

## 5.4 Homelessness

### Why this measure is included

There is a growing body of evidence about the immediate and longer term effects of homelessness on children and young people’s wellbeing. Research indicates childhood experiences of homelessness may affect physical health, educational attainment, social relationships and functioning, and may be linked with subsequent homelessness in adulthood.<sup>376 377 378 379</sup>

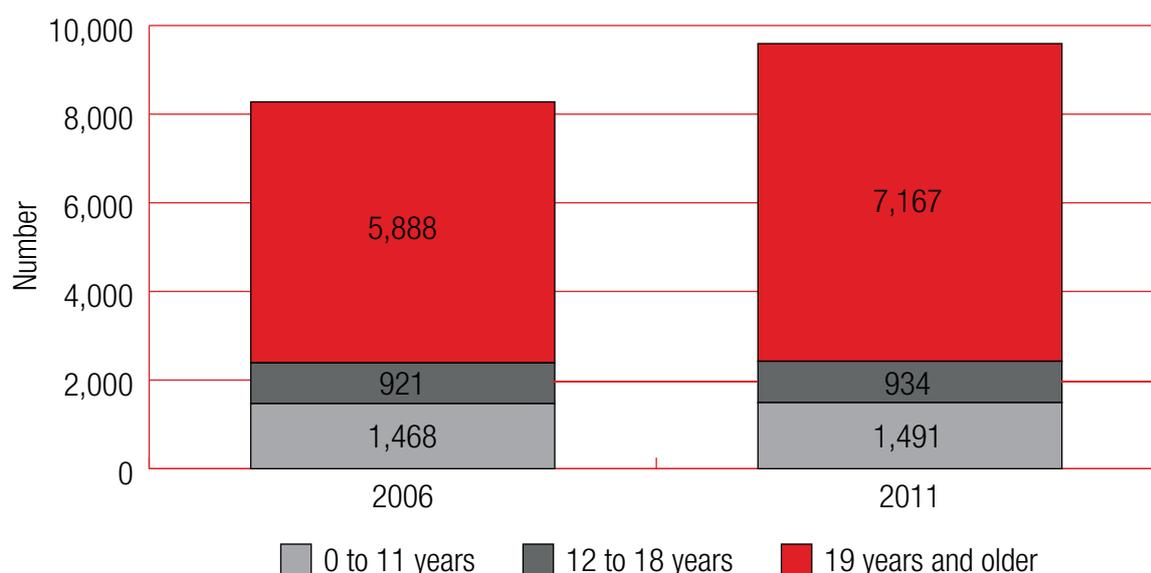
Homelessness has also been linked with contributing factors such as substance abuse, crime and mental health issues.<sup>380 381</sup>

**Table 5.9: Children and young people 0 to 18 years who are homeless: rate per 10,000 population, by age groups and homeless operational groups by selected characteristics, Western Australia and Australia, 2011**

	0 to 11 years		12 to 18 years	
	WA	Australia	WA	Australia
Persons who are in improvised dwellings, tents or sleeping out	1.6	1.2	2.0	1.9
Persons in supported accommodation for the homeless	4.1	16.5	5.3	15.5
Persons staying temporarily with other households	5.8	5.1	4.3	4.6
Persons staying in boarding houses	0.5	0.6	2.0	2.5

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011, *Census of Population and Housing, Estimating homelessness 2011*

**Figure 5.6: Children and young people 0 to 18 years who are homeless: number, by age group, Western Australia, 2006 and 2011**



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011, *Census of Population and Housing, Estimating homelessness 2011*

**Table 5.10: Children and young people 0 to 18 years who are homeless: number, by age group and gender, Western Australia, 2011**

	0 to 11 years	12 to 18 years	Total 0 to 18 years	
	Number	Number	Number	Percentage of all homeless
Male	767	458	1,225	22.9
Female	724	476	1,200	28.3
Total	1,491	934	2,425	25.3

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011, *Census of Population and Housing, Estimating homelessness 2011*

**Table 5.11: Children and young people 0 to 18 years whose living arrangements are close to the statistical boundary of homelessness<sup>382</sup>: number, by age group and gender, Western Australia, 2011**

	0 to 11 years	12 to 18 years	Total 0 to 18 years	
	Number	Number	Number	Percentage of all homeless
Male	709	461	1,170	31.0
Female	675	445	1,120	34.0
Total	1,384	906	2,290	32.4

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011, *Census of Population and Housing, Estimating homelessness 2011*

