



**Australian Government**  
**Department of Social Services**

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Mr Andrew Wallace MP  
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Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs  
Department of the House of Representatives  
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Dear Mr Wallace

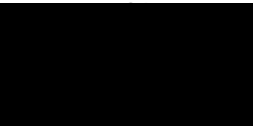
**SUBMISSION TO STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL POLICY AND LEGAL AFFAIRS**

Please find attached a submission to the Inquiry into Homelessness in Australia.

This submission is a multi-agency submission led by the Department of Social Services and developed with:

- Department of Health
- Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications
- Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet
- Department of Social Services
- Department of Veterans' Affairs
- National Indigenous Australians Agency
- Services Australia
- The Australian Bureau of Statistics
- The Treasury.

Yours sincerely



Troy Sloan  
Group Manager

11 June 2020



**Australian Government**  
**Department of Social Services**

# Multi-agency Government Submission

The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and  
Legal Affairs – Inquiry into Homelessness in Australia



## List of contributing agencies to this submission

- Department of Health
- Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications
- Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet
- Department of Social Services
- Department of Veterans' Affairs
- National Indigenous Australians Agency
- Services Australia
- The Australian Bureau of Statistics
- The Treasury

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## Executive Summary

While state and territory governments (states) are largely responsible for the provision of day-to-day housing and homelessness services, the Australian Government supports states by spending more than \$6 billion a year to improve housing and homelessness outcomes, including:

- around \$4.6 billion per year in Commonwealth Rent Assistance to help around 1.3 million individuals and families to help pay their rent
- around \$1.6 billion a year through the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA) to states, including \$125 million in dedicated homelessness funding. The NHHA priority homelessness cohorts are:
  - women and children affected by family and domestic violence
  - children and young people
  - Indigenous Australians
  - people experiencing repeat homelessness
  - people exiting institutions and care into homelessness
  - people aged 55 years or older.

The Australian Government has also taken additional measures to improve housing and homelessness outcomes through:

- the National Housing Finance and Investment Corporation to help grow the community housing sector through lower cost and longer term financing
- the \$1 billion National Housing Infrastructure Facility to help unlock new housing supply, including social housing
- the Reconnect program providing up to \$118 million for the delivery of youth homelessness prevention services over five years
- \$78 million for domestic violence housing services including \$60 million to the Safe Places program to build emergency accommodation and \$18 million for the Keeping Women Safe in their Homes program
- \$30 million to build more than 100 social and affordable homes under the Hobart City Deal.

The 2016 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Census of Population and Housing, estimated 116,427<sup>1</sup> people in Australia were classified as homeless. Of these:

- 51,088 people were living in severely crowded dwellings

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<sup>1</sup> The totals do not add up because the ABS imputes responses and applies random adjustments to returned values to avoid the release of confidential data.

- 21,235 people were in supported accommodation for the homeless
- 17,725 people were staying temporarily with other households
- 17,503 people were staying in boarding houses
- 8,200 people were living in improvised dwellings, tents or sleeping out (also referred to as 'rough sleepers')
- 678 people were staying in other temporary lodging.

The ABS definition of homelessness is based on core elements of 'home' in Anglo-American and European interpretations of 'home'. These elements include a sense of security, stability, privacy, safety and the ability to control the living space. Homelessness relates to a lack of one or more elements representing a 'home' as opposed to purely 'roof-lessness'.<sup>2</sup>

Between 2001 and 2016, the national prevalence of homelessness has remained relatively stable, but homelessness rates vary between groups and jurisdictions.

Several factors can contribute to a person experiencing homelessness, including long-term unemployment, mental health issues, substance abuse, family and relationship breakdown and shortages of affordable housing. In addition, natural disasters and unprecedented events, such as the global coronavirus pandemic can also contribute. As a result, treatments to address homelessness will differ depending on the form of homelessness.

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<sup>2</sup>Australian Bureau of Statistics 2049.0 – Census of Population and Housing: Estimating homelessness, 2016, Appendix 1: Definition of Homelessness <<https://www.abs.gov.au/Ausstats/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/2049.0Appendix12016?opendocument&tabname=Notes&prodno=2049.0&issue=2016&num=&view>>.

## Introduction

The Department of Social Services (the department) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs (the Committee) Inquiry into Homelessness in Australia (the Inquiry).

The Committee may inquire into and report on any matter referred to it by either the House or a Minister, including any pre-legislation proposal, bill, motion, petition, vote or expenditure, other financial matter, report or document. Following a referral from the Minister for Families and Social Services, Senator the Hon Anne Ruston, and the Assistant Minister for Community Housing, Homelessness and Community Services, the Hon Luke Howarth MP, the Committee resolved on 11 February 2020 to conduct the Inquiry.

The Australian Government recognises homelessness is an important issue affecting many Australians. Addressing homelessness requires a long-term and systematic effort across agencies, sectors, and the wider community at large.

This submission examines factors contributing to homelessness and discusses the services and supports provided by the Australian Government to help people who are experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness, noting states are responsible for the provision of day-to-day housing and homelessness services. Within this context, this submission discusses trends, data limitations, and roles and responsibilities.

## Section 1: The Australian Government works with state and territory governments

While state and territory governments (states) are primarily responsible for housing and homelessness, the Australian Government spends more than \$6 billion a year to improve housing and homelessness outcomes. This includes around \$1.6 billion a year through the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA) to states to improve housing and homelessness outcomes, including \$125 million a year in dedicated homelessness funding.

### ***National Housing and Homelessness Agreement***

The NHHA improves transparency and accountability as states are required to:

- have publicly available housing strategies indicating the level of social housing supply needed and address priority policy areas
- have homelessness strategies that address priority cohorts with initiatives to reduce homelessness
- contribute to improved data collection and reporting to develop a nationally consistent and transparent dataset to improve comparability.

The housing priority policy areas include: affordable housing; social housing;

encouraging growth and supporting the viability of the community housing sector; tenancy reforms; home ownership; and planning and zoning reform initiatives.

Under the NHHA, priority cohorts, which are not mutually exclusive, include:

- women and children affected by family and domestic violence
- children and young people
- Indigenous Australians
- people experiencing repeat homelessness
- people exiting institutions and care into homelessness
- people aged 55 years or older.

States may identify other priority homelessness cohorts in their bilateral schedules as agreed with the Australian Government.

Homelessness priority policy areas include:

- achieving better outcomes for people, including priority cohorts
- early intervention and prevention
- commitment to service program and design when developing and evaluating homelessness responses.

The NHHA also requires states to develop strategies to outline reforms or initiatives that contribute to a reduction in the incidence of homelessness.

The NHHA sets out the roles and responsibilities of the Australian Government and states, and where responsibilities are shared.

**Table 1: NHHA Roles and Responsibilities**

Australian Government	States	Shared responsibilities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NHHA provides funding to states and monitors performance.</li> <li>• Income support and Commonwealth Rent Assistance for low-income people.</li> <li>• Providing Government own-purpose housing and homelessness related programs and services.</li> <li>• Publishing data.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Publishing and implementing a homelessness strategy to address priority cohorts.</li> <li>• Funding homelessness services to support local needs.</li> <li>• Collecting data from homelessness service providers.</li> <li>• Providing an annual expenditure breakdown, disaggregated by priority homelessness cohorts.</li> <li>• Social housing and homelessness services, administration and delivery to support local needs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Housing, homelessness and housing affordability policy.</li> <li>• Identifying and sharing best practices and policy for housing, homelessness and housing affordability.</li> <li>• Collecting and sharing data.</li> <li>• Setting joint priorities for evaluation and research.</li> </ul>



## **Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA)**

The Australian Government will provide an estimated \$4.6 billion in 2019–20 to around 1.3 million individuals and families renting in the private rental market or living in community housing.

CRA helps reduce rental costs for Australians on eligible income support, family assistance and veterans' payments and helps support the Australian rental market.

CRA reduces the incidence of rental stress by around 30 percentage points in the number of low-income recipients in housing stress after receiving CRA.

CRA is indexed in line with the Consumer Price Index in March and September each year.

Further investment by the Australian Government is at **Section 4** (Direct Australian Government support for priority cohorts) and **Section 5** (Assistance to improve housing and homelessness outcomes) of this submission.

## **Section 2: Homelessness is a complex issue and can impact anyone**

Homelessness is rarely the result of a single event, action or issue. Even a short period of homelessness can have a profound impact on the lifetime wellbeing of an individual. As factors leading to homelessness vary, people experience homelessness and are affected by homelessness in different ways. The homeless population is diverse because anyone can experience homelessness and the length of time they experience homelessness can also vary.

### **Definition and Causes of Homelessness**

According to the ABS, a person is considered homeless if their current living arrangement is in an inadequate dwelling, has no tenure or if their initial tenure is short and not extendable or does not allow the tenant to have control of and access to space for social relations.<sup>3</sup>

The ABS categorises homelessness into six operational groups:

1. persons living in improvised dwellings, tents or sleeping out ('sleeping rough')
2. persons in supported accommodation for the homeless
3. persons staying temporarily with other households ('couch surfers')
4. persons living in boarding houses
5. persons in other temporary lodgings
6. persons living in 'severely' crowded dwellings.

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<sup>3</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics 2049.0 – Census of Population and Housing: Estimating homelessness, 2016, Appendix 1: Definition of Homelessness <<https://www.abs.gov.au/Ausstats/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/2049.0Appendix12016?opendocument&tabname=Notes&prodno=2049.0&issue=2016&num=&view>>.

Sleeping rough includes any person in an improvised home, such as a dwelling made of tarp or cardboard, tent or sleeping out on the street, and reported they were at home or had no usual address.

Supported accommodation for the homeless refers to people living in transitional housing support that is time limited and not long term. It can include crisis and temporary accommodation and refuges. Persons staying temporarily with other households comprises of people staying as visitors with friends and relatives and people who were homeless in 'visitor only' households.<sup>4</sup> A common term for this category is 'couch surfing'.

Boarding house residents are considered homeless if they do not have control of or access to space or privacy, or lack security of tenure. This includes vulnerable residents living in non-private dwellings that do not have exclusive living areas such as a private bathroom. Halls of residence for students, dwellings for members of religious orders and institutions such as hospitals are not considered boarding houses for homeless purposes because:

- they may have chosen to live in these circumstances and have accommodation alternatives or
- they are required by law to live in these circumstances or
- they are in temporary living arrangements (such as student halls of residence) or
- it is essential for their broader health and wellbeing to be living in these situations.

Temporary lodgings are classified as homeless including people living in private accommodation, such as hotels or motels, who report a low income (less than \$400 a week), 'no usual address' and 'unemployed' or 'not in the labour force'.

Persons in severe crowding refer to people living in a dwelling that needs four or more extra bedrooms according to the Canadian National Occupancy Standard (see **Appendix 1**).

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<sup>4</sup> In the Australian Bureau of Statistics Census, a household consisting only of visitors is deemed to be a visitor only household. A visitor is anyone who does not usually live in the household in which they were enumerated on Census night. A family who were all visitors to that dwelling would become a visitor only household, and no family relationship information would be recorded for them.

**Table 2: Estimated homeless population by operational groups, 2001, 2006, 2011 and 2016 (a)<sup>5</sup>**

Operational Groups	2001 no.	%	2006 no.	%	2011 no. (b)	%	2016 no.	%	Change 2001 to 2016 %
Persons living in improvised dwellings, tents or sleeping out	8,946	9.4	7,247	8.1	6,810	6.6	8,200	7.0	-8.3
Persons in supported accommodation for the homeless	13,420	14.1	17,329	19.3	21,258	20.8	21,235	18.2	58.2
Persons staying temporarily with other households	17,880	18.8	17,663	19.7	17,374	17.0	17,725	15.2	-0.9
Persons in boarding houses	21,300	22.3	15,460	17.2	14,944	14.6	17,503	15.0	-17.8
Persons in other temporary lodging	338	0.4	500	0.6	682	0.7	678	0.6	100.6
Persons living in 'severely' crowded dwellings	33,430	35.1	31,531	35.1	41,370	40.4	51,088	43.9	52.8
<b>All homeless persons</b>	<b>95,314</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>89,728</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>102,439</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>116,427</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>22.2</b>

(a) Cells in this table have been randomly adjusted to avoid the release of confidential data. As a result, cells may not add to the totals.

(b) Homeless estimates from 2011 for the category 'Persons living in boarding houses' have been revised.

While Australia's nominal number of homelessness has increased over the 2001 to 2016 period (see **Table 2**), the rate of homelessness per 10,000 people has decreased (see **Table 3**). This reduction is more pronounced if Australia's definition of homelessness is more closely aligned with other countries.

### **Australia's definition<sup>6</sup> of homelessness differs from other comparable nations**

Most Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries include rough sleepers, people living in accommodation for the homeless and in emergency temporary accommodation when defining homelessness.<sup>7</sup> However, Australia is the only country that includes severe crowding and boarding houses in estimating homelessness. Therefore, comparing homeless estimates across countries is difficult, as countries do not define or count the homeless population in the same way.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, 4922.0 - Information Paper - A Statistical Definition of Homelessness, 2012.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.oecd.org/els/family/HC3-1-Homeless-population.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.oecd.org/els/family/HC3-1-Homeless-population.pdf>

**Table 3: Australia’s homelessness rates per 10,000 people 2001 to 2016, including and excluding severely crowded dwellings and boarding houses<sup>9</sup>**

	2001	2006	2011	2016	% Change 2001 to 2016
All homelessness	50.8	45.2	47.6	49.8	-2.0
Homelessness excluding severely crowded dwellings	33.0	29.3	28.4	27.9	-15.2
Homelessness excluding boarding houses	39.4	37.4	40.7	42.3	7.4
Homelessness excluding severely crowded and boarding houses	21.6	21.5	21.4	20.4	-5.6

From 2001 to 2016, including severe crowding and boarding houses, the estimated rate of homelessness per 10,000 people dropped slightly by 2.0 per cent, from 50.8 people to 49.8 people. Excluding severe crowding, the estimated rate of homelessness per 10,000 people fell by 15.2 per cent, from 33.0 people to 28.0 people. Excluding boarding houses, the estimated rate of homelessness per 10,000 increased by 7.4 per cent, from 39.4 people to 42.3 people.

Over this same period, excluding severe crowding and boarding houses, Australia’s estimated rate of homelessness per 10,000 drops by 5.1 per cent, from 21.6 people to 20.5 people.

### Section 3: Homelessness trends vary across Australia

While homelessness rates in Australia have remained relatively stable, homelessness growth rates have varied across different jurisdictions, reflecting the different social and economic circumstances of each state.

