

COUNCIL TO HOMELESS PERSONS



Homelessness in Victoria

The Council to Homeless Persons believes that for a prosperous, peaceful and civilised society such as ours, homelessness is unacceptable. We believe access to safe, secure, affordable and adequate housing is a fundamental human right for all Australians.

However, despite more than a decade of economic prosperity and low unemployment, more than 122,000 people are homeless and marginally housed on any given night in Australia.

In Victoria 23,299 people were recorded as homeless on Census night 2006. They included those sleeping outside or in improvised dwellings, sleeping temporarily with friends or relatives, staying at caravan parks or in boarding houses, and staying in supported accommodation funded by the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP).

Homelessness includes:

1. **Primary homelessness:** people without conventional accommodation – e.g. living on the streets, in deserted buildings, in cars, under bridges, in improvised dwellings (known as 'sleeping rough'). Homelessness is often portrayed with images of a man sleeping on a park bench, people sleeping rough make up less than 15% of the homeless population.
2. **Secondary homelessness:** people moving between various forms of temporary shelter, including staying with friends or relatives, emergency accommodation and boarding houses. These people form about 65% of the homeless population.

3. **Tertiary homelessness:** people living in single rooms in private boarding houses on a long-term basis – without their own bathroom, kitchen or security of tenure – and people living as 'marginal residents' in caravan parks where no person in the household is in full time employment and all persons are at their 'usual address'. About a quarter of homeless people are in this situation.

Who is homeless?

Homelessness can affect anyone at any stage of life - families with children, young people, single men and women, older people, indigenous people and culturally and linguistically diverse people.

Homelessness occurs across inner urban inner areas of major cities, in outer suburban areas, regional centres, rural towns and in remote areas.

According to the 2006 Census, single people make up the majority of the homeless population, followed by families with children (26%) and families without children (20%).

One in every three homeless Australians is a child.

Of the 122,172 homeless people counted in the Census, about 55% were staying with friends or relatives or in a supported accommodation service, 32% were staying in boarding houses or caravan parks, and 13% were sleeping rough.

Indigenous people are over-represented in the homeless population. For indigenous people who are homeless, there is a greater reference to 'spiritual homelessness' or a separation from traditional land or from family, and more emphasis on overcrowding, which acts as a hidden form of homelessness in indigenous communities, compared with non-indigenous people who are homeless.

Youth homelessness has doubled over the past 20 years – an estimated 17,891 teenagers between 12 and 18 are homeless on any given night, more than half of them girls and women. This number decreased from 22,600 in the 2001 Census but is still cause for concern.

How do people become homeless?

The causes of homelessness are multiple, complex and varied. Key factors leading to homelessness are poverty, unemployment

and a lack of affordable housing. Other factors contributing to a person becoming homeless are family breakdown and domestic violence, mental illness, alcohol or drug addiction, financial hardship brought about by gambling, and social isolation.

Domestic violence is the single greatest cause of homelessness in Australia – one in every two women with children seeking homelessness services is escaping a violent home situation.

Family and relationship breakdown are the main reasons people seek assistance from homelessness services.

Most people who are homeless cycle through temporary and tenuous forms of accommodation – they live temporarily with friends ('couch surfing'), or in supported accommodation, private rooming houses and caravan parks.

About the Council to Homeless Persons

CHP is the peak Victorian body representing individuals and organisations with a stake or interest in homelessness. Our mission is to work towards ending homelessness through leadership in policy, advocacy and sector development.

The CHP incorporates the Homelessness Advocacy Service (HAS), a service aimed at securing and protecting the rights of people experiencing homelessness, and the Peer Education Support Program (PESP), a group of people who have experienced homelessness who give those affected by homelessness a powerful voice in decisions that have a direct impact on their lives.