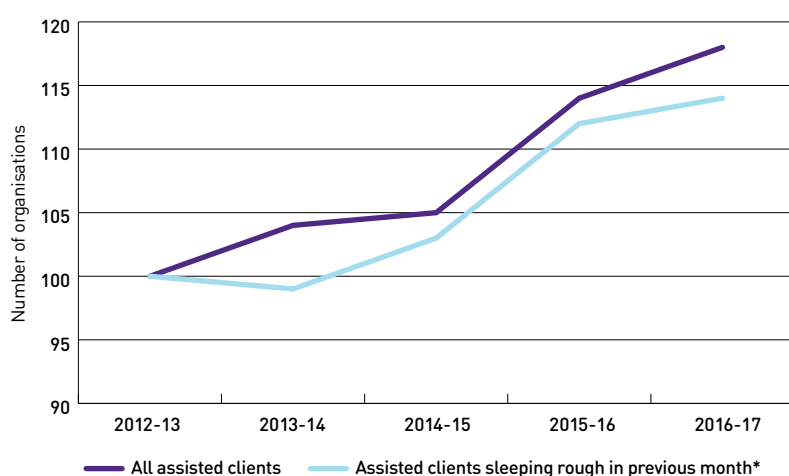
The national rough sleeping trend can also be gauged against rough sleeper numbers in cities from which consistent local count figures are available. Trends in the four council areas for which such numbers can be collated are shown in Figure 5.3. In the City of Sydney, for example, the August 2017 figure was 26% higher than in August 2011 – albeit that the number fell in 2011-12 and then again (marginally) in 2016-17. Such reductions may well reflect the impact of local 'way to home' initiatives – impacts which, unless sustained, may be short lived.

²⁷ Importantly, it should be noted that, to the extent that it will include persons living in improvised dwellings on their own land (e.g. while constructing a conventional house on-site), the ABS category 'persons living in improvised dwellings, tents, or sleeping out' is a slightly broader category than 'rough sleeping' per se (Parsell 2011). In most urban settings, however, sleeping in an 'improvised dwelling' will equate to a form of rough sleeping.

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The rough sleeper 'local count' estimates for Adelaide and Melbourne (and, indeed, Parramatta) suggest recent rates of increase much faster than that for Sydney. In both Adelaide and Melbourne enumerated numbers more than doubled over the five years to 2016 (from 60 to 128 in Adelaide and from 105 to 247 in Melbourne). Such large changes might prompt doubts about consistency of approach. For Melbourne, the ABS Census numbers for 2011 and 2016 for the same 'City of Melbourne' locality in fact show an even larger increase from 133 to 345. In Adelaide, though, the 2016 ABS Census enumerated a smaller increase – from 103 to 121.

Figure 5.2: Incidence of recent rough sleeping among assisted service users – indexed trend, 2012-17

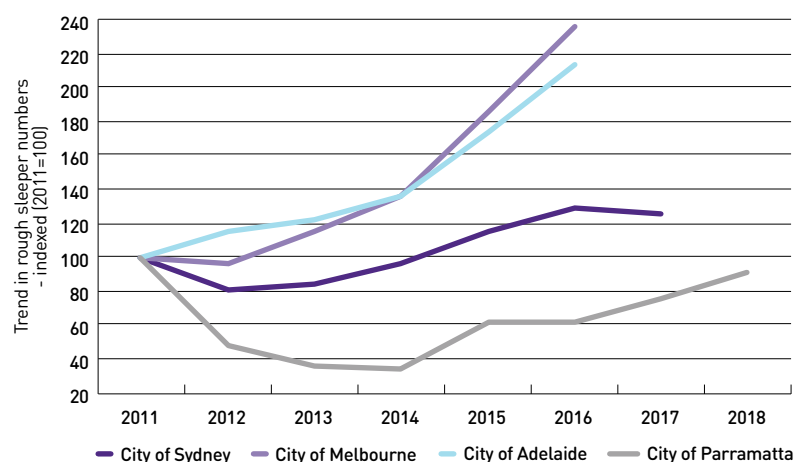


*including use of 'non-conventional accommodation'

Note: 'recent rough sleeper' figures adjusted for non-response on relevant question

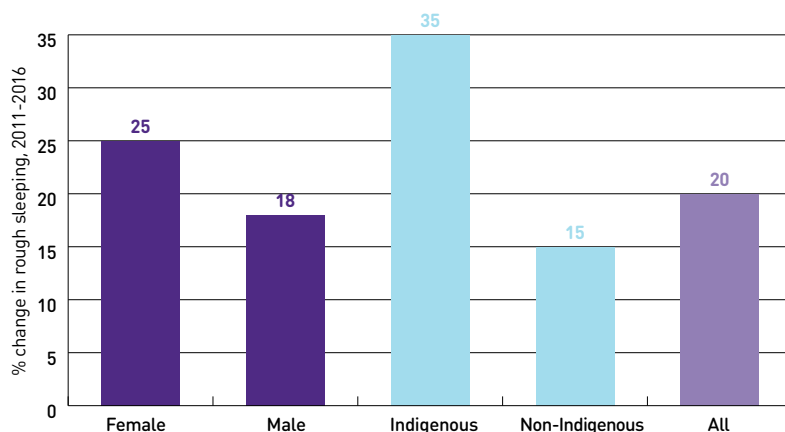
Source: AIHW. Notes: 1. 'Recent rough sleeper' figures adjusted for non-response on relevant question. 2. 2011-12 data unpublished

Figure 5.3: Changing incidence of rough sleeping in selected cities, 2011-18: street count data



Source: collated by authors from municipal street count statistics. Notes: 1. Sydney data collated from August street counts. 2. Melbourne data collected via two-yearly counts – intermediate years interpolated. 3. Adelaide data from August/September counts, 2015 interpolated. 4. No 2017 count in Melbourne; no August/September 2017 count in Adelaide. 5. Parramatta figure for 2017 interpolated.

Figure 5.4: Changing profile of rough sleepers, 2011-16



Source: ABS Census. Notes: 1. ABS category: 'Persons living in improvised dwellings, tents, or sleeping out' treated as proxy for 'rough sleepers'; 2. Indigenous and non-Indigenous numbers adjusted to account to differential non-response in 2011 and 2016 – non-respondents allocated pro rata to identified Indigenous and non-Indigenous persons for each year.

Recent rates of change in the incidence of rough sleeping have been highly variable, not only according to jurisdiction (see Figure 5.1) but also across population groups. In particular, as shown in Figure 5.4, 2016 figures show a disproportionate increase for Indigenous persons. This is especially notable since, as highlighted in the next section, Indigenous homelessness more broadly appears to have actually declined in recent years. Female rough sleeping has also increased disproportionately in recent years (see Figure 5.4). However, although women's representation in the national rough sleeping total rose to 34% in 2016, there are reasons to believe the true figure may be higher. As evidenced by UK research, women rough sleepers – concerned for their safety – are more inclined than men to seek well-hidden places liable to be overlooked by survey enumerators (Reeve 2007; Casey et al., 2008).

5.4 Overall homelessness numbers

5.4.1 Overall homelessness estimates

According to the recently published ABS Census results, the overall number of people experiencing homelessness in Australia rose from 102,000 in 2011 to 116,000 in 2016. This represents a 14% increase in numerical terms. Also, since this exceeds mainstream population growth (9% over the same period), the rate of homelessness also increased by 5%.

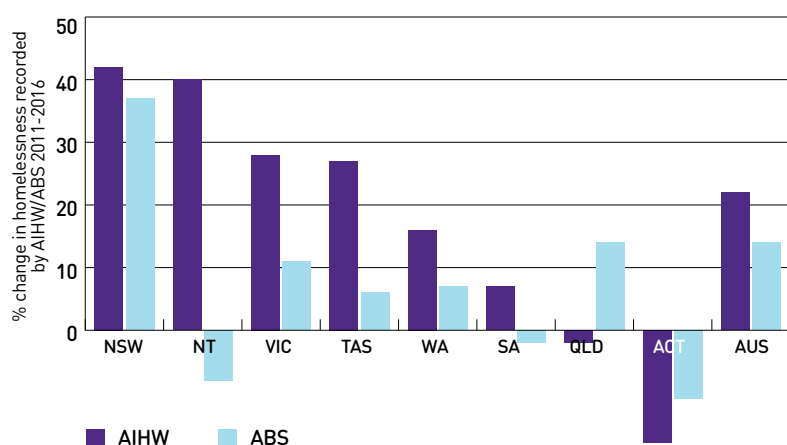
The ABS estimate of change in homelessness 2011-16 can be triangulated against the changing scale of homelessness as indicated by the AIHW SHS statistics. As explained in Section 5.2, this data relates to individuals seeking help from specialist homelessness service providers. Albeit that these are two entirely different methods of calibrating the issue, there is a reasonable amount of consistency between them at the national scale and in some, though not all, states and territories (see Figure 5.5).²⁸

²⁸ It should be noted that as part of its homelessness enumeration practice, ABS makes direct use of AIHW SHS records to identify addresses used as supported accommodation for homeless people. With respect to these buildings, however, ABS Census numbers tend to generate higher resident estimates than AIHW records – see paras 86-91 of ABS Census explanatory notes at: <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/2049.0Explanatory%20Notes12016?OpenDocument>

The changing scale of homelessness

Nationally, the AIHW homelessness caseload total expanded by 22% over the five-year period shown in Figure 5.5 which is a greater increase than the 14% indicated by the ABS Census data. Similarly, in most states and territories, the percentage increase in recorded homelessness service user caseload was larger than the change measured by the census. The most visible inconsistency (albeit relating to a jurisdiction with a numerically small homelessness total) relates to the Northern Territory. In this case, however, the notably large increase in SHS caseloads may reflect the disproportionate increase in homelessness in Darwin where, by comparison with remote regions of the Territory, services can be more easily accessed (see Section 5.5).