**Table 4: Homelessness numbers and rate per 10,000 of the population, by state and territory of usual residence, 2001 to 2016 (a)<sup>10</sup>**

State or territory	2001			2016			Change 2001 to 2016	
	no of people	% of total	Rate per 10,000	no of people	% of total	Rate per 10,000	% Change in no of people	% Change in Rate per 10,000
<b>Persons living in improvised dwellings, tents, or sleeping out</b>								
NSW	1,698	19.0	2.7	2,588	31.6	3.5	52.4	29.6
Vic.	1,018	11.4	2.2	1,123	13.7	1.9	10.3	-13.6
Qld.	2,322	26.0	6.6	1,736	21.2	3.7	-25.2	-43.9
SA	512	5.7	3.5	387	4.7	2.3	-24.4	-34.3
WA	1,410	15.8	7.7	1,083	13.2	4.4	-23.2	-42.9
Tas.	125	1.4	2.7	139	1.7	2.7	11.2	0.0
NT	1,798	20.1	96.0	1,097	13.4	47.9	-39	-50.1
ACT	61	0.7	2.0	54	0.7	1.4	-11.5	-30.0
<b>Australia</b>	<b>8,946</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>4.8</b>	<b>8,200</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>3.5</b>	<b>-8.3</b>	<b>-27.1</b>
<b>Persons living in supported accommodation for the homeless</b>								
NSW	3,339	24.9	5.3	5,861	27.6	7.8	75.5	47.2
Vic.	5,146	38.3	11.0	7,157	33.7	12.1	39.1	10.0

<sup>9</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2049.0 – Census of Population and Housing: Estimating homelessness, 2016, Table 1.5.

<sup>10</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2049.0 – Census of Population and Housing: Estimating homelessness, 2016, Table 1.3 and Table 1.5.

State or territory	2001			2016			Change 2001 to 2016	
	no of people	% of total	Rate per 10,000	no of people	% of total	Rate per 10,000	% Change in no of people	% Change in Rate per 10,000
Qld.	2,155	16.1	6.1	3,722	17.5	7.9	72.7	29.5
SA	842	6.3	5.7	1,433	6.7	8.5	70.2	49.1
WA	1,111	8.3	6.1	1,054	5.0	4.3	-5.1	-29.5
Tas.	305	2.3	6.6	574	2.7	11.3	88.2	71.2
NT	285	2.1	15.2	636	3.0	27.8	123.2	82.9
ACT	232	1.7	7.5	793	3.7	20.0	241.8	166.7
<b>Australia</b>	<b>13,420</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>7.2</b>	<b>21,235</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>9.1</b>	<b>58.2</b>	<b>26.4</b>
<b>Persons staying temporarily with other households</b>								
NSW	5,194	29.0	8.2	5,350	30.2	7.2	3.0	-12.2
Vic.	3,546	19.8	7.6	3,091	17.4	5.2	-12.8	-31.6
Qld.	4,392	24.6	12.5	4,796	27.1	10.2	9.2	-18.4
SA	1,584	8.9	10.8	1,323	7.5	7.9	-16.5	-26.9
WA	1,958	11.0	10.7	1,950	11.0	7.9	-0.4	-26.2
Tas.	482	2.7	10.5	479	2.7	9.4	-0.6	-10.5
NT	361	2.0	19.3	415	2.3	18.1	15.0	-6.2
ACT	363	2.0	11.7	275	1.6	6.9	-24.2	-41.0
<b>Australia</b>	<b>17,880</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>9.5</b>	<b>17,725</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>7.6</b>	<b>-0.9</b>	<b>-20.0</b>
<b>Persons living in boarding houses</b>								
NSW	7,574	35.6	12.0	6,869	39.2	9.2	-9.3	-23.3
Vic.	5,144	24.2	11.0	4,406	25.2	7.4	-14.3	-32.7
Qld.	4,967	23.3	14.1	3,600	20.6	7.7	-27.5	-45.4
SA	1,190	5.6	8.1	906	5.2	5.4	-23.9	-33.3
WA	1,423	6.7	7.8	991	5.7	4.0	-30.4	-48.7
Tas.	221	1.0	4.8	139	0.8	2.7	-37.1	-43.8
NT	587	2.8	31.3	486	2.8	21.2	-17.2	-32.3
ACT	193	0.9	6.2	97	0.6	2.4	-49.7	-61.3
<b>Australia</b>	<b>21,300</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>11.4</b>	<b>17,503</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>7.5</b>	<b>-17.8</b>	<b>-34.2</b>
<b>Persons in other temporary lodgings</b>								
NSW	116	34.3	0.2	222	32.7	0.3	91.4	50.0
Vic.	43	12.7	0.1	108	15.9	0.2	151.2	100.0
Qld.	90	26.6	0.3	211	31.1	0.4	134.4	33.3
SA	20	5.9	0.1	31	4.6	0.2	55	100.0
WA	32	9.5	0.2	51	7.5	0.2	59.4	0.0
Tas.	11	3.3	0.2	25	3.7	0.5	127.3	150.0
NT	12	3.6	0.6	18	2.7	0.8	50	33.3
ACT	16	4.7	0.5	3	0.4	0.1	-81.3	-80.0
<b>Australia</b>	<b>338</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>0.2</b>	<b>678</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>0.3</b>	<b>100.6</b>	<b>50.0</b>
<b>Persons in severely crowded dwellings</b>								
NSW	5,120	15.3	8.1	16,821	32.9	22.5	228.5	177.8
Vic.	3,257	9.7	7.0	8,930	17.5	15.1	174.2	115.7
Qld.	5,390	16.1	15.3	7,601	14.9	16.2	41	5.9
SA	1,696	5.1	11.5	2,140	4.2	12.8	26.2	11.3
WA	3,865	11.6	21.1	3,871	7.6	15.6	0.2	-26.1
Tas.	120	0.4	2.6	267	0.5	5.2	122.5	100.0
NT	13,905	41.6	742.0	11,065	21.7	483.5	-20.4	-34.8
ACT	78	0.2	2.5	370	0.7	9.3	374.4	272.0
<b>Australia</b>	<b>33,430</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>17.8</b>	<b>51,088</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>21.8</b>	<b>52.8</b>	<b>22.5</b>

(a) Cells in this table have been randomly adjusted to avoid the release of confidential data. As a result, cells may not add to the totals.

**Table 5: Number of homeless persons and rate of homeless persons per 10,000 of the population, by state and territory of usual residence - 2001, 2006, 2011 and 2016 (a)<sup>11</sup>**

State or territory	2001		2006		2011 (b)		2016	
	no of people	Rate per 10,000	no of people	Rate per 10,000	no of people	Rate per 10,000	no of people	Rate per 10,000
NSW	23,041	36.4	22,219	33.9	27,479	39.7	37,715	50.4
Vic.	18,154	38.9	17,410	35.3	22,306	41.7	24,817	41.9
Qld.	19,316	54.8	18,856	48.3	19,039	43.9	21,671	46.1
SA	5,844	39.8	5,607	37.0	5,816	36.4	6,224	37.1
WA	9,799	53.6	8,277	42.3	9,191	41.0	9,005	36.4
Tas.	1,264	27.5	1,145	24.0	1,537	31.0	1,622	31.8
NT	16,948	904.4	15,265	791.7	15,330	723.3	13,717	599.4
ACT	943	30.4	949	29.3	1,738	48.7	1,596	40.2
<b>Australia</b>	<b>95,314</b>	<b>50.8</b>	<b>89,728</b>	<b>45.2</b>	<b>102,439</b>	<b>47.6</b>	<b>116,427</b>	<b>49.8</b>

(a) Cells in this table have been randomly adjusted to avoid the release of confidential data. As a result, cells may not add to the totals.

(b) Homeless estimates from 2011 for the category 'Persons living in boarding houses' have been revised.

Between 2001 and 2016, New South Wales had the highest increase in homelessness rates per 10,000 of the population (38.5 per cent), largely due to the growth in severe overcrowding. This was followed by Australian Capital Territory (32.2 per cent), Tasmania (15.6 per cent) and Victoria (7.7 per cent).

Northern Territory's homelessness rates decreased the most (33.7 per cent), largely due to declines in severe crowding and rough sleeping. Western Australia (32.1 per cent), Queensland (15.9 per cent), and then South Australia (6.8 per cent) also experienced decreases in homelessness rates.