**Table 5.12: Children and young people 0 to 17 years who are clients of Specialist Homelessness Services: number, by age group and gender, Western Australia 2011–12 and 2012–13**

	2011–12			2012–13		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
0 to 9 years	2,235	2,334	4,569	1,921	2,074	3,995
10 to 14 years	816	820	1,636	595	708	1,303
15 to 17 years	508	659	1,167	395	551	946
Total 0 to 17 years	3,559	3,813	7,372	2,911	3,333	6,244

Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2014, Specialist Homelessness Services revised 2011–12 data, unpublished; Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2013, *Specialist Homelessness Services 2012–13*, Supplementary tables: WA



**Table 5.13: Children and young people 0 to 17 years who are clients of Specialist Homelessness Services: number and rate per 1,000 population, by age group and Aboriginal status, Western Australia 2012–13**

	Aboriginal		Non-Aboriginal		Unknown	Aboriginal
	Number	Rate per 1,000	Number	Rate per 1,000	Number	Per cent
0 to 9 years	1,733	83.3	1,803	6.4	459	49.0
10 to 14 years	485	48.1	651	4.7	167	42.7
15 to 17 years	260	45.5	576	6.7	110	31.1

Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2013, *Specialist Homelessness Services 2012–13*, Supplementary Tables: WA, Table 2.3

Notes:

1. Aboriginal status was not reported for 625 clients (aged 0 to 17 years) in 2011–12 and 736 clients (aged 0 to 17 years) in 2012–13.
2. Rates are Commissioner for Children and Young People WA calculations based on data from ABS 2013, *Estimates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, June 2011*, cat. no. 3238.0.55.001 and ABS, *Australian Demographic Statistics, Jun 2011*, cat. no. 3101.0.

### What is this measure?

This measure examines the incidence of homelessness among children and young people in WA and compares this with national data. It is difficult to measure the actual number of homeless people, as the nature of homelessness means it may be difficult to maintain contact with a person, and homelessness may be a transient condition.<sup>383</sup> The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) estimates the homeless population based on information collected in the Census of Population and Housing.<sup>384</sup>

It is important to note that:

*...for some groups of people, Census variables provide limited opportunity to estimate those likely to be homeless. Three key groups are: homeless youth; homeless people displaced due to domestic and family violence; and homeless Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.*<sup>385</sup>

Notwithstanding these limitations, the ABS estimates have been compiled on a generally consistent basis so that they can be compared over time to track increases or decreases in homelessness.<sup>386</sup>

This measure uses ABS estimates derived from the Census 2011 and compares those estimates to 2006. Information has been included on the number and rates per 10,000 population of children and young people 0 to 18 years who are either homeless or whose living arrangements are close to the statistical boundary of homelessness.<sup>387</sup>

Other data used in this measure is from the annual report on *Specialist Homelessness Services 2012–13* published by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW). The data in the report is compiled from the new Specialist Homelessness Services Collection that was introduced in 2011.<sup>388</sup> It includes data on children and young people aged 0 to 17 years.<sup>389</sup>



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This data is not comparable with the previous edition's data, taken from the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program National Data Collection. In that data collection, children who accompanied a parent or guardian were counted as accompanying children, not as clients in their own right, and as a result only limited information was collected from them. In the Specialist Homelessness Services Collection, all individuals who receive any service from a specialist homelessness agency are counted as clients, and detailed data is collected from them.<sup>390</sup> This is intended to improve information about children and young people who are at risk of, or experience homelessness.

## Commentary

Based on data from the 2011 Census of Population and Housing, the ABS estimates that in 2011 there were 1,491 homeless 0 to 11 year-olds and 934 homeless 12 to 18 year-olds<sup>391</sup> in WA (Figure 5.6).

The total of 2,425 homeless children and young people is similar to the total that was estimated for 2006 (2,389). While the number of homeless children has remained largely the same over the past five years, the number of homeless people overall in WA has increased by more than 15 per cent (Figure 5.6 and Table 5.14).

Nationally, the number of homeless children and young people aged 0 to 18 years has increased by 12.8 per cent, while the number of all homeless people is estimated to have increased by 17.3 per cent (Table 5.15).

In 2011 children and young people represented about one-quarter (25.3%) of all homeless people in WA. Although this proportion is smaller than the proportion calculated for 2006 (28.9%), children and young people remain over-represented in the homeless group, as they comprise only 25 per cent of the State's general population. The ABS also note that homeless young people are one of the key groups most likely to have been underestimated in the Census (Table 5.10).