Figure 5.5: Change in scale of homelessness by jurisdiction, 2011-16: triangulating independently collated estimates



Sources: AIHW Specialist Homelessness Services statistics and ABS Census

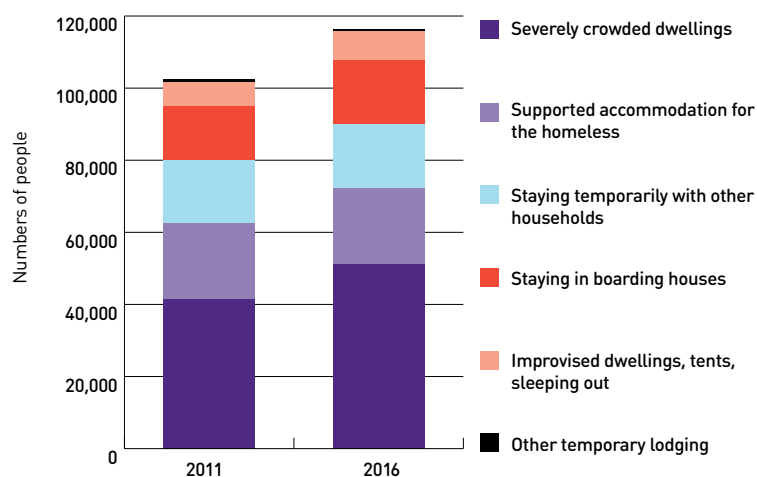
As indicated by both sets of statistics, AIHW and ABS, NSW saw the most rapid increase in homelessness in the period 2011-16 — by 42% and 37%, respectively. To a certain extent, this reflects the population growth in that state. However, even taking that into account, the NSW ABS-calibrated homelessness rate per 10,000 population rose by 27% which is far above the comparable figures recorded in every other jurisdiction (ABS 2018a).

5.4.2 Components of change in the 'homeless population'

At the national scale, the largest 'homelessness operational group' in 2016, and the category that grew fastest in the preceding period, was 'persons living in severely crowded dwellings' (see Figures 5.6 and 5.7). This relates to residents of dwellings needing four or more extra bedrooms to accommodate the household adequately. Extending a trend seen in the 2006-11 period, the number of people in this situation increased by 23% in the five years to 2016. As noted in the official commentary, most of this increase was attributable to a doubling in the number of persons born overseas living in this situation (ABS 2018a). Of the 51,000 persons experiencing severe overcrowding in 2016 just over a quarter (26%) were people who had arrived in Australia since 2011.

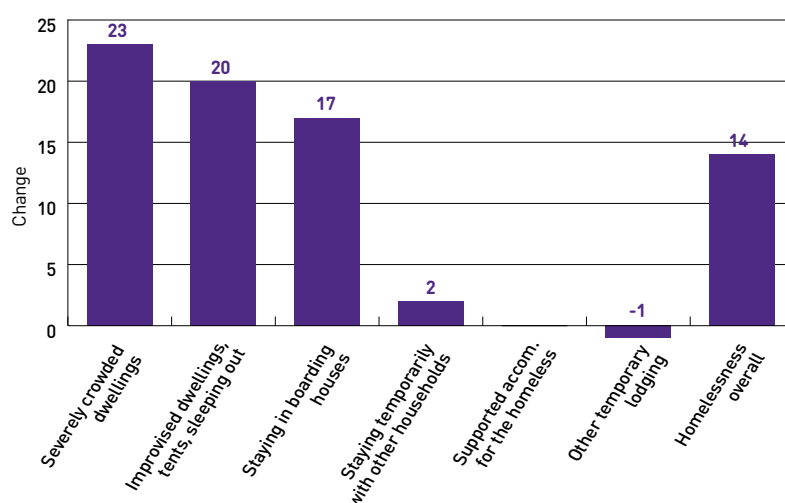
Severe overcrowding increased over the period 2011-16 in all but two jurisdictions (WA and NT). However, NSW and Victoria stand out as the states in which this problem expanded most alarmingly, by 74% and 48%, respectively.

Figure 5.6: ABS Census homelessness operational groups: Australia-wide numbers 2011 and 2016



Source: ABS Census

Figure 5.7: ABS Census homelessness operational groups: Percentage change 2011-16



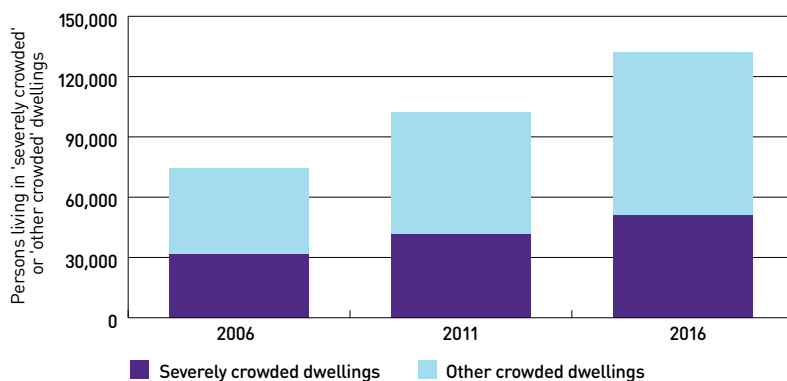
Source: ABS Census

Nevertheless, as shown in Figure 5.8, the rising incidence of 'severe overcrowding' is only an element of a broader trend affecting the lower end of the housing market. While not considered as equating to homelessness, the number of persons experiencing overcrowding of a slightly lesser magnitude has been growing even faster. Those enumerated within the 'other crowded dwellings' category are residents of dwellings where the number of available bedrooms is three less than required (under the Canadian National Occupancy Standard).

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In the five years to 2016, the 'other crowded' category expanded by 33% (see Figure 5.8), and over the past decade by 88% (59% even after allowing for population increase). It must be emphasised that even 'other crowding' as defined here represents what, for most Australians, would be considered extreme deprivation of personal residential space. Placing all of the above within a broader setting, ABS survey data shows that households living in homes with a shortage of at least one bedroom increased in number from 3.2% of the overall household population in 2009-10 to 3.6% in 2015-16 (Housing Occupancy and Costs – ABS Catalogue no. 4130).

Figure 5.8: Changing incidence of overcrowding (severe and other), 2006-16



Source: ABS Census

5.4.3 Marginal housing

'Other overcrowding' is one of three categories identified by ABS as equating to 'marginal housing'. The other two involve people living in:

- caravan parks
- improvised dwellings, other than those where conditions are tantamount to rough sleeping (see above).

Collectively, these groups are considered by ABS as some of those encompassing '[people who] may be at risk of homelessness ... [since their] living arrangements are close to the statistical boundary of homelessness' (ABS 2018a).²⁹

In contrast with the population living in 'other crowded dwellings', the other two 'marginal housing' groups (see above) have lately contracted. Indeed, the shrinking capacity of caravan parks in accommodating low-income people was mentioned by many of our key actor interviewees as a contributory factor to homelessness in regional areas (see Chapter 3). Overall, however, Australia's 'marginally housed' population has been growing faster than the homeless population — by 24% in the five years to 2011.

²⁹ The ABS acknowledges that this definition of 'marginally housed', in principle, encompasses other cohorts, e.g. people living in situations of domestic and family violence. However, these are difficult or impossible to enumerate.

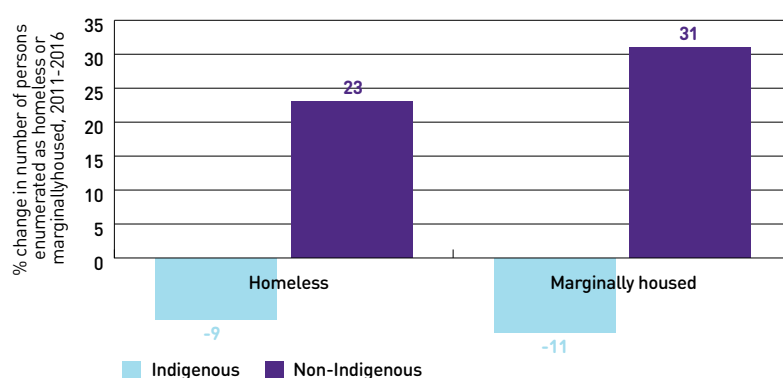
5.4.4 Trends in homelessness and marginal housing: the Indigenous dimension

As noted in Section 5.3, the period 2011–16 saw a disproportionate increase in the scale of rough sleeping involving Indigenous Australians (see Figure 5.4). In contrast, across the broader ‘homeless’ population and also across the marginally housed cohort, published ABS Census figures show Indigenous representation falling significantly over the five years to 2016. The reduction in Indigenous people enumerated as homeless was seen in every jurisdiction, except NSW where the increase was 3%.

At least in part, the declining numbers of Indigenous people experiencing homelessness may well reflect the success of the NPARIH program described in Chapter 4. Under NPARIH, as discussed in Section 4.2, it was expected that some 4000 new homes designated for Indigenous people would be constructed in remote areas of the Northern Territory, NSW, Queensland, South Australian and Tasmania. Whether this is sufficient to account for all of the published reduction in Indigenous homelessness and marginally housed population is a moot point. If these numbers had increased by the same rate as the comparable groups of non-Indigenous people (rather than, as the published figures show, declining, see Figure 5.9), the number of Indigenous homeless and marginally housed people in 2016 would have been some 15,000 higher than the recorded number.

It is, in any case, important to emphasise that despite its recent recorded reduction, the rate of homelessness as it affects Australia’s Indigenous population remains dramatically higher than for non-Indigenous people. As published by ABS, the respective national rates of homelessness per 10,000 population in 2016 were 361 and 38. Thus, the Indigenous homelessness rate remains 10 times that experienced by the non-Indigenous population.

Figure 5.9: Change in homeless and ‘marginally housed’ populations, 2011–16: breakdown by Indigenous status

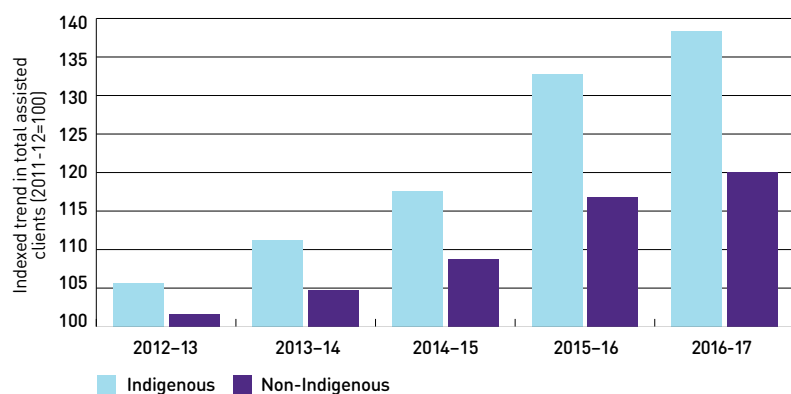


Source: ABS Census. Note: Indigenous and non-Indigenous numbers adjusted to account to differential non-response in 2011 and 2016 – non-respondents allocated pro rata to identified Indigenous and non-Indigenous persons for each year.

Perhaps significantly, on this dimension of homelessness there is a notable lack of consistency between the ABS Census statistics and those collected by AIHW from Specialist Homelessness Service providers. Indeed, as shown in Figure 5.10, agencies in the AIHW dataset not only recorded an increase in Indigenous service user caseloads over the five years to 2016–17, but *an increase disproportionate to that of the non-Indigenous cohort*. Whereas the former grew in number by 39%, the latter expanded by only 17% over this period.

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Figure 5.10: Indexed trend in Indigenous versus non-Indigenous service users assisted, 2011-17



Source: AIHW Specialist Homelessness Services statistics.

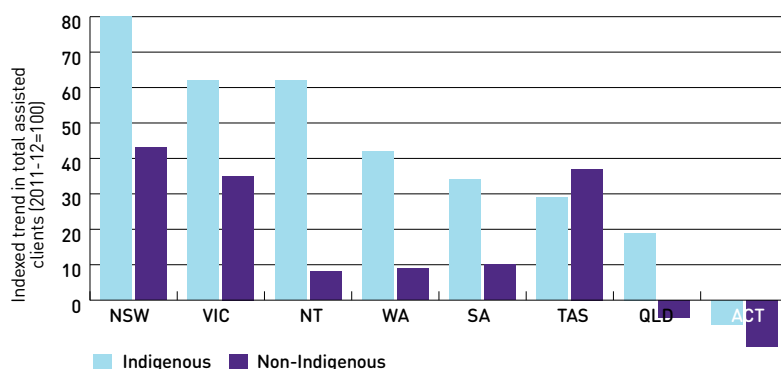
Drilling down further into the AIHW data it can be seen that the larger proportionate increase in the Indigenous caseload enumerated at the national scale was recorded in all jurisdictions other than Tasmania (see Figure 5.11). In NSW, for example, logged Indigenous service users rose by 80% while non-Indigenous numbers grew by only 43%. In Victoria the respective figures were 62% and 35%.

A corollary of this trend in AIHW data is that, at the national scale, homelessness service users of Indigenous origin increased from 22% of all service users in 2011-12 to 25% in 2016-17. This is diametrically at variance with ABS Census-derived homelessness estimates which show Indigenous representation falling from 28% of the national total in 2011 to 22% in 2016.³⁰

Various hypotheses might possibly explain this apparent inconsistency. One is that, by comparison with their non-Indigenous counterparts, homeless people of Indigenous origin have become markedly more likely to make contact with service provider agencies over the past five years. This could be associated with Indigenous population movement from remote locations to larger settlements where services are more available. A second, related theory would be that service providers have become much more effective in engaging with Indigenous communities and populations since 2011.

³⁰ These figures factor in the much larger rate of non-response in the 2016 Census than in 2011 as regards the question about a person's Indigenous or non-Indigenous status. Thus, in the data underlying these figures, Indigenous and non-Indigenous numbers have been adjusted to account to this differential non-response – non-respondents being allocated pro rata to identified Indigenous and non-Indigenous persons for each year. A similar procedure has been applied to the AIHW SHS statistics. In this latter case the resulting adjustment eliminates the possibility that the rising numbers of Indigenous service users identified by homelessness agencies partly reflects improvements in the record-keeping in this respect.

Figure 5.11: Change in service user caseloads 2011-17: breakdown by Indigenous/non-Indigenous status



Source: AIHW Specialist Homelessness Services statistics.

A third possible explanation for the inconsistency between the two sets of statistics is that the 2016 ABS Census significantly under-enumerated Indigenous homelessness — not just to the extent of the limitations inherent in census methodology, but to a significantly greater degree than in 2011. Arguably, moving the default mode of ABS Census data submission to an online approach, as implemented in the 2016 fieldwork, might have been expected to result in such an outcome.

A knock-on implication of more substantial Indigenous homelessness under-enumeration in 2016 than in 2011 would be the under-statement of the true scale of the overall homelessness increase seen at the national scale over the past five years.

ABS acknowledges the tendency towards a disproportionate level of under-enumeration of the Indigenous population, specifically in relation to homelessness:

The estimate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians who were homeless on census night is likely to be an under-estimate, particularly for those staying temporarily with other households, reflecting both a relatively large under-enumeration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons in the census compared to the total population and because for some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians a usual address may be reported that is associated with a 'place' rather than with a home or dwelling (ABS 2018a).

However, this statement does not indicate that under-counting of the Indigenous population was substantially more extensive in 2016 than in 2011 or earlier censuses. And, indeed, the ABS post-enumeration survey did not identify any such concern. That exercise, as recently reported (ABS 2018b), quantified the 2016 Indigenous population under-count as only slightly greater than in 2011 (17.5% as compared with 17.2%). So uncertainty about the apparent inconsistency between ABS and AIHW figures remains an open question.

5.4.5 Incidence of homelessness by age

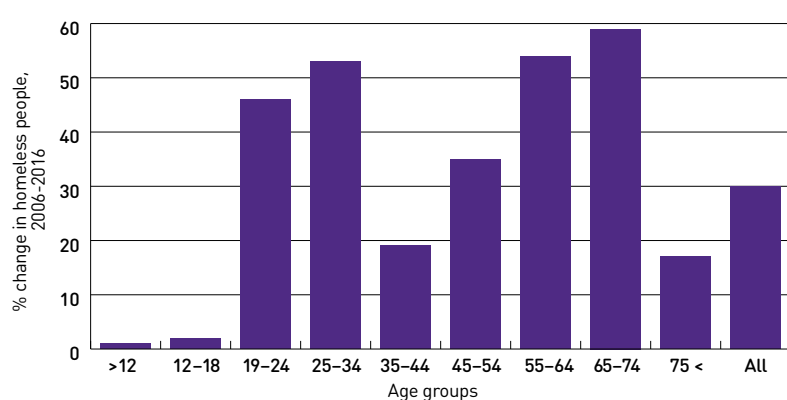
Finally, before analysing the geography of recent homelessness change, Figure 5.12 highlights striking variation in the fortunes of the various age cohorts when it comes to enumerated homelessness over the past decade. While still accounting for a relatively small share of Australia's overall homeless population (14% in 2016), the older age groups in the 55-74 slot have seen the fastest increase. This is consistent with the more recent trend over time data on homelessness service users which indicates the rapidly growing incidence of homelessness among the older population (see Figure 5.17).

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The broader pattern here —the spikes for the ‘young adult’ and the older (but not very elderly) groups — suggests two distinct sets of pressures that have been contributing to overall homelessness increases.

Also highly notable is the observation that, in relative terms, the representation of children and young people within the homeless population has reduced substantially. Although still accounting for 22% of the enumerated total in 2016, it would seem that the relative stability of this number could represent a ‘policy success’ — perhaps reflecting social work practice and/or prioritisation of families with children for social housing allocation.

Figure 5.12: Homelessness change 2006-2016 – breakdown by age cohort



Source: ABS Census

5.5 The changing spatial pattern of homelessness

As demonstrated earlier in this chapter the past five years have seen substantial variations in homelessness trends at the state and territory level. The scale of this variation is plainly apparent in Figure 5.1 and in Figure 5.5. However, ABS homelessness statistics are also published at much lower levels of spatial aggregation so it is possible to analyse the changing geography of homelessness in many other ways.

In this section we draw on analysis undertaken by the research team where data at ABS Statistical Area 2 (or SA2) level have been aggregated into a customised geographical framework enabling us to differentiate different settlement types across the country. Each SA2 is categorised into the largest population centre (Section of State Range) that it intersects with. Section of State Range categories are aggregated as shown in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1: Spatial framework for census analysis of changing homelessness geography

Area type	2016 population of settlement
Large metro	1,000,000 or more
Small metro	100,000 to 999,999
Large regional centre	20,000 to 99,999
Small regional centre	1000 to 19,999
Rural	999 or fewer; incl. remainder of state

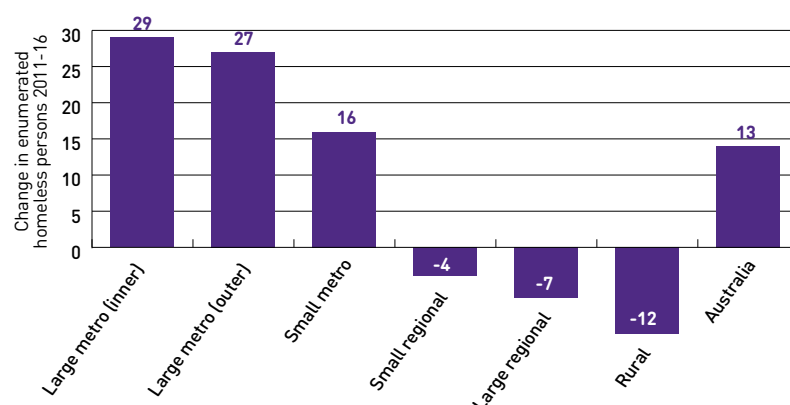
SA2s in the 'large metro' category are further divided into two categories:

- Large metro (inner) – SA2s with a distance to the CBD (centroid to centroid) below the median for SA2s in that metro.
- Large metro (outer) – SA2s with a distance to the CBD (centroid to centroid) above the median for SA2s in that metro.

The 2011 homeless counts for 2016 SA2s were calculated using the 2011-16 SA2 correspondences. The 2011 total population counts for 2016 SA2s were sourced from the 2016 SA2 time series profile tables. Rounding errors, particularly SA2s with low counts, which are randomised, mean the counts differ slightly from the otherwise reported numbers.

As shown in Figure 5.13, there have been marked contrasts in recent homelessness trends recorded in different types of settlement across the country. While inner metropolitan areas saw a 29% increase over that period, settlements with less than 100,000 people ('large regional', 'small regional', and 'rural' places) have experienced falling numbers since 2011.

Figure 5.13: Change in the incidence of homelessness 2011-16 by settlement type



Source: Based on ABS Census data.

The national trends highlighted in Figure 5.12 are to some extent borne out in most individual jurisdictions. However, there are some notable departures from these themes. For example, there is a distinct contrast between the eastern states and the others with respect to 'rural' places. In the former jurisdictions, homelessness numbers rose appreciably, whereas in all of the latter, it fell sharply. There looks to be a distinct pattern common to NT and WA whereby declining numbers are the norm for all non-capital city settlement types. This might suggest some regional to urban movement in marginally housed and/or homeless populations in these jurisdictions. Victoria stands out as having an unusual pattern of change in that inner Melbourne has seen an increase much more modest than that recorded in some other settlement types.