## Homelessness is increasing in major cities

Australia's major cities have experienced the largest growth in homelessness among all regions, and comprised around 64.6 per cent of Australia's total estimated homeless population in 2016. Between 2001 and 2016, the estimated homeless population living in major cities of Australia more than doubled from 36,505 to 75,202 (see **Figure 1**).<sup>12</sup>

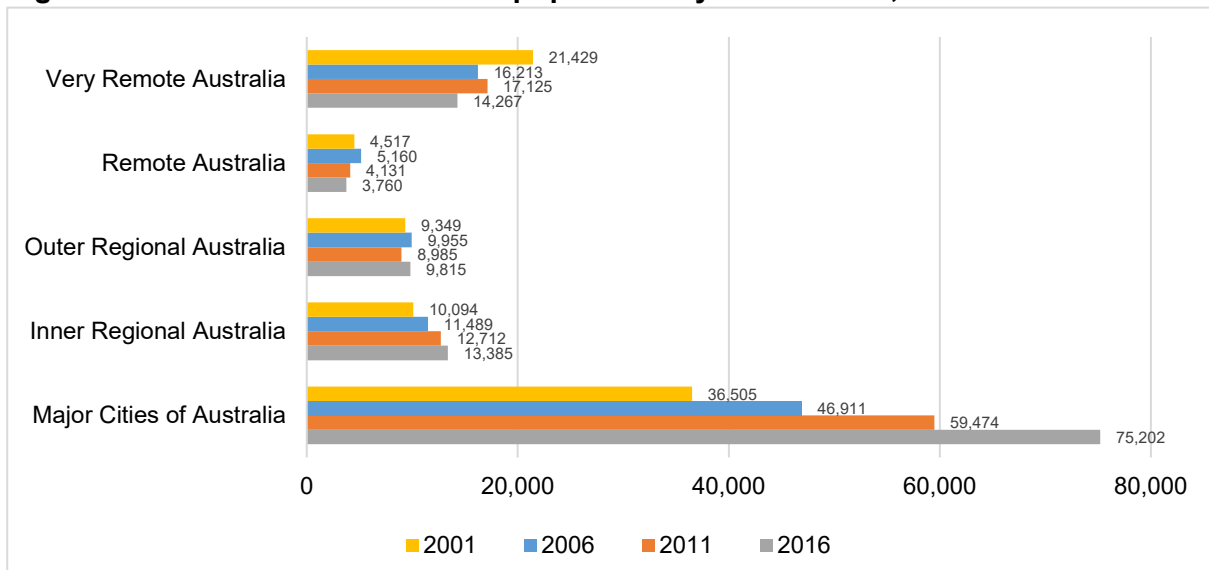
This increase also occurred on a per capita basis, rising from 33.1 per 10,000, to 45.4 per 10,000, an increase of 37.2 per cent.

The growth in the estimated homelessness population was less pronounced in regional Australia and also decreased in remote and very remote Australia.

<sup>11</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2049.0 – Census of Population and Housing: Estimating homelessness, 2016, Table 1.3 and Table 1.5. Accessed at <<https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/2049.0>>.

<sup>12</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2049.0 – Census of Population and Housing: Estimating homelessness, 2016, Table 7.1, and 2006 – Table 1.

**Figure 1: Estimated homelessness population by remoteness, 2001 to 2016<sup>13</sup>**



### Severe crowding has driven the growth in homelessness

Between 2001 and 2016, severe crowding has grown significantly and has been the largest contributor of overall homelessness growth. The Australian Bureau of Statistics estimates 51,088 people were living in severely crowded dwellings on Census night in 2016.<sup>14</sup> Since 2001, the rate of people living in severe crowding increased by 22.5 per cent from 17.8 per 10,000 of the population to 21.8 per 10,000 in 2016.<sup>15</sup>

Severe crowding could be driven by a range of factors, which may include house prices, the overall housing market and choice, for example where individuals may choose to live in what is considered severely crowded situations for various reasons. Additionally, the ABS notes some individuals may choose to ‘live in situations that might parallel the living situations of people who are homeless’.<sup>16</sup>

In this context, while severe crowding remains a problem in remote Australia, especially in the Northern Territory, the largest population increases in severe crowding have been in New South Wales and Victoria, see **Figure 2** and **Table 6** below.

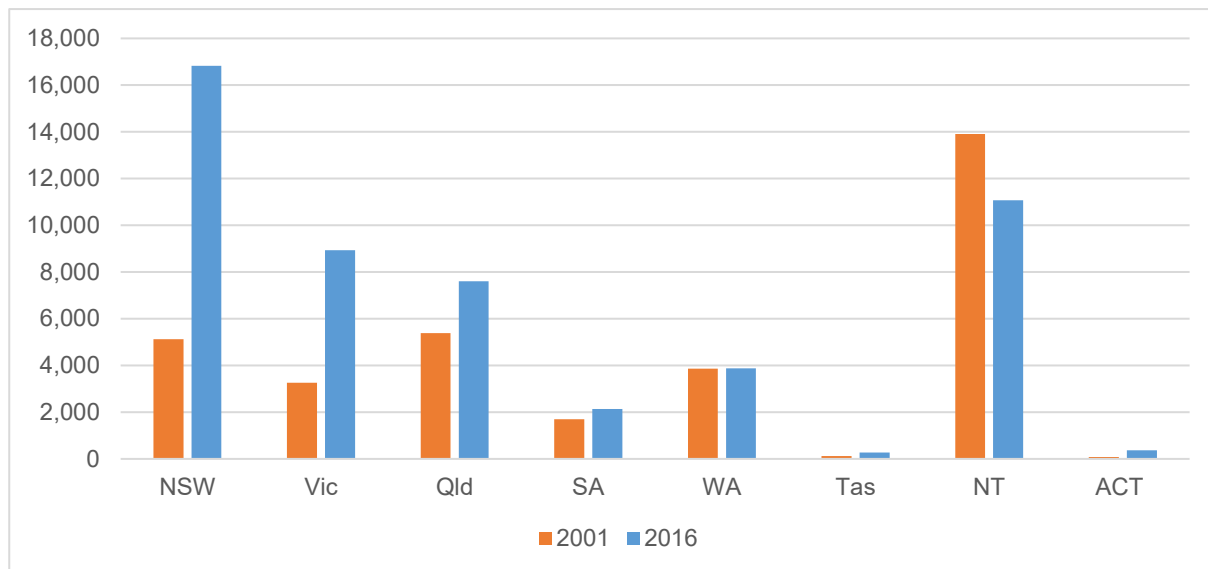
<sup>13</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2049.0 – Census of Population and Housing: Estimating homelessness, 2016, Table 7.1

<sup>14</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2049.0 – Census of Population and Housing: Estimating homelessness, 2016, Table 1.1.

<sup>15</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2049.0 – Census of Population and Housing: Estimating homelessness, 2016, Table 1.5.

<sup>16</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, 4922.0 – Information Paper - A Statistical Definition of Homelessness, 2012, page 7.