Boys and girls appear equally likely to experience homelessness with both male and female children represented almost equally across the younger age groups (1,225 boys compared to 1,200 girls) (Table 5.10).

In addition to the estimated 2,425 homeless children and young people in WA for 2011, a further 2,290 children and young people aged 0 to 18 years were estimated to be living in arrangements close to the statistical boundary of homelessness.<sup>392</sup> Children and young people represented one-third (32.4%) of all people living in these type of arrangements (Table 5.11).

Aboriginal people were significantly over-represented in the homeless group. In WA in 2011, Aboriginal people represented more than one-third (35.2%) of all homeless people,<sup>393</sup> while only representing 3.1 per cent of the State's overall population.<sup>394</sup>

While estimates of the number of homeless Aboriginal children and young people in WA were not requested for this report, it is assumed that Aboriginal children and young people are significantly over-represented in the group of homeless children and young people described above.

According to 2012–13 data from the Specialist Homelessness Services Collection, 6,244 children and young people aged 0 to 17 years received support from specialist homelessness agencies in WA. Almost two-thirds (64.0% or 3,995) of these were aged between 0 and nine years (Table 5.12). By comparison, in 2011–12 a total of 7,372 children and young people received support. This represents a decrease of 1,128 children and young people and is reflective of an overall decrease in clients younger than 18 years across Australia.<sup>395</sup>

Overall, children and young people were significantly over-represented among those who received support from specialist homelessness agencies relative to their representation in the overall population. This result was recorded for WA as well as nationally.



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In WA, children and young people represented 29 per cent of clients receiving support in 2012–13 (relative to their representation in the general WA population of 25 per cent). Children aged zero to nine years accounted for 19 per cent of all clients<sup>396</sup> despite representing only 13 per cent of the general WA population<sup>397</sup>.

Aboriginal children represented almost one-half (49.0%) of all clients in the youngest age group of 0 to nine year-olds and were also considerably over-represented in the older age groups (42.7% of 10 to 14 year-old clients and 31.1% of 15 to 17 year-old clients were Aboriginal) (Table 5.13).

Aboriginal children aged 0 to nine years received homelessness support at a rate of 83.3 per 1,000 population of that age group<sup>398</sup>. In other words, almost one in ten Aboriginal children in WA received support from agencies in 2012–13. The comparative rate for non-Aboriginal children aged 0 to nine years was 6.4 per 1,000 population of that age group<sup>399</sup> (Table 5.13).

## Strategies

### **State Plan 2010–2013: Opening Doors to Address Homelessness, Government of Western Australia**

This plan provides a framework for government and community agencies to address homelessness, building on the National Affordable Housing Agreement and the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness described below. Key strategies are:

- early intervention and prevention
- a better integrated service system
- breaking the cycle of homelessness.

The State government departments involved in the plan are the Department for Child Protection and Family Support (as the lead agency), Department of Housing, Mental Health Commission, Drug and Alcohol Office, Department of Corrective Services and the Western Australia Police. Further information is available at [www.dcp.wa.gov.au/servicescommunity/Documents/WA%20Homelessness%20State%20Plan.pdf](http://www.dcp.wa.gov.au/servicescommunity/Documents/WA%20Homelessness%20State%20Plan.pdf)

### **National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness, Council of Australian Governments (released 2009)**

The four-year National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness commenced in 2009, focusing on three key strategies to reduce homelessness:

- prevention and early intervention to stop people becoming homeless
- breaking the cycle of homelessness
- improving and expanding the service response to homelessness.

In 2013 the Commonwealth and State governments reached a Transitional National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness to extend the joint arrangements for a further 12 months.

The Department for Child Protection and Family Support is the lead agency responsible for the Commonwealth/State partnership in WA. The Department works closely with other government and community agencies to promote an integrated, seamless response for people at risk of or experiencing homelessness. Commonwealth and state-funded specialist homelessness programs include:

- services for rough sleepers
- housing support workers for private and public tenancies, and people leaving supported accommodation and institutional care
- supports for women and children experiencing domestic violence
- the 'Foyer' development of supported independent accommodation for young people (contracted to Anglicare WA).