The changing scale of homelessness

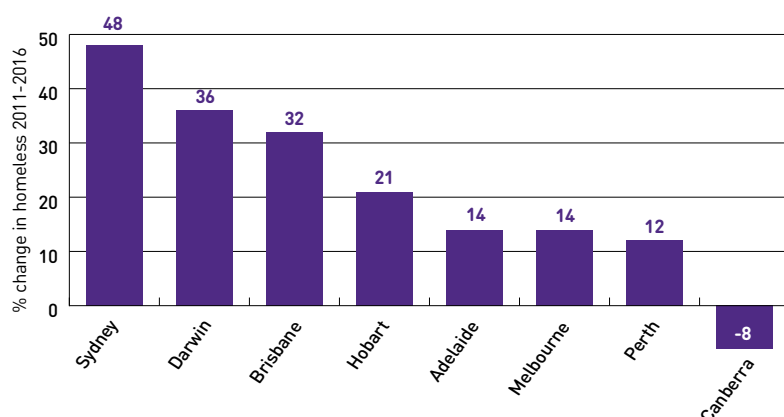
Table 5.2: Percentage change in the incidence of homelessness 2011-16 by settlement type and jurisdiction

	NSW	VIC	QLD	SA	WA	TAS	NT	ACT
Large metro (inner)	53	8	37	16	16			
Large metro (outer)	39	22	25	10	7			
Small metro	16	20	20			21	36	-8
Large regional	10	5	-32	32	-7	12	-33	
Small regional	10	0	1	3	-9	-4	-13	
Rural	32	28	22	-34	-31	-32	-15	33
Australia	37	12	14	6	-2	8	-11	-8

Source: Research team calculations based on ABS Census data.

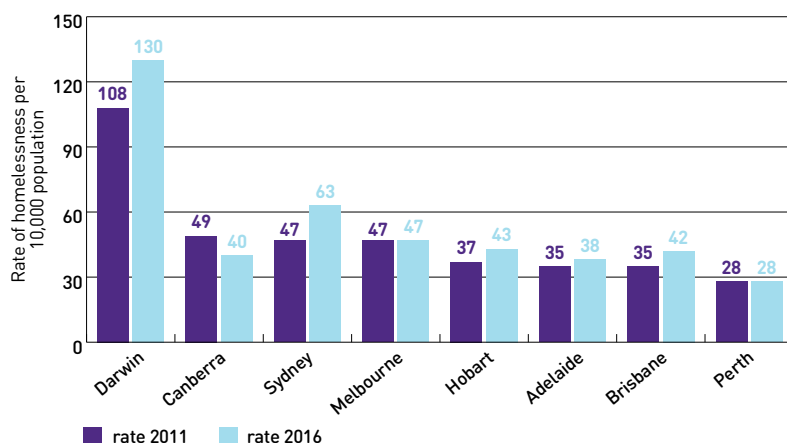
At the capital city level, Sydney saw the sharpest increase in homelessness in the five years to 2016. As shown in Figure 5.14, Sydney saw a numerical increase of 48% over this period, more than three times the national increase. Although part of this can be attributed to population growth, a 34% increase remains even when this is taken into account. Nevertheless, the rate of homelessness per 10,000 population remains far higher in Darwin than in any other capital city, see Figure 5.15.

Figure 5.14: Change in number of homeless people by capital city, 2011-16



Source: Research team calculations based on ABS Census data.

Figure 5.15: Changing rates of capital city homelessness, 2011-16



Source: Research team calculations based on ABS Census data.

5.6 Homelessness causes

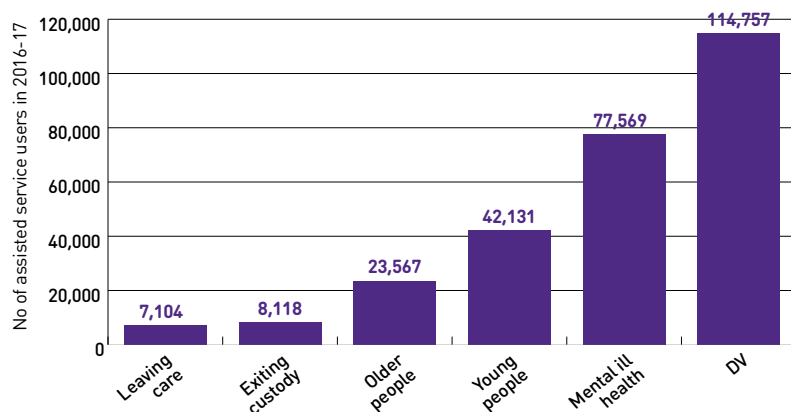
While there may be some uncertainties about its true growth rate (see Section 5.4) there is little doubt that homelessness in Australia has been rising well ahead of mainstream population growth. Movements in some of the contributory economic, social and policy phenomena that might help to explain homelessness trends have been explored in Chapters 2 and 3. Data from the AIHW Specialist Homelessness Services collection can shed some more light on this issue.

In our ‘change over time’ analyses that explore the incidence of ‘homelessness causes’ below we focus primarily on statistics drawn from the AIHW SHS datasets for the years 2014-15, 2015-16 and 2016-17. While established in 2011, the framework took some time to ‘bed down’ such that the extent of missing data on many variables was reduced to reasonable levels only over a few initial years of system operation.

AIHW data suggest that domestic violence is an overwhelmingly important ‘associated issue’ in relation to homelessness in Australia. Of the 288,000 service users logged by homelessness agencies in 2016-17, 115,000 (40%) reported that domestic violence was a factor in their case (see Figure 5.16). The next most commonly reported ‘associated issue’ was mental ill health — a factor affecting 27% of service applicants.

The changing scale of homelessness

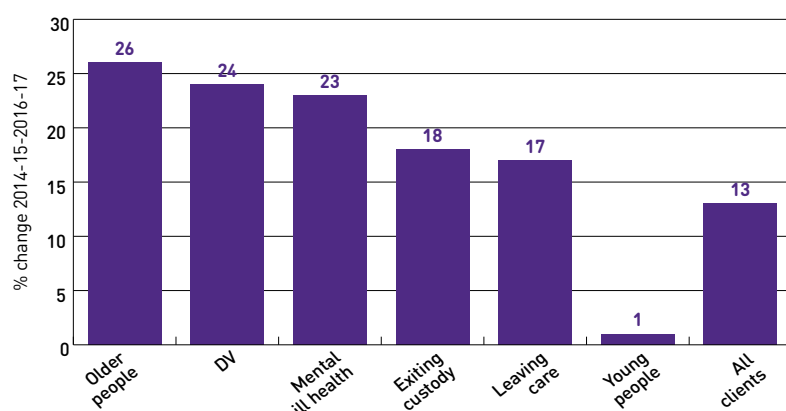
Figure 5.16: Assisted homelessness service users in 2016-17: number with identified 'associated issues'



Source: AIHW Specialist Homelessness Services statistics.

The number of homelessness service users subject to domestic violence has been rising at a rate substantially above the general rate of service user increase. As shown in Figure 5.17, while the overall SHS caseload expanded by 13% in the two years to 2016-17, the number reporting domestic violence increased by 24%. Growth rates well above the cohort-wide norm were also recorded over this period in relation to older people and to people with mental ill health. Notably, the number of service users logged as 'young people' remained virtually static over this period, at around 40,000 applicants annually (see Figure 5.16).

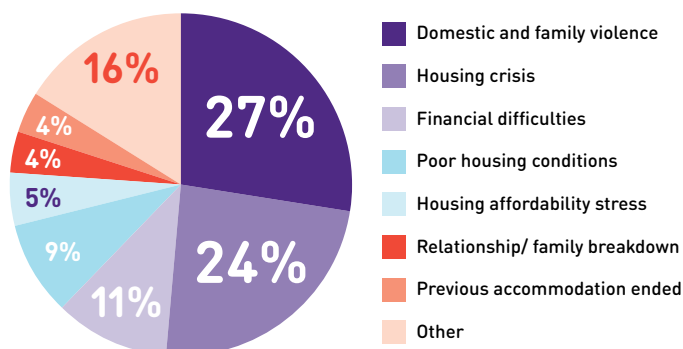
Figure 5.17: Assisted homelessness service users with associated issues: % change 2014-15 – 2016-17



Source: AIHW Specialist Homelessness Services statistics.

A related variable within the AIHW dataset is the 'main [stated] reason for seeking assistance'. In 2016-17 domestic violence once again looms large here, with more than a quarter of all service users citing this issue (Figure 5.18). At the same time, comparing Figure 5.16 with Figure 5.18 it is implicit that for a significant number of service users reporting domestic violence as a contributory factor, it was not the 'main reason' that prompted them to seek help.

Figure 5.18: Assisted service users in 2016-17 – Breakdown by main reason for seeking assistance



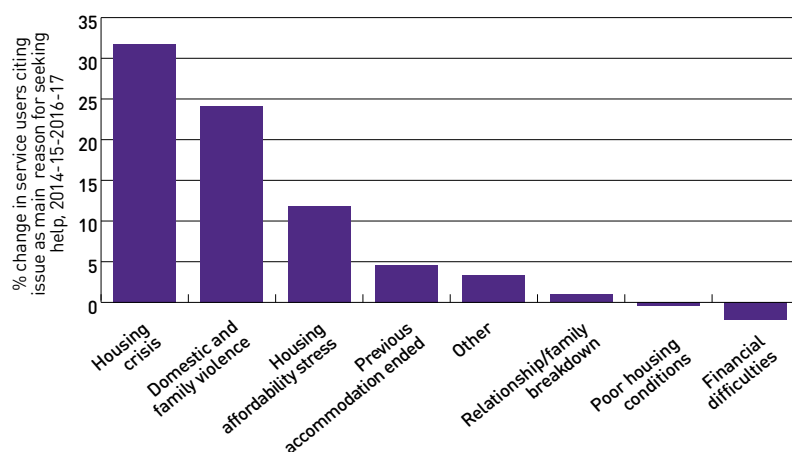
Source: AIHW Specialist Homelessness Services statistics

The classification of 'main reason for seeking assistance' could be considered perhaps somewhat rubbery in terms of local interpretation. For example, what is understood by 'housing crisis' could vary from organisation to organisation (and also within organisations). Similarly, categories such as 'previous accommodation ended' are relatively uninformative.

Possibly more revealing is the trend over time data on the changing representation of each 'main reason for seeking assistance' category. This analysis, as shown in Figure 5.18, seems to confirm once again the growing importance of domestic violence as a cause of homelessness in Australia. Identical to the trend on 'associated issues' (see Figure 5.17) the number of service users reporting domestic violence as the 'main reason' for seeking help rose by 24% over the two years to 2016-17.

However, whatever its precise interpretation by the person responsible for data entry, 'housing crisis' as an immediate cause of homelessness has been rising even more rapidly, by 32% over this same time period. This may reflect ongoing intensification of rental affordability stress affecting low-income households competing for accommodation at the lower end of the housing market (see Section 2.4.3, especially Figure 2.21).

Figure 5.19: Assisted service users – main reason for seeking assistance: percentage change 2014-15 – 2016-17



Source: AIHW Specialist Homelessness Services statistics.

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5.7 Chapter summary

Homelessness in Australia has increased at a rate considerably in excess of mainstream population increase. In the last five years (2011-16), ABS Census figures reveal that overall homelessness rose by 14% in absolute terms and by 5% in population-adjusted terms. However, although less commonly cited, data drawn from administrative sources suggest that homelessness numbers may have grown by 22% over a comparable period. These figures come from the Australian Institute for Health and Welfare (AIHW) Specialist Homelessness Services collection, a repository of records on people seeking services provided by these agencies across the country.