**Figure 2: Persons in severely crowded dwellings, by state, 2001 and 2016<sup>17</sup>**



**Table 6: Numbers for persons in severely crowded dwellings and rate per 10,000 of the population, by state or territory of usual residence, 2001 to 2016<sup>18</sup>**

State or territory	2001			2016			Change 2001 to 2016	
	no of people	% of total	Rate per 10,000	no of people	% of total	Rate per 10,000	% Change in no of people %	% Change in Rate per 10,000
NSW	5,120	15.3	8.1	16,821	32.9	22.5	228.5	177.8
Vic.	3,257	9.7	7.0	8,930	17.5	15.1	174.2	115.7
Qld.	5,390	16.1	15.3	7,601	14.9	16.2	41	5.9
SA	1,696	5.1	11.5	2,140	4.2	12.8	26.2	11.3
WA	3,865	11.6	21.1	3,871	7.6	15.6	0.2	-26.1
Tas.	120	0.4	2.6	267	0.5	5.2	122.5	100.0
NT	13,905	41.6	742.0	11,065	21.7	483.5	-20.4	-34.8
ACT	78	0.2	2.5	370	0.7	9.3	374.4	272.0
<b>Australia</b>	<b>33,430</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>17.8</b>	<b>51,088</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>21.8</b>	<b>52.8</b>	<b>22.5</b>

Between 2001 and 2016, severe crowding in New South Wales increased by 177.8 per cent on a per capita rate, from 8.1 per 10,000 to 22.5 per 10,000. Victoria also experienced significant, albeit lower growth over the same period.

Queensland also saw an increase in the number of people living in severe crowding between 2001 and 2016. The growth rate on a per capita basis was 5.9 per cent, from 15.3 per 10,000 to 16.2 per 10,000 over 15 years.

The Northern Territory experienced decreases in both the number and rate of severe crowding between 2001 and 2016; however, severe crowding remains an issue. The severe crowding rate in Northern Territory remained at 483.5 per 10,000 population, more than 20 times more prevalent than New South Wales, the next highest state.

Western Australia also saw a significant decrease on a per capita basis in the rate of severe crowding over this period and a slight increase of 0.2 per cent in the

<sup>17</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2049.0 – Census of Population and Housing: Estimating homelessness, 2016, Table 1.3.

<sup>18</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2049.0 – Census of Population and Housing: Estimating homelessness, 2016, Tables 1.3 and 1.5.



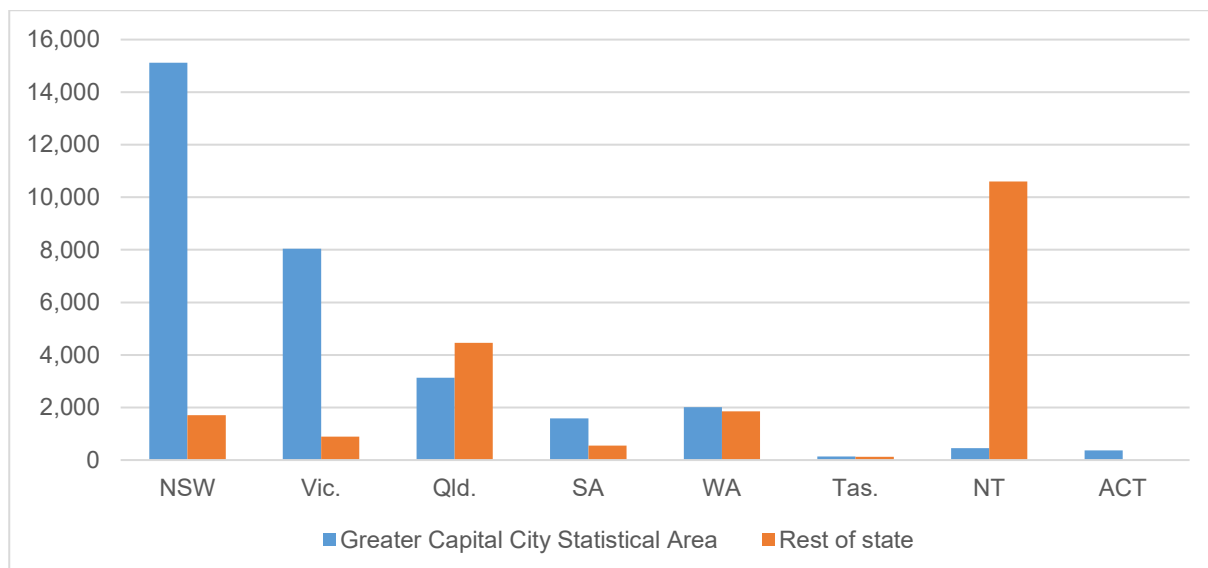
number of people in severe crowding. Both the Australian Capital Territory and Tasmania experienced large increases in the number and rate of severe crowding over this period, with the rate of severe crowding growing by 272.0 per cent and 100.0 per cent respectively. However, both the Australian Capital Territory and Tasmania have the lowest severe crowding rates in Australia at 9.3 per 10,000 and 5.2 per 10,000 respectively.

Rates and numbers of severe crowding for South Australia have remained relatively stable when compared to the other states over time.

### Geographic characteristics of severe crowding

Nationally, the majority (60.4 per cent) of individuals living in severely crowded dwellings live in greater capital city areas, particularly in Sydney and Melbourne. While in Northern Territory and Queensland, the majority live outside of the capital city areas, as shown in **Figure 3** below.

**Figure 3: Number of persons living in severe crowding by greater capital city areas and rest of state, 2016<sup>19</sup>**



Sydney and Melbourne's rise in severe crowding has coincided with strong population growth in these cities. Between 2001 and 2016, the Australian population grew by around five million,<sup>20</sup> with Sydney and Melbourne accounting for 43.5 per cent of this growth, despite together having a share of 40.3 per cent of the total Australian population in 2016.<sup>21</sup>

Between 2006 and 2016, Sydney's rate of homelessness grew by 59.8 per cent<sup>22</sup> from 36.1 to 57.7 per 10,000 of the population.<sup>23</sup> Melbourne's rate of homelessness

<sup>19</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics Census TableBuilder, – Counting Persons, Estimating Homelessness 2016.

<sup>20</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, 3101.0 – Australian Demographic Statistics, September 2019, Table 1 ERP – Dec 2001 (19,386,500) to Dec 2016 (24,389,700).

<sup>21</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, ABS.Stat – Estimated Resident Population by SA2 and above (ASGS 2016), 2001 Onwards.

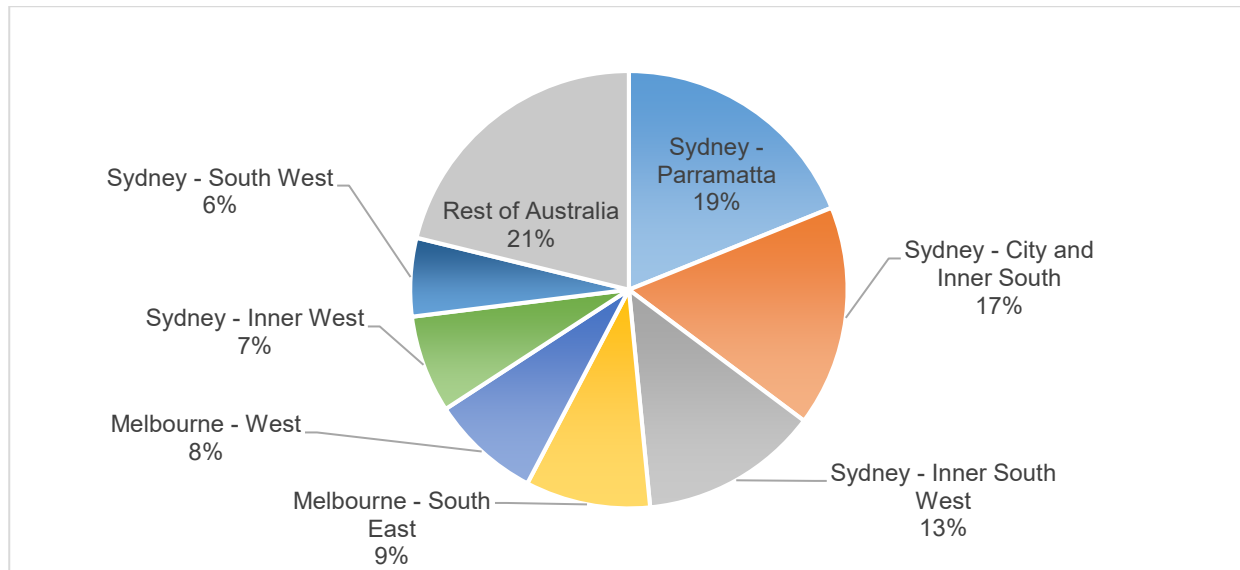
<sup>22</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, ABS.Stat – Estimated Resident Population by SA2 and above (ASGS 2016), 2001 Onwards.