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Information on the National Partnership Agreement and transitional plans can be accessed at [www.mediastatements.wa.gov.au/Pages/StatementDetails.aspx?listName=StatementsBarnett&StatId=7426](http://www.mediastatements.wa.gov.au/Pages/StatementDetails.aspx?listName=StatementsBarnett&StatId=7426) and [www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/housing-support/programs-services/homelessness/national-partnership-agreement-on-homelessness](http://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/housing-support/programs-services/homelessness/national-partnership-agreement-on-homelessness)

Further information on WA's implementation is available at the Department of Child Protection and Family Support website at [www.dcp.wa.gov.au/servicescommunity/Pages/Homelessness.aspx](http://www.dcp.wa.gov.au/servicescommunity/Pages/Homelessness.aspx)

Specific information on the Foyer development is available at <http://oxfordfoyer.com.au/> and [www.anglicarewa.org.au/](http://www.anglicarewa.org.au/)

### **National Affordable Housing Agreement, Council of Australian Governments (released 2009)**

The National Affordable Housing Agreement commenced in 2009 and aims to ensure all Australians have access to affordable, safe and sustainable housing that contributes to social and economic participation.

The Agreement provides housing assistance to low and middle-income Australians and is supported by the National Partnership Agreements on social housing, homelessness and Indigenous Australians living in remote areas.

Further information is available at [www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/housing-support/programs-services/housing-affordability/national-affordable-housing-agreement](http://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/housing-support/programs-services/housing-affordability/national-affordable-housing-agreement)

## **Want to know more?**

### **Data on homelessness**

The Australian Bureau of Statistics produces a range of publications on housing and homelessness. An overview of available resources is available at [www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs/c311215.nsf/web/Housing+and+Homelessness](http://www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs/c311215.nsf/web/Housing+and+Homelessness)

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare produces an annual report on homelessness based on data from the Specialist Homelessness Services collection. Annual reports are available at [www.aihw.gov.au/homelessness-publications/](http://www.aihw.gov.au/homelessness-publications/)

### **Research, reports and articles**

The Western Australian Auditor General's Report, *Implementation of the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness in Western Australia*, Report 13 October 2012, is available at [http://audit.wa.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/report2012\\_13.pdf](http://audit.wa.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/report2012_13.pdf)

The Commonwealth Government's 2008 White Paper on homelessness, *The Road Home*, is available from the Department of Social Services website [www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/housing-support/programs-services/homelessness/the-road-home-the-australian-government-white-paper-on-homelessness-0](http://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/housing-support/programs-services/homelessness/the-road-home-the-australian-government-white-paper-on-homelessness-0)

The 2008 report by the National Youth Commission on youth homelessness, *Australia's Homeless Youth*, is available at [www.theoasismovie.com.au/pdfs/Homeless\\_report.pdf](http://www.theoasismovie.com.au/pdfs/Homeless_report.pdf)

The report *Seen and Heard: Putting children on the homelessness agenda* by Mission Australia recommends that a consistent and nationwide framework is required to address the needs of homeless children, informed by child and family centred practice. This framework should articulate how to:

- prevent families and children from becoming homeless
- intervene early to stabilise housing where it is precarious
- better support children and families once homeless.



Further information is available at [www.missionaustralia.com.au/research-page/homelessness-page?view=docman](http://www.missionaustralia.com.au/research-page/homelessness-page?view=docman)

The National Homelessness Research Network provides information and access to research on the issues and challenges associated with homelessness. The Network can be accessed at [www.ahuri.edu.au/about/nhrn](http://www.ahuri.edu.au/about/nhrn)

## Other information

The Australian Homelessness Clearinghouse, funded by the Commonwealth Government Department of Social Services, provides an extensive range of information as a resource on homelessness, including latest research, data, articles and communities of practice. Further information is available at <http://homelessnessclearinghouse.govspace.gov.au/>

## Additional Tables

**Table 5.14: Children and young people 0 to 18 years who are homeless: number, Western Australia, 2001, 2006 and 2011**

	0 to 11 years	12 to 18 years	Total 0 to 18 years	
	number	number	number	Per cent of all Homeless
2001	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
2006	1,468	921	2,389	28.9
2011	1,491	934	2,425	25.3

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011, Census of Population and Housing, *Estimating homelessness 2011*

**Table 5.15: Children and young people 0 to 18 years who are homeless: number, by age group, Australia, 2001, 2006 and 2011**

	0 to 11 years	12 to 18 years	Total 0 to 18 years	
	number	number	number	Per cent of all Homeless
2001	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
2006	15,715	9,788	25,503	28.4
2011	17,845	10,913	28,758	27.3

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011, Census of Population and Housing, *Estimating homelessness 2011*