Triangulation of ABS and AIHW statistics at a state and territory level shows a degree of consistency in the trends over time from the two systems. However, an apparent discrepancy between the two data sources regarding Indigenous homelessness numbers might suggest that the 2016 ABS Census statistics understated the true increase in homelessness seen in the 2011-16 period.

While it has undoubtedly risen significantly at the national scale, recent changes in the incidence of homelessness has varied substantially between the states and territories, and by settlement type. ABS Census-based 2011-16 estimates suggest that homelessness fell in three of Australia's eight jurisdictions (ACT, NT and ACT) while increases in the other five jurisdictions varied from 6% in Tasmania to 37% in NSW. Even accounting for mainstream population growth, ABS Census-enumerated homelessness increased in NSW by 27%. Meanwhile, in terms of settlement type, rising homelessness rates have been substantially concentrated in capital cities. In Sydney and Brisbane rates grew most significantly in inner suburban areas, although in Melbourne the fastest increases were in outer suburbs.

Overall, capital city homelessness rates remain highest in Darwin, although Sydney's 48% increase in raw numbers was the largest of any state or territory capital city.

In terms of the distinct forms of homelessness, as defined by ABS, most of the increase in overall numbers 2011-16 arose from rising rates of 'severe overcrowding'. While this increased in all jurisdictions barring NT and WA, the most serious increases were in Victoria (48%) and NSW (74%). However, overcrowding at this extreme level (the shortfall of at least four bedrooms in a home) is only one facet of a wider problem of growing overcrowding that meets the ABS definition of 'homelessness' or falls

within the ABS category 'marginal housing' (the shortfall of at least three bedrooms). Combining these two cohorts, persons experiencing serious overcrowding have increased in number by 77% over the past decade.

Another important homelessness sub-category that has seen a recently disproportionate increase, according to ABS Census data, is rough sleeping (or, in ABS terminology 'persons living in improvised dwellings, tents, or sleeping out'). ABS Census numbers indicate rough sleeping has grown by 20% in the five years to 2016. Again, rates of increase vary substantially by jurisdiction with Tasmania at the lower end (11% reduction) and South Australia at the top (50% increase). In contrast with their declining recorded representation with the overall homelessness total, Indigenous rough sleepers increased disproportionately over the 2011-16 period, according to ABS Census data.

Homelessness services user data suggest that recent increases in overall homelessness have been substantially driven by rising numbers of (primarily) women in need of accommodation or other help due to domestic violence, due to 'housing crisis' or due to 'housing affordability stress'.

06

Conclusions

Exactly a decade ago, in 2008, the Australian Government set out to radically overhaul homelessness and affordable housing policies across Australia. Key commitments included the setting of headline goals to achieve measurable reductions in homelessness through a strategy aimed at early intervention; improving the nature, effectiveness, and connectivity of the service system, and breaking the cycle of homelessness (Australian Government 2008). Exemplified by the launch of affordable housing programs — the National Rental Affordability Scheme (NRAS) and the National Program for Remote Indigenous Housing (NPARIH) — at that time, homelessness was recognised as a systemic problem that called for strategic investment in long-term, affordable housing as well as enhanced provision of emergency housing services.

Crucially, two headline targets were adopted: to halve overall homelessness by 2020 and to offer supported accommodation to all rough sleepers who need it by 2020 (Australian Government 2008). These pledges were widely applauded at the time not only for their ambition, but also for the acknowledgment of associated commitments that this would require a massive investment in new affordable housing stock (Parsell and Jones 2014).

Regrettably, these policy priorities were downgraded even under the succeeding Labor government, let alone under the post-2013 administrations that have disowned any strategic ambition in this realm. Rather than overtly disavowing the 2008 homelessness policy objectives and strategic vision, subsequent national governments, and most of their state and territory counterparts, have returned to a complacent mentality of reactive incrementalism. Annually rising real terms expenditure on homelessness 'emergency services' is tolerated but significant investment in longer term housing solutions, foresworn. This policy stance is underpinned by an abiding belief that market forces can be relied upon to provide suitable and affordable housing for disadvantaged Australians, just as much as for all other citizens.

Five years ago, prior to the 2013 federal election, a spokesperson for what was to be the incoming government referenced *'the Coalition's homelessness plan'* as *'to abolish the carbon tax, pay down Labor's debt, generate one million jobs in the next five years and increase our collective wealth so all of us, individuals and charities, have the capacity to help the homeless and those most in need in areas where government is not always the answer'* (Needham 2013). With the recent publication of new figures demonstrating that homelessness continues to run well ahead of population growth, it is clear that the official approach moulded by this thinking has yielded little success.

More positively, the past couple of years have seen tentative indications of the Australian Government's re-commitment to an active role in the expansion of affordable housing (Pawson 2016). As announced in the 2017 Budget, plans to establish a new National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA) between the federal, state and territory governments intimated a possible new Canberra-initiated drive to expand affordable housing and to reduce homelessness (Martin and Pawson 2017).

However, especially given the multi-dimensional causes of homelessness, reversing current national trends would be a highly challenging objective, even for a government with an unqualified commitment to pursue such a goal. As shown in Chapter 2, many social, economic and housing market trajectories have been trending in directions likely to increase, not ameliorate, the scale of the problem.

As highlighted in Sections 2.2 and 2.3, we can identify a range of recent social and economic developments that might be expected to place upward pressure on homelessness. Most importantly, these include:

- Growing income stress for many benefit-reliant households due to social security administrative practices, mainly by shifting claimants onto lower value and more conditional forms of payment, and the increased 'sanctioning' of claims.

Conclusions

- Rising rates of institutional discharges from prisons and out-of-home care, as well as increasing incidences of domestic violence.

Such changes are critical in a housing market that lacks an adequate supply of social and affordable rental housing. This is evident from the geographical pattern of recent homelessness changes as shown in Chapter 5. Generally speaking, increases have been much more rapid in capital cities, with much lower growth rates, or even reductions, in some non-metropolitan contexts. Within this, increases have tended to be higher in the large eastern states where economies and housing markets have been relatively strong over the past few years, and lower in South Australia, Tasmania and Western Australia where these factors have been less applicable.

Both in the extent of geographical variability and in its overall pattern, recent homelessness trends strongly point to housing market conditions as the main contributor to change over time. With their especially pressured housing markets, Sydney and Brisbane, especially their inner areas, have seen striking increases.

As for the rising numbers recorded in Darwin, the marked reductions in homelessness numbers elsewhere in the Northern Territory suggest that the movement of the homeless population may have been a special contributory factor. Marked homelessness reductions elsewhere in 'rural' Australia may well be related to the ABS Census-recorded decline in Indigenous homelessness, a trend probably linked with the success of the NPARIH housing investment program.

Looking to the future, the numbers subject to housing insecurity seem most likely to be pushed higher by the ongoing restructuring of private rental housing markets whereby low rent provision continues to contract. For any realistic prospect of progress, the Australian Government needs to:

- re-confirm recognition of homelessness as a social ill that cannot be ignored
- re-engage with the problem through a coherent strategic vision to reduce the scale of homelessness by a measurable amount within a defined period, and
- re-commit to government support sufficient to ensure that provision of social and affordable housing keeps pace with growing need, at the very least.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Poverty rates before and after housing costs 2013-14

Characteristic of Household Reference Person (HRP)	Poverty before housing costs (BHC):			Poverty after housing costs (AHC):		
	Incidence of poverty:	Composition of the poor:	Numbers affected ('000):	Incidence of poverty:	Composition of the poor:	Numbers affected ('000):
Household type:						
Single person	21.6	22.5	427.0	24.6	19.4	486.9
Couple	9.9	20.4	386.4	10.1	15.7	393.9
Couple with children	7.0	28.0	530.4	11.3	33.9	849.6
Sole parent	21.5	16.0	302.5	33.2	18.6	466.1
Other	6.1	13.2	249.6	7.7	12.5	312.4
Labour force status:						
Employed full-time	1.5	8.8	167.1	4.7	20.8	522.4
Employed part-time	9.2	10.8	204.9	15.5	13.8	346.4
Unemployed	54.5	11.1	210.5	63.2	9.7	244.2
NILF (HRP<65)	36.9	44.1	836.2	43.9	39.6	993.5
NILF (HRP≥65)	17.1	25.2	477.4	14.4	16.0	402.5
Social Security payment received by HRP:						
Newstart Allowance	49.8	21.2	243.8	55.0	21.5	269.6
Youth Allowance	32.4*	1.6*	18.0*	51.8*	2.3*	28.8*
Parenting Payment	37.4	18.4	211.7	51.5	23.3	291.3
Carer Payment	24.3	8.9	102.3	24.3	8.2	102.2
Disability Support Pension	29.3	16.8	193.3	36.2	19.1	238.7
Age Pension	16.5	33.2	383.1	13.9	25.7	321.6
Housing Tenure of HRP:						
Owner without Mortgage	12.9	35.9	636.2	7.6	15.8	374.0
Owner with a Mortgage	4.1	17.7	313.8	7.9	25.5	606.0
Private Renter	11.2	31.9	565.8	21.9	46.7	1107.9
Public Renter	43.4	14.5	256.6	48.4	12.0	285.9
Total	10.0	100.0	1896.0	13.3	100.0	2509.0

Note: 1. Table shows percentages of individuals in households below poverty lines set at 50% of median BHC and AHC income, 2007-08 basis³¹

2. An asterisk (*) indicates that the estimates are based on a small sample size and are unreliable.

Source: ACOSS (2016: Table 4) supplemented by tables prepared by SPRC.

³¹ It should be noted that the groups are identified by a single characteristic of the HRP, but there will be many instances where the identified groups overlap (for example, a single household may be identified as being a sole parent family, unemployed, a public renter and in receipt of a specific social security payment and will thus appear multiple times in the estimates).

Appendices

Appendix 2: Online survey report



Australian Homelessness Monitor Online Survey of Homelessness Service Providers

Report by Hal Pawson, September 2017

A2.1. Introduction

This survey forms part of a 2017 stocktake on homelessness across Australia, commissioned by Launch Housing under the Australian Homelessness Monitor (AHM) project. Taking a cue from the UK Homelessness Monitor (UKHM) program, ongoing since 2011, it was decided that an online survey of homelessness service providers could contribute a useful ‘coal face’ perspective on recent changes in the scale, nature and causes of homelessness in different parts of the country.