<sup>23</sup> All figures have been rounded to the nearest decimal point. This applies to the subsequent figures.

<sup>24</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2049.0 – Census of Population and Housing: Estimating homelessness, 2016, Customised Request; Australian Bureau

also grew by 19.8 per cent from 36.4 to 43.6 per 10,000 of the population.<sup>24</sup>

**Figure 4: Growth in severe crowding from 2011 and 2016, Statistical Areas Level 4 (SA4s), Sydney and Melbourne<sup>25</sup>**



As illustrated in **Figure 4** above, seven SA4s in Sydney and Melbourne contributed almost 80 per cent of the growth in severe crowding between 2011 and 2016. The largest growth in severe crowding occurred in Parramatta, inner-city Sydney, Melbourne South East and Melbourne West.

From 2006 and 2016, Hobart's rate of homelessness increased by 72.0 per cent from 21.8 to 37.5 per 10,000 of the population.<sup>26</sup> Brisbane's rate of homelessness increased by 14.8 per cent from 34.4 to 39.5 per 10,000 of the population while Adelaide's rate of homelessness grew by 10.1 per cent from 31.7 to 34.9 per 10,000 of the population.<sup>27</sup> Perth's rate of homelessness increased by 4.4 per cent from 25.2 to 26.3 per 10,000 of the population and Darwin's rate of homelessness decreased by 15.7 per cent from 142.1 to 119.8 per 10,000 of the population.<sup>28</sup>

of Statistics, ABS.Stat – Estimated Resident Population by SA2 and above (ASGS 2016), 2001 Onwards.

<sup>24</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2049.0 – Census of Population and Housing: Estimating homelessness, 2016, Customised Request; Australian Bureau of Statistics, ABS.Stat – Estimated Resident Population by SA2 and above (ASGS 2016), 2001 Onwards.

<sup>25</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2049.0 – Census of Population and Housing: Estimating homelessness, 2016.

<sup>26</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2049.0 – Census of Population and Housing: Estimating homelessness, 2016, Customised Request; Australian Bureau of Statistics, ABS.Stat – Estimated Resident Population by SA2 and above (ASGS 2016), 2001 Onwards.

<sup>27</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2049.0 – Census of Population and Housing: Estimating homelessness, 2016, Customised Request; Australian Bureau of Statistics, ABS.Stat – Estimated Resident Population by SA2 and above (ASGS 2016), 2001 Onwards.

<sup>28</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2049.0 – Census of Population and Housing: Estimating homelessness, 2016, Customised Request; Australian Bureau of Statistics, ABS.Stat – Estimated Resident Population by SA2 and above (ASGS 2016), 2001 Onwards.

## Section 4: Direct Australian Government support for priority cohorts

### Women and children affected by family and domestic violence

#### ***National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022***

The Australian Government has committed \$340 million in funding to the Fourth Action Plan of the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022*, to prevent violence before it happens and provide support to women and children.

Under the Fourth Action Plan, the Australian Government is implementing a range of supports for people affected by domestic and family violence, which is a key risk factor for homelessness, including the Keeping Women Safe in their Homes (KWSITH) program.

Under the KWSITH program, the Australian Government is providing \$18 million between 2019–20 and 2021–22 to states and select providers to support women and children experiencing violence to stay in their own home, or a home of their choice, when it is safe to do so.

#### ***Safe Places***

As part of the Fourth Action Plan, the Australian Government introduced the \$60 million Safe Places program competitive capital grants program to deliver new emergency and crisis accommodation for women and children experiencing domestic and family violence.

Eligible organisations are expected to build up to 450 safe places and assist up to 6,500 women and children per year. The application round opened on 28 November 2019 and closed on 14 February 2020, with additional time given to bushfire-affected organisations. Applications are currently being assessed with funding available over two years from 2020–21.

#### ***Income support***

Income support recipients who have experienced family and domestic violence may receive additional financial assistance through a Crisis Payment, a one-off payment equivalent to one week of their maximum basic rate of income support. For example, based on 20 March 2020 rates, a Parenting Payment Single recipient would receive a Crisis Payment of \$382.95.

### Children and young people

#### ***Towards Independent Adulthood trial***

The Towards Independent Adulthood (TIA) trial is an initiative under the Third Action Plan of the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children. The TIA trial aims

to demonstrate improved social and economic outcomes for young people transitioning from out-of-home care to adulthood by testing a new model of service delivery that provides intensive support, including mentoring and wrap around services linking to education, health and housing.

The 2016–17 Budget provided \$3.9 million to fund the TIA trial. Due to the additional difficulties young people are currently facing as a result of the coronavirus, the Australian Government has announced \$720,000 in additional funding to extend the support services provided to young people who have participated in the TIA trial until March 2021. An evaluation of the TIA trial will be finalised following the end of the trial, and states will be able to use the results to guide future investments for young people leaving out-of-home care.

### ***Transition to Independent Living Allowance***

The Transition to Independent Living Allowance is a nationally available one-off payment of \$1,500 to assist young people leaving formal out-of-home care transition to independence. This payment is available to young people to pay for a range of goods and services related to their formal Independence Plan, such as connecting utilities, education costs, moving expenses and bond payment.

## **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples**

Indigenous Australians are half as likely to own their own home, five times as likely to be in social housing and 10 times more likely to be homeless than non-Indigenous Australians.

The Government is working with states and Indigenous Australians to ensure Indigenous Australians have access to appropriate housing, regardless of where residents live.

### ***National Partnership Agreements***

The Australian Government continues to invest in housing to reduce overcrowding in jurisdictions with the greatest level of need, including investing \$550 million over five years to deliver the equivalent of 1,950 new bedrooms in remote Northern Territory communities under the *National Partnership Agreement for Remote Housing Northern Territory* until 2023.

The Australian Government provided final funding contributions to Western Australia (\$121 million) and South Australia (\$37.5 million), to assist with their transition to full responsibility for housing. These final payments to jurisdictions were based on half of the need for remote overcrowding at June 2018, based on 2016 ABS Census data, with the understanding funding would be matched by jurisdictions.

The Australian Government announced \$105 million for remote Indigenous housing in Queensland in May 2019. The National Indigenous Australians Agency is working closely with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Councils and the Queensland Department of Housing and Public Works to ensure the \$105 million investment

is delivered in a coordinated and effective way.

### ***Regional Deal Pilots***

Regional Deal pilots bring together all levels of government and local community leaders around a clear set of objectives. Regional Deal pilots support 'a place-based approach' by putting community identified priorities at the centre of negotiations and implementation.

Three pilots are underway and the Australian Government committed funding to these in the 2019–20 Budget, including the Barkly Regional Deal.

Through the Barkly Regional Deal, the Australian Government has committed \$15.9 million to increase housing supply and reduce overcrowding in the Northern Territory's Barkly region through the construction of a visitor park and student boarding accommodation in Tennant Creek, entering into a public-private partnership for new social and affordable housing stock and delivery of an affordability trial at Aboriginal Hostels Limited's Tennant Creek accommodation facility.

### **People aged 55 years or older**

Older persons (aged 55 years and over) made up 16.0 per cent (18,623 persons) of the total homeless population in 2016. Older men continued to make up the majority of older people experiencing homelessness (11,760 men or 63.1 per cent). However, the number of older homeless women in Australia increased by 44.0 per cent between 2006 and 2016, to 6,872 women.<sup>29</sup> Under the NHHA, older people were made a priority in recognition that homelessness among this cohort, particularly for older women, is growing.

### ***Aged Care Diversity Framework***

Under the Australian Government's Aged Care Diversity Framework, launched in December 2017, the Australian Government has committed to developing a range of cohort specific action plans including one for older people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

The Homelessness Action Plan was endorsed by the Aged Care Sector Committee on 6 December 2019 and is being considered by the Australian Government.

### ***Assistance with Care and Housing (ACH)***

The ACH Sub-Program of the Commonwealth Home Support Programme provides support to those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. This includes access to appropriate and sustainable housing as well as community care and other support services, specifically targeted at avoiding homelessness or reducing the impact of homelessness.

In 2018–19, funding of \$12.8 million was provided to 61 ACH service providers

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<sup>29</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2049.0 – Census of Population and Housing: Estimating homelessness, 2016, Table 1.12.

nationally with some 121,249 ACH services delivered to 6,280 clients.

### ***Residential Aged Care***

In 2018–19, funding of \$9.8 million was provided through the homelessness supplement to 40 residential aged care facilities on behalf of more than 1,900 residents.

On 17 December 2018, the Australian Government announced a 30 per cent increase to the rate of the homelessness supplement in residential aged care applying from 20 March 2019.

In response to the coronavirus, the Australian Government has funded \$26.9 million for a temporary 30 per cent increase to the Residential and Home Care Viability Supplements and the Homeless Supplement until 31 August 2020.

## People living with disability

### ***National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)***

Under the NDIS, participants may be funded for accommodation or housing supports. A participant's circumstances are considered during the development of their NDIS plan. A plan review, due to a change of circumstances, including an increased risk of homelessness, can be requested at any time. Support to access and connect with mainstream and community services (including housing and homelessness services) can be included as part of an NDIS plan.

## People living with mental illness

### ***The National Mental Health and Wellbeing Pandemic Response Plan (the plan)***

The plan, released 15 May 2020, aims to meet the mental health and wellbeing needs of all Australians to reduce negative impacts of the coronavirus pandemic in the short and long-term. It sets out a direction to help navigate through the pandemic and post pandemic, including integration of suicide prevention interventions into key cross-portfolio settings such as housing and homelessness services.

The plan recognises supports are needed that specifically target the mental health of those who are homeless or in insecure housing through assertive outreach. This could include alternative accommodation and social housing that addresses the diverse needs of mental health patients, particularly during isolation periods.

### ***Family Mental Health Support Services***

Family Mental Health Support Services (FMHSS) is a child-focussed family inclusive program providing early intervention and non-clinical supports for children and young people, aged up to 18 years, who are affected by, or at risk of, mental illness, including those who may be at risk of homelessness.

In 2019–20, the Australian Government invested over \$42 million in FHMSS, with 53 providers operating in 101 sites nationally. FMHSS providers are currently funded until 30 June 2020.

### ***Australian Government Psychosocial Support initiatives***

The Australian Government provides funding of \$358.6 million over five years from 2017–18 to provide psychosocial support to people with severe mental illness who are not supported through the NDIS.

These services build ability and skills to assist people who are significantly affected by mental illness including vulnerable and hard to reach groups such as people at risk of, or experiencing homelessness.

### ***Adult Mental Health Centres***

The Australian Government is investing \$114.5 million to trial eight adult community walk in mental health centres, with one to be located in each state and territory. Activities to establish the centres will commence in 2020–21.

While the new Adult Mental Health Centres will not be specifically delivered for people who are homeless, the Centres' model of care, will mean people who are homeless and need support with an existing mental health condition, or who may be at risk of developing a mental health condition, can visit the Centres.

## **Veterans**

### ***Services and support***

The Australian Government commissioned research to better understand the incidence and nature of veteran homelessness, including risk factors. The research confirmed that many of the risk factors that can contribute to veteran homelessness are the same as those for the general population, including negative life events such as relationship breakdown, unemployment, and mental health issues. The research and consultation also found a number of unique risk factors associated with Australian Defence Force (ADF) service.

There are several characteristics that may entrench housing unaffordability, particularly for medically discharged veterans. These include, having no rental history, being discharged into a high cost rental market, the cessation of their Defence rental allowance, and a reluctance to move away from existing medical providers. Shared housing may not be an option for veterans with mental health issues, while older veterans with entrenched behavioural issues may face difficulties accessing residential aged care.

The Australian Government's approach has been to:

- gain a better understanding of the scale and profile of homelessness amongst veterans

- address some of the risk factors associated with homelessness, including:
  - access to mental health care and support
  - timely financial support (e.g. through incapacity payments and the Veteran Payment) during periods of increased pressure and stress
  - support for veterans and their families through Open Arms
  - providing intensive case management support for veterans most at risk (e.g. through Coordinated Client Support and the Wellbeing and Support Program etc.)
  - provision of targeted rehabilitation programs to support vocational and non-vocational outcomes
- ensure optimal support for veterans during transition.

The Australian Government strives to ensure any former serving members of the ADF who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness, have access to the services and support they need.

## Section 5: Assistance to improve housing and homelessness outcomes

The Australian Government has several programs and initiatives to reduce the risk of people becoming homeless. This includes Specialist Homelessness Services, Reconnect, Financial Counselling, Emergency Relief, and encouraging the supply of social and affordable housing. Services Australia also offers supports for people at risk of experiencing homelessness.

### **Specialist Homelessness Services**

The Australian Government and states through the NHHA jointly fund Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS); however, states are responsible for day-to-day delivery of services.

The SHS system aims to promote wellbeing and independence for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, by providing assistance that supports them to achieve and maintain housing, social and economic participation.

Nationally 1,583 agencies delivered SHS to more than 290,300 clients during 2018–19.<sup>30</sup>

Over the last four years, total government expenditure on frontline SHS providers increased from \$777.3 million in 2014–15 to \$989.8 million in 2018–19 or by 27.3 per cent.<sup>31</sup>

In 2018–19, 86,146 people were provided accommodation through SHS services (29.7 per cent of SHS clients). Of this group, 22.7 per cent were provided short-term or emergency accommodation, 7.7 per cent were provided medium term/transitional

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<sup>30</sup> Clients may access services in more than one state or territory. Therefore, the Australia total will be less than the sum of jurisdictions.

<sup>31</sup> Report on Government Services 2020 Table 19A.1.



housing, and 1.4 per cent were provided long-term housing.

### ***Reconnect***

The Australian Government is also investing up to \$118 million over five years through the Reconnect program to support young people aged 12 to 18 years (or 12 to 21 years in the case of newly arrived youth) who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, and their families.

Reconnect is a community-based program that aims to prevent homelessness through early intervention, working to improve their relationship with their family and their school attendance and increase their participation within their local community.

In 2018–19, Reconnect services supported around 7,900 young people nationally with 81 per cent of clients reporting an overall positive improvement in their circumstances.

### ***Financial Counselling***

The Australian Government is investing around \$65 million for Commonwealth Financial Counselling (CFC) and Financial Capability (FC) services over 4.5 years, from 1 January 2019 to 30 June 2023 for 44 organisations nationally to deliver face-to-face financial counselling and financial capability services to eligible individuals.

The Australian Government is also providing:

- more than \$11 million in funding over 4.5 years to 30 June 2023, to eight National Debt Helpline (1800 007 007) organisations to provide telephone financial counselling and financial capability services to eligible individuals
- \$20 million under the Community Support Package in 2019–20 and 2020–21 in response to the coronavirus to immediately scale-up telephone financial counselling services through the National Debt Helpline, as well as provide support for one-on-one tele-financial counselling services.