A2.2. Methodology

Emulating the UKHM surveys of local authority homelessness staff, the AHM questionnaire was designed to tap into service provider organisations’ perceptions of:

- recent changes in the scale, nature and causality of homelessness; and
- recently enacted or proposed policy developments (whether at the state or national level) that were potentially significant for homelessness (either in exacerbating or ameliorating the problem).
- With the assistance of Homelessness NSW, the draft questionnaire was piloted with four NSW homelessness services provider organisations.

Organisations suitable for inclusion in the main survey were selected with kind assistance from the Homelessness Australia (HA) national network of state and territory homelessness sector peak bodies and/or jurisdiction representatives. HA contacts were asked to recommend a selection of service providers in their jurisdiction, with a preference for ‘larger agencies with a significant role in assisting people seeking help with housing’. Beyond this, state and territory contacts were advised that recommended survey participants should ideally include a diverse mix of organisations in terms of their metro/non-metro location, and in terms of their specialisation on particular homelessness client groups, for example, youth, people who have experienced family violence, Indigenous people.

Through the approach described above, a national dataset of 174 organisations was established. Although not scaled systematically according to the relative population of each jurisdiction, the size of the sample in each state and territory bore some relation to this.

HA contacts were then requested to email the listed organisations in their jurisdiction, on behalf of the research team, to invite participation in the survey. Email recipients were requested to click on a link to complete the online survey via the UNSW website. Two rounds of survey invitation emails were sent to each state and territory cohort.

A2.3. Survey response rate and coverage

With 70 of the 174 invited organisations taking part in the survey, the overall national response rate was 40% — see Table A2.1. As shown here, participation rates varied across the country. Notably, the two most populous states, NSW and Victoria, recorded rates close to 50%. Less successfully, only two of the 19 organisations in the WA sample (11%) took part.

Given that responding organisations from jurisdictions other than NSW and Victoria were relatively small in number, it was decided that the main geographical framework for survey analysis should group these other states and territories together under the heading 'Rest of Australia'.

Table A2.1: Survey coverage and response rate

Jurisdiction	Sample	No response	Percentage response
NSW	45	23	51
ACT	12	2	17
VIC	45	22	49
QLD	18	6	33
SA	20	9	45
WA	19	2	11
TAS	5	3	60
NT	10	3	30
Total	174	70	40

Table A2.2: Distribution of responding organisations compared with national population

Jurisdiction/ grouping	2016 population	Responding organisations	Responding organisations per million population
NSW	7.6	23	3.0
VIC	5.9	22	3.7
Rest of Australia	10.3	25	2.4
Australia	23.8	70	2.9

In any survey of this kind consideration must be given to the risk that 'national' results could be distorted by a geographically unbalanced cohort of respondents, thus giving rise to a need to 'weight' the raw data. However, although survey response rates varied across the country, the representation of respondents in each jurisdiction/grouping relative to total population was contained in a fairly narrow band, see Table A2.2 Col 4. Proceeding from this observation it was decided that there was no strong case for weighting the raw data.

Appendices

Table A2.3 – Responding organisations spatial coverage by area type

Organisations spatial coverage	Number of responding organisations*	Percentage of responding organisations**
Inner metropolitan	27	41
Middle and outer ring metropolitan	27	41
Regional cities	26	39
Other regional centres	34	52
Remote regional	16	24

*Organisations could indicate as many area types as applicable. **Not including the four pilot organisations who were not asked the relevant question.

Participating organisations were asked to indicate the type(s) of area where they operated. As shown in Table A2.3, the responding cohort included significant representation of organisations operating in all of the specified spatial contexts. Most worked in two or more of these. Overall, 22 organisations (33% of all respondents for whom this data was available) worked only in 'metropolitan' (capital city) areas, while 29 (44%) worked only in non-metropolitan contexts. The remaining 15 responding organisations (23%) worked in both metropolitan and regional areas. Again, this demonstrates the overall diversity of the survey coverage and the strong representation of regional perspectives.

Table A2.4: Responding organisations by homelessness service type

Service provided	Number of responding organisations*	Percentage of responding organisations
Housing support	64	91
Outreach	56	80
Early intervention	49	70
Prevention	42	60
Housing provision	42	60

*Organisations could indicate as many area types as applicable.

For almost all survey participants, 91%, housing support was part of their service offering (see Table A2.4). Only 60% were accommodation providers.

Table A2.5 – Responding organisations by homelessness service user group

Service user groups covered	Number of responding organisations*	Percentage of responding organisations
Women	49	70
Young people	47	67
Families with dependent children	47	67
Rough sleepers	44	63
Older people	40	57

*Organisations could indicate as many area types as applicable.

As shown in Table A2.5, more than half of the sample of responding organisations catered for each of the specified homelessness groups. This was usually within the context of services targeted at two or more of these constituencies, although a few organisations focused exclusively on only one such group.

A2.4. Survey findings

A2.4.1 Recent change in the incidence of homelessness

To gauge respondent views about recent change in the overall scale of the problem they were asked:

“In your organisation’s experience, how has the scale of homelessness demand changed in the past 5 years?”

Respondents were free to define ‘homelessness demand’ in their own way. This might be conceptualised as the ‘stock’ of people experiencing homelessness (e.g. number of rough sleepers on any given night) or the ‘flow’ of newly arising homelessness (e.g. rental housing evictions over a given time period).

However defined, the vast majority of survey participants reported that homelessness had increased significantly since 2012 - see Tables 6(a) and (b). This judgement was somewhat more emphatic among Victorian respondents than among organisations operating elsewhere, and also among ‘metro only’ agencies, see Tables 6(a) and (b). Not a single survey respondent operated in an environment where homelessness was perceived as having reduced over this period.

Table A2.6: Perceived change in homelessness over past 5 years

(a) Breakdown by jurisdiction (%)

Region	Increased significantly	Remained fairly steady	Decreased significantly	Total	N=
1 NSW	78	22	0	100	23
2 Vic	86	14	0	100	22
3 RoA	72	28	0	100	25
Australia	79	21	0	100	70

(b) Breakdown by responding organisation’s service coverage (%)

Area type	Increased significantly	Remained fairly steady	Decreased significantly	Grand Total	N=
1 Metro only	86	14	0	100	22
2 Metro and non-metro	73	27	0	100	15
3 Non-metro only	76	24	0	100	29
Grand Total	79	21	0	100	66

Note: Excludes pilot survey participants.

Appendices

It might be contended that reports of rising homelessness demand could reflect un-evidenced responses from organisations with a vested interest in this scenario. However, more than two-thirds of those asserting a significant increase in the scale of the problem (69%) stated that this assessment reflected hard quantitative evidence rather than merely informed judgement. Many referred to statistical data submitted to government via the AIHW Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) system. Some were more specific:

2010 – service was funded to support 322 clients; 2015-16 – 899 clients presented to the service for support. (SA metro provider)

We have recorded a 25% increase in individual client numbers in the metro service and a 22% increase at the regional service. (Vic metro and regional provider)

For the 2012-13 reporting period, we had 110 support periods with 47.3% being homeless compared with 2016-17 statistics of 171 support periods with 40.7% being homeless. (NSW regional provider)

Turnaways have increased. (Vic regional provider)

Nonetheless, many comments suggested that increased demand for services had resulted as much (or possibly more) from longer service use durations as from an increased inflow of service users (or 'incidence of homelessness'). This 'longer service use duration' might, in turn, reflect both:

- increasing complexity of service user needs
- reduction in scope to assist people into longer-term housing as a result of contracting affordable housing opportunities in the private market.

Awareness of extended service use duration was evident from responses such as the following:

The overall annual statistics indicate a 5% increase in 'individuals' presenting, however the amount of 'assists' provided has increased by 20%. This indicates people are staying homeless longer and needing to present more often. (Vic metro and regional provider)

The period of support required to achieve a sustainable outcome has increased. (Vic regional provider)

Caseload has been fairly consistent but we have qualitative and quantitative evidence proving we are working harder for clients. (Vic regional provider)

A2.4.2 Reasons for perceived homelessness increase

Analysis of open-ended survey responses provides some clues on the factors believed to be underlying the rising incidence of homelessness in terms of an increased inflow of people need of assistance. The two most commonly cited factors were (a) the ongoing decline in private rental housing affordability and (b) the growing numbers in need of housing assistance due to family and domestic violence.

The perceived intensification of housing affordability stress leading to homelessness was reported as arising especially from the Australian Government's ongoing failure to index welfare benefits increases to keep pace with rising rents and other living costs. Thus, the growing scale of the problem reflected:

Increase in exclusion from private rental due to being a Centrelink recipient. (Qld metro and regional provider)

[Declining] affordability of shared accommodation and private rental ... pushing clients on Centrelink benefits almost to the point of paying 70% or more of their income in rent. (Vic metro provider)

Private rental [has] become impossible for single parents and unemployed people. (NSW metro provider)

Housing affordability: so we are seeing lots more people who are homeless due to loss of housing due to inability to enter the market or to sustain their tenancy. (Qld metro provider)

While many respondents saw recently rising homelessness as substantially resulting from growing numbers displaced through family violence, a number believed this was partly attributable to heightened public awareness of the issue:

More education in the community in relation to violence against women means more women are seeking help. (NSW metro provider)

Awareness around [family violence is] increasing ... demand for services for people fleeing or being excluded from properties [is therefore growing]. (Vic regional provider)

People are better educated on the effects of ... family violence. We are now seeing an increase in older women leaving domestic violence and looking ... to be re-housed ... More articles in magazines with survivors speaking out. (NSW regional provider)

Linking with the above testimony, one respondent (Vic regional provider) attributed rising homelessness to, among other things, 'increased demand for [housing for] perpetrators of family violence coming through the entry point' (our italics).

Another theme on reasons for rising homelessness was the reduced supply of suitable, low-cost housing in the 'marginal rental' bracket:

Decrease in registered boarding houses ... Decrease in caravan parks. (Vic metro provider)

More than an increase in initial demand (which there still is) there is a decrease in outcomes or housing options, also leading to more repeat clients. (Vic metro provider)

Changing boarding house market with [operators now] targeting working people. (NSW metro provider)

A2.4.3 Very recent change in the incidence of homelessness

As a follow-up to the question about the changes in homelessness over a five year time-frame, respondents were also asked whether any notable changes in previous trends had been seen during the past 12 months. Just over a third of survey participants (36%) said this was the case in their area(s) of operation. Almost all were respondents who perceived that homelessness had 'increased significantly' over the past five years. The diverse range of factors contributing to sharper increases in 2016-17 included:

[This] has occurred in the metropolitan service and relates to the [rising] number of 'crisis assists'. This represents [people] who ... require immediate accommodation assistance ... [It] generally relates to the availability of affordable rental housing. (Vic metro and non-metro provider)

[There are] more people becoming homeless through the [domestic violence] system, i.e. women placed in motels ... [or not taking] up refuge options because of lack of appropriateness. (Qld regional provider)

[Homelessness] has [recently] increased at a higher rate ... Unsure why, perhaps an increase in methamphetamine use. (WA metro and non-metro provider)

[Partly] due to drugs and alcohol being so cheap and readily available and it [has become] harder to get clients to choose accommodation over buying drugs. (SA metro provider)

Government now trying to contract all inner-city services to 'relocate' people out of the inner city. (NSW metro provider)

HNSW are no longer making offers to our client group and if they get Start Safely they are not allowed to be on the priority housing wait list. (NSW metro provider)

Notably, the final two comments in the above list refer to the effects of administrative action rather than 'underlying demand'. 'Negative policy developments', as perceived by survey respondents, are further discussed in Sections 4.6 and 4.7.

A2.4.4 Change in profile of homelessness caseload

A third of respondents (33%) reported that the profile of the homelessness caseload had 'changed significantly' over the past five years. Another 54% said that it had 'changed slightly'. Perhaps consistent with testimony on rising rates of displacement due to family violence, the most commonly cited change in profile (nearly a third of those reporting change) was a disproportionate increase in the number of families. The second most commonly cited 'profile change' was a rise in the number of applicants with 'complex needs'.

Appendices

A2.4.5 Change in availability of suitable accommodation

To explore the challenges faced by homelessness service providers in helping people find suitable accommodation, respondents were asked 'has the scope for matching service users with suitable accommodation changed in the past five years?' As shown in Table A2.7, the overwhelming majority of organisations operating in all spatial settings stated the job of matching applicants and housing had become harder over this period.

**Table A2.7 – Ease of finding suitable accommodation
– change over past five years (%)**

	Has become somewhat easier	Has become somewhat harder	No change	Total	N=
Metro only	0	82	18	100	22
Metro and non-metro	7	86	7	100	14
Non-metro only	14	79	7	100	29
Grand Total	8	82	11	100	65

Note: Excludes pilot survey participants and the one organisation reporting that its functions did not include helping people find suitable housing.

Asked in what ways it had become more difficult to find suitable accommodation for service users, respondents cited many growing challenges. These included the contracting availability of 'marginal rental' housing, as noted by several regional Victorian services:

Caravan parks in our area no longer take longer-term residents, they cater to 'grey nomads'. Pubs that previously housed clients are now changed to more boutique pubs. (Vic non-metro provider)

Less chance of getting clients into motels, caravan parks or temporary accommodation. (Vic non-metro provider)

Lack of alternative accommodation sources due to closing of boarding houses and caravan parks. (Vic non-metro provider)

Another commonly reported issue of rising significance was the greater difficulty for organisations handling increased numbers of service users with complex needs:

Clients are presenting with many more issues which services and accommodation providers are not willing to engage with. (Vic metro provider)

Greater incidence of dual diagnosis together with other issues that means the client does not fit into 'box'. (NT metro)

Lack of options for clients with complex needs and need supported housing. (Vic metro provider)

For many respondents the worsening problem of private rental (un)affordability — exacerbated by inadequate benefit indexation rates — was the main concern:

Previously we could find properties for young people ... on Youth Allowance ... this is rarely possible now. (NSW non-metro provider)

Finding properties that are affordable to single people who are unemployed is extremely difficult – see Anglicare report. (NSW metro and non-metro provider)

Contracting accessibility of social rental housing was also mentioned by a number of respondents. While often referenced simply in terms of growing wait times for public housing, there were various other dimensions to this problem in certain local contexts:

Longer waiting lists for public housing. (Vic non-metro provider)

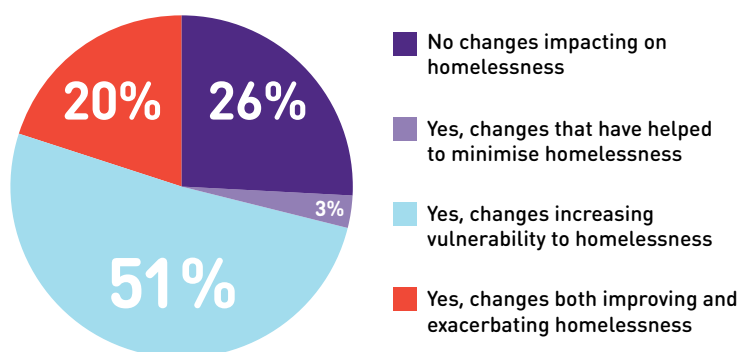
Public housing renewal program [absorbing available vacancies] – lots of people moving, no additional properties. (ACT provider)

Local community housing has also become stricter on rent arrears, upfront provision of bonds, etc. (NSW non-metro provider)

A2.4.6 Social security policy changes and homelessness

Nearly three-quarters of respondents (71%) believed that recent changes in the welfare benefits system had increased people's vulnerability to homelessness, see Figure A2.1. At the same time, nearly one-quarter (23%) thought that recent changes had helped the situation.

Figure A2.1: What significant changes to the welfare benefits system and/or Centrelink practice over the past five years have impacted on homelessness?



N=70

Problematic developments

In terms of problematic social security developments, the most commonly cited issue was the growing rental affordability stress due to inadequate indexation of social security payment rates. As experienced across the country, the past few years have seen benefits failing to keep pace with rent inflation.

Appendices

Three other changes to social security payments seen as exacerbating homelessness were cited by numerous respondents. These are exemplified by respondent comments as set out below.

First was the new rules pushing more single parents onto Newstart Allowance:

Newstart Allowance and the Youth Allowance exclude most from private rental unless they are participating in shared housing. (Qld metro and non-metro provider)

There are a number of mothers who are having difficulties with the change to Newstart once their youngest child turns eight. (ACT provider)

[Sole Parent Payment] clients who are changed to Newstart when their youngest child turns eight. (SA non-metro provider)

Changes to Newstart Allowance for clients who were previously on a parenting payment. Massive issue. (Vic non-metro provider)

The second widely referenced 'problematic recent change' in the social security system was the displacement of Disability Support Pension (DSP) recipients on to Newstart Allowance (or the increased likelihood that a DSP applicant would be awarded Newstart Allowance only):

More difficulty accessing Disability Support Pension. (Vic metro provider)

Getting approval for Disability Support Pension has been increasingly harder. (NSW metro provider)

Stricter criteria for DSP. Changes to Newstart. Restriction of Parenting Payment. Much more paperwork required for submission. (WA metro and non-metro provider)

Tightening of access to the Disability Support Pension, particularly for people at the lower severity of intellectual disability. (NSW non-metro provider)

Sometimes [Centrelink award of Newstart rather than DSP] is [now] happening with women who are very psychiatrically unwell and this was different five years ago. (NSW metro provider)

The third 'homelessness-generating' social security system issue mentioned by numerous respondents was the perceived increase in benefit sanctioning:

Since ... 2014 ... there has been a noticeable increase in [benefit condition] 'breaches'. (NSW metro and non-metro provider)

Clients being cut off from payments for not presenting to appointments. (Vic metro provider)

Clients have their payments suspended if they fail to attend an appointment which is difficult for those who are homeless as they do not receive mail. (NSW non-metro provider)

Punitive approach to income support, people are often left without payments, or waiting for payments. People who don't comply [with Centrelink requirements] are cut off from payments. (Vic metro and non-metro provider)

Cutting off payments more easily for non-compliance definitely increases the risk of homelessness. (NSW non-metro provider)

Related to the above issue but raising a wider concern, one respondent commented:

Clients often don't have access to internet, have reading and writing difficulties. These difficulties often lead to clients having payments cut and doing nothing about it. (SA metro provider)

Positive developments

Although these were much fewer in number (see Figure A2.1), a few respondents acknowledged recent developments connected with the social security system that had been positive from a homelessness perspective:

Centrelink more able to recognise 'no fixed address' and can be flexible to person's situation. (Vic metro provider)

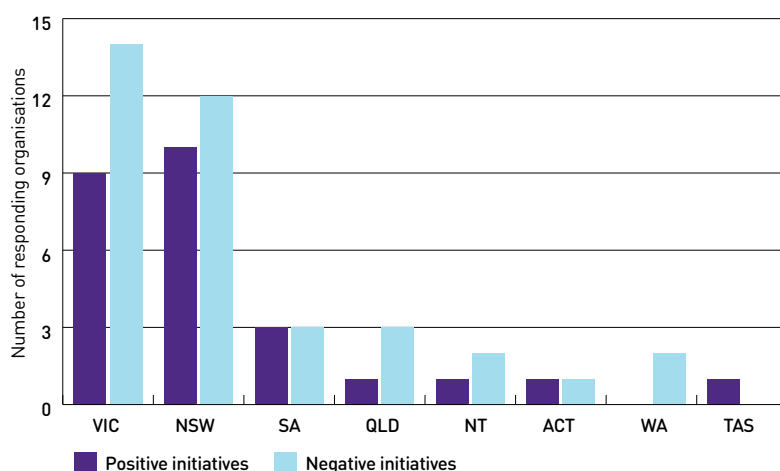
Community engagement officers — extremely helpful resource with direct access to Centrelink but have to cover a huge geographic area. (Vic non-metro provider)

Homelessness workers [co-located] in ... Centrelink offices to support ... customers at risk of becoming homeless. (Vic metro provider)

A2.4.7 State/territory homelessness policy reforms and initiatives

Over a third of respondents (36%) acknowledged significant policy changes recently enacted by their home state or territory that had helped to tackle homelessness. At the same time, 53% of organisations believed there had been recent negative policy changes at the state or territory level³². As shown in Figure A2.2, negative policy changes were more commonly identified in most jurisdictions.

Figure A2.2: State and territory recent policy reforms and initiatives perceived as having a bearing on homelessness (N=70)



³² Although in a few instances it was clear from their answers to the follow-up question that respondents were mistakenly citing 'negative' policy change initiated by the Australian Government.

Appendices

Positive changes

Most of the cited positive changes related to NSW or Victoria, often connected with well-known state government initiatives in the realm of homelessness and/or affordable housing, notably under the banner of Future Directions for Social Housing in NSW and Victoria's programs to tackle family violence.

Cited 'positive initiatives and reforms' recently enacted by state and territory governments across Australia are listed below.