### ***Emergency Relief***

The Australian Government is investing more than \$200 million over 4.5 years to 30 June 2023 for Emergency Relief (ER) services across Australia. ER services are delivered by community organisations and help people to address immediate basic needs in times of crisis. The type of assistance offered by ER providers may include food, clothing, vouchers, budgeting assistance and referral to other services. Access to ER is free.

In addition to this ER funding, the Australian Government is also providing:

- \$33 million in 2019–20 to assist Commonwealth-funded ER providers in bushfire-affected areas
- \$37 million over two years from 2019–20 for almost 200 Commonwealth-funded ER providers, as part of the \$200 million Community Support Package

announced by the Australian Government on 29 March 2020, to help vulnerable Australians impacted by coronavirus

- \$7 million over two years from 2019–20 for the Australian Red Cross, as part of the Community Support Package, to deliver ER and counselling support to up to 30,000 temporary migrants over the next six months.

### ***Social and Affordable Housing***

States are responsible for public and social housing. However, the Australian Government will provide around \$1.6 billion in 2019–20 through the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA) to support states to improve housing and homelessness outcomes. The NHHA improves accountability, as states are required to have publicly available housing and homelessness strategies and contribute to improved data collection and reporting. The housing priority policy areas required to be addressed under the NHHA include affordable housing, social housing, encouraging growth and supporting the viability of the community housing sector, tenancy reform, home ownership and planning and zoning reform initiatives.

#### ***National Housing Finance and Investment Corporation (NHFIC)***

The Australian Government recognises that greater private and institutional investment is needed to expand the community housing sector and provide more Australians with access to affordable housing. This is why the Australian Government established the NHFIC to operate the Affordable Housing Bond Aggregator and the \$1 billion National Housing Infrastructure Facility.

#### ***Hobart City Deal***

The Australian Government is using City Deals to bring together the three levels of government. Seven City Deals have been signed to date, in Townsville, Launceston, Western Sydney, Darwin, Hobart, Geelong and Adelaide. For the Hobart City Deal, the Australian Government is providing \$30 million to community housing providers to boost the supply of social and affordable housing in Greater Hobart. This funding will deliver more than 100 new affordable dwellings and priority will be given to house those most in need of housing from the Tasmanian social housing wait list including vulnerable people, older people, families and women fleeing violence, and people with disability. Construction has commenced and the first affordable homes were delivered on 17 January 2020.

### ***Services Australia***

Services Australia is a point of first contact for people at risk of, or experiencing homelessness. A range of supports are available to ensure customers are able to maintain access to payments and services, help manage their money and stabilise accommodation.

Services Australia have specialists who support customers, including Community Engagement Officers, social workers and Financial Information Service Officers.

There are a range of services available, including Centrepay, Weekly Payments, the Rent Deduction Scheme, Tax Deduction Service and Income Management.

## Section 6: Data sources to inform homelessness policy

The Australian Government draws from a number of publicly available data sources to inform decision-making around housing, homelessness and housing affordability. The Australian Government also collects information provided from states through national partnership funding agreements.

Under the NHHA, the Australian Government and states agree to be jointly responsible for collecting and sharing data to develop a nationally consistent data set and commit to continuous improvement of data.

### ***Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS)***

The ABS' five-yearly Census of Population and Housing supports the most accurate and comprehensive approach to estimating homelessness in Australia.

Looking ahead to the 2021 Census, the ABS is continuing to engage with experts from the Homelessness Statistics Reference Group and community service providers to support the next estimation of homelessness.

The ABS will explore approaches for maximising the utility of Census homelessness information. For example, the feasibility of integrating a homelessness indicator from the Census to data assets, such as the Multi-Agency Data Integration Project will vastly enrich the possible insights into the social, health and economic pathways and circumstances of persons who were homeless on Census night. Further information is at **Appendix 1**.

## Appendix

### Appendix 1: Data

#### ***Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Census for estimating homelessness***

Under the Census method, a series of analytical techniques based on both the characteristics observed in Census and assumptions about the way people respond to Census questions are applied to estimate the number of homeless persons.

The approach considers people living in private dwellings and non-private dwellings (e.g. hotels, boarding houses, prisons, hospitals, hostels for the homeless etc.) on Census night, and those who on Census night were in an area where people are known to live in improvised dwellings, tents or to be sleeping out.

The Census estimation method, despite being detailed and rigorous, is committed to remaining transparent and repeatable. Leading into the Census, the ABS enlists the support of homelessness service providers and community authorities to help identify possible sites where the homeless persons are likely to be located. This includes those 'rough sleepers' living in improvised dwellings, tents or sleeping out, or those living in supported accommodation for the homeless.

Census information is used extensively during processing to avoid the misclassification of people who are not really homeless. For example, in order to exclude residents of student halls from being mistakenly counted as homeless, people in identified boarding houses will not be counted as homeless if at least 60 per cent of residents had a student status of 'full-time student'. There are many other techniques applied to estimates for other homeless groups.

There are some limitations with the Census approach. One of the key challenges is the ability to fully operationalise, with a limited number of Census questions, the full range of conceptual aspects that define homelessness. Individual responses are essentially proxy measures of the adequacy of current living arrangements. Census is also likely to underestimate key populations of interest such as youth, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons, or those displaced due to domestic and family violence.

There are also emergent living arrangements that may be difficult for the Census approach to detect, such as residences which appear to be separate dwellings (e.g. by having individual letter boxes), but which in fact are boarding houses where tenants occupy one room of a self-contained apartment, and share facilities such as bathrooms and kitchens. In recognising these limitations, the ABS notes the capacity to monitor change over time as a key priority for users, and factors such as under-estimation are unavoidable in the current approach and recommend the use of supplementary sources to help better understand these groups.

### ***Canadian National Occupancy Standard (CNOS)***

Persons in severe crowding refer to people living in a dwelling that needs four or more extra bedrooms according to the CNOS. The CNOS for housing appropriateness is sensitive to both household size and composition.

The measure assesses the bedroom requirements of a household by specifying that:

- there should be no more than two persons per bedroom;
- children less than 5 years of age of different sexes may reasonably share a bedroom;
- children 5 years of age or older of opposite sex should have separate bedrooms;
- children less than 18 years of age and of the same sex may reasonably share a bedroom; and
- single household members 18 years or over should have a separate bedroom, as should parents or couples.

Households living in dwellings where this standard cannot be met are considered to be overcrowded.

## Glossary

**ABS:** The Australian Bureau of Statistics

**ACH:** Assistance with Care and Housing

**Affordable Housing:** housing that has been developed with some assistance from government to make sure it is appropriate for the needs of a range of very low to moderate income households and priced so these households are able to meet basic living costs.

**CNOS:** Canadian National Occupancy Standard

**CRA:** Commonwealth Rent Assistance

**Couch surfing:** persons staying temporarily with other households

**ER:** Emergency Relief

**FMHSS:** Family Mental Health Support Services

**NDIS:** National Disability Insurance Scheme

**NHHA:** National Housing and Homelessness Agreement

**PHN:** Primary Health Network

**Rough Sleepers:** people living in improvised dwellings, tents or sleeping out.

**Severe crowding:** the requirement of five or more extra bedrooms in a household according to the Canadian National Occupancy Standard.

**SHS:** Specialist Homelessness Services

**SIH:** Survey of Income and Housing

**Social Housing:** short and long-term rental housing that is owned and run the government or a not-for-profit organisation and consists of public and community housing for people on low incomes.

**States:** state and territory governments

**TIA Trial:** Towards Independent Adulthood Trial

**The Department:** Department of Social Services