- New South Wales providers
 - *Trialling the Homelessness Action Plan (HAP) [was] a great improvement leading into the reforms as brokerage. The new No Wrong Door policy has also assisted clients ... all services are now accredited services with the new quality assurance system ... Link2Home is another good initiative*
 - *Expansion of Specialist Homelessness Services to [previously excluded] areas in rural NSW*
 - *Youth Private Rental Subsidy*
 - *The NSW Social and Affordable Housing Fund ... provides a start in addressing the supply of affordable housing*
 - *Homestay programs that support people to maintain their tenancies*
 - *The Queensland Statewide Tenant Advice and Referral Service (QSTARS) — assisting [renters] with their housing rights and responsibilities*
 - *Going Home Staying Home: People who are homeless or at risk of homelessness only need to call one number to be connected to the rightservice.*
- Queensland providers
 - *Street to Home (where assertive outreach and housing are critical elements)*
 - *Common Ground — homestay programs that support people to maintain their tenancies*
 - *QSTARS — assisting people with their housing rights and responsibilities in the private rental market*
 - *Safer Lives — responding to women escaping domestic violence.*
- Tasmania providers
 - *Housing Connect shared data base has increased the capacity of services to share information and reduced the need for clients to repeat their story.*
- Victoria providers
 - *Rough Sleepers Initiative, Towards Home program*
 - *Promise of NPAH funding spanning more than 12 months at a time*
 - *Early Intervention programs funded by Department of Health and Human Services, Private rental access program*
 - *Private Rental Assistance Program*
 - *Increased assistance for domestic violence services, including the direct provision of housing through capital grants and head leasing in the private rental market*
 - *A significant increase in funds to assist low-income clients to access or sustain private rentals*
 - *Access to accommodation costs from Department of Health and Human Services for young people leaving state care at 17/18 years.*
 - *Increased funding towards family violence provisions*
 - *Private rental advocate scheme*
 - *Family violence initiatives.*

Negative changes

The many cited instances of 'negative recent policy change' at the state and territory level included a few recurrent themes, some were jurisdiction-specific. Among NSW responses, for example, a number referred to the 2015-16 homelessness services restructuring program *Going Home Staying Home* as having had significant negative impacts:

The recent massive restructure of the homelessness sector has most definitely exacerbated homelessness. Going Home Staying Home, I think, has been a disaster.

Going Home Staying Home reform ... was needed ... but the upheaval and disruption to the service system has taken a long time to recover from.

[Going Home Staying Home] did not really consider deeply enough the role/specialisation of domestic and family violence and by lumping this in one big generic reform agenda ... some of that specialisation has been lost.

The Going Home Staying Home ... initiative was [undertaken by a large accounting firm] without any significant field consultation. Even the peak bodies involved in the negotiations were subject to confidentiality clauses, so the whole process was an absolute debacle that was destined to ... fail given the lack of consultation in the field.

Recent homelessness system reforms implemented in the ACT also triggered critical comments from two local service providers:

Closing of refuges, complications to how the funding is distributed, competitive relationships amongst service providers.

Homelessness service [reforms] ... reduced diversity and size of sector. [Funding diversion to] central gateway ... complicates a small sector that worked well together.

Meanwhile, two NT respondents alluded to recent policy changes that were seen as negatively impacting on homelessness in that jurisdiction:

Alcohol mandatory treatment. Police at alcohol outlets. Support for hospital patient's family.

Rough sleepers are now moved on by police, so they move to family who are already overcrowded to avoid being harassed by police.

From respondents across Australia, numerous other comments specifying negative state and territory government policy developments highlighted a lack of policy direction and/or a neglect of social and affordable housing. These included:

Uncertainty of SHS funding, short-term agreements for support and property leases, discontinued stock transfer initiatives to community housing to enable leverage opportunities, no significant investment in housing options, uncertain policy and political environment. (Qld provider)

The state [social housing] strategy doesn't reduce homelessness it just addresses the fact we have ageing stock that needs to be maintained. (Qld provider)

Homelessness funding has been rolling over year on year with no real policy direction. (Qld provider)

Lack of policy direction [on] housing affordability [and] ... social housing. (Vic provider)

No reform of the RTA [Residential Tenancies Act] — the Act is outdated and favours private rental owners. (Vic provider)

Lack of affordable housing initiatives and strategies. (Vic provider)

Finally, there were the respondents who considered moves to transition public housing to community housing providers as a negative policy direction for homelessness:

[Moves towards] Community Housing Associations ... handling all government housing. (SA provider)

Trend to decrease provision of public housing ... shift towards community housing providers and the market. (Vic provider)

Whether such policy moves are problematic from a homelessness perspective is something that calls for further research.

Appendices

Appendix 3: Online survey questionnaire



IT'S TIME TO END
HOMELESSNESS

SPRC
Social Policy Research Centre



Australian Homelessness Monitor 2017

This national study of homelessness in Australia is funded by Launch Housing and conducted by the University of New South Wales (UNSW) and the University of Queensland. It links with the UK's Homelessness Monitor that one of the researchers, Professor Hal Pawson, has been heavily involved in since it commenced in 2011. Alongside analysis of existing published data, the research investigates changing levels and causes of homelessness through the informed perceptions of practitioners in the field. This survey, targeting selected homelessness service providers in each state and territory, is part of that primary fieldwork. This questionnaire comprises 10 questions about your organisation, the scale and nature of homelessness demand in your locality, the availability of suitable accommodation for different demand groups, and the perceived homelessness impacts of recent policy change - whether involving federal, state/territory or even local government. It should take 10-20 minutes to complete. The researchers and Launch Housing will be very grateful for your kind assistance here.

This project has ethics approval from UNSW's Human Research Ethics Committee (HC17199). This information statement provides more detailed information about how the information you provide will be used if you choose to participate. By clicking 'Next' below, you agree to contribute to this survey under these terms and conditions. You may discontinue at any point in time and be assured that this will not impact your relationship with UNSW Sydney, the University of Queensland, and Launch Housing. To find out more about this study, please visit our project website, or contact the project leader, Professor Hal Pawson.

Respondent details

Name (optional):

.....
.....
.....
.....

Current position:

.....
.....
.....
.....

Email (we will only use this to seek further clarifications of your survey responses (if required) and to update you on project outcomes):

.....
.....
.....
.....

How many years have you worked in the homelessness sector?

- ☐ Less than 1 year
☐ 1-5 years
☐ 5 or more years

Organisation classification questions

State(s) of operation (please select all that apply):

- ☐ NSW
☐ VIC
☐ QLD
☐ SA
☐ WA
☐ TAS
☐ ACT
☐ NT

Area(s) of operation (please select all that apply):

- ☐ Inner metropolitan
- ☐ Middle-ring metropolitan
- ☐ Outer metropolitan
- ☐ Regional cities
- ☐ Other regional areas
- ☐ Remote areas

Types of services offered (please select all that apply):

- ☐ Outreach
- ☐ Early intervention
- ☐ Prevention
- ☐ Housing support
- ☐ Housing provision

Other, please specify:

.....

Service specialisation (please select all that apply):

- ☐ Young people
- ☐ Women
- ☐ Parents with dependent children
- ☐ Older people
- ☐ Rough sleepers

Other, please specify:

.....

Q1: Scale of homelessness demand – recent change

(a) In your organisation's experience, how has the scale of 'homelessness demand' changed in the past 5 years?

- ☐ Increased significantly
- ☐ Remained fairly steady
- ☐ Declined significantly

(b) If the scale of 'homelessness demand' has changed significantly in the past 5 years, please describe the change and its possible causes

.....

.....

.....

Q2: Is there evidence that could confirm or quantify this perceived change in scale of homelessness demand?

- ☐ Yes, we have statistics (e.g. caseload, turn-aways) collected in-house that we can share if required.
- ☐ Yes, we have statistics (e.g. caseload, turn-aways) collected in-house that we are unable to share.
- ☐ No, response to Q1 is based mainly on informed judgement.

Q2: Please briefly describe the caseload or other monitoring statistics (if any) that could demonstrate how 'homelessness demand' in your area(s) of operation has changed significantly in the past 5 years.

.....

.....

.....

Q3: Scale of homelessness demand – very recent change

(a) In your organisation's experience, have there been any particular changes in the scale of 'homelessness demand' in the past 12 months that differ significantly from the 5-year trend as already described above?

- ☐ Yes - recent change different from preceding few years (e.g. sharp increase in 2016 following years of stability)
- ☐ No - change in past 12 months consistent with preceding five years

Appendices

(b) If the scale of 'homelessness demand' has changed significantly in the past 12 months in a new way, please describe the change and its possible causes

.....

Q4: Nature of homelessness demand

(a) How far has the cohort of people seeking homelessness assistance from your organisation changed in character by comparison with 5 years ago? (e.g. in terms of age or type/severity of need)

- ☐ Profile of homelessness unchanged
☐ Profile of homelessness changed slightly
☐ Profile of homelessness changed significantly

(b) If the profile of homelessness has changed, please summarise the nature of that change.

.....

(c) If the profile of homelessness has changed, please summarise the likely causes of that change.

.....

Q5: Availability of suitable accommodation - housing market conditions

(a) If your organisation's functions include providing housing advice for potentially homeless people, please comment on whether the scope for matching service users with suitable accommodation has changed in the past 5 years.

- ☐ Has become somewhat easier
☐ No change
☐ Has become somewhat harder
☐ Not applicable - do not help people find suitable housing

(b) If the ease of matching service users with suitable accommodation has changed in the past 5 years, please summarise the nature of that change.

.....

(c) If the ease of matching service users with suitable accommodation has changed in the past 5 years, please summarise the the likely causes.

.....

Q6: Welfare benefits system issues

(a) Thinking about the past 5 years, would you say there have been any significant changes to the welfare benefits system and/or Centrelink practice that have impacted on homelessness?

- ☐ Yes, changes that have helped to minimise homelessness
☐ Yes, changes that have increased vulnerability to homelessness
☐ Yes, some changes have helped to minimise homelessness while others increased vulnerability
☐ No, no changes significant in this respect

(b) If welfare benefits changes during the past 5 years have impacted on homelessness, please indicate the changes you have in mind

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(c) If welfare benefits changes during the past 5 years have impacted on homelessness, please indicate how these have changes affected the incidence of homelessness

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Q7: State/territory/local government policy change to ameliorate homelessness

(a) Thinking about the past 5 years, would you say there have been any significant policy changes enacted in your area(s) of operation by state/territory/local government that have helped to reduce homelessness?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

(b) If there has been positive policy change, please indicate the initiative(s) you have in mind

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(c) If there has been positive policy change, please indicate the resulting impact(s)

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Q8: State/territory/local government policy change tending to exacerbate homelessness

(a) Thinking about the past 5 years, would you say there have been any significant policy changes enacted in your area(s) of operation by state/territory/local government that have tended to exacerbate homelessness?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

(b) If there has been negative policy change, please indicate the change(s) you have in mind

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(c) If there has been negative policy change, please indicate the resulting impact(s)

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Is there any other comments regarding changes to homelessness demands that your organisation has experienced in the last 5 years not covered in this survey that you would like to make?

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This is the end of the survey. Thank you for contributing to this research. Please click 'submit' below to complete your submission.

Contact us

Launch Housing

68 Oxford Street
Collingwood
Victoria 3066

T (03) 9288 9600

www.launchhousing.org.au